

1979

American Military Biographies

James C. Bradford

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Bradford, James C. (1979) "American Military Biographies," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 32 : No. 4 , Article 23.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol32/iss4/23>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

130 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

opposition against the Communists. Second, the United States refused to learn from the South Vietnamese experience of fighting along with the French against the Communists for many years; after the United States spent a long time committing exactly the same mistakes the French had, it became demoralized to the point of wanting solely to extricate itself from the war.

Although the account of the war may be incorrect in some of its details and even self-serving with regard to the author's own role, this book has two important lessons for American foreign policy. First, the defeat of Communist insurgency cannot be accomplished through military means alone. An acceptable political alternative to the adversary's must also be provided. If it was worthwhile for the United States to fight in Vietnam, it would have also been worthwhile both to insist upon and help organize political reform in Saigon. In addition, while beleaguered Third World Governments may have much to learn from the United States about ending insurgencies, the United States has much to learn from them regarding the local history and political context in which these conflicts take place. In sum, while General Don's account of the errors committed in Vietnam may be painful for some, the conclusions he draws from them may lead the United States to avoid such errors in the future.

MARK N. KATZ
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Webster's American Military Biographies. Springfield, Mass.: Merriam, 1978. 548pp.

Biographical dictionaries abound, but until now none has been devoted to American military figures. The void is now to a large degree filled by a work with several merits.

The editor must be congratulated

broad definition to the term "military" and thereby to include not only the traditional officer corps but also Indians, writers, explorers, inventors, and even spies, cartoonists, and astronauts among the 1,033 entries. All eras and branches of the armed forces are covered and it is pleasant to find such individuals as Bill Mauldin, Jean Laffite, John Philip Sousa, and Sergeant York included. Many of the subjects are still living, thus giving this work much wider coverage than such guides as the *Dictionary of American Biography* that are limited to the deceased.

Selection aside, the entries are on the whole well written, pithy summaries of their subjects' entire careers, not simply their years of military service. The brevity of the entries—they average 500 words each—precludes sophisticated analysis. Perhaps more judicious allocation of space might have allowed further development of some individuals. Edmund Ruffin, for example, whose only claim to military fame was his firing of the first shot at Fort Sumter, is accorded equal coverage with Benjamin Franklin Isherwood, James Forrestal, Francis Marion, and others.

Several appendixes add greatly to the utility of this work. Secretaries of the Army, Navy and Defense, chief officers of all four services, and Chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff are chronologically listed as are all wars, and within wars, almost all battles, their dates, and the American commanding officers and their major subordinates. Tables of army, theater, corps, squadron, fleet, and air force commanders and their dates of office are also helpful.

Minor criticisms aside, the work's broad coverage, especially of individuals still alive, and its modest price (\$12.95) make it a most attractive addition to the library of anyone interested in American military and naval history.

JAMES C. BRADFORD
U.S. Naval Academy