

History as Prologue

by Jeffrey Steinberg

Partners in Command—George Marshall and Dwight Eisenhower in War and Peace

by Mark Perry

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473 pages, hardcover, \$29.95.

American historian Mark Perry has written a truly wonderful account of the partnership that was pivotal to the victory over Nazism, Fascism, and Japanese imperialism in World War II. That partnership, between Gen. George Marshall and Gen. Dwight Eisenhower, also formed a critical part of the post-war resistance to the efforts to wipe out the vision and legacy of President Franklin Roosevelt. And while Perry's book does not delve in any detail into the post-war achievements of these two remarkable men, his account of the political battles among the Allied commanders and elected leaders during the war, provides an invaluable insight into their post-military careers.

Marshall and Eisenhower were FDR's two leading collaborators in the conduct of the war, and Perry has provided an extraordinarily personal account of the relationship between the two generals, that is unique among such military biographies.

On a more profound level, Perry's dual biography provides new and vital documentation of one of the most important undercurrents of the wartime Anglo-American alliance: the deep conflicts between the American and British approaches to the war, the fundamentally contradictory post-war aims of the two allies, and the very different views of the third key wartime ally, the Soviet Union.

In one particularly insightful account of a Marshall-Eisenhower meeting towards the end of the war, on Jan. 26, 1945, at Château Valmonte in Marseilles, France, one of the most

tense meetings between the two longtime colleagues and friends, Perry demonstrates his depth of understanding of these underlying wartime conflicts. Marshall began the meeting by rejecting Eisenhower's proposal that a British general be appointed as deputy ground-commander for the final assault into Germany.

"As Eisenhower's notes on Marshall's presentation make clear, this exchange—after so many years of agreement—marked the most difficult moment of their command partnership. Looking directly at his subordinate, Marshall gave him specific instructions. His sentences were short. He left no room for misinterpretation. The Army chief of staff had fought the British for years on precisely this point—command in Europe. He was not going to give an inch now, with victory so close at hand."



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British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, famous for his incompetence, also typified the British opposition to American military leadership. Eisenhower later called him a "psychopath."

Perry displays his own understanding of the meaning of Marshall's instructions, an understanding that punctuates nearly every page of this 413-page narrative. Perry writes:

"The question of command in Europe in 1945 was *not* military, it was political. America's commitment to World War II was complete. Three-quarters of all the soldiers fighting in Europe in 1945 were American. The United States produced nearly half the world's armaments and two-thirds of its ships. [Gen. Omar] Bradley alone commanded more men in his Army group than the British and French put together. The stark realities of these sacrifices were clear to Marshall. The Americans were now the dominant force in the world and no matter how much Churchill or Brooke or Montgomery might protest, that needed to be recognized. Those who made the greatest sacrifices would retain the most power. As Franklin Roosevelt's most trusted military advisor, George Marshall had developed a keen sense of American political realities. The American people would not tolerate a British commander of American troops. Then too, Marshall had concluded, the only way to keep Europe from plunging itself into another European war was to keep America engaged in Europe. To make America the keeper of the European peace. To take control, finally, of Europe's destiny."

As Perry's account makes clear, both Marshall and Eisenhower were as profoundly aware as Roosevelt, of the monumental differences between the American and British approach. *Partners in Command* offers perhaps the most in-depth documentation of the hand-to-hand combat that the American military leadership engaged in with their British counterparts—at every turn. And Gen. Bernard Law Montgomery was hardly the worst of the British adversaries. Sir Alan Brooke, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, hated all things American, and used every opportunity to convey his disdain to Marshall and Eisenhower, far too often, with the full backing of Winston Churchill.

The Perry book is also a genuine military history of one of the most important wars in modern times, conveying in stunning prose, the complex and always unpredictable twists and turns in the conflict. The evolution of the American fighting force is presented in a way that is highly educational, showing how a clear sense of mission and high-quality military command can rapidly transform a rag-tag conscript army into a credible fighting force. Perry made clear that the German Army was a far superior military force, and that the outcome of the war was far from certain, at many key junctures. Many



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Generals Dwight Eisenhower (left) and George Marshall, shown here returning to the U.S.A. on June 18, 1945, were keenly aware that wartime tensions with the British command were primarily political, not military; the two countries' leaders had quite different war aims.

of the leading American commanders are presented, in all their complexities—George Patton, Douglas MacArthur, Omar Bradley.

What comes across out of the whole account are the incredible accomplishments of Marshall and Eisenhower—in pursuing the war objectives, holding the always volatile Allied coalition together, and keeping their own generals focussed on those larger objectives, when often, they would have preferred to square off against their British partners.

As Perry emphasizes, modern warfare is coalition warfare, and that requires an extraordinary blend of military and diplomatic competence. As a team, Marshall and Eisenhower displayed those qualities, and formed a near-perfect partnership with the great American President, Franklin Roosevelt.

Perry makes great use of Marshall's and Eisenhower's shared mentorship by Gen. Fox Conner, one of the great generals of World War I, who saw another European war coming, as soon as the Versailles Treaty was signed. Connor emphasized, in a simple aphorism, a vital lesson that informed Marshall's and Eisenhower's command partnership in World War II: "Never fight unless you have to, never fight alone, and never fight for long."

Such forms of coalition warfare create an enormous number of challenges, which go far beyond the lessons taught at West Point. As Mark Perry documents, with wonderful precision, Marshall and Eisenhower, as a team, met those challenges head-on, and along with FDR, secured victory.