



The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today

By Thomas E. Ricks

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An epic history of the decline of American military leadership—from the #1 bestselling author of *Fiasco*

Thomas E. Ricks has made a close study of America's military leaders for three decades, and in *The Generals*, he chronicles the widening gulf between performance and accountability among the top brass of the U.S. military. While history has been kind to the American generals of World War II—Marshall, Eisenhower, Patton, and Bradley—it has been less kind to others, such as Koster, Franks, Sanchez, and Petraeus. Ricks sets out to explain why that is. We meet great leaders and suspect ones, generals who rose to the occasion and generals who failed themselves and their soldiers. In Ricks's hands, this story resounds with larger meaning: about the transmission of values, about strategic thinking, and about the difference between an organization that learns and one that fails.

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Editorial Review

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When George Marshall headed the U.S. Army in WWII, generals were frequently fired. They haven't much been since, writes Ricks, a phenomenon he connects to the strategically unsatisfactory conclusions to subsequent wars in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. Ricks was a military-affairs journalist, and his criticism of the Iraq invasion (*Fiasco*, 2006) echoes in this survey of the army's top echelons since WWII. He diagnoses the top brass' problem as being good at organizing combat operations but terrible at converting tactical victories into war-winning success. He points to several causes of the situation. One has been the slowness of generals trained in set-piece battles to adapt to insurgency warfare. Another has been, Ricks argues, the sidelining of nonconformist officers, outliers in personal habits or in their unorthodox positions in the army's internal debates about strategic doctrine. Individual cases, such as those of Maxwell Taylor and William Westmoreland, stoke his negative appraisal of the army's leadership, which he unifies by urging as a remedy a revival of Marshall's methods of promoting and dismissing generals. Ricks' prominence plus the publisher's promotion should equal a high-profile title. --Gilbert Taylor

Review

A *Washington Post* 2012 Notable Work of Nonfiction

"Ricks shines, blending an impressive level of research with expert storytelling."

—*The Weekly Standard*

"[A] savvy study of leadership. Combining lucid historical analysis, acid-etched portraits of generals from 'troublesome blowhard' Douglas MacArthur to 'two-time loser' Tommy Franks, and shrewd postmortems of military failures and pointless slaughters such as My Lai, the author demonstrates how everything from strategic doctrine to personnel policies create a mediocre, rigid, morally derelict army leadership... **Ricks presents an incisive, hard-hitting corrective to unthinking veneration of American military prowess.**"

—*Publisher's Weekly* (Starred Review)

"Informed readers, especially military buffs, will appreciate this provocative, blistering critique of a system where accountability appears to have gone missing - like the author's 2006 bestseller, *Fiasco*, this book is bound to cause heartburn in the Pentagon."

—*Kirkus*

"Entertaining, provocative and important."

—*The Wilson Quarterly*

"This is a brilliant book—deeply researched, very well-written and outspoken. Ricks pulls no punches in naming names as he cites serious failures of leadership, even as we were winning World War II, and failures that led to serious problems in later wars. And he calls for rethinking the concept of generalship in the Army of the future."

—William J. Perry, 19th U.S. Secretary of Defense

"Thomas E. Ricks has written a definitive and comprehensive story of American generalship from the battlefields of World War II to the recent war in Iraq. *The Generals* candidly reveals their triumphs and failures, and offers a prognosis of what can be done to ensure success by our future leaders in the volatile

world of the twenty-first century.”

—Carlo D’Este, author of *Patton: A Genius for War*

“Tom Ricks has written another provocative and superbly researched book that addresses a critical issue, generalship. After each period of conflict in our history, the quality and performance of our senior military leaders comes under serious scrutiny. *The Generals* will be a **definitive and controversial work** that will spark the debate, once again, regarding how we make and choose our top military leaders.”

—Anthony C. Zinni, General USMC (Ret.)

“*The Generals* is insightful, well written and thought-provoking. Using General George C. Marshall as the gold standard, it is replete with examples of good and bad generalship in the postwar years. Too often a bureaucratic culture in those years failed to connect performance with consequences. This gave rise to many mediocre and poor senior leaders. Seldom have any of them ever been held accountable for their failures. This book justifiably calls for a return to the strict, demanding and successful Marshall prescription for generalship. It is a reminder that the lives of soldiers are more important than the careers of officers—and that winning wars is more important than either.”

—Bernard E. Trainor, Lt. Gen. USMC (Ret.); author of *The Generals’ War*

“*The Generals* rips up the definition of professionalism in which the US Army has clothed itself. Tom Ricks shows that it has lost the habit of sacking those who cannot meet the challenge of war, leaving it to Presidents to do so. His devastating analysis explains much that is wrong in US civil-military relations. America’s allies, who have looked to emulate too slavishly the world’s pre-eminent military power, should also take heed.”

—Hew Strachan, Chichele Professor of the History of War, University of Oxford

About the Author

Thomas E. Ricks is the author of "Fiasco" and "The Gamble," both "New York Times" bestsellers. As a journalist, he was a member of two Pulitzer Prize-winning teams. He lives in Washington, D.C.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Maureen Harris:

This *The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today* book is not ordinary book, you have after that it the world is in your hands. The benefit you receive by reading this book is information inside this book incredible fresh, you will get information which is getting deeper anyone read a lot of information you will get. That *The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today* without we realize teach the one who reading through it become critical in thinking and analyzing. Don't end up being worry *The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today* can bring once you are and not make your handbag space or bookshelves' turn into full because you can have it in your lovely laptop even mobile phone. This *The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today* having very good arrangement in word and also layout, so you will not experience uninterested in reading.

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Judy Brown:

That publication can make you to feel relax. This particular book The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today was colorful and of course has pictures around. As we know that book The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today has many kinds or style. Start from kids until teens. For example Naruto or Detective Conan you can read and believe you are the character on there. So , not at all of book are make you bored, any it offers you feel happy, fun and unwind. Try to choose the best book for yourself and try to like reading this.

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