



Maj Gen DT Zabecki (ed) *Chief of Staff. The Principal Officers behind History's Great Commanders* Annapolis Naval Institute Press 2008 ISBN 978-1-59114-0 2 vols £25 each

This 2 volume work consists of a series of biographic essays by a number of distinguished academics, retired officers and scholars on the key chiefs of staff (COS) drawn from those who have supported some of history's most important commanders. The volumes cover from the Napoleonic era to Vietnam.

The choices of the COS selected for the book are interesting to this reviewer as they include individuals unfamiliar to the Anglo-centric reader; it has an impressive coverage of the Germans, the Americans and two interesting Russian examples. A downside, however, is that the essays tend to lack depth of analysis. It also seems to this reviewer that they concentrate a little too much on the COS's biography, rather than the relationship with the commanders and the contribution to success. One perhaps surprising omission is that of Sutherland, Macarthur's COS in the Philippines and SW Pacific.¹

Both volumes have a useful introduction examining the development of the staff system in the German, Russian, French, American and British Armies. In the latter's case the first volume is marred by some definitions which are at best unhelpful: to state that a GSO 1 is 'head of the G Branch' is misleading if not qualified by adding: 'of a division.' Similarly to define a Brigade Major as: 'the GSO 1 of a brigade' is imprecise. Other definitions are based on operational formations, hence missing out Colonels GS or in the old terminology Colonels on the Staff. Its description of the Adjutant General's and the Quartermaster General's branches' duties in Wellington's era in the British Army is wrong, the latter handled operational issues in as far as Wellington delegated them.² The Adjutant General's Branch broadly dealt with discipline and personnel issues.³ Again it states baldly that the British General Staff was founded in 1906;⁴ it is more exact to say that it was created between 1904 and 1906. These faults are insignificant but one of the principles of staffwork and for that matter scholarship is accuracy and this reviewer has been subject to too many slashing red ink corrections to ignore the point.

The work would have benefitted by a concluding chapter drawing the threads together. It seems to this reviewer that one factor which makes for an effective commander/COS relationship is that the 2 are complementary not congruent. Here Montgomery and De Guingand or Eisenhower and Bedell Smith make the point, while Hubert Gough and Neil Malcolm show the dangers of similarity. The old rule of thumb was that a clever and idle officer was the ideal commander, the clever and industrious the better COS.

On a final note a personal anecdote of two of those included in this book, Generals De

¹ G Perrett *Old Soldiers Never Die* (London 1996), pp 338-9, 362-4 suggests some of the problems within Macarthur's HQ.

² SPG Ward *Wellington's Headquarters* (Oxford 1957), p 131.

³ M Glover *Wellington's Army in the Peninsula 1808-1814* (Newton Abbot 1977), pp 136-7.

⁴ BJ Bond *The Victorian Army and the Staff College* (London 1972), Chapter 7.



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Guingand and Westphal. De Guingand was visiting the 1st Battalion the Prince of Wales's Regiment, the successor to the West Yorkshires, his old regiment. Westphal lived in Celle where the battalion was based and it was felt that that it would contribute to Anglo-German relations that the two distinguished veterans met. Not a bit of it; the two, urbane, civilised, charming, sat silent glaring at each other. The Russian guards at Helmstedt were genial in comparison.

Nick Evans

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