

## REVIEW ARTICLE



# Leadership in War: Essential Lessons From Those Who Made History by Andrew Roberts. New York: Viking, 2019. Pp. xiv, 239. ISBN: 9780525522386. \$27.00.

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Author Andrew Roberts brings together nine persons who distinguished themselves during wartime in this book, a product of previous lectures on the men and woman portrayed. The purpose is to convey the positive and negative examples of leadership exhibited during war, which as Richard Nixon once observed “brings forth qualities we can readily measure.”

In the Introduction, Roberts identifies broad traits that all highlighted leaders possessed, including self-confidence and a mission-like view of their duties. The ensuing nine war leaders are presented in semi-chronological order.

In Chapter 1, the life and career of Napoleon Bonaparte is reviewed.

According to Roberts, “Even though he was ultimately defeated, Napoleon is the wartime leader against whom all others must be judged” (p. 26).

Napoleon, who earned the rank of general at age 24, drew many fighting techniques from his heroes of antiquity. These tactics included speed, adapting to conditions, and predicting moves in advance of battles. Too, Napoleon understood the power of positive motivation, had the ability to concentrate on the matter at hand, and outworked everyone else around

him.

As a military leader, Napoleon’s mix of charisma and ruthlessness certainly contributed to his record of winning forty-six of sixty battles he participated in.

Chapter 2 contains the biography of Horatio Nelson, whose meaning to Britain was evidenced by his funeral, the largest in that nation’s history until the burial of Princess Diana. Nelson started gaining experience began before his 13<sup>th</sup> birthday aboard a Royal Navy ship commanded by his uncle.

He passed naval exams at 21 and ascended from Second Lieutenant to Captain in short order. When Britain began sustained hostilities against France in 1794, he earned command of his own warship, and gained notoriety as the first English officer to board an enemy ship in nearly three centuries. Nelson reached the rank of Admiral and was appointed to command the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean in late 1803. He was killed at the Battle of Trafalgar

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two years later, a victim of a sniper's bullet. But the British victory in that battle ensured English naval dominance for a century. Though Admiral Lord Nelson's fixation on France may have been myopic, it was justified in the period in which he served. In addition to possessing normal features of a military leader—inspiring troops, leading from the front, and keeping the enemy on the defensive—Nelson was adept at securing financial backing for ventures.

Another Englishman, Winston Churchill, is portrayed in Chapter 3.

When he was appointed as Prime Minister as Britain fought off German attacks in 1940, Churchill had finally attained the post he always knew he would reach. An upper-class aristocrat, Churchill served in several government positions prior to Prime Minister, including Home Secretary, First Lord of Admiralty, and Chancellor of Exchequer. His sense of destiny got him through a series of car crashes and four wars, but his World War II service as a part of the victorious Atlantic alliance solidified his reputation. If his admiration of the British Empire periodically created an inability to weigh risk and reward, his earnestness and enthusiasm more than compensated. Despite a plethora of World War II officials who thought of themselves as invaluable to the outcome, Winston Churchill was indisputably one who made a difference.

In Chapter 4, Roberts describes the dual persona of Adolf Hitler.

On the one hand, he was a mediocre, uninteresting individual who was uncomfortable with most human interaction. On the other hand, "he was extravagantly admired and even worshipped by millions of normal people for more than a decade" (p. 67). For Roberts, the reason for the latter phenomenon was a contrived charisma in which the apparatus of the Nazi Party controlled the backdrop, lighting, cameras, and messaging. Much of the rest of this chapter covers Hitler's musings to friends early in World War II. It likewise reviews later actions initiated by Germany during the war, including the 1941 invasion of the Soviet Union.

Because that move and others ultimately failed due to Hitler's intransigence, Roberts observes that "Hitler

did not deserve to win the war on the grounds of military competence" (p. 85).

Soviet leader Joseph Stalin is depicted in Chapter 5. While most people have some knowledge of Stalin's three-decade run as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, few are aware of his training for the job. Stalin studied Marxist-Leninist writings from his youth; risked his life opposing the czarist government; played a major role in the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution; and worked closely with Vladimir Lenin prior to his death. It was due to Stalin's devout adherence to the communist creed that he took what would otherwise be self-defeating actions, including farm collectivization programs, mass starvations, purges of government personnel, and random murders to terrorize the populace. Roberts blames Stalin's pre-World War II mismanagement and failure to anticipate the German invasion on his faithful following of ideology. Though Roberts suggests that Stalin was more like Churchill than Hitler in that he permitted others to outvote him, Stalin's racial genocide against various groups rivaled the Nazi Holocaust. Perhaps the most devastating indictment against Stalin is the assertion that the war could have been won earlier but for his paranoia and distrust of other Allied leaders.

General George C. Marshall is the subject of Chapter 6. If other World War II leaders underappreciated the General—as Marshall preferred to be called even after his military service—America did not. Marshall's military career included academic training at Virginia Military Institute, military service in the Spanish-American War, director of training and planning during World War I, command of infantry regiments, and teaching at the Army War College. However, it was his service as Army Chief of Staff from 1939-1945 which stood out. Marshall increased U.S. military size, directed augmented weapons production, and enunciated a Germany-first plan to win World War II. As part of the latter strategy, Marshall was among the first to support an invasion of Germany through France.

Following the war, Marshall was tapped as Secretary of State for President Harry Truman. There, he coordinated the American effort to rescue nations devastated by World War II. The effort, dubbed the

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Marshall Plan after its architect but not by him, is a testament to a leader who shunned the limelight and let others defend his policies.

In Chapter 7, the military career of French General Charles DeGaulle is presented. Despite the humiliations meted out by Germany toward France in the decades between 1870-1944, DeGaulle held a lifelong antipathy toward Anglo-Saxons due to a little-known incident in 1898 in which British forces halted a French advance in Sudan. Once he became an Army cadet and received his commission, he quickly demonstrated unusual bravery in World War I, where he was wounded three times and attempted multiple prisoner escapes. After France was overrun by Germany in 1940, DeGaulle inspired the resistance to Nazi rule which cost Germany dearly as the war progressed. Despite his prickly personality and minimal French military assistance with the D-Day invasion at Normandy, British and American officials agreed to allow DeGaulle to lead French forces into Paris first during its liberation in 1944. Roberts notes that it was because of DeGaulle's influence that France was assigned a section of Berlin to occupy after World War II.

In Chapter 8, the military career of Dwight D. Eisenhower is assessed. His background included service under General Douglas MacArthur in the 1930's. A protégé of General George C. Marshall, Eisenhower saw no combat action in World War II, but rose from lieutenant colonel to five-star general in forty-two months. Later, he led the international war effort as Supreme Allied Commander.

Eisenhower is viewed as having several positive leadership characteristics, including being a good picker of staff, possessing common sense, and displaying an outward calm even in stressful situations. Too, Ike's determination to succeed overcame setbacks and obstacles along the way.

The "most remarkable Englishwoman since Queen Elizabeth I" (p. 197), Margaret Thatcher, is examined in Chapter 9. As a child, her memories were of Winston Churchill and the Battle of Britain. Later, her political views were shaped by England's capitulation to Germany before World War II. The lesson from that episode—not to give the enemy any quarter—is what Thatcher applied once she rose

through the ranks of Parliament to become prime minister in 1979. Her eleven-year stint in that position is highlighted by the brief 1982 war with Argentina over the disputed Falkland Islands. Thatcher's uncompromising stance of demanding the islands be liberated won out, and her performance there gave her confidence to confront difficult issues during the remainder of her tenure as British prime minister.

In the book's Conclusion, Roberts corrals the leadership lessons advanced by those encompassed in the study. He likewise adds the perspective of several other writers in defining leadership, including SunTzu, General George Patton, and Richard Nixon. Roberts asserts that Hitler's example illustrates how easy it is to learn the wrong examples from history.

During the current century, several studies have probed leadership facets during war or crisis. In their 2004 book, Robert Pois and Philip Langer employ modern psychology techniques to examine why military commanders fail, finding that inflexibility was a common trait among all those included. In 2012, Michael Flynn and Stephen Griffin assess the leadership styles of George Washington and Napoleon Bonaparte during the American and French Revolutions, respectively.

Correlli Barnett published back-to-back studies in 2013 and 2014 exploring the strengths and weaknesses of twenty leaders across the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Doris Kearns Goodwin includes one example of war leadership—Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War—among four case studies in her 2018 book assessing leadership during crisis. Finally, Stewart Forsyth analyzes the personalities of five war leaders in his 2020 tome.

For sure, Roberts has experience in writing about several persons found in the present book. Five of his previous dozen books encompass coverage of Napoleon, Hitler, and Churchill. Unfortunately, the alignment of *Leadership in War* is not purely chronological by either date of birth or death. Further, the chapters on Winston Churchill and Charles DeGaulle are shorter than the other offerings. While the author sticks to war issues involving the subjects, that approach renders the biographies of DeGaulle and Dwight Eisenhower somewhat incomplete given their later civilian service.

Still, the presentation of little-known facts about the principals is refreshing and the assemblage of leadership traits included is impressive. In the end, Roberts believes that studying the past and infusing spirit are the essential elements of successful wartime leadership.

## 1 | REFERENCES

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