



PROJECT MUSE®

---

On War and Leadership: The Words of Combat Commanders from  
Frederick the Great to Norman Schwarzkopf (review)

Matthew S. Muehlbauer

The Journal of Military History, Volume 67, Number 1, January 2003, pp.  
288-289 (Review)

Published by Society for Military History

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jmh.2003.0060>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/40486>

***On War and Leadership: The Words of Combat Commanders from Frederick the Great to Norman Schwarzkopf.*** By Owen Connelly. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002. ISBN 0-691-03186-X. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. viii, 347. \$29.95.

To use one of the author's favorite terms, this book is a celebration of winners. Owen Connelly presents the writings of twenty military commanders from the past 250 years who represent the "muddy boots school of leadership," men who "all led from the front" (p. 3). Except for some original material contributed by Harold G. Moore (who commanded American forces at Ia Drang in Vietnam) all these selections have previously been published in other texts. Connelly provides a brief introduction and conclusion to the book, and for each individual chapter; chapter introductions are biographical in nature, and the conclusions reiterate what he deems to be the salient points of a commander's writings or experience.

Most of Connelly's chosen leaders fought in twentieth-century conflicts, and of these about half made their reputation in World War II. Earlier commanders include Frederick the Great, Napoleon Bonaparte, William Tecumseh Sherman, Stonewall Jackson, and T. E. Lawrence; later ones include Moshe Dayan, Harold G. Moore, and Nicholas F. Vaux (who led a Royal Marine commando unit in the Falklands). However, not all the selections actually present that particular officer's views on leadership: many rely wholly or in part on battle narratives, from which Connelly infers a commander's attitudes. His choice of excerpts is often arbitrary, leading to selections of varying relevance for his purpose. For example, whereas the chapter that presents Archibald Percival Wavell's views on leadership is quite insightful, half of the chapter devoted to Erich von Manstein actually presents that commander's criticisms of Adolf Hitler. Connelly should be commended for attempting to include Vo Nguyen Giap in his work, the only example of a non-Western commander; but this selection presents more Vietnamese Communist propaganda and theory than ideas about commanding in battle, and Connelly seems unsure of how to address Giap as a leader.

Lacking from this book is any deeper analysis that places the men Connelly considers in historical context. In his conclusion, he expounds upon a laundry list of desired attributes in a commander: personal leadership, presence, capacity for improvisation, belief in unity of command, among others. Although one of these attributes includes "the best use of modern weapons" (p. 282), Connelly's final assessment is that "basic doctrines of leadership seem to be unchanging" (p. 283). The author never addresses what, over the period his work covers, is the most significant development regarding the recruitment, training, and education of military commanders: the advent of institutions devoted to advancing military professionalism.

The book is geared towards readers seeking examples of effective leadership. Hence it is appropriate for popular audiences, and students new to the topic of military history and leadership. In this regard, Connelly's thirty-page bibliography is a great aid for those interested in further reading. Schol-

ars and individuals who already possess significant knowledge of either military history or executive decision-making will prefer works on specific military commanders, or that elaborate on the forces that have shaped military leadership in the modern era, such as Andrew Gordon's *The Rules of the Game*.

Matthew S. Muehlbauer

Temple University  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

***Rethinking the Korean War: A New Diplomatic and Strategic History.*** By William Stueck. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002. ISBN 0-691-08853-5. Maps. Photographs. Illustrations. Notes. Index. Pp. xiv, 285. \$29.95.

This volume comprises a lively and balanced reassessment of the origins, character and impact of the Korean War. William Stueck is the author of two books dealing with this broad area, apart from the work considered here. He is concerned with posing key questions, such as how Korea came to be divided in 1945; how the United States and the Soviet Union sponsored rival regimes, following the breakdown of the attempt to secure a unified state; how Syngman Rhee and Kim Il Sung endeavoured to manipulate the great powers and how the latter imposed their authority; how Stalin and Mao Zedong viewed each other and perceived the current and future states of Sino-Soviet relations; how the domestic and international dimensions of the conflict interacted; why the United Nations became involved in Korea and how members of the UN reacted to American policy, plus the ways in which the latter was modified by representations from within the UN; why the war did not escalate into a nuclear conflict or into a third world war; and why it took so long to achieve an armistice agreement. Stueck focuses primarily upon political and diplomatic developments and these are pursued with clarity and conviction. Due consideration is given to the significance of evidence that has become available from the archives of China and the former Soviet Union. Stalin's desire to involve China in the war so as to obviate the contingency of an improvement in Sino-American relations is underlined, as is Stalin's determination to prevent formal Soviet participation in the Korean struggle. The author portrays Harry Truman in a reasonably positive light, thus resisting the current trend towards a more critical analysis of the Truman administration. In an interesting succinct comparison between Truman and Mao, Stueck observes that the former was flexible and prepared to entertain proposals from America's allies; far from being seduced by military romanticism (as happened to Mao), Truman dismissed the principal American advocate of such an approach in April 1951. Mao was excessively pre-occupied with establishing China's new international presence and ignored advice from his comrades which ran contrary to his own inclinations. Stueck explains the importance of the Korean conflict for the development of the