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## **Omar Bradley: General at War**

by Jim DeFelice

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Admit it, the first images that come to mind when you hear the name Omar Bradley are either that of a wire-rimmed glasses-wearing, bookish-looking math teacher or that of Karl Malden portraying the greatly admired General in the movie *Patton*. Jim DeFelice's book, *Omar Bradley: A General at War* provides the reader with an excellent resource for understanding who the GI General was, how he evolved into a tremendous wartime leader, and the critical relationships and great challenges he faced throughout World War II. The reader will certainly gain a better understanding of who this distinguished General was, how he made decisions, and how he led.

As explained by Jim DeFelice, this book was to fill a perceived "void" believing that an "impartial, easily accessible summary and evaluation of his life has been missing." Opining that historians have either "forgotten or miscast" Bradley, the author endeavors to explain why this general should be hailed as one of the architects of success in Europe. Finally, Mr. DeFelice believes that we cannot understand our victory in Europe without understanding Bradley."

To help with his cause, the author draws upon a number of sources in the presentation of his assertions. First, and certainly most critical to the project, he uses General Bradley's personal and professional papers housed at West Point's Omar N. Bradley Collection. Aiding the author with firsthand observations were the personal papers and diaries of Bradley's aide, Chester Hansen. These in particular help fill the gaps by supplying context to statements by various personalities throughout the book. In addition to other primary sources, the author relies on Bradley's two books as well as a number of books covering such World War II titans as Eisenhower, Patton, Montgomery, and Marshall to help tell Bradley's story.

An important component of any biography is the story of the individual's formative years. DeFelice does a nice job of providing material to give readers an understanding of Bradley's humble upbringing and the impact that growing up in rural Missouri played in his professional development. The discipline, studious approach toward solving problems, sense of fair play, and unrelenting commitment can be traced to the manner in which he was raised.

The most interesting portions of the book are those devoted to Bradley's professional relationships. DeFelice devotes a significant number of pages toward debating the manner in which other authors portray Bradley's relationship with various peers and superiors. He provides the reader with insight into the friction and controversy that existed between many battlefield commanders during the war. Generals Patton and Montgomery warrant several pages, which

makes sense considering the amount of time these three gentlemen worked together, starting in North Africa. The constant friction among the key leaders makes one grateful these senior leaders somehow managed to get past egos, personality conflicts, and self-serving plans in order to win the war in Europe. As Mr. DeFelice describes the prideful competition of the Coalition generals, we gain a deeper appreciation for the difficult job General Eisenhower had with balancing those egos. The reader will come to understand the struggles senior leaders endured more than sixty years ago, struggles that transcend the ages. Politics and personalities were critical factors in every major decision throughout the war. Even today, both continue to bedevil military leaders.

Another timeless topic is the never-ending love-hate relationship with the press that challenged Bradley to the point where he finally had to accept the value of holding regular press conferences. Odd, some things never change. What today's leader can gain from General Bradley's story is an appreciation for the pressure that comes with leadership. There are multiple accounts in which the reader can feel the weight of command responsibility bearing down on the general as he tries to plan the break out from the Normandy beachhead and turnaround American efforts in Africa while dealing with the multitude of strong personalities that filled the ranks of the Allied Army. Present day leaders at the operational and strategic level can relate to these challenges.

In the end, DeFelice accomplishes his mission—to provide the reader with a deeper appreciation of General Omar Bradley. This book is a worthwhile read. Though at times the author seems to go out of his way to defend General Bradley, he does not shy away from offering criticism of the man. DeFelice's point-counterpoint with other authors appear at times as a history food fight and detract from an otherwise good work. The author's work is an easy read for Bradley fans as well as those unfamiliar with the general, or for those seeking a quick read that captures the life of one America's great leaders. DeFelice covers all the critical points. The author provides a good link to some much longer works, *A Soldier's Story* and *A General's Life: an Autobiography*. For the student of military history, this work should encourage the reading of other books about Bradley, Patton, Eisenhower, and Montgomery. This book provides an opportunity to further examine controversial decisions, contentious relationships, and the debate as to which leader was the best.