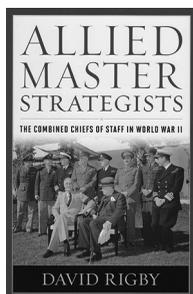


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## ***Allied Master Strategists: The Combined Chiefs of Staff in World War II***

By David Rigby

Reviewed by Dr. Bianka J. Adams, Historian, Office of History, US Army Corps of Engineers

While most histories of the Anglo-American Alliance in World War II mention the existence of the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) in passing, not many go into detail about its members, their biographies, their relationship with each other, or their work with their trans-Atlantic counterparts. David Rigby's *Allied Master Strategists* is an attempt to fill that particular gap. Over the course of eight chapters, the reader becomes very familiar with each individual, his role on the staff, and the CCS's importance for the conduct of Allied warfare.

Organized thematically with a rough chronological overlay, the book begins with a biographical chapter that introduces full-fledged members of the CCS as well as those who did not “quite make the cut” (page 43). The second chapter focuses on the organization of the CCS and the negotiations at the Casablanca Conference in 1943. Chapter three deals with the war in the Pacific, and the next chapter compares the effectiveness of the Alliance with the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis. Here, Rigby attributes the success of Allied coalition warfare in large part to the efforts of the Combined Chiefs of Staff. The fifth chapter details how the CCS helped reduce inter-Allied friction regarding Operation Overlord.

In the final three chapters, the author defends his thesis “that it was the Combined Chiefs of Staff organization, not politicians, diplomats, or bureaucrats that was the most important planning agency behind the military victories achieved by the Western Allies during the war” (page 7). In chapter six, the author details how members of the CCS had to fend off their political masters' attempts at making strategy, and in chapter seven Rigby gives examples of how individual members of the CCS supervised actions of their subordinate commanders in the field. The last chapter explores how the Combined Chiefs of Staff handled issues not traditionally military in nature, such as war production, management of raw materials, and diplomacy.

To undertake a subject in the well-plowed field of Allied strategy and planning during World War II with the intent to offer new insights is an ambitious undertaking, at which the author only partially succeeds. His well-researched, well-documented, and well-indexed study certainly breathes life into an institution that scholars of World War II mostly take for granted—never stopping to think about the men who served as the Combined Chiefs of Staff. Rigby humanizes this planning body. He carefully crafts short biographical sketches of each member, pointing out their strengths and weaknesses, though their weaknesses are never so grave as to make any of them unworthy of being a member of the CCS. Quite the contrary, each brought the right mix of prickliness or charm or an uncanny ability to handle either President Franklin D.

Roosevelt or Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill. The author also gives examples of how each service chief contributed directly to the war effort by limiting mistakes through decisiveness at the right moment. They all had their faults, to be sure, but Rigby paints overwhelmingly positive portraits of the chief Allied planners.

So positive are Rigby's descriptions of their qualities and concerns for the welfare of the Alliance and the conduct of the war that the politicians responsible for the overall Allied war strategy look foolish by comparison. The author's low opinion of the political leadership on both sides of the Atlantic finds its best expression in the title of chapter six: "Keeping the Armchair Strategists at Bay." Here, Rigby channels what might well have been the anguish some members of the Combined Chiefs of Staff felt towards their political leadership. Rigby directs most of his wrath against Churchill, whom he describes as a petty micromanager and a highly intrusive armchair strategist (pages 146-58). Compared to Churchill's offenses, Roosevelt's interventions appear minor. While the author concedes that Churchill was the right leader for a beleaguered Great Britain, he condemns the prime minister's meddling in the affairs of strategic decisionmaking. His judgment about Roosevelt is milder (page 157). The point Rigby seems to be missing is that politicians are supposed to "intervene" in strategic decisionmaking. Indeed, following the dictum of the primacy of politics/policy, they have a duty as leaders of governments to formulate strategic goals and to determine how best to achieve those goals.

The author's strong prejudice in favor of the CCS notwithstanding, *Allied Master Strategists* is a contribution to the field of World War II history, well worth researchers' attention. I recommend, however, reading the book in conjunction with other, more balanced studies on Allied warfare such as Mark A. Stoler's *Allies in War: Britain and America Against the Axis Powers, 1940-1945* (Bloomsbury 2007). Stoler provides much-needed context for a proper understanding of the significance of the creation of the Combined Chiefs of Staff. While Rigby points out the CCS was an unprecedented institution in the history of coalition warfare, he fails to explain how unlikely this close cooperation was in light of the antagonism that persisted in Anglo-American relations before Churchill and Roosevelt decided that it was in their mutual interest to become not only allies but also friends.