

**Patton, Montgomery, Rommel: Masters of War.** By Terry Brighton. New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2008. 448 pages. \$30.00. **Reviewed by COL (Ret.) Cole C. Kingseed**, former Professor of History at the US Military Academy, and writer and consultant.

During World War II, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States each produced a battle captain who stood above the rest: Erwin Rommel, Bernard Montgomery, and George Patton. All three displayed varied traits of overpowering egotism, publicity-seeking, and military genius, and were personally flawed in their own right. Each commander viewed combat as a personal contest against his adversary and quite often against his senior headquarters.

In exploring the role of ego in war, Terry Brighton, the curator of the Queen's Royal Lancers Regimental Museum, meshes these diverse personalities into a well-written, lucid, triple biography that appeals more to the general reader than the serious student of military history. Set against the backdrop of the large tank battles in North Africa, Sicily, and northwest Europe, *Patton, Montgomery, Rommel: Masters of War* is the story of three remarkable military commanders.

Brighton sees more similarities among the three generals than differences. With the exception of a minor skirmish in northern Mexico in 1916 in which Patton shot three guerrillas by his own count, these future commanders received their baptism by fire during the Great War. They emerged from that conflict, however, with different perspectives, opines Brighton. While Patton and Rommel demonstrated a genius for forward action, Montgomery earned his battle spurs as a staff officer, convinced that future battles would be won or lost at headquarters before the engagement if the proper planning was conducted and sufficient resources accumulated.

During the interwar period and the opening stages of the next war, all three wore what John Keegan labels "a mask of command." Patton repeatedly perfected "his war face" to compensate for a shrill voice that he considered slightly effeminate. In North Africa, Rommel took to wearing his field goggles above his visor, while Monty donned a black Tank Corps beret. All such displays were deliberate attempts to develop a familiar persona to instill pride and esprit de corps within their respective commands. The three generals also advocated an expanded role of armored forces on the modern battlefield.

Fate brought the three combatants together in North Africa. This section of the book is probably the most interesting, as Brighton allows the commanders to enter "the same ring and to go at it." The author skillfully outlines both the impediments facing Rommel once he assumed command of the Afrika Korps and the constant problem of having to coordinate strategy with Hitler. Montgomery, on the other hand, built his reputation as the victor of El Alamein, and Brighton is careful to balance his personal assessment of Montgomery's subsequent "pursuit" of Rommel against Monty's own predilections for waging a cautious campaign to avoid the stalemate and slaughter that he had witnessed during the Great War.

Brighton's coverage of the war in northwest Europe is provocative, but he seldom takes the reader beyond the conventional interpretation of the war within the Allied High Command following the Normandy invasion. One chapter is labeled "Bulging Ambitions: Monty and Patton 'Win' the War." Such a title gives the reader the overall impression that Montgomery and Patton were peers and each coordinated the movement of his respective forces directly with the Supreme Commander. General Omar Bradley, the commander of the 12th Army Group, seems to disappear from these pages aside from an occasional reference. Though Brighton corrects this mispercep-

tion in the text, the reader is at best confused regarding the structure of the Allied command. The author is far stronger on his portrayal of Rommel, who commanded Army Group B in the defense of Normandy.

Montgomery emerges from these pages as a far more flawed commander than either Patton or Rommel. While Brighton sees Rommel as the best tactician, his admiration for Patton as an operational commander is quite evident. On the other hand, the author views Montgomery as a supreme egotist who more frequently than not disrupted the conduct and execution of combined operations. Whether it was with Patton in Sicily, where both Monty and Patton served as army commanders, or with Eisenhower in northwest Europe, Monty exercised a rather parochial view on how the war should be conducted. Montgomery's distaste for Eisenhower as the overall land forces commander during the last nine months of the war led to tremendous friction with the Allied High Command and almost caused Montgomery's relief from command.

On the debit side, Brighton spends an inordinate amount of time on sexual innuendo and is prone to exaggeration. He plows familiar ground with accusations of Patton's infidelity and Montgomery's estrangement from his mother, to say nothing of Monty's "predilection for the company of young men," as one biographer noted after Montgomery's death in 1976. Why Brighton includes this latter passage in the final page of text is anyone's guess and adds nothing to the book avowed purpose of examining three dynamic commanders and their mastery of war in the twentieth century. Nor is Patton's speech to soldiers on the eve of the D-Day invasion hardly the "greatest motivational speech of all time, exceeding the words Shakespeare gave Henry V at Agincourt."

A number of factual errors also sprinkle the text. The Tehran conference never witnessed a near-brawl between British Chief of the Imperial General Staff General Alan Brooke and Soviet leader Josef Stalin. Southwick House outside Portsmouth, England served as Admiral Bertram Ramsay's headquarters on the eve of D-Day, not Montgomery's. Robert Grow commanded the 6th Armored Division in Brittany, not the 4th Armored Division. The Yalta summit occurred in February 1945, not November 1944. The list goes on.

In the final analysis Brighton has produced a highly readable, but slightly flawed, portrait of three of their respective countries' more flamboyant commanders. He concludes with an interesting interpretation of how Carl von Clausewitz might have viewed Rommel, Montgomery, and Patton. The author then opines that if neither Patton nor Montgomery had been available to the Allies, and if Hitler's mental decline had not broken his trust in Rommel, Nazi Germany might well have won the war on the sandy beaches of Normandy. That is more contingency history than most authors would venture in a single volume.