

General Truscott, Seagoing Cavalryman

CPYRGHT

H. W. BLAKELEY

COMMAND MISSIONS: A PERSONAL STORY, by Lieutenant General L. K. Truscott, Jr. Dutton. \$7.50.

THE MARINES will do some head-shaking when they read this story of a horse cavalryman who was the senior American "observer" (an inadequate word) during the Dieppe raid, a key commander and a successful one in the seaborne assaults in North Africa, Sicily, Anzio, and Southern France.

In April, 1942, Colonel Truscott was commanding a cavalry regiment on the Mexican border when he was ordered to report to Washington. There he discovered that he was to go to Lord Mountbatten's Combined Operations Headquarters, which was responsible for amphibious training in Britain, as the head of a group of American officers. When Truscott reported to Eisenhower, then a major general and head of the Army's Operations Division, he raised the question of his inexperience—he had been in a small boat on salt water only twice in his life—and received the Army's traditional answer: "You can learn, can't you?"

Truscott, as he went up the ladder, commanding in turn the 3rd Infantry Division, the VI Corps, and the Fifth Army, often found himself over officers who had long been his seniors. He pays tribute to their complete loyalty. In our peculiar U.S. Army tradition, Truscott was never given the four stars of an army commander's normal rank.

Of Patton and Clark

His book, as the subtitle indicates, is "a personal story," told with honesty and with more frankness than might be expected. As the author says in a foreword, it was done "without professional assistance." Some paragraphs are extraordinarily illuminating. In the case of General Patton, for example, there is a brief description of

one incident that shows Patton fitting perfectly into General Eisenhower's description: "His emotional range was very great and he lived at either one end or the other of it." Faced with a delay in the controversial amphibious outflanking movement at Brolo, on the north coast of Sicily, Patton stormed into Truscott's 3rd Division command post. "'God-dammit, Lucian, what's the matter with you? Are you afraid to fight?' I bristled right back: 'General, you know that's ridiculous and insulting. You have ordered the operation and it is now loading. If you don't think



I can carry out orders, you can give the Division to anyone you please. But I will tell you one thing, you will not find anyone who can carry out orders which they do not approve as well as I can.' General Patton changed instantly, the anger all gone. Throwing his arm about my shoulder he said: 'Dammit, Lucian, I know that. Come on, let's have a drink—of your liquor.'"

General Mark Clark, who was often Truscott's immediate commander, gets credit for making every effort to support subordinates in their tasks, and for being an unusually able executive and administrator, but he comes off rather poorly on other counts. "His concern for personal publicity was his greatest weakness," says Truscott. When Rome fell, Truscott "received orders to report to General Clark on Capitoline Hill . . ." He complied, but

the meeting turned out to be nothing but a speechmaking ceremony. "I was anxious to get out of this posturing and on with the war," he writes.

Months later, when Bologna fell, another of Clark's liberation celebrations fell flat. "Clark led a procession of jeeps . . . on a tour of downtown streets. What we were to accomplish, I do not know. There were few Bolognese around and these did not seem overly enthusiastic . . ." Truscott reports with evident satisfaction.

The differences of opinion between the two commanders is even more marked in tactical matters than in personal appraisals, particularly in regard to the Anzio and Rapido River operations. Of one of General Clark's plans for an attack out of the Anzio beachhead, Truscott says flatly: "A worse plan would be difficult to conceive." Truscott and other senior officers reacted so unfavorably to this particular plan that "Our pessimism was not without effect," and it was abandoned. Of the controversial attempt of the 36th Infantry Division to cross the Rapido River a few weeks later, Truscott says he told Clark under what conditions he believed a crossing would be possible and that these conditions had not been fulfilled. The attempt was a costly failure.

The Muffed Opportunity

More emphatically, he charges that Clark's turning of the main effort of the attack out of the Anzio beachhead away from the Valmontone Gap prevented the destruction of the German Tenth Army: "There has never been any doubt in my mind that had General Clark held loyally to General Alexander's instructions, had he not changed the direction of my attack to the northwest on May 26th, the strategic objective of Anzio would have been accomplished in full. To be first in Rome was poor compensation for this lost opportunity." Anzio, says Truscott, was nevertheless worth the cost.

Strangely, out of the book there emerges a sense of similarity between Patton and Truscott. Very different in appearance, manner, and approach, they had one common characteristic to which everything else had to give way. Each, as far as his part of it was concerned, was going to win the war.

Field Marshal Kesselring, Flying Artilleryman

AL NEWMAN

KESSELRING—A SOLDIER'S RECORD, by Field Marshal Albert Kesselring. *William Morrow*, \$5.

ON MARCH 7, 1945, advance elements of the 9th Armored Division of First U.S. Army crossed the Rhine on a partially destroyed bridge at Remagen. The last great barrier to victory on the Western Front was breached. Although it took three weeks of heavy fighting for First Army to establish a bridgehead from which the climactic offensive could be mounted and for the other Allied armies to close up to the Rhine in strength and push their first elements across, the outcome was never in doubt.

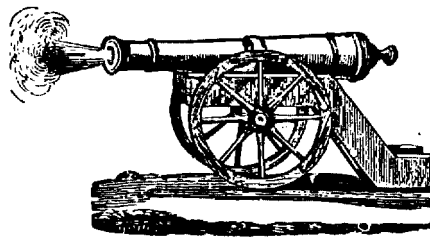
On March 8, Adolf Hitler summoned Field Marshal Albert Kesselring from his post in charge of the Italian Front to make him Commander in Chief West in place of the aged Gerd von Rundstedt.

On the Allied side in North Europe many asked: "Who is this Kesselring? How good is he? And what possessed him to take over this hopeless mess?"

Even in North Europe a few people knew the answers to the first two. Colonel Benjamin A. ("Monk") Dickson, First Army G-2, who had been General Omar Bradley's G-2 at II Corps in Sicily twenty-one months earlier, remembered Kesselring's maneuvers well: the extraordinary defense by inferior numbers anchored on both sides of Mount Etna and the north and east coasts of the island; the skillful bridge and cliff-road demolitions; the step-by-step fighting withdrawal to Messina; the evacuation of surviving German forces across the Strait of Messina to the Italian mainland with the loss of hardly a man.

On the U.S. Seventh Army's Palatine Front there were entire divisions that had good cause to recall Kesselring. The 36th, whose Texans had gone ashore at Paestum on the Gulf of Salerno September 9, 1943,

had come close to being pushed into the sea by forces mustered quickly from nowhere by a German commander already harassed by the sudden defection of his Italian allies one day earlier. The 45th and 3rd Divisions, rushed to the assistance of the 36th at Salerno, had even sharper memories of Anzio early the following year. The 3rd, landing in the rear of an unsuspecting enemy, soon found itself in contact with German forces which, as General Lucian Truscott, then commanding the 3rd, puts it in his excellent *Command Missions*, just couldn't have been where they were: "I suppose that arm chair strategists will al-



ways labor under the delusion that there was a 'fleeting opportunity' at Anzio during which some Napoleonic figure would have . . . galloped on into Rome. . . . On January 24 [two days after the landing] . . . We were in contact with German detachments with tanks and self-propelled artillery everywhere along the [beachhead] front."

What's Wrong with Fascism?

The German commander was Kesselring. The whole flawless defense of the Italian Peninsula was his plan—the location of line after line of fortifications and switch positions anchored firmly on terrain features and the exaction of the last drop of Allied blood for each defense line. It was adroit. It was witty. There could be no question of Kesselring's talent. He was probably the ablest of Hitler's high commanders—abler even than Rommel, whose tempera-

ment hampered his relations with both superiors and subordinates.

The answer to the third question—why Kesselring consented to take command of the tatters of the German Western Front two months to the day before the final surrender—has remained unanswered until publication of his extraordinary book.

For it shows Kesselring as one of the rarest men who ever lived—a man who never asked a question, even of himself. Temperamentally at least, Kesselring must be rated the perfect commander of the armed forces of a dictatorship.

Joining a Bavarian artillery regiment in 1903, young Kesselring served with various South German units as a junior officer during the First World War. After defeat, he set quietly to work, along with other promising survivors, to get ready for the next war. In 1933, he was transferred to the air branch. Kesselring records his conversation with Lieutenant General Freiherr von Hammerstein on that occasion as follows:

"Has Stumpff told you about your future employment?"

"Yes."

"Well, are you satisfied with it?"

"When I said no and proceeded to summarize my reasons he cut me short with: 'You are a soldier and have to obey orders.'"

And that was that, but the transfer was the making of Kesselring, for he became one of the first generals to see war in three dimensions. As an air commander and then as commander of combined forces he saw the war on more fronts than any other high-ranking officer.

In the same year Kesselring joined the Luftfahrt, Hitler came to power. "Until 1933," writes the Field Marshal, "I avoided all personal contact with the [Nazis]. . . . It was not until the end of October 1933, when as an executive in the Luftfahrt Ministry I was able to appreciate the methodical qualities of the régime, that I gained more favourable impressions. . . ."

TO THIS DAY, Kesselring he whatever that he served. As a Luftwaffe brass hat all over Germany in his pe aircraft year after year and saw a concentration camp. Or did, he fails to mention it.