

“The Generals”

“The Generals” by Thomas E. Ricks (2012) discusses military and civilian leadership during World War One (WWI) through Iraq. Ricks explains why generals, such as Marshall (famous for his leadership during WWI and after) are different from the generals we see today. Ricks, a journalist, covered wars in Korea and Iraq. The title ties into Ricks’ argument by ultimately showing generals are held accountable along with civilian leaders. The personalities of leadership, both civil and military, can determine the outcome of a war and the policies shaped. The types of leadership described throughout Ricks work compares the difference in personality, mentors, and experiences of the generals and the way the military and civilian policies are shaped regarding these traits. Ricks also describes the effects on the successfulness of certain wars due to the leaders they had.

The generals in WWI and World War II (WWII) did not hesitate to relieve a commander, at any level, due to the lack of leadership qualities. When they failed they were relieved and when they were successful they were promoted. Mentorships and aide positions were a large factor in the success or failure of leaders. Ricks explains the changes of leadership, in this time period, were the crucial factor in the Army. Ricks describes the lack of flexibility which is the most significant trait in the failures of the Vietnam and Korean Wars. The Army transitioned from two massive world wars to a small isolated war. Many of the older commanders were relieved due to age and ability, prior to the Korean War. There is a different reasoning for the

failure of these two wars. Leadership played a role. However, the lack of communication between civil and military leaders played a large role in both the Korean and Vietnam Wars. The Army was not used to fighting in guerilla warfare. It was an Army of limited abilities in strategy and tactics. By the time the Army figured out the problems and was willing to admit to failure it was too late to win.

The ending to these two major failures in history leaves a broken Army trying desperately to survive. The leaders began to micromanage other commanders and repair the broken trust between its soldiers and civilian leaders. The Army of the Cold War took more of a management position in tactical maneuvers and left the strategies to the civilian leadership, playing a major role in Afghanistan and Iraq. Throughout, the Korean and Vietnam wars dismissal of officers became extinct. All in all, Ricks provides evidence that leadership throughout time has shaped the Army today and perhaps the belief and values of Marshall's dismissal policy would fix the problems in today's Army.

Ricks applies suggestions at the end of the book on how Marshall may fix the problems of today's Army. He compiles evidence by comparing the outcome of wars to the specific qualities in civilian and military leadership in great detail. He even makes reference of generals today operating in Iraq to generals holding command in Vietnam showing that the same traits in those leaders are seen with very similar outcomes in different wars and time periods.

The evidence Ricks presents is convincing. The overall outcome tends to be the same. The lack of relieving incompetent officers leads to failure of a mission and creates a gap between leadership and soldiers. Therefore, the war will be lost. The ability of leaders to calmly access and conform to a situation seemed to be lost after WWII. Korea started with brand new

officers whom had little to no experience on the battle field. The Army was lost and no one seemed to know what to do. Instead of trying to mend mistakes made in history they did what they did best—chase the enemy and fight. They could not admit to mistakes. Therefore, generation after generation of military conform to the ways of the civilian and military leadership of that time.

In conclusion, Ricks did an outstanding job in providing evidence and outcomes of each general and each war. This book would be a great read at any level of education not only for military purposes but for civilian understanding too. He does an outstanding job implying the importance of removing a leader, whom does not perform well. He provides his conclusion only after studying each war and leader in great detail. He also provides several realistic options at the end of his writing of which he is sure Marshall will approve. The simple conclusion is when there is bad leadership there is a weak military and when there is strong leadership and flexibility the Army cannot be defeated.

Work Cited

Ricks, Thomas E. 2012. *The Generals*. New York: The Penguin Press.