



Roosevelt's Centurions: FDR & the Commanders He Led to Victory in World War II

Joseph E. Persico

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All American presidents are commanders in chief by law. Few perform as such in practice. In *Roosevelt's Centurions*, distinguished historian Joseph E. Persico reveals how, during World War II, Franklin D. Roosevelt seized the levers of wartime power like no president since Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War. Declaring himself “Dr. Win-the-War,” FDR assumed the role of strategist in chief, and, though surrounded by star-studded generals and admirals, he made clear who was running the war. FDR was a hands-on war leader, involving himself in everything from choosing bomber targets to planning naval convoys to the design of landing craft. Persico explores whether his strategic decisions, including his insistence on the Axis powers’ unconditional surrender, helped end or may have prolonged the war.

Taking us inside the Allied war councils, the author reveals how the president brokered strategy with contentious allies, particularly the iron-willed Winston Churchill; rallied morale on the home front; and handpicked a team of proud, sometimes prickly warriors who, he believed, could fight a global war. Persico’s history offers indelible portraits of the outsize figures who roused the “sleeping giant” that defeated the Axis war machine: the dutiful yet independent-minded George C. Marshall, charged with rebuilding an army whose troops trained with broomsticks for rifles, eggs for hand grenades; Dwight Eisenhower, an unassuming Kansan elevated from obscurity to command of the greatest fighting force ever assembled; the vainglorious Douglas MacArthur; and the bizarre battlefield genius George S. Patton. Here too are less widely celebrated military leaders whose contributions were just as critical: the irascible, dictatorial navy chief, Ernest King; the acerbic army advisor in China, “Vinegar” Joe Stilwell; and Henry H. “Hap” Arnold, who zealously preached the gospel of modern air power. The Roosevelt who emerges from these pages is a wartime chess master guiding America’s armed forces to a victory that was anything but foreordained.

What are the qualities we look for in a commander in chief? In an era of renewed conflict, when Americans are again confronting the questions that FDR faced—about the nature and exercise of global power—*Roosevelt's Centurions* is a timely and revealing examination of what it takes to be a wartime leader in a freewheeling, complicated, and tumultuous democracy.

Praise for *Roosevelt's Centurions*

“FDR’s centurions were my heroes and guides. Now Joe Persico has written the best account of those leaders I’ve ever read.”—**Colin L. Powell**

“Benefiting from his years of studying Franklin Roosevelt and his times, Joseph Persico has brought us a briskly paced story with much wisdom and new insights on FDR, his military liege men, World War II, and political and military leadership.”—**Michael Beschloss, author of *Presidential Courage: Brave Leaders and How They Changed America 1789–1989***

“Long wars demand long books, but these are 550 pages of lively prose by a good writer who knows his subject. . . . A fine, straightforward politics-and-great-men history.” —**Kirkus Reviews**

“Persico makes a persuasive case that FDR was clearly in charge of the most important decisions of the American war plan.” —**The Washington Times**

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Details

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From Reader Review Roosevelt's Centurions: FDR & the Commanders He Led to Victory in World War II for online ebook

Richard de Villiers says

A nice book to have if you are a WW2 buff but also a great book for novices to get to know the major players and arc of the war. Persico does not complicate things and tells his story in straightforward manner. His focus is on FDR and the men he chose to take soldiers, sailors and airmen to battle. The oft overlooked (not by history buffs) Marshall emerges as the indispensable man. A soldier and man of virtue and sense of duty unseen since George Washington - my words not Persico's. Eisenhower, MacArthur, Patton, Nimitz, King, Arnold, Stillwell, etc. They are all there. We do not get fawning portraits, except perhaps in the case of Marshall and FDR. Although FDR does not emerge completely unscathed. Persico is a bit too forgiving once it comes to FDR repeated concessions to Stalin. It is hard to square how he could stand up and even mock Churchill's imperial worldview but excuse or ignore Stalin's bloodthirsty regime. My only other quibble is the a small one dealing with China. Recent scholarship has been more generous to Chiang Kai Shek's leadership during the war. Persico swallows the Stillwell's story of a feckless "Peanut." That isn't much to complain about. Good book and worth the read.

John Yingling says

This is a first-rate, highly readable account of how FDR and his military commanders led the United States during World War II. And it is a very personal book, in that the reader gets to know intimately each of the main leaders who worked with and sometimes disagreed with Franklin Roosevelt. It is also a good book about history, even for those who are well-versed in that particular time period of world and American history.

My only problem is not with the book itself, but with the person who read it, since I listened to it on CD. He insisted on using voices for many of the historical figures, such as FDR, DeGaulle, Japanese leaders, Hitler, and most egregiously, Winston Churchill. These attempts to recreate the voices were rather annoying.

Jc says

A reasonable book that settles in with the vast collection of Roosevelt and World War II. It has lots of detail and some anecdotes not really found everywhere. You end up with a better idea of Churchill's reasoning about his Centurions than Roosevelt's.

Ron Perkowski says

This is a useful time life style compendium of anecdotes surrounding Roosevelt and a few of the celebrated American commanders in WWII. The thesis of the book is splendid and could have been terrific if the author had actually explored the theme expressed and provided insight into Roosevelt's role in the selection and assignment of commanders. For example, the selection of Marshall, how he was denied command in Europe, the plucking of Eisenhower from obscurity and the role of Admiral King. Various of these decisions are

praised and criticized on a cursory basis with a pro forma scorecard review (entirely lacking in intellectual rigor) forming the end part of the book. The inclusion of Patton in this collective hagiography of successful commanders is utterly bizarre and can only be explained by the fact that Patton was profiled in a successful movie the watching of which is a much better use of anyone's time.

Jane Thompson says

WWII Story

An excellent book, it explains the action and , more importantly, the personalities of those who fought the war with special emphasis on Roosevelt. It is exciting and explains things well. It is one of the best books about the war.

Joy says

I admire Persico's research and analysis. I don't rate ROOSEVELT'S CENTURIONS as high as his NUREMBERG, because in my opinion NUREMBERG's moral high ground has stepped down a bit in CENTURIONS to politics. The many personalities in both books are granted their share in shaping events.

Theresa says

I was a little nervous going in to this book because I am not a fan of military history. I don't think I've ever read another book before this one on the military from any war or time period. However, this book had enough military to explain some terms I heard before but not too much that I was uninterested. It found just the right balance. More importantly, Persico focused on Roosevelt and his commanders and less about battles and strategy. I think this was a good first military history book for me and I will think twice before skipping over a military book.

Ronald says

A superb overview of World War II - a fascinating overview of the key strategic decisions and major battles and campaigns of the war, as well as deep insight into Roosevelt's leadership style and the key people that fought the war under his direction.

Jill Hutchinson says

This was a group read in the History Book Club and got a lot of attention, as it should. Persico has done an admirable job describing the environment and men surrounding President Franklin Roosevelt just prior to and through WWII. He has some interesting insights into the behavior of some of the Generals like Patton

and MacArthur and how they got away with some of their actions which verged on disobedience. He paints a clear picture of how FDR came to some of his decisions and how he sometimes had to give in to his Allies' wishes, especially those of Stalin. The narrative style is enjoyable and makes this an easier read than one might expect. Beautifully done and highly recommended.

This book was received gratis from Random House through an agreement with the History Book Club

Joy H. says

Added 9/6/18. (first published May 29th 2012)

Narrated by: Dan Woren

<https://salon.overdrive.com/media/674841>

FDR was amazing!

Paul May says

Well Written and Well Researched

This book will fill in the gaps of you are a WW2 historian. Many books explain the battles or personalities of WW2. This book gives you the why it happened and who did it. General George Marshal was supposed to lead the D Day invasion but Eisenhower an obscure soldier a few years removed was tapped instead. Learn why and find out other fascinating facts about the strategy and thinking of Roosevelt and his commanders.

Barbara says

We all know how the story ends -- Roosevelt died before the Allies victoriously ended the war. And we know much about Roosevelt and his key generals. What Persico adds to the story are stories -- anecdotes of the personalities to make these seemingly larger-than-life characters more human. Persico has added these details to my lifelong love of World War II history. It doesn't change my impressions of these characters; rather, it adds another layer of meaning.

Chris says

Good overview of the discussions and decisions made between FDR, his military commanders, and Churchill. The book traverses steadily through FDR's involvement in WWII, providing anecdotes and insight that help to bring out the decisions made during the course of that war while showcasing the peculiar and masterful leadership of FDR during his tenure.

He covers a lot of things, some of which were covered in Roosevelt's Secret War: FDR and World War II Espionage. That book covered a lot of great things in detail, and I really enjoyed that book. But this book is also good, if at a different level. The focus here is the Allied leadership, their purposes and rationale for their

various proposals and plans, and criticism of some of the plans.

Overall, this was a very good read, and an enjoyable look at FDR's wartime years.

Grindy Stone says

Another general survey of World War 2 that examines the war from the perspective that f FDR and his war council. If this is your first crack at that sort of story you will enjoy, for anyone who has read one of the other dozen books on the topic, this will seem like a rerun.

Doug says

The book is excellent, covering the war's major military leaders as chosen by Roosevelt, why he chose them, and in hindsight, how good were those choices. I would not recommend it as a first book on WWII but for those who are familiar with the players, it is very good.

I have to comment on the audio performance. The reader uses cheesy accents when reading quotes from Churchill, Hitler, De Gaulle, Stalin, Tojo, and others. This would be less annoying if the reader at least pronounced the German names and places correctly. (Albert) Jodl is not pronouced Yah-dle. Hermann Goring is not pronounce Hair-mann Gair-ing
