



The Fourth Star: Four Generals and the Epic Struggle for the Future of the United States Army

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From Reader Review The Fourth Star: Four Generals and the Epic Struggle for the Future of the United States Army for online ebook

James says

The Fourth Star presents some interesting insights into not only the military leaders of the Iraq war but also the Army culture that produced those leaders. Written in a journalistic tone, it recounts events more than it analyzes, but the inside baseball of who said what to whom, who worked for whom, the personal connections that led to promotions, is all valuable. Of the four generals, only one, John Abizaid, was truly unconventional in his path to four stars. Dave Petraeus rubbed a lot of people the wrong way, and he stepped off the operations track for a few years to teach at West Point, but a quick scan of general officers' biographies demonstrates that he was hardly unusual. He served repeatedly as an aide-de-camp and stayed close to people who could help him. George Casey rose by the most common route--be the son of a general, work extremely hard, and don't rock the boat, advocate unpopular ideas, or step off the beaten path. Pete Chiarelli just kept slogging his way up the chain of command. I served under all four generals at some point or other, and the impressions conveyed match my own. The observations about counterinsurgency are now the conventional wisdom--Rumsfeld and Casey were wrong to push for an early withdrawal. Chiarelli's aid-based approach and Petraeus's security-based approach were the right answer. Subsequent events should cause us to reassess. In fact there is as much divergence between Petraeus and Chiarelli as between either of them and Casey. Chiarelli's jobs and projects approached achieved some short-term gains but could not transition to Iraqi control. Petraeus's security approach created space for political and economic development, but the U.S. proved completely unwilling/unable to prod the Iraqi government into using that space. Now the results are proving to be equally ephemeral as IS overruns northern Iraq. Of the four, Abizaid had the deepest understanding of the Middle East and harbored the greatest skepticism. History is demonstrating that his instincts were probably correct. Unfortunately, he was unable to translate that understanding to a workable plan that could gain support from the Bush administration.

James King says

The Fourth Star, for the most part, follows the careers of four of the most influential Army generals of the modern era. It takes you on a journey from their formative years on up to the war in Iraq. The book does a good job of documenting the generals careers, highlighting both their strengths and, in some cases, their weaknesses.

As the book moves on, it begins to use the generals careers as a device to explore the failed policies of the US government in Iraq. While this was great, it left out a lot of information about the generals careers outside of Iraq. This is further compounded by the early publication of this book leaves out the eventual disintegration of the Iraq strategies these men promulgated as well as some of the controversies late in some of their careers.

It is a book trying to be one thing and at the same time trying to be another.

Despite this it was a very interesting read about some very important men in US military history.

James Murphy says

This book follows the careers of 4 Army officers who served as contemporaries and who achieved the rank of General, 4-star rank, and served in Iraq together, all of them having an impact on events there. It traces the details of their careers and the forces that shaped the way they conducted themselves at the level of high command. Once the thrust of the book moved away from the biographies of these men, it became the story of how the U. S. conducted itself in postwar Iraq in solving the problems there, in helping to create a stable government, and in combating the snowballing insurgency. The book became an account of how the military let the country slide into civil war before they were able to successfully put the puzzle pieces together and turn the situation around. These generals are George Casey, John Abizaid, Peter Chiarelli, and David Petraeus. I got a more positive impression of military competence from this book than I get from periodicals and the evening news. Though the book may be a bit partisan, it does present an image of a military recognizing what needed to be done before their civilian bosses and beginning to move in that direction. The title and PR on the book hinted at a mild expose, at a failure by 2 of these generals and a deliverance by the other two. I found this not exactly true. They were all working effectively toward the same vision and end result. Washington policy deeply affected the day-to-day efforts of these officers and those serving with them. General Abizaid directed operations for the Mideast region. Casey and his executive, Chiarelli, were responsible for Iraq. They were blamed when the sectarian violence threatened to spiral beyond the points where the Army and the 2 governments could contain it. Petraeus, perhaps rightly so, gets the credit for driving the counterinsurgency doctrine that returned the country to the most stable condition we've seen since 2003. What happens in the book, the "future" of the Army, is a shift from conventional warfare to counterinsurgency tactics, a shift now also underway in Afghanistan as well. The debate about counterinsurgency has been going on for years in the wake of Vietnam. Because our larger enemy in that war was the North Vietmanese Army and because they conducted conventional tactical operations the U. S. military fought a conventiional war as well, though the perception of history is often different. And after the war the Army, eager to forget Vietnam, refocused on what they considered their primary mission, responding to major land conflicts in Europe and elsewhere. Cloud and Jaffe don't approach the issue in that way and for that reason lessen the impact of counterinsurgency doctrine and strategy in Iraq after Petraeus had taken command following Casey's elevation to Army Chief. I personally think the change of gears in Iraq to that of counterinsurgency is quite distinct from previous approaches, and decidedly effective. The Fourth Star, despite its claim to describe the events affecting the future of the Army, seems to avoid giving credit to that policy.

Gary says

This is really a great book that looks the the careers of four of the premier U.S. Army general officers at the top levels of leadership over the past decade or so. In many ways, their experiences encompass the main themes and events of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Readers learn about the lives and careers of John Abizaid, Peter Chiarelli, George Casey, Jr., and David Petraeus, all of whom ascended to four-star rank. On Petraeus, I also recently read Paula Broadwell's biography of him, and after having read this one, I think it is the more objective rendering of the man. I think that Broadwell may have been too close or too beholden to him for the access she was getting to include some of the more critical things that Cloud and Jaffe do in this book. Of course, as that this book was published in 2009, if you want to read about Petraeus's command in Afghanistan, you won't find it here, and Broadwell's book is a good place to read about that. I also liked that Abizaid's experience as an Olmsted Scholar in Jordan in the late 1970s was frequently referenced in terms of the effect that it had on him and his suitability for some of the senior posts and commands he later rose to. Though again, as with Petraeus, the authors do not say that everything Abizaid did was good - he came in with a few warts as well. In all, I found it be a quite balanced and interesting survey of the Army, the U.S. military, and how conditions changed from the beginning of the careers of these fine leaders in the wake of

Vietnam to the first decade of the 21st century. Highly recommended.

Mike Kershaw says

This is the story of four senior leaders of the Iraq War -- Casey, Abizaid, Chirelli and Petraeus -- following them from their time as junior officer to 2007-2008. I was contacted by one of the authors (Jaffe) on a recommendation from someone I know in DC last year about the book and he asked some very informed questions about my time in South Baghdad -- so I can attest to the depth of some of their work. I chose not to participate in the book however because I didn't feel I could shed light on the officer he asked me about in particular -- although I think he does a great job portraying him. The bottom line is that I think it is a great read and can help guys like us understand why things appeared to be so screwed up in the Summer of 2006. To some extent it condemns Casey, is critical of Abizaid, sympathetic to Chirelli and admires Petraeus -- assessments I do not necessarily hold. But it is not an expose or anything like that -- he clearly had the cooperation of these guys when he wrote it. And while it glosses over much (the disfunction below MNF-I in Baghdad in 2006 in particular which I was a witness to), it does not attempt to be THE definitive account of the 2006-2007 campaign. Its value is putting the perspective of these higher leaders into the context of the fight for Iraq -- valuable for those of us who served below them.

Rodney Harvill says

This book describes at a high level the Army careers of four men who achieved four-star rank:

- John Abizaid
- George Casey
- Peter Chiarelli
- David Petraeus

While the book covers almost the entirety of their careers, using snapshots of key episodes, at least half of the book deals with their involvement in the Iraq War. Because the careers of these officers often intersected, it was not possible to have separate sections dedicated to each General. Instead, each officer would be the focus of every fourth chapter. As, I was listening to the book on audio while I was driving, this made the book somewhat tricky to follow. Regardless, I have several observations:

1. Each one of these officers had his own distinct personality, value system, agenda and skill set; they were not homogenous snap-on tools. As a former Navy petty officer, I am fully aware of such diversity along the enlisted ranks and in the officer corps. Yet, I had been unsure if selection pressure at flag rank tended to favor certain personalities.
2. Each of them spent time away from command roles pursuing advanced degrees, and at least three of them taught at West Point's Department of Social Sciences. In fact, one of them, John Abizaid, got his Masters degree at Jordan University in Amman, a task requiring competence in the Arabic language and culture, no easy feat. This time away from command put them at risk of being passed over, but it gave them a broader view of the world and probably made them more effective generals.
3. Prior to the Iraq war, several of them had been assigned peacekeeping duties in Kurdistan or Bosnia. This gave them an idea of the difficulties inherent in restoring and maintaining order in situations where different identity groups want to kill each other.
4. Decisions by civilian leadership before and during Operation Iraqi freedom regarding troop levels, de-

Ba'athification, etc., hindered the ability of the Army to prevent and contain the insurgency. Different generals dealt with this in unique ways with varying degrees of success and failure. I was particularly impressed with David Petraeus' efforts in Mosul with the 101st Airborne Division. He pushed early elections and went to bat against de-Ba'athification, recognizing the need for experienced civil servants.

5. I was also impressed with Peter Chiarelli. Recognizing that disaffection with high unemployment and lack of modern utilities that worked before the Americans arrived was contributing to the insurgency, he pushed innovative solutions, not caring whose toes he stepped on. He was hindered by funding levels and by organizational siloing, and I have to wonder how different the progress of counter-insurgency efforts would have been if he had a freer hand.

6. A final observation from the book was the need to own decisions and consequences. As a result of problems with the Iraq War, senior government and military officials came under withering levels of criticism, some well justified and some not. Paul Yingling's controversial article, A Failure in Generalship, in the Armed Forces Journal was mentioned. The authors consider his criticism to be just and were dismayed at the circle-the-wagons response of the Army's generals. No one likes being criticized, but personal discomfort is not the standard of truth. The assertions in the article needed to stand or fall on their merits

In the final analysis, the book provided an intriguing inside glimpse of the careers of four men who had an outsized impact in the shape of today's Army.

Jerome says

I may not one to judge but I found the book a bit to "article like" and although the information was a bit flat in the details about the men behind the stars. It may start off as study of military leadership, but degenerates quickly into a "critique" of Operation Iraqi Freedom, which dominates more than half the writing. Naturally, there is little to no discussion of the successful endeavors of the last decade: millions freed from tyranny, democracy spreading throughout the region (also supported by Obama), toppling genocidal regimes in rapid time, avenging 9/11 and the deaths of 3400 Americans, etc. Those are ignored or covered rapidly as background to further criticism.

Oh, and of course, The Surge -- that every Democrat (and some Republicans) opposed -- but Bush & McCain bravely and successfully chose is ignored. When it is mentioned briefly, it's done only as way to correct prior tactical errors.

Additionally, very little coverage of risky and successful free elections (before pushing the issue aside to focus on violence) or killing terrorist leaders. This book was mainly penned pre-Obama, therefore the war and its mission was still "bad" then. Hypocrisy?

Particularly, the authors make the esteemed generals they're supposedly honoring -- who accomplish more for society in one day than these writers have in their lives -- look confused and forever at odds. Bush is also criticized, and disproven clichés about "rushing into war" are included ad nauseam.

Strong terms like "Humiliating setbacks," "disasters," "strained tensions" and so on are common words, as are opinions disguised as facts.

The 43rd POTUS being congenial, open minded, humble and a good listener -- unlike Obama, who only looks at the war politically -- is never described in such ways, unless interpreted by a sentient reader.

Perhaps most odiously, rather than note that we have the most educated, best-trained soldiers in US history, our troops and officers are shown to have low morale, be undereducated, suffer from low re-enlistment rates,

obstinate to changing tried & tested military strategies, discouraging of creativity and "anti-intellectual." Commanders are mocked as choleric killers counting dead bodies.
Lovely.

Instead, the authors laud nitwits who challenge status quo and support social science academic intelligentsia at West Point. The military may be a bureaucracy, but it isn't incompetent, change-resistant public education; it's the strongest force for freedom in world history.

Sec. Rumsfeld, to no surprise, is not portrayed kindly. Colin Powell is barely mentioned, and when he is, he's praised! Naturally, Powell gets off scot free, even though he was the real phony in the Bush Admin. Not much credit for Petraeus' COIN either, which tore apart the flawed Powell Doctrine, which occasionally works, but also shows inane fear of public will, which is often overstated, since while fatuous elites have fatigue, military families regularly do not.

Effective COIN reduced the violence and U.S. casualties against all odds. It allowed the army to achieve its mission of helping secure a functioning, elected Iraqi government. And to pacify the military haters, U.S. troops ended their combat role in 2010 (for better or worse).

And on that topic, if you want a real look at the war, read Paula Broadwell's "All In," a very objective book about Gen. Petraeus.

It's amazing this book could be so slanted hard left, yet the NYT's reviewer, like a child, begged for more war bashing:

"What is missing from "The Fourth Star" is a sense of the magnitude of the Iraqi disaster -- not merely what the generals inherited, but also what they, especially Abizaid and Casey, wrought. The Iraqi strategy conceived by Abizaid and Casey...led directly to the catastrophe that Iraq became."

Read history much? Look at FDR and Wilson's flawed rhetoric and epic blunders in the two world wars. Instead, the only prior war endeavors mentioned are "Defeat in Vietnam" and "the military hitting its nadir." Over & over. All conjecture, written as fact.

Jack says

Great book. Not too long. Perhaps a bit more could have been said on the pre-Iraq war lives of these great men. Still, a great overview of four important Army generals of the past decade: Petraeus, Casey, Abizaid, and Chiarelli. Most know about Petraeus as a hero, and Casey and Abizaid are not so highly regarded after the difficulties during their times in Iraq. However, Jaffe and Cloud make great cases for the decency, intelligence, and competence of the non-Petraeus generals. And Petraeus is indeed one of the most impressive people one can now read about (along with General McChrystal). Amazingly intelligent, hard-working, and confident. I think ONLY someone like him and McChrystal are capable of allowing the US to leave Iraq and Afghanistan in some form of acceptability. Even then, though, "capable" may not be good enough. So my main concern with Petraeus is that I wonder if it's in his DNA to recognize when something is beyond his control. Jaffe and Cloud note that Petraeus made a mistake or two in Iraq (and he seemed to catch on to that). That's the worst thing I think I could imagine about him, and that's me struggling to offer up a potential problem. The Chiarelli story is also interesting because I think he's the least well known among the four of them, yet he went a long way in pointing out early errors and he offered important ideas that eventually became a part of improving conditions in Iraq. Overall this is an impressive four person

biography that tells the larger story of how a huge government bureaucracy (the US Army) made some quick changes in the midst of challenging times to better address horrendous conditions. The four generals discussed in The Fourth Star made a lot of that happen.

Chip says

3.5 stars. Good, and interesting, but lacks the depth of works such as The Looming Tower and Ghost Wars. Would have been better (although admittedly also then not quite the same book) with more on the changes and development of the armed forces rather than being so focused on the four main subjects.

Meg says

I picked this book up just prior to the recent fall out over Gen. McChrystal and the naming of Gen. Petraeus as his replacement. I thought it ended up being a pretty timely read.

More than anything, this book cemented my belief that we did not have a game plan going into Iraq. Based on the accounts provided here, no one was talking to anyone to figure out what to do - they were all trying their best, just with different ideas of what should happen. I suspect that if the leadership from the civilian side had been stronger (from the President all the way to Congress), the Generals in charge might have had a better chance of succeeding in a quicker manner. At least that is my take from what is provided in the book. This book also made it clear to me, probably for the first time, that there was not one person I could point to and blame for the continuation of the war in Iraq. There were so many chances for things to go differently had there been proper communication between civilian leadership and military leadership. Not to mention that if the folks in Washington could have put aside party politics and thought for just ONE MINUTE about the soldiers there, maybe it would have ended more quickly.

Anyway, this is supposed to be a review of the book, not a review of the war. I thought they made Gen. Petraeus out to be a little too God like. Instead of the weird quirks being weird quirks, they are signs of a brilliant mind. I'm sure he is brilliant, I'd just like for the descriptions and things of him to at least feel a little less adoring.

I really enjoyed learning about how the Army's ideology has changed since Vietnam - and been changed by that conflict. I hadn't ever really given thought to the fact that there is a ideology behind warfare. It is an interesting read for that fact alone.

I also found it funny (in a sad sort of way) to read the General's pronouncements of what would be happening in Iraq by 2008 and 2009. How sobering to realize that the government and military leaders have been telling us essentially the exact same thing since 2003!

The writers made sure that this material didn't become too tedious. I definitely recommend reading this. Whether you support the war in Iraq or not, you'll learn something either way.

James says

In so many ways, an amazing book. Jaffe tells a truly remarkable story in fantastic detail without sacrificing the narrative elements common to any page-turning novel. The Fourth Star is an absolute must for anyone concerned with the inner-workings, recent operational history, or leadership of the US Army.

Eric S. says

WARNING: read Anton Myrer's Once an Eagle first. A good read of the conflict between professionalism and careerism.

The Fourth Star is an excellent book on the careers of Abizaid, Casey, Chiarelli, and Petraeus and their rise to prominence during the Iraq/Afghanistan wars.

A fair and accurate look at all four personalities. I was particularly stricken that it would seem that all four aspired to general rank and had a clear disconnect with the common soldier or any other officer that didn't share their career drive and determination.

After spending years in the Army, I can easily identify these generals with officers that I have personally served with and under. Not concerned about the average soldier and less concerned with the common values that they shared with fellow commanders.

I am stricken by the overwhelming urge to be the opposite these men. It is possible to be successful and to be totally dedicated to your subordinates. A healthy concern for soldiers, families, and subordinates is what we, as officers, are obligated to attend to.

These profiled officers are only tragic figures when the Iraq and Afghanistan wars seemingly do not bend and sway at their will and pleasure and then they look at the Iraqi people and the American soldier as somehow failing them and their careers.

Carrying notecards in your pocket with the name of deceased soldiers falls incredibly short of actually caring for the soldiers before and after their deaths.

No sympathy for these officers. I want to serve and read about the battery grade officer that is breaking track with his men while accumulating a batch of center mass evaluation reports rather than the distinguished men that spent the apex of their careers writing treaties and dissertations about how wars are fought from the safety of a classroom.

This book serves as the antithesis for officer leadership. Well written and serves as an outstanding negative example on how to lead and grow as an American Army officer.

Louis says

This book follows four Generals who have had various levels of command responsibility during the U.S. war and occupation of Iraq from 2003 and on. John Abizaid, Commander CENTCOM from 2003 - 2007. George Casey, Commander MNF-Iraq in 2004-2007 and current Chief of Staff of the Army, Peter Chiarelli, Commander MNC-Iraq (under Casey), and David Petraeus, Commander MNF-Iraq 2007-2009 and current Commander CENTCOM. These were the commanders who took over the occupation of Iraq after Tommy Franks and Ricardo Sanchez. Of importance for this book, these were also officers that recognized that Iraq was not a conventional war and what the U.S. faced in Iraq was an insurgency, one that the military and its political leaders were ill-equipped to fight from an attitude, doctrinal and training standpoint.

The first part of the book was about their training. Abizaid, Chiarelli and Petraeus were all given assignments and training experiences that encouraged them to be thinkers as well as soldiers. Abizaid having spent a few years on a college fellowship in Jordan, Chiarelli and Petraeus both spent time on academic assignments, with graduate school followed by teaching stints at West Point in the Department of Social Sciences, which the book depicts as a wellspring of unconventional ideas, which trained those who spent a tour as instructors in the willingness to question what the Army prepared for and fought its wars. The book returns to this theme of Sosh as the place where officers were taught to think, which served them well in learning a new kind of war.

The book makes it clear that those that came before them, Franks and Sanchez were completely out of their element. And while Abizaid, Casey and Chiarelli began to understand that things were wrong and had ideas of what needed to be done, they were hampered by an Army that did not want to change, and a political leadership that was more interested in managing U.S. involvement than they were interested in winning in Iraq. And this interest in merely managing gave a growing insurgency (which was being willfully ignored by the U.S. political leadership) room to blossom, and cause the large scale casualties over 2004-2006.

The star of the book is David Petraeus (with Odierno as his understudy). With the exception of his assignment into the hinterland of the Combined Arms Center, which would have been better than the career ending assignment that was another option. But still a disappointment after the lauded 101st Airborne which was one of the brightest spots in the immediate post-invasion occupation of Iraq. The book paints Petraeus as a hard driving genius who was a stickler for detail and drove his people hard. It was evident in his field level commands detailed in the book, and his first combat command as Commander 101st Airborne in the invasion of Iraq and the occupation of Mosul. And his return to the combat zone as Commander MNF-Iraq after rewriting the new Army Counterinsurgency doctrine had the feel of the rescuing hero, taking over from the exhausted Casey and Chiarelli who had to fight off their political supervisors in Washington as much as the insurgency.

How does it fare? Many of the current conventional wisdom does not credit Abizaid, Casey and Chiarelli since they presided over the worst period of the Iraq occupation, even if the seeds were planted before their arrival and they were hamstrung by a civilian leadership that was in denial of the reality of the situation and was more interested in perception than fact. The book notes what they recognized and tried to create, an Army that recognized that its goal was to win the population, not necessarily just build up a body count. But they were not able, and that failure hung over them. And the lauding of Petraeus may not be misplaced. I remember a Command Sergeant Major preparing me and some other civilian analysts for deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan describing Petraeus as a 'warrior-poet', and this was before Petraeus took his position as Commander MNF-I.

The driving point of the book is the requirement for a military to be flexible in thought and adaptable in the face of an enemy. It is a lesson that is learned with every new war. A peacetime military rewards conformity to standard. An actual war against an adaptable enemy requires leaders who can themselves adapt. The book identifies Chiarelli and Petraeus as officers of this type. And it also identifies them as generals who are actively raising and promoting the careers of other officers of this mode, in many cases against the desires of some of the institutional army. It means creating room for inventiveness and dissent, which is not always the easiest thing in an institution that is necessarily conservative like the Army. But, even if the heavy responsibility of the life of its soldiers requires some level of conservatism, it also requires innovation in the face of an innovative opponent. The book makes the argument that the Army needs these officers and leaders. And more importantly, it needs institutions that will provide these officers and leaders room to grow, and the ability to question and provide dissent in safety, so that the Army can benefit from them.

Larry Zieminski says

This book provided some great insight into some of the most powerful Generals in the US Army. It starts off with fairly short bios for each man, covering their early life and decisions to join the Army. Then the authors follow their careers until all 4 Generals are tested in Operation Iraqi Freedom. I enjoyed getting a closer look on how the Generals were viewing the war (which varied, sometimes significantly, from what they said publicly at the time).

I'd have liked to see the book cover more of the "end" of the Iraq War. We get to the surge, then the book

just ends. I'm guessing that as the Generals had moved on to other things (and other Wars), that it was beyond the scope of the book. I'm still looking for the definitive history of the Iraq War.

Kevin says

I just finished the book: "The Fourth Star" (2009©) written by Greg Jaffe and David Cloud over the X-mas weekend. It's about the lives and careers of four of the generals who've led the Army in the last decade. The book tells how they came up through the ranks and some of the experiences which prepared them for the challenges they faced in the middle-east. The book never glorifies war, but I found it to be incredibly self-serving. It is an obvious attempt to get their side of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts out into public domain before the political hacks from the Bush Administration can get their stories out.

I don't doubt that all four men are genuine patriots – as they define the term – I'm just not sure I define it the same way. Their primary goal seems to be to make the Army the best that it can be and to protect it, as much as possible from both the politicians (who would misuse it) and from itself. The confusion I have is I feel their primary duty is to protect the Constitution – from all enemies "foreign and domestic" – and not just to protect the country by protecting the Army. I don't know what these generals could have done to prevent the Iraq war or to prevent the mismanagement in Afghanistan, but I find it unbelievable to imagine they could not see the folly in both.

Further, I think their efforts to promote the Patreus surge in Afghanistan will harm the US military for decades and may cripple the Obama Administration. The classic warning to all generals is that they always prepare their army to fight the last war. The coincidence that a surge has temporarily worked in Iraq for a year, has now led them to convince President Obama that a similar strategy will work in Afghanistan.

I do not feel it will – further, I believe history will show the surge had a marginally short benefit in Iraq.
