

## Book Review

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***General Jacob Devers: World War II's Forgotten Four-Star*** by John A. Adams, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, Gemini House, 2015, 438 pages with maps and appendices, \$31.89.

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Author John A. Adams' latest book brings to light the story of GEN Jacob Devers, a renowned World War II problem-solver seldom recognized for his achievements and accomplishments. His life spanned the military activities of the Army from horse cavalry to the atomic age. His impact on the development and employment of armored forces established the foundation for our current force structure. As such, this book will appeal to members of the Armor community.

Commissioned in 1909 from West Point, along with fellow classmates George Patton and William Simpson, Devers trained as an artillery officer. For the next several years, he served in a variety of tactical-level assignments.

He returned to the military academy as an instructor and coach of the baseball team, where two of his players were cadets Omar Bradley and Dwight D. Eisenhower. As the nation prepared to enter World War I, Devers was assigned to Fort Sill, OK. There he prepared artillery units for combat and participated in research-and-development efforts. He witnessed no combat in WWI; however, his drive and enthusiasm earned him high praise.

Devers' interwar schooling allowed him to absorb lessons on organization and problem-solving as he honed his leadership style. By 1940, he led 9<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. As Adams points out in some detail, he was charged with developing both the division and Fort Bragg, NC. His interaction with civilian contractors, labor unions and the War Department are clearly laid out as Devers implemented his guiding principle to "Treat men as men, don't coddle them. Think before you act, but having thought, *act*."

And act he certainly did as both the division and the installation grew into exemplary organizations that reflected his leadership and managerial skills. It is interesting to note that the author does not hesitate to explain that while Devers assembled a great deal of objective data before he acted, occasionally he would "bridge across some fact he did not command ... and guess wide of the mark." Several examples are presented that demonstrate Devers should have better prepared himself before making a decision. Those poor decisions had ramifications that troubled several of his activities.

Following the death of GEN Adna Chaffee, Devers assumed command of the Armor Center at Fort Knox, KY. This area of the book presents Devers' uncanny ability to rapidly recognize the critical objective and move toward solving the problem at hand. As such, he became the driving force behind the organization of a combined-arms team, development of the M-4 Sherman tank, mobile artillery and tactical-employment doctrine.

The author discusses the Devers-led M-4 Sherman group that addressed such topics as industrial production capability, the speed of manufacturing, ease of maintenance, shipping weight and effect of weight on European roads. This analysis allowed him to successfully stop the heavy-tank program and proceed in developing the M-4 Sherman. Adams also includes an interesting review of the pros and cons of diesel- and gasoline-fueled tanks.

At GEN George C. Marshall's command, Devers moved to the European Theater of Operations when Eisenhower went to the Mediterranean theater. A fascinating examination highlights the differences between these two men. While both brilliant and capable, they had different approaches to problem-solving.

Adams relates that Eisenhower carefully assembled information from many sources, looked at the alternatives and came to deliberate conclusions. On the other hand, Devers looked over the situation, often shot from the hip, came to a rapid conclusion and then cut through whatever stood in the way of rapid action.

These two distinct approaches clashed on several occasions. By the time Devers assumed command of 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group, Eisenhower and his staff treated 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group as an "unwanted and ugly stepsister to whom nothing was given and nothing was expected."

Disagreements with Eisenhower, Bradley and their respective staffs are presented in a balanced and informative style. Reasoning behind the decisions and actions such as the early crossing of the Rhine River and reduction of the Colmar Pocket are thought-provoking. The trials and tribulations of dealing with the political and military strengths and weaknesses of the Free French Forces assigned to 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group are detailed. The tense relationship among the Allies because of the Battle of the Bulge and the subsequent German Nordwind operation against 6<sup>th</sup> Army Group provide insights into decision-making, massive troop movement and tactical employment, along with details on the logistical burden of Allied countermoves.

Throughout the war the author notes, "Devers was bright, empathetic to other people, incredibly optimistic and boundlessly energetic. He got things done and had Marshall's solid backing." As the war concludes, Marshall intervened and recommended Devers' promotion to full general ahead of others endorsed by Eisenhower. This was a fitting conclusion to a brilliant performance by Devers in war and peace.

***General Jacob Devers, World War II's Forgotten Four Star*** is an interesting and well-written book on a commander who espoused that "commanders of armored units must be bold, aggressive men who waste not a minute." Fittingly, it should have a prominent place in the professional library of the maneuver branches' members.

**D.J. JUDGE**  
**COL, U.S. Army (retired)**