



***Fighting the Cold War: A Soldier's Memoir***  
**By GEN (Retired)**  
**John R. Galvin**  
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**568 pages**

Reviewed by Maj Timothy Heck, U.S. Marine Corps Reserve

As tensions between the United States and Russia continue to simmer, the memoirs of the late GEN (Retired) John R. Galvin, NATO's last Cold War commander, offer a more nuanced view than the standard black and white portrayal of the adversary. *Fighting the Cold War*, which spans Galvin's life from youth to West Point to Vietnam to NATO command and beyond, is a free-roaming reflection on the events, people, and causes that made GEN Galvin one of the key architects to the peaceful end of the Cold War. Galvin's stories reveal him to be an adept commander, staff officer, and an astute judge of human character.

Throughout his early military career, GEN Galvin was placed in assignments that were not necessarily career-enhancing. When his Ranger School and West Point classmates headed to assignments in Germany, Galvin went to Puerto Rico to a unit about to furl its colors. From Puerto Rico, he served as an advisor and instructor with the Colombian Escuela de Lanceros where he saw firsthand a counterinsurgency and learned how to work with foreign forces, experiences that would benefit him later in his career. Later, with the 101st Airborne Division he was transferred from company command to running an administrative center, a less-than-desirable career step. Regardless of his circumstances, GEN Galvin managed to improve the Soldiers, their support of the division, and his proficiency through leadership, "self-awareness, [emphasis on] teamwork, communication, and sensitivity to change."

GEN Galvin's candor about his relief in Vietnam as a brigade operations officer during his first tour is refreshing. Furthermore, it serves as a reminder that not every commander-subordinate relationship is destined to be smooth and harmonious. In Galvin's case, it was a matter of chemistry rather than competence. Nevertheless, the relief left him stunned. As he had in Puerto Rico and in the administrative center, Galvin picked himself up and focused on learning what lessons he could from the experience. After stewing as an extra officer on staff, he found a job with the 1st Cavalry Division to finish his tour, not letting his relief alter his sense of mission in Vietnam. This sense of mission and need to contribute, though, do not leave him immune from some soul-searching about his place in an action-oriented Army after years spent thinking at Columbia University, West Point, and Fort Leavenworth.

GEN Galvin's role as a thinker benefitted him greatly as he went from Vietnam to the Pentagon, all the while working on a book about the development of airmobile warfare, something based on his experience in Vietnam. His role in the Pentagon Papers is interesting, although he avoids any discussion of his feelings or thoughts about their release and impact on the American effort in Vietnam. Further staff assignments in Germany, interspersed

with command in Germany, the United States, and Latin America reveal Galvin to be a leader dedicated to his mission, his men, and the larger picture of America's presence in the world.

Of particular note are his command of United States Southern Command (1985-1987) and subsequent command of NATO forces as the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) from 1987 to 1992. While in Latin America, GEN Galvin tackled ongoing insurgencies in four countries, a corrupt Noriega government in Panama, and was tangentially involved in the Iran-Contra Affair. The assignment, he reveals, honed his skills as a leader of troops and a diplomatic figure representing American foreign policy.

In Europe, General Galvin again returned to the main theater of the Cold War. As SACEUR, Galvin had to address issues of deterrence and defense. Defense, he claimed, was easier because he had "trained for that all [his] life." Deterrence, however, required "politics and psychology and coordination with the kinds of people I have never really known." As a result, he focused on nuclear issues, disarmament talks, and the eventual end of the Soviet Union. Both roles required him to be a diplomat as well as a troop commander. His command in Germany also involved delicate diplomatic maneuverings as NATO's military leader with all the subtleties inherent in multinational involvement. GEN Galvin's memoirs offer prime examples of how to build and mature an alliance that buttress Secretary of Defense James Mattis' recent reminder "that no nation is secure without friends."

Some readers might find Galvin's writing style distracting. Long an adherent to 3x5 note cards to record his thoughts, he made extensive use of them in preparing this book. As a result, stories do not always have a smooth transition from one to another, creating a somewhat choppy narrative. This does not, however, detract from the core message and ultimate value of the work.

The fine balance between thinking and acting is one of the consistent themes in *Fighting the Cold War*. Whether dealing with the paperwork headaches in the 101st or disarmament talks with his Soviet counterparts, GEN Galvin's memoir reveals an astute and self-reflective leader who grasped the many dimensions of senior command. The book offers ideas and examples of how to be an effective commander and staff officer at all levels, how to deal with foreign forces, and how to deal with profound change. As we prepare for an uncertain future, *Fighting the Cold War* provides insights on how to approach change thoughtfully, with emphasis on self-reflection, teamwork, and communication.