

Book Reviews



Masters of Warfare: Fifty Underrated Military Commanders from Classical Antiquity to the Cold War

By Eric G. L. Pinzelli

**Yorkshire, England: Pen & Sword
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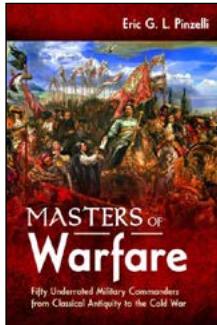
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As a society, we are enamored with creating lists. Seemingly, for every category imagined there is surplus of lists associated with it. Some name the greatest or the best in a category, while others focus on the opposite direction and single out futility or the worst in a particular group. Once a list is developed and shared, it is time for the second part of the process to begin — the debate.

Military history is certainly not devoid of its own share of lists. Numerous books and articles have been crafted highlighting someone's opinion on the best or worst in a certain category. In the past, that has included greatest or worst commanders, most decisive or important battles, most effective use of deception, best units, etc. One of the more recent publications added to this genre is Eric Pinzelli's outstanding volume *Masters of Warfare: Fifty Underrated Military Commanders from Classical Antiquity to the Cold War*.

Before delving into the list and the merits of the book, it is prudent to learn about the author who is responsible for both. Pinzelli spent time with the French Marines in the 1990s before pursuing academic interests. This included receiving the French Defense Ministry's Military History Award for best military research work in 1998 and obtaining his PhD in 2003. He focuses on 17th and 18th century military history and is particularly interested in naval and siege warfare and the clashes the Ottoman Empire had versus Venice, Austria, the Papacy, Poland, and Russia. This expertise led him to crafting his first book, *Venise Et L'empire Ottoman: Les Guerres de Moree (1684-1718)*, before releasing *Masters of Warfare*.

As the title strongly suggests, Pinzelli utilizes the volume to offer his selections of 50 commanders he believes are clearly underrated in their careers and performance. He narrows the playing field by focusing on the period from "Classical Antiquity to the Cold War" — basically from the sixth century BC to the Vietnam War. In the book's introduction, the author shares the criteria he used to make his selections. He states, "Fundamentally, this selection follows the criterion of legacy: their geopolitical impact on local or continental affairs, their distinctive contribution(s), their long-term influence on warfare and human history as a whole."



Employing the above measures, Pinzelli has clearly selected an eclectic group. The list includes a mix of army and navy commanders and is a very balanced group in terms of cultural and country origins and time periods. Thus, readers will find many commanders with Asian origins vice a heavy dose of European or North American World War II commanders.

To introduce his group to readers, Pinzelli has crafted short biographies of each commander (placed in chronological order). Within his introduction, the author concludes that more detailed analysis would have expanded the book at least tenfold. Within these profiles, he provides a concise synopsis of the commander's career, several quotes by or about them, and a final section where the author addresses their achievements (essentially why they made the list). As an added benefit to readers, he includes a select biography at the end of the volume where you can read more about the commander if interested.

I found these bios to be incredibly informative. Pinzelli writes in a highly conversant style which readers will find refreshing. While they can be read in any sequence, the author recommends reading the book in order. He feels it affords readers the opportunity to gain an appreciation of how warfare changed during the book's focused time frame.

To be honest, I consider myself well-versed in military history, but only in certain periods and genres. Thus, there were several (okay, many names) early in the book which I was not familiar with. As I continued through the volume, the names became more familiar, and I could increasingly question a selection based on my own knowledge. I was a little surprised at seeing the names T.E. Lawrence, Manstein, Zhukov, and Ridgway. In my opinion, in some cases, they may have been overshadowed but not underrated by their peers, foes, or historians. As with any list, there will undoubtedly be disagreements and those were some of mine.

With that said, as I completed the book, I surmised that although it was enjoyable to question selections, that was clearly not the author's intent. I believe he wanted to achieve two key things. First, as highlighted earlier, he wanted to instill an understanding of how warfare evolved during his selected period. Second, he could expose readers (certainly myself) to many commanders that they had never heard of and if so inclined seek out further scholarship. In both cases, Pinzelli has clearly succeeded.

In summary, readers will debate the author's selections within *Masters of Warfare*, but there should be little debate on the quality of his volume. Pinzelli has clearly crafted an outstanding volume. It is a book superbly written and organized. I believe any reader will benefit from his ability to provide outstanding, concise biographies on these 50 commanders. These in turn will surely entice readers to do further research.