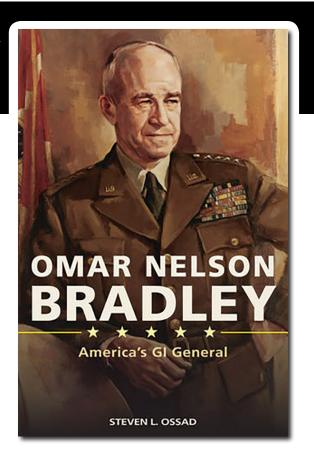
REVIEW ESSAY

Omar Nelson Bradley

America's GI General, 1893–1981

Steven L. Ossad, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, Missouri, 2017, 492 pages



Lt. Col. Rick Baillergeon, U.S. Army, Retired

"Always examined in comparison to fascinating figures above and below him, Omar Bradley has rarely been seen as interesting, compelling, or inherently valuable for study. Those who have written about him have strained to find synonyms for *quiet*, *shy*, *modest*, *steady*, *humble*, and *soft-spoken*, without resorting to the use of the words *dull*, *colorless*, *or slow*."

he above passage is taken from Steven L. Ossad's superb biography *Omar Nelson Bradley: America's GI General,* 1893–1981. For many, Bradley is clearly known for his World War II leadership and service, although he has been overshadowed over the years by his contemporaries such as Dwight Eisenhower and George Patton. Ossad strives to bring Bradley back into the public consciousness with a book that readers will find highly readable and informative.

Before delving into the many virtues of Ossad's book, it is worthy to address why historians have generally strayed from Bradley as a biographical subject. First, as the review's initial quote highlights, historians do not view Bradley as a particularly intriguing or worthwhile subject to devote a book to. Consequently, many are more apt to put another Patton or Eisenhower biography on the market. Second, amongst most historians, there is a belief that Bradley's own

personal memoirs (e.g., A Soldier's Story and A General's Life) have been more than sufficient to meet the public's interest over the years. Fortunately for readers, Ossad did not fall into any of the above categories.

Lt. Col Rick Baillergeon, U.S. Army, retired, is a faculty member in the Department of Army Tactics at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. In analyzing this book, it is appropriate to begin with what the biography is not. Earlier biographies or books focus almost entirely on his World War II years. Ossad's biography does not fit into this category. This is a book that seeks to provide a retrospective of Bradley's entire life.

Within this reflection, Ossad is detailed and comprehensive. He sets the conditions by allocating the first part of his book to a section titled, "Becoming a Commander." In this segment, he concisely addresses Bradley's childhood, his West Point years, and his military assignments that groomed him for the challenges he would later face. I found this section extremely beneficial, and it provided an enlightening perspective on how and why Bradley developed into the senior leader that he became.

Ossad's treatment of Bradley's World War II years is outstanding. The only biography I find comparable is Jim DeFelice's outstanding book, *General at War*, which keyed specifically on this period. To achieve this quality, the author has conducted exhaustive research to provide a ground-truth perspective of the key events and decisions Bradley was part of. In seeking this fidelity, Ossad compares the reflections of Bradley, others involved, and those of other historians. This section is particularly useful to anyone interested in the strategic and operational aspects of World War II.

Ossad devotes the final section to Bradley's postwar years. This is unquestionably a portion of his life that is overlooked. Unfortunately, the author falls a bit short on his overall treatment of this period of Bradley's life. He dedicates the preponderance of this study on the Bradley years from the end of the war until his retirement from active duty in August 1953. In particular, he appropriately focuses on Bradley's tenures as head of the Veterans Administration and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. However, the book addresses the last twenty-eight years of Bradley's life in only a few pages. It left me wanting a bit more on Bradley's waning years, but overall, it was a very informative section.

This is not a biography in which the author is overt in his praise or criticism of his subject, although it is clear that Ossad is an admirer of Bradley; he has crafted a balanced approach to his study. Throughout the book, he highlights the strengths of Bradley on and off the battlefield. Just as importantly, the author does not hesitate to discuss any personal shortcomings he believes Bradley possessed or mistakes Bradley made on the battlefield. Personally, it was refreshing to read a biography that sought objectivity.

There are several things that this biography is. To begin, this is a book that is one of the most readable volumes I've found in many years. Ossad achieves this readability principally through

two factors. The first is that he writes in an incredibly conversant style that engages a reader throughout the biography.

The second factor is the organization of the book. Ossad utilizes numerous subchapters within the biography that keep readers focused and aid in understanding.

This is a biography in which the author has made excellent choices in the "extras" he has included. These include a chronology of Bradley's life, and a glossary of terms and a list of abbreviations utilized in the book. Most importantly, he has inserted ten superbly crafted maps and thirty-two photos throughout the book. In total, these supplements greatly assist in clarity and work well in tandem with Ossad's words.

Ossad states in his introduction, "If it succeeds, this biography will help take Bradley from obscurity and expose him once more to critical light, where his considerable achievements—and his glaring shortcomings—can be recounted, examined, and evaluated on their own terms." I believe the author has clearly achieved this objective. He has crafted a biography that superbly reintroduces Omar Bradley to the public. They, in turn, will find

that Bradley was indeed an interesting and compelling figure and is truly inherently valuable in study.

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