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But It Does Take a Leader: The Schwarzkopf Autobiography

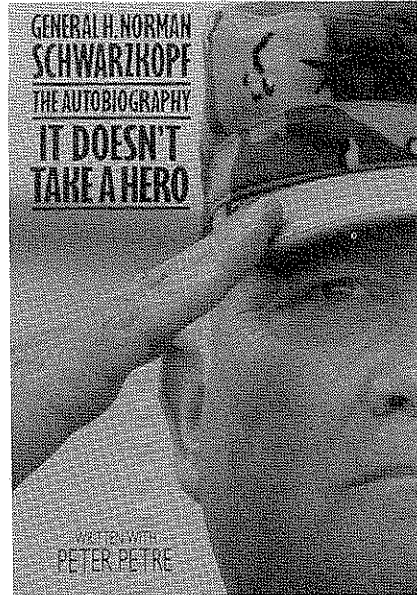
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A review essay on *The Autobiography: It Doesn't Take a Hero*. By H. Norman Schwarzkopf, written with Peter Petre. New York: Bantam Books, 1992.

It *Doesn't Take a Hero* is an extraordinary book about a remarkable leader of great courage and exceptional talent. In a few short weeks in the winter of 1991, General H. Norman Schwarzkopf captured the imagination of the world and became not only an American hero but an international hero as well. Coauthored with Peter Petre, a professional writer and editor, this is a well-organized, well-written book. It makes good reading. It is also a money-maker, reportedly bringing General Schwarzkopf an advance of several million dollars. Almost as soon as it was published, the book was selected by the Book-of-the-Month Club and made the *Washington Post* and *New York Times* non-fiction best-seller lists, remaining Number 1 for several weeks before being bumped by Madonna's *Sex*.

Like many autobiographies, this book reflects an enormous ego. General Schwarzkopf tells his complete life story in his own words with a capital "I." In the preface, he professes his admiration for Grant's memoirs, probably the finest military memoirs ever written in the English language, but, as Schwarzkopf acknowledges, his book bears no resemblance to that classic. Those segments of the book covering his "growing up" years, his service during the Vietnam War, and his role in the Grenada intervention of 1983 are especially interesting, but the most fascinating, most significant part is his account of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.



The defining influence on General Schwarzkopf's life was no doubt his father, a West Point graduate, Class of 1917, who instilled in his son at an early age the ideals of the US Military Academy—Duty, Honor, Country—and encouraged him to follow in his father's footsteps at West Point. The younger Schwarzkopf stood high in his Class of 1956 and could have chosen assignment to any branch of the Army, including the Corps of Engineers, but to his credit he chose the infantry—the heart and soul of any great army.

Long before he became a second lieutenant of infantry, however, Schwarzkopf had seen a lot of the world beyond his family home in New Jersey. Shortly after his 12th birthday in August 1946, he went to Tehran to live with his father, then Colonel Schwarzkopf, who was a special advisor to the Shah of Iran. Attending the Presbyterian Mission School in Tehran with other foreign students, he was exposed to the vastly different ways of the Islamic world as well as the customs of the Arab countries neighboring (Persian) Iran. In 1947 he went to Geneva to attend L'Ecole Internationale, whose students were children of diplomats in the region. Here he became fluent in French. (He was already familiar with German, his family being of

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German descent.) In Switzerland he was exposed to another wide spectrum of nationalities as well as to kids from the other side of the political fence, young Marxists and communists. In 1948, when his father was transferred to Germany, he attended successively the Frankfurt and Heidelberg American high schools, graduating in 1950. After spending that summer in Rome with his family, he returned to the United States to attend Valley Forge Military Academy before entering West Point.

Schwarzkopf's unusual background was to stand him in good stead throughout his military career. It seems as though he had been destined to become the Commander-in-Chief of the US Central Command (CENTCOM), whose area of responsibility included the Persian Gulf area and much of the Middle East. Nearing the end of his Army service, he chose CENTCOM over two other four-star commands he was offered.

Given his overpowering personality, it is not surprising that Schwarzkopf likes to brag about himself, at times exaggerating his story beyond the substantiated facts. He also tends to monopolize credit for some of the contributions and accomplishments of others. Nevertheless, his refreshing candor adds credibility to his story, even though he can be unthinking and can hurt people unnecessarily. When it comes to his beloved soldiers, however, he is very caring.

Unfortunately, Schwarzkopf's bent toward magnifying his own role at the expense of others has gotten him into hot water with Lieutenant General (Prince) Khalid bin Sultan, a senior member of the ruling royal family of Saudi Arabia. General Khalid, who was co-commander of coalition forces participating in Desert Storm, wrote a scathing article titled "Schwarzkopf Falls Short In Writing History," which appeared in *Army Times* on 2 November 1992. Khalid declared that "there are so many inaccuracies and slanted remarks in [Schwarzkopf's] book that I feel I must set the record straight Many . . . events described in *It Doesn't Take a Hero* will be remembered differently in Riyadh and in the capitals of other coalition partners." This controversy will no doubt boost book sales, but regrettably it is bound to hurt US relations with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf nations, an area of vital importance to the entire world.

Despite General Khalid's unhappiness, nothing can detract from Schwarzkopf's magnificent performance in Desert Storm as a US and allied commander. Bringing together in harmony the many disparate allied and US forces involved, fitting them all in the right place where each could make the most valuable contribution to the overall effort, and committing them to battle in a cohesive, synergistic manner led to a brilliant success.

In an earlier part of the book, addressing Schwarzkopf's first tour in Vietnam (1965-66), one is struck by a curious omission. As a junior officer, Schwarzkopf served as an advisor to Colonel Ngo Quang Truong, an outstanding leader in the Airborne Brigade (later expanded to a division), an elite element of the South Vietnamese army. Schwarzkopf tells us he came to

admire Truong as an exemplary fighting leader he could never forget. But Truong is never mentioned again. Schwarzkopf seems to be unaware that Truong went on to command a division, then a corps in the Delta, and then another corps in the north, all with great distinction. Indeed, he became one of the most admired military leaders in South Vietnam. When that nation collapsed in 1975, he was evacuated to the United States. Thus it is difficult to understand why Schwarzkopf did not recognize this great soldier further in his book.

Another curiously incomplete picture is found in his account of his second tour in Vietnam (1969-70), when he commanded a battalion in the Americal Division located in the northern part of the country. His division commander was Major General Lloyd B. Ramsey (now retired), a highly experienced and decorated combat leader, wounded five times in actions previous to the Vietnam War. Schwarzkopf speaks disparagingly about Ramsey's headquarters at Chu Lai, singling out the officers' mess for being too plush for a war zone. (The way the war was fought, all of South Vietnam was a war zone! Moreover, Schwarzkopf, on his first tour in Vietnam as a junior officer, lived in a villa in Saigon when he was not out in the field with his South Vietnamese counterpart.) Ramsey inherited the headquarters at Chu Lai from a succession of previous division commanders; he had to live somewhere, if not at the division's established command post. But, unaccountably, Schwarzkopf does not mention what happened to Ramsey. On 17 March 1970, his helicopter crashed in a remote jungle area, and after every available helicopter in the division was tasked to find the crash site, a chopper with Schwarzkopf aboard found Ramsey. Badly injured, Ramsey had been unconscious or semiconscious for some 18 hours when he was rescued. He was evacuated to the United States and miraculously lived to tell the tale. Again it is difficult to understand why Schwarzkopf made no mention of this dramatic episode. In the book, moreover, Ramsey's successor as the division commander is incorrectly identified as Major General Stan Meloy when in fact it was Major General A. E. Milloy. Assuming that Schwarzkopf knew the correct name of his division commander, such an egregious error does not reflect well on the editing of the book.

The composite picture of Schwarzkopf as a personality that emerges from his story is a complex one. Perhaps the strongest impression is that of a man with raw courage and an overweening ambition, but with a hair-trigger, explosive temper that often got him into trouble. In his first tour in Vietnam, for example, as a captain and a MACV advisor, Schwarzkopf blew his stack and got away with flagrant insubordination toward a US Army colonel that should not have gone unnoticed. He wasn't even verbally reprimanded by his senior in the MACV advisory chain of command. During the Grenada intervention of 1983, now Major General Schwarzkopf lost his cool and threatened to court-martial a Marine colonel in a situation that could have been better handled with

a little finesse. During the Persian Gulf crisis, General Schwarzkopf owes much to General Colin Powell, the JCS Chairman, who served as an indispensable buffer in Washington, keeping Schwarzkopf and his famous temper from damaging relations with the Secretary of Defense and the President, not to mention shaking their confidence in him.

To complete the portrait, it should be added that Schwarzkopf is a superb briefer, talented speaker, and consummate actor. Although he apparently does not care for the media and goes out of his way to keep them out of his hair, he knows how to use television effectively and can con the media when he has to. But above all, Schwarzkopf is a charismatic leader who was favored by Lady Luck and knew how to exploit good fortune.

Although it is fortunate that this book was written while things were still fresh in Schwarzkopf's mind, it still leaves some unanswered questions. One hopes that after he has had time to reflect and mellow, he will sit down and write a more contemplative sequel, or at least an article or two. Meanwhile, here are some lingering, unanswered questions to ponder. They are not intended to detract from Schwarzkopf's brilliant record in the US Army, but rather to bring to light important areas that for reasons unknown were not addressed in the book.

- *Grenada, 1983:*

Overall joint planning for Urgent Fury, as the operation was called, was apparently finalized at Headquarters CINCLANT with all major commanders present. What guidance did the JCS provide? How were special operations melded into the plan? Were they conducted independently from the main H-Hour show? How were they coordinated with the main operations plan? Who had ultimate responsibility for determining their feasibility? (Most of these pre-H-Hour operations failed, resulting in a bad beginning for the main event.) What were the major planning lessons?

Why wasn't an individual designated in advance to take command of the various ground forces—82d Airborne, Marines, Rangers, Special Forces, etc.—after they had been inserted on land? (This is normal joint and service doctrine.) In Grenada, after the JTF Commander, Vice Admiral Metcalf, had in effect made Major General Schwarzkopf his deputy commander, why didn't the latter take over ashore? He roundly criticizes the 82d Airborne Division for being slow and timid in its advance on its objectives—why didn't he assert himself and get the 82d moving?

- *Desert Shield, 1990:*

General Schwarzkopf's command, CENTCOM, had a good grasp of the situation in the region just before Iraq invaded Kuwait in early August 1990 and indeed had predicted the invasion, but did not believe that Saddam would seize all of Kuwait. However, why did CENTCOM and the intelligence

community so grossly overestimate Iraq's military capabilities? Mere size and numbers of troops, tanks, aircraft, etc. are meaningless in themselves. As any student of military history knows, time and again far smaller forces have decisively defeated much larger enemy forces. What counts is the *quality*—the fighting heart and will of an army. For several decades, Israel with much smaller forces had decisively defeated any combination of Arab forces opposing her. The question of quality applied in spades in the case of Iraq, greatly weakened by enormous casualties during its eight-year war with Iran, a conflict that had indeed demoralized Iraqi forces. Why then did the United States make the Iraqis out to be ten feet tall? In the event, the Iraqi air force declined to fight and even the vaunted Republican Guard was no match for US forces. How could Iraq possibly be expected to vie successfully with the world's only superpower reinforced with strong allied contingents? Moreover, how could Iraq possibly be a nuclear or chemical threat to the United States? Saddam was *not* crazy enough to use such weapons, assuming in the first place that he had the capability to deliver any, knowing full well that US retaliation would be devastating. In sum, it seems reasonably clear, not just in hindsight, but with the knowledge of Iraqi capabilities possessed at the time, that the United States could have decisively defeated Iraq with a smaller force buildup and accomplished this at an earlier date and at lesser cost.

- *Desert Storm, 1991:*

In hindsight, it does seem clear that the 100-hour ground battle was ended prematurely when our top leaders in Washington, feeling the heat of public pressure to stop the “wanton killing” of the enemy, persuaded General Schwarzkopf to agree to a cease-fire before he could be reasonably certain of the destruction of the Republican Guard. Schwarzkopf had exhorted his forward battle commanders to make every possible effort to assure total destruction, emphasizing that anything less was not acceptable. Yet at the crucial moment, General Schwarzkopf gave in and agreed to a cease-fire at a time when only a few more hours might have allowed his field commanders, all of whom wanted to press the attack, to accomplish their mission. Perhaps Schwarzkopf was influenced by the possibility that our Arab allies might not like to see the Iraqis crushed to the point of upsetting the balance of power in the region. But the fact remains that some half of the Republican Guard escaped, leaving Saddam still entrenched in power. In any event, hopes for a decisive military victory, which had been within the grasp of US forces, appear to have been thwarted. Only time will tell how this outcome is to be judged. It was not the first time, however, that political considerations have taken precedence over military objectives.

Finally, have our armed services thought long and hard enough about the role of air assets in this particular, perhaps unique, case? Blinded by US multi-service air power and immobilized by an unrelenting air attack, Iraq

could not maneuver her forces and in effect was almost helpless. What are the implications for all US services in the future, not only with respect to their roles and missions, but also for service and joint operational doctrine?

In Conclusion

In the opinion of this reviewer, there is one major flaw in the book—the absence of any strategic overview that puts things in a larger perspective. In referring to the Vietnam War, for example, General Schwarzkopf seems unaware that the President, not the military chiefs, decided the policy on how the United States would fight the war. From the beginning, starting with President Truman and followed by five successive American Presidents, the decision was to support South Vietnam, but to avoid expanding the conflict; later, when US forces were committed, we were to fight in effect a limited war. North Vietnam was supported by the Soviet Union, a superpower, and by China; the risk of another world war was very real. South Vietnam, outmanned and outgunned by the North, could not have survived without outside assistance. Had the United States not committed major ground forces in 1965, South Vietnam would have disappeared as an independent state that year. By the same token, had the Soviet Union opposed military action against Iraq in 1990, there would have been no UN ultimatum against Iraq, and Desert Shield and Desert Storm would not have occurred. In other words, there is a vast strategic difference between the 25-year struggle in Vietnam and the six-month crisis in the Persian Gulf.

Pursuing this strategic vein, in the broad sweep of history that occurred during the four-decade period between World War II and the end of the Cold War, the United States and its allies succeeded in containing the Soviet Union and in preventing any major territorial communist gains other than China. The presence of NATO forces in Europe, and the prosecution of the Korean and Vietnam wars, were together largely responsible for this triumph of the Free World. Thus it can be said with conviction that the sacrifices of our young men and women in those two distant wars were *not* in vain. Sooner or later, the American people will come to this realization. Schwarzkopf's book would have served readers better had he paused at the end of his distinguished 35-year military career to link our post-World War II conflicts into a coherent geostrategic weltanschauung.

The United States remains blessed with unsurpassed young American men and women in our armed forces who will carry out the orders of their Commander-in-Chief with no questions asked and without complaint. Likewise, our country continues to produce leaders worthy of the trust of our fighting forces. Indeed, these young people serving in our armed forces know what the motto, "Duty, Honor, Country," truly means. And so does General Schwarzkopf. □