

General in Command: The Life of Major General John B. Anderson from Iowa Farm to Command of the Largest Combat Corps in World War II

Michael M. Van Ness

Koehler Books (Jun 24, 2019)

Hardcover \$35.95 (252pp)

978-1-63393-851-9

General in Command is a fascinating biography of an overlooked but great American soldier.

Michael M. Van Ness's *General in Command* is a fantastic biography of one of World War II's less familiar, but brilliant, leaders.

The man who would become Major General John B. Anderson was born in Iowa, the youngest child of Danish immigrants. His was a family of farmers, though some were also soldiers; Anderson's older brother was a member of the Iowa National Guard and a veteran of the Spanish-American War. Hardship and service came to define Anderson's private and public life.

Told in short and punchy chapters that are absent unnecessary descriptions or thematic diversions, this biography presents a holistic view of Anderson as a man and military officer. From his time at West Point to his early combat experiences in Mexico and in World War I, Anderson's early life and career are given as much importance as his later days as one of the US Army's most competent and successful generals during World War II.

More than just a rundown of Anderson's incredible life, the book argues that Anderson never received the accolades that he was due because of his reserved Midwestern personality. Unlike the flashy General George Patton or the intellectual General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Anderson led his men—American, Canadian, and British—into the teeth of the *Wehrmacht* with quiet determination. He won the day, but history has long credited his victory in March of 1945 to the British and Winston Churchill.

Simultaneously a heroic portrait of Anderson and a top-down overview of the deadly Rhineland Campaign, the story is told in great detail, its language action oriented as it moves between dissecting on-the-ground battles and discussing the diplomatic and political machinations that accompanied every Allied offensive.

The book's top-down narration style means that some of the horrors of World War II are glossed over. The gore of the European Theater is presented in a sanitized way. Not much background information is shared about the war—either its causes or the actions leading up to Operation Overlord in 1944. A wide variety of pictures, including candid and personal images of Anderson outside of uniform and outside of battle, are included, as are Anderson's letters to his wife, which are rendered in Comic Sans that strains the eyes and is too light for their content.

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BENJAMIN WELTON (November 18, 2019)

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