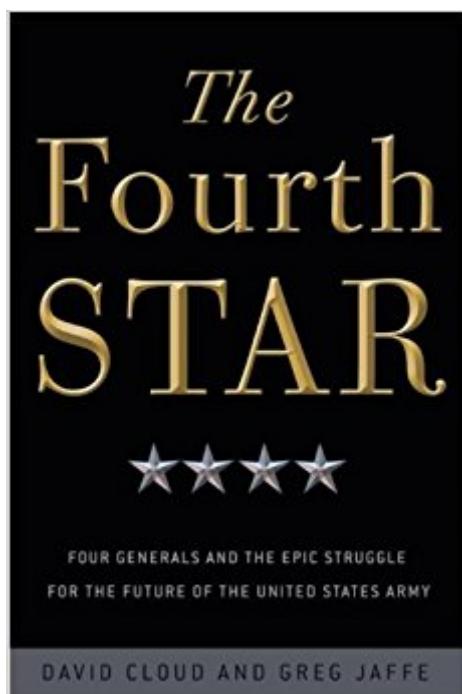


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The Fourth Star: Four Generals And The Epic Struggle For The Future Of The United States Army



Synopsis

They were four exceptional soldiers, a new generation asked to save an army that had been hollowed out after Vietnam. They survived the military's brutal winnowing to reach its top echelon. They became the Army's most influential generals in the crucible of Iraq. Collectively, their lives tell the story of the Army over the last four decades and illuminate the path it must travel to protect the nation over the next century. Theirs is a story of successes and failures, of ambitions achieved and thwarted, of the responsibilities and perils of command. The careers of this elite quartet show how the most powerful military force in the world entered a major war unprepared, and how the Army, drawing on a reservoir of talent that few thought it possessed, saved itself from crushing defeat against a ruthless, low-tech foe. In *The Fourth Star*, you'll follow: Gen. John Abizaid, one of the Army's most brilliant minds. Fluent in Arabic, he forged an unconventional path in the military to make himself an expert on the Middle East, but this unique background made him skeptical of the war he found himself leading. Gen. George Casey Jr., the son of the highest-ranking general to be killed in the Vietnam War. Casey had grown up in the Army and won praise for his common touch and skill as a soldier. He was determined not to repeat the mistakes of Vietnam but would take much of the blame as Iraq collapsed around him. Gen. Peter Chiarelli, an emotional, take-charge leader who, more than any other senior officer, felt the sting of the Army's failures in Iraq. He drove his soldiers, the chain of command, and the U.S. government to rethink the occupation plans yet rarely achieved the results he sought. Gen. David Petraeus, a driven soldier-scholar. Determined to reach the Army's summit almost since the day he entered West Point, he sometimes alienated peers with his ambition and competitiveness. When he finally got his chance in Iraq, he more than anyone changed the Army's conception of what was possible. Masterfully written and richly reported, *The Fourth Star* ranges far beyond today's battlefields, evoking the Army's tumultuous history since Vietnam through these four captivating lives and ultimately revealing a fascinating irony: In an institution that prizes obedience, the most effective warriors are often those who dare to question the prevailing orthodoxy and in doing so redefine the American way of war. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

The author has chosen the careers of 4, four star generals to illustrate the transformation in the post-Vietnam War military. Although he focuses on the early lives of these 4 generals, the latter part of the book gives credit to a number of supporting officers who contributed to their successes. Inevitably, the book focuses on the decade long war in Iraq (and to a lesser extent the one in Afghanistan), and its ups and downs. That does not detract from the central goal of illustrating the struggles within the modern military organization. The book has an easy flow, and a pleasure to read. I found a number of interesting things in the book. Commanders in the modern military fought wars with PowerPoint slides (like the rest of us on the main street do, much to the detriment of good communication). You need a good "PR strategy" to remain visible, and move up the ranks in the military. For 2 of the 4 generals in the book, Iraq was their first time in the front lines. Going into Iraq, US military did not understand counter-insurgency even after all the debacles of Vietnam. There is a quote in the book from "Bureaucracy Does Its Thing", by Robert Komer which best describes both Iraq and Vietnam ... "The sheer incapacity of the regimes we backed, which largely frittered away the enormous resources we gave them, may well have been the single greatest constraint on our ability to achieve the aims we set ourselves at acceptable cost". The army was caught in the middle ... between the goals to fight a war and build a nation.

The Fourth Star is a great look at four Generals who have shaped the US Army during the first decade of the 21st century. Two of them have suffered a lot of bad press: George Casey and John Abizaid. The former was commander of US forces in Iraq as the country descended further into chaos and the latter was the commander of Central Command. The third, Peter Chiarelli, has flown largely under the radar of the mainstream press but appears to be well regarded in military circles. The fourth, David Petraeus, has been much heralded as a brilliant commander, strategist, power player, and potential president. Although the authors made good use of their access to Petraeus and told us a lot about his background, much of his story has been heavily featured in news articles and books like *The Gamble*. Where this book breaks new ground, at least to me, is its focus on the other three. After reading about Casey and Abizaid, I had a much better understanding of what they were trying to achieve in Iraq and the problems they faced. I felt pity for them because based on this book, it appears they were a victim of events as much as their own failings. Casey is depicted as a well meaning man with a great tolerance for criticism, surprisingly surrounding himself with people who did not agree with his point of view. Abizaid is the type of commander I would have thought was well suited for the Middle East. He had expressed a strong interest in the region early in his career before the Persian Gulf War, studied there, and learned Arabic. What we see of these men goes largely unmentioned when discussing the surge, that many of the elements that allowed the surge to work began before the strategy was changed. Chiarelli is a different case. He seems to have done well in Iraq but was unable to get his desired command, Petraeus'. As a result, while Casey is likely finishing his last job in the Army as Chief of Staff and Abizaid is retired, Chiarelli probably has a future on the Joint Chiefs. The book offers excellent background on these four men. It also shows the Army at the crucial period following Vietnam and before the Persian Gulf War as these men were mid-career. Finally, it shows what happened in Iraq as it deteriorated and gives the perspective of the commanders who were there. Many other books on Iraq are dismissive of the commanders from 2003 to 2007 while lionizing Petraeus. While General Petraeus deserves praise, these other men deserve attention too. There are some great tidbits in the book about how these generals felt about their civilian commanders, how they interacted with each other, and how staffing works in the Army. It offers all this in a very accessible, readable way.

I could not put this book down. It was a consistent steady read throughout. I like the intertwining nature of the 4 biographies and felt that truly the only way to analyze these 4 exceptional individual's lives was to see the interplay, crossing paths, and at times tug-of-war like struggles between these fine men. However, more than a simple biographic of the individuals this book dives deeper to better

understand how these 4 individuals impacted and completely changed the dynamic of counter insurgency. David Petraeus's innovative and completely competitive character drove his ground breaking ideas in the ways of conducting counter insurgency. John Abizaid's expertise in the middle east not only as a geographic boundary region but also as a culturally diverse people and an excellent manager of people shines completely through out his chapters in this book. George Casey Jr. is painted in my opinion in a polarizing light. His early career looks promising and stands him up as a tough but firm leader who wishes to succeed without being a "poster boy". However, in the later chapters he is portrayed as merely a man trying his best to hold a tough situation together and he is in my opinion the embodiment of the Iraq conflict at times successful but more often fractured and directionless. Finally Peter Chiarelli, in my opinion is mostly playing a side role to the other three. He seems to get minimal focus from the author and is seemingly limited to a supporting cast role rather than the star the cover designation attempts to make him out to be. What I found most enjoyable about the book is not only does the author introduce and follow these fine men through their career but you get to see some other influential people through their eyes. Colin Powell, Donald Rumsfeld, Former President George W. Bush, and even glimpses of notable senators from that time period. Over all I felt the book was thoroughly fleshed out and provided complete knowledge of the scene in a simple easy to read manner while driving home the most important lessons learned by the U.S. Army through the career's of these fine men. A must read!

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