



## *The General Who Wore Six Stars: The Inside Story of John C.H. Lee*

by Hank H. Cox.

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Military historians have in recent years been writing biographies of a number of second-tier American general officers of the World War II era.<sup>1</sup> In *The General Who Wore Six Stars*, Hank Cox<sup>2</sup> adds to this scholarship on commanders who helped achieve Allied victory in Europe. As a self-described author of “books and stories, articles and plays,” he writes in a fluent prose honed during his forty-year career as a Washington-based “journalist, editor, writer, and media manager” (www.hankhcox.com).

Cox’s subject is the much-misunderstood and maligned Lt. Gen. John Clifford Hodges Lee (USMA Class of 1909). Seventy-three years after World War II, Lee remains virtually unknown even among scholars. His role as the principal organizer of the Allied logistical effort in Europe may be glimpsed in popular works by Jonathan Jordan,<sup>3</sup> Steven Ambrose,<sup>4</sup> and Rick Atkinson,<sup>5</sup> who portray Lee as a venal, effete, and bumbling martinet of no consequence to the Allied war effort. By contrast, Cox stakes out a stridently revisionist position:

Certainly there was no shortage of “grandiose” generals in World War II. Gens. George Patton, Douglas MacArthur, and Bernard Montgomery come to mind. But though they offended many, they also excited admiration for their daring deeds on the battlefield. Lee, perhaps because his mission was supply instead of combat, never received that kind of fame and adulation. The question at issue in this book is whether General Lee warrants all of the opprobrium heaped upon him or whether the historian [Jean Edward] Smith was closer to the truth. Was Lee a jerk or a hero? Just who was this guy, and why do all those people say such terrible things about him? (xviii)

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1. E.g., D.R.K. Crosswell, *Beetle: The Life of General Walter Bedell Smith* (Lexington: U Pr of Kentucky, 2010); Harvey Ferguson, *The Last Cavalryman: The Life of General Lucian K. Truscott, Jr.* (Norman: U Okla Pr, 2015); John McLaughlin, *General Albert C. Wedemeyer: America’s Unsung Strategist in World War II* (Philadelphia: Casemate, 2012); Jon Mikolashek, *General Mark Clark: Commander of U.S. Fifth Army and Liberator of Rome* (id., 2013); Mark Calhoun, *General Lesley J. McNair: Unsung Architect of the U.S. Army* (Lawrence: U Pr of Kansas, 2015); Stephen R. Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals: U.S. Army Commanders in World War II* (id., 2015); John Scott Wheeler, *Jacob L. Devers: A General’s Life* (Lexington: U Pr of Kentucky, 2015); and John Adams, *General Jacob Devers: World War II’s Forgotten Four Star* (Bloomington: Indiana U Pr, 2015).

2. His earlier work includes *Lincoln and the Sioux Uprising of 1862* (Nashville: Cumberland House, 2005) and (with Lt. Gen. Clarence E. McKnight) *From Pigeons to Tweets: A General Who Led the Dramatic Change in Military Communications* (Palisades, NY: History Pub. Co., 2013).

3. *Brothers, Victors, Rivals: Eisenhower, Patton, Bradley, and the Partnership That Drove the Allied Conquest in Europe* (NY: NAL/Caliber, 2011) 287.

4. *Citizen Soldiers: The U.S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany* (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1997) 336.

5. *The Guns at Last Light: The War in Western Europe, 1944-1945* (NY: Holt, 2013) 237.

Cox has written a straightforward biography, arranged chronologically in twenty-two chapters. Some two-thirds of the book (starting with chap. 7) concerns Lee's role in the European Theater. The fascinating story of his formative years gets short shrift. Despite the subtitle's promise to deliver "The Inside Story of John C.H. Lee," Cox has little to say about the people and events that shaped Lee's personality and character. That said, the chapters on his command tenure in Europe in 1942-47 make for compelling reading.

This engaging book will attract scholars of the Second World War, professional soldiers, and all discerning readers with an interest in good military history. Specifically, it champions Lee against the harsh treatment he has received from historians and adds to the growing number of studies that have stripped the veil of hagiography from both Dwight D. Eisenhower and Omar N. Bradley. Cox's criticisms of them are withering, but well supported by evidence. He convicts both men of systematically undermining Lee's authority and effectiveness by acts of omission and commission, all motivated less by reasoned judgments of military matters than by pettiness and vanity. Cox also praises Lee's undeniably central role in creating the conditions for desegregating the US Army: "Lee's advocacy of better treatment and more opportunity for African Americans was also a red flag for many of his contemporaries who were caught up in the racist attitudes that prevailed in that time and place. Today he seems ahead of his time; then he just seemed weird" (237).

The book's biggest shortcoming is its distinct impression of being a "hothouse tomato," a forced argument based mostly on secondary evidence. The foundational source is Lee's own "Service Reminiscences," composed after he retired in November 1947. It is more an outline than the proper memoir Lee intended to write but never got to before his death in 1958 at age seventy-one. The other principal resource is Roland Ruppenthal's *Logistical Support of the Armies*.<sup>6</sup> Cox also consulted several personal memoirs and some recent secondary scholarship.<sup>7</sup> The items listed in his two-page bibliography include no archival primary sources or contemporary accounts. An "inside story" this is not.

The book's other major shortcoming is Cox's poor grasp of the relevant military historical scholarship. For example: his discussion of the origins of the Allies' Combined Bomber Offensive (100) betrays an ignorance of the work of interwar theorists and the evolution of the air war over Europe. His terse summary of Exercise TIGER, the April 1944 rehearsal for D-Day, mischaracterizes the German naval vessels as "U-boats" and overlooks that most Allied casualties resulted from friendly-fire, not enemy action. Smaller slips include the misidentification of an army colonel as Gen. Brehon Somervell (photograph 14). Better editing would have caught such mistakes, but larger errors owing to defective scholarship are the author's alone.

Despite these problems, *The General Who Wore Six Stars* belongs in the personal library of every serious scholar of World War II. For one thing, its account of the antagonisms between Lee's headquarters on the one hand and the combined headquarters of 1st US Army, 12th Army Group, 6th Army Group, and Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force on the other is clearer and more memorable than Crosswell's, thanks to Cox's skills as a veteran journalist. His discussion of Lee's lonely effort to expand opportunities for black servicemen is concise and pointed, if not comprehensive. Although his treatment of the slanders against Lee by journalist Robert Ruark at the end of his career is too brief, it neatly sets up his closing argument. In sum,

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6. Two vols., Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, Dept. of the Army, 1953-59.

7. Esp. Crosswell (note 1 above).

Cox's persuasive case for Lee as the "unsung hero" of the Allied war effort rests on a deft blending of key themes in the book's preceding chapters. Readers will admire C.H. Lee's sanguinity in the face of nearly universal vituperation and have no doubt about his personal impact on the war in Europe.