



## **Terrible Terry Allen: Combat General of World War II The Life of an American Soldier. By Gerald Astor**

Book review, ARMY Magazine, August 2003 by Gen. Frederick Kroesen, U.S. Army Ret., a former commander in chief of U.S. Army Europe and a senior fellow of AUSA's Institute of Land Warfare.

Terrible Terry Allen's military career began as an Army brat, the son of a West Point graduate who moved his family among artillery posts from Boston, Mass. to Pensacola, Fla., and to West Point where young Terry spent four formative years learning to love the Army. Nevermore than adequate scholastically, he nevertheless obtained an appointment to West Point thanks to a family connection with the former police commissioner of New York City and governor of the state, one Theodore Roosevelt, who in 1907 was in the White House. In his second year Allen was "found" and turned back one year to the class of 1912. One year later he was dismissed for academic deficiencies. Undaunted, he enrolled at Catholic University and attained an ROTC commission and an assignment to the 14th Cavalry, then patrolling the Mexican border. Allen acquitted himself well on the border and was promoted twice before the United States entered World War I. Willing to take any assignment to get to France, he went overseas in command of the 315th Ammunition Train, attached to the 90th Infantry Division. Further volunteering obtained him command of the 3rd Battalion, 358th Infantry, a position he held until the war ended. He learned quickly, was innovative and resourceful and acquitted himself with distinction. In less than seven years Terry Allen had become a major in the Regular Army, possessing a sterling reputation as a combat soldier and commander. For the next 20 years, as a contemporary of Eisenhower, Bradley and Patton, he honed his skills, broadened his education and had a very good time playing polo and developing a reputation as a hard-drinking, profane, fun-loving soldier, and also, just incidentally, becoming a good husband and doting father. Gen. George Marshall made note of Allen's qualities during that period and remembered him well when World War II came along. In September 1940, as the nation began to mobilize for war, Marshall promoted George Patton and Terry Allen to brigadier general, Allen from deep down in the promotion list and ahead of the West Point Class of 1912. From that point on, Allen's life became one of triumph and tragedy. He commanded the 1st Infantry Division in North Africa and his soldiers earned the reputation as the best combat organization in the theater, not least because of the astute generalship and leadership qualities of their commander. Unfortunately, they also became known as rowdy and undisciplined, earning the undying dislike and discontent of Omar Bradley and Walter (Beetle) Smith, Eisenhower's chief of staff. During respites in the fighting, 1st Division soldiers made their way to rear areas in search of rest and recreation. There, in their wool olive-drab uniforms, they resented the well-fed khaki-clad and beribboned rear area troops who were the normal clientele of the bars and spas they wanted to visit. They were most disgusted by the military policemen who cited them for being out of uniform or other indiscretions of like seriousness. By the time the North Africa campaign ended, the appearance of 1st Division troops in Tunis, Bizerte, Casablanca or any other town guaranteed a brawl of significant proportions. Terry Allen's standing with Omar Bradley went from bad to worse, not only because of the perceived lack of discipline of the division but also because Allen operated according to his own interpretation of the corps commander's orders. That Allen was almost always right, that his troops fought well and that missions were accomplished did little to change Bradley's opinion.

Consequently, Bradley sought Allen's relief from command, a step that George Patton, then the Army commander, resisted until the completion of the campaign to liberate Sicily. Returned to the United States, Allen and the U.S. Army, were rescued by George Marshall who remained convinced of his value. Marshall appointed him once again to division command, this time the 104th Infantry Division, which Allen trained, led to Europe and commanded commendably through the last months of World War II. Despite his successes, his reputation was never fully restored in Europe where the high command acknowledged that he was a fine division commander "but not a candidate to takeover a corps." In the post-war Army, led by Eisenhower and Bradley, Allen had no future. He retired in 1946 after 33 years of service, settling in El Paso, Texas, where he died in 1969. His later years were marked by continuing tragic events, principally the loss of his only son, Terry Jr., in Vietnam in 1967. The details of Terry Allen's life and Army career make this book a fascinating story. The author endorses claims that Allen was World War II's greatest soldier and provides adequate testimony to explain the fondness and adoration he enjoyed from the men of both the 1st and 104th Divisions. He also highlights Allen's unique and innovative approaches to training and operations. Today's Army, with its claim to owning the night, owes much to the Allen philosophy about night attacks, advanced in the days before the technological breakthroughs that gave us night-vision devices.

Terry Allen, to this day, is the number one icon of the 1st Division and the only icon of the 104th. This volume explains why. One wonders how Eisenhower and Bradley could have been so mistaken and why Patton acquiesced in having him relieved. Perhaps, as you read these pages, you will come to a more satisfying answer than has been apparent to me.