



The Mantle of Command: FDR at War, 1941-1942

Nigel Hamilton

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A closeup, in-the-room look at how FDR took masterful command and control of the Second World War, from wresting key decisions away from Churchill and his own generals, to launching the first successful trial landing in North Africa, and beginning to turn the tide away from the Axis.

The Mantle of Command: FDR at War, 1941-1942 Details

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Joe says

FDR – C in C

The Mantle of Command is an interesting and engaging, albeit at times a somewhat heavy handed snapshot of the Allied War effort from mid 1941 to late 1942, i.e. the Atlantic Conference to Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa. As the title suggests FDR is the focus, yet the author provides an excellent overall description of both the times and personalities involved, giving the reader the proper context as the US ramped up for and became actively involved in WWII. All the while being personally led by President Roosevelt.

The last bit – FDR's political/military wisdom and foresight - a "new" perspective – at least according to this author. And the otherworldly FDR intuition presented here much to the detriment of Churchill, Stimson and even George Marshall – the heavy handed part - who all needed to catch up with FDR when it came to military strategy.

I am being a tad facetious for the author does makes an excellent case that FDR's leadership and ultimately, control of the Allies' military strategy is at the very least underappreciated. And in hindsight it's difficult not to label his foresight and intuition – his sheer optimism - "otherworldly" – for instance the "united nations", America's soon to be realized potential for war materiel production, and prioritization of the invasion of North Africa prior to opening a second front in Europe.

Historians question when military control of the war shifted from Great Britain to the US, i.e. from Churchill to FDR. Here the author makes the not so subtle point that the shift never occurred. Simply because once the US entered the war after Pearl Harbor FDR immediately assumed control, i.e. the Mantle of Command, expertly herding his military advisors and Great Britain – including a kicking and if not screaming, a very vocal Churchill – onto his path to victory.

All and all a very good addition to the FDR/World War II library

Socraticgadfly says

Twasn't the British forcing Operation Torch down our throats, twas FDR forcing it down the throats of a vociferously opposed chiefs of staff. That's the main takeaway from this very good book.

How vociferously opposed? Roosevelt finally had to give the C-in-C's equivalent of a direct order, or nearly so, to get George Marshall and Ernie King to stop talking about cross-Channel plans, to focus on what became Torch, and to actually develop operational plans. This is also when and why he brought Admiral Leahy into his orbit as his military aide.

The almost-outright insubordination of Marshall, and even more of his direct military head, Secretary of War Stimson, as well as their post-Torch refusal to admit they were wrong and FDR right, is stunning.

Much else on the military side is not new, such as the vanity and idiocy of Dugout Doug MacArthur.

The second big takeaway is how strenuously FDR worked to get Churchill to open his mind on India and how tenaciously he refused.

Related to that, the other main takeaway is how Roosevelt was using the Atlantic Charter as the first salvo in announcing that part of US war goals, even before being in the war itself, was for a post-colonial post-war world.

A lesser takeaway, to be found in more depth elsewhere, is just how badly performing, militarily, the British were during this period.

The biggest negative takeaway is that Hamilton seems a fairly blatant FDR booster, enough that it arguably affects his "framing" on some issues, such as how close to quasi-mutinous (his words) Stimson and Marshall may have been.

That and a few nitpicks of factual error keep this book from a fifth star. Chief of those errors is Hamilton calling the Lusitania of WWI an American ship. This is yet another reflection on the sad cheapness of modern book publishing, too.

Christopher says

One of the great myths of World War II is that, while a great moral and coalition leader, Pres. Roosevelt deferred many of the war's military decisions to Churchill, the British, and his own military chiefs (Marshall, King, etc.). In this book, Mr. Hamilton seeks to dispel that myth and, but for a few odd choices and some serious overstatement, does so very well. The book covers the U.S.'s first year taking part in the war starting with FDR and Churchill's first meeting in August 1941, which produced the Atlantic Charter, through to the landing of American troops in French Northwest Africa during Operation Torch in 1942. Through it all Mr. Hamilton's points to FDR's incredible grasp of the greater political and strategic picture. He makes the argument that even before America's entry into the war, Roosevelt held to the idea that an American invasion of French Northwest Africa would be the first and best place to start the liberation of Europe. The book also builds up to a climax with FDR being at loggerheads with his military chiefs, Gen. Marshall and Secretary of War Stimson in particular. Mr. Hamilton is very quick to show how their calls for opening a second front in France in 1942 was doomed to failure and how their threat to FDR and the British to switch to the Pacific should they not support a cross-channel invasion was a bluff that they couldn't back up once the President called them on it. One other great theme of this book that few Americans may realize or remember is how the British Empire was crumbling in 1942 with a series of defeats between December 1941 and Gen. Montgomery's victory at El Alamein. There was a strong belief that the British couldn't fight and that India was under imminent threat by the Japanese. Thus, with the British unable to hold on and rumors that Churchill wasn't competent enough to run a global war, FDR and the Americans had to assume ultimate control, the "mantle of command," of the United Nations effort to defeat the Axis forces. Still, there are two problems I had with this book. The first was the structure of the book. Mr Hamilton, for some reason, wrote some monolithically long chapters in the beginning of the book, front loading the reader with a lot of information before his themes could develop. The chapters become shorter and more manageable in the second half and theme is better able to develop there, but the editor and author should have tried to break up the first chapters some. Also, the choice to break up the book into fourteen parts with some parts being very short, one chapter affairs is rather odd. Also, the authors choice to use some rather rare words, like jejune and

majeure (the last one I couldn't even find in my dictionary app), is slightly annoying. Couldn't he have used the synonym juvenile rather than jejune instead? But, perhaps the book's biggest fault is to overstate the case that Operation Torch was a masterstroke of strategic vision. Mr. Hamilton makes a compelling case and, true, Nazi forces did have to be diverted to take control of all of France and send reinforcements to Gen. Rommel's Afrika Korps after the Torch landings, but was it really such an ingenious move that Mr. Hamilton makes it to be? Personally, I'm skeptical. However, throughout this book Roosevelt's fine character, leadership, and political skills shine through. This book makes strong case for thinking of FDR as one of our country's greatest presidents both in peace and war.

Jim Cooper says

Fascinating, and full of stuff I didn't know. This book covers the 11 months between Pearl Harbor and the beginning of Torch through the eyes of FDR, showing how he slowly and surely became Commander in Chief, not just of US forces (as prescribed by the Constitution, though even that wasn't guaranteed at the beginning of 1942), but also Commander in Chief of the entire world's combined efforts to beat Germany and Japan.

The story of how FDR rises to supreme control over those 11 months is fascinating, at least partly because his (and the US's) rise to power meant the fall of the British Empire would happen at the same time. The story of Churchill vs. India was something I'd never heard before.

Great book.

Gerry Connolly says

Nigel Hamilton's *Mantle of Command* is a masterpiece. He revisits FDR's critical decision to invade North Africa instead of France in '42 overruling his generals and changing the tide of war.

Naomi says

An excellent, thought-provoking book. Well written and superb research. Thoroughly enjoyed it - could not put it down once I started reading it.

Jim says

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt is the subject of innumerable biographies, in fact I would venture to guess no President save Abraham Lincoln has been the subject of more. Yet with so many available there seem to be precious few that take a truly in depth look at his role as Commander in Chief. Happily, renowned historian and biographer Nigel Hamilton has rectified that situation with the publication in 2014 of *The Mantle of Command: FDR at War, 1941 – 1942*. A practically flawless work, I was disappointed it only covered part of FDR's time as Commander in Chief. I truly wish he would take on the rest of FDR's tenure, but fear that task will have to be left for another.

The Mantle of Command takes us from FDR's initial meetings with Winston Churchill in 1941 that resulted in the Atlantic Charter, through to the landings of American and British troops in French northwest Africa (Morocco and Tunisia) as part of operation Torch in November of 1942. Hamilton quotes copiously from letters, diaries and other primary sources to give us a very thorough, chronological look at this period of FDR's tenure as Commander in Chief. Though detailed, the prose is never boring.

A number of things struck me as I read this; far too many to go through in a short review, though four stood out. First, the overall take away is that this period represented the ascendancy of the United States as the dominant world power, while at the same time it heralded the end of Great Britain as an empire. Both FDR and Winston Churchill recognized this (though Churchill took a bit longer), and played their roles accordingly. Second, Hamilton is clearly impressed with FDR's abilities as Commander in Chief. Time after time, whether he was dealing with prima donnas such as George Patton and Douglas MacArthur over command responsibilities, or with opposition from his military chiefs and Secretary of War over Operation Torch, FDR, in Hamilton's view, knew exactly how much pressure to apply and when to apply it. Third, in contrast to his positive view of FDR's military leadership, Hamilton (a British subject himself), is surprisingly hard on Churchill's judgement, faulting him for serious British setbacks early in the war, and for his hard headed attitude towards Indian Independence. And lastly, I was particularly pleased with the extensive use of German and Japanese primary sources, including diaries and letters. It really provided a great juxtaposition to accounts of Allied opinion during this period.

Prior to its entry into WWII the United States was essentially isolationist. After World War I it had drawn down its armed forces to the point where it's army was approximately the size of Portugal's. The United States Congress was in many ways dominated by an isolationist sentiment, and men as prominent as Charles Lindbergh were promoting a xenophobic isolationism even as it became obvious United States entry into the growing conflict was going to be required. FDR, who understood earlier than most that the United States would be drawn into war, recognized and adapted to this reality. As Hamilton portrays it Roosevelt's political instincts were so spot on he knew exactly how far the country would be willing to go and when. He also knew how to present increased U.S. involvement in a way the public could understand and support. One example of this of course, was the Lend Lease program the U.S. initiated in March 1941 (prior to the events recounted in this book). Roosevelt, recognizing Britain, Free France, and China could not hope to hold out against Germany and Japan without aid, but cognizant of the country's isolationist mood, devised a way to deliver that aid without it appearing as though it was entering the war. He was able to present it as a defensive measure; by loaning military equipment to those who were fighting our enemies the U.S. could stay out of the fighting. Once the crisis passed, intact equipment would be returned, and the U.S. would be reimbursed for equipment that had been destroyed. He sold this plan in a way every person could understand, by relating it to their own lives. In a December 1940 press conference Roosevelt used the following illustration to demonstrate why the country and Congress should support Lend Lease:

Suppose my neighbor's home catches fire, and I have a length of garden hose four or five hundred feet away. If he can take my garden hose and connect it up with his hydrant, I may help him to put out his fire. Now, what do I do? I don't say to him before that operation, "Neighbor, my garden hose cost me \$15; you have to pay me \$15 for it." What is the transaction that goes on? I don't want \$15—I want my garden hose back after the fire is over. All right. If it goes through the fire all right, intact, without any damage to it, he gives it back to me and thanks me very much for the use of it. But suppose it gets smashed up—holes in it—during the fire; we don't have to have too much formality about it, but I say to him, "I was glad to lend you that hose; I see I can't use it any more, it's all smashed up." He says, "How many feet of it were there?" I tell him, "There were 150 feet of it." He says, "All right, I will

replace it.” Now, if I get a nice garden hose back, I am in pretty good shape.

A February 1941 Gallup poll showed Roosevelt’s campaign for passage had worked, with a Lend Lease proposal receiving the support of 54% of Americans, and it was passed by Congress a month later. Ten months later Lend Lease would take its place as part of a larger American effort when the empire of Japan declared war on the United States.

On August 7, 1941, four months before American entry into WWII, a U.S. naval ship, the Northampton class heavy cruiser U.S.S. Augusta slipped into Placentia Bay, Newfoundland. Aboard was President Franklin Delano Roosevelt there to meet in secret with the Prime Minister of Great Britain, Winston Churchill. Though they had met earlier during WWI, this was the first face to face meeting of the two. On August 9th, the H.M.S. Prince of Wales arrived with Churchill aboard. Each had different goals for this first meeting. Great Britain, having been the target of an intense and destructive air campaign by the German Luftwaffe, was eager for the United States to enter the war as soon as possible. Roosevelt, recognizing the U.S. was not yet ready for this, nevertheless wanted to signal to the country that the United States sympathized with Britain’s plight and opposed Nazi Germany. Given these parameters, Roosevelt suggested development of a set of principles that would guide allied nations after the war. The “Atlantic Charter” agreed to by FDR and Churchill included pledges not to seek territorial gains, to seek lowering of international trade barriers, to work for establishment of global economic cooperation and advancement of social welfare, for freedom of the seas, for the right of all nations to self determination, and to work toward a world free from want and fear. This agreement became the basis for many subsequent agreements including establishment of the United Nations. Like Lend Lease, it was FDR’s way of moving the United States ever closer to a formal wartime alliance with Great Britain without actually crossing that line and incurring the wrath of politically powerful isolationists. For Great Britain it represented a step toward bringing the United States into the war as a full combatant, and for the Axis powers it signaled an escalation of the war; one they would regret encouraging.

On December 7th, 1941 airplanes of the empire of Japan attacked the U.S. Naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii. Killing or wounding 5,381 Americans, this attack, and the declaration of war four days later by Germany on the United States, signaled the end of America’s role as a mere bit player on the world stage. From this time forward the U.S. would assume its position as the dominant economic and military power in the world, a position it has yet to relinquish. Britain on the other hand, would take its place as the junior partner in this alliance.

Due to poor leadership at all levels British forces were defeated in Malaya and Singapore, the latter surrendering without showing much resistance. Japanese Naval sorties into the Indian Ocean panicked the British, forcing them to move their fleet from Ceylon to Kenya, and although they had shown courage and grit during the Battle of Britain, they had not been able to mount any kind of effective counter to German expansion. Meanwhile after the devastation of Pearl Harbor and the loss of the Philippines, the United States achieved a strategic victory over the Japanese Navy at Coral Sea, and completed a decisive one at Midway Island, sinking four Japanese aircraft carriers. Domestically, its full productive capacity brought to bear, the U.S. was producing war materiel at an astounding rate, and the military services were rapidly adding manpower. Since it was providing the bulk of the men and materiel for the allied war effort (with the exception of the U.S.S.R.), it was understood the U.S. would be the dominant partner in this relationship. And to his credit, Winston Churchill understood and adapted to this reality, eventually. However, as Nigel Hamilton shows, Churchill’s leadership abilities were rightly called into question during this period.

Winston Churchill was an enigmatic man; courageous, stalwart and indefatigable. At the same time he could be stubborn, myopic, and a control freak. As Hamilton describes it, his admirable qualities kept Britain strong and defiant during the Battle of Britain. He was the rock around which the Allied effort eventually grew. But it was his less admirable qualities that were largely responsible for early British setbacks. His stubbornness in not recognizing the futility of trying to restore the British empire, and his poor choice of subordinates resulting in unnecessary tensions between British and American staff officers being two of the most important examples. As British defeats mounted in southeast Asia and North Africa and as the Japanese fleet moved into the Indian ocean fostering fears of an attack on India, Churchill appeared stubbornly determined to preserve the prewar structure of the British Empire. As Japan moved into the Indian Ocean FDR encouraged Churchill to begin independence negotiations with Indian leaders. Aside from his belief that India deserved independence as a matter of right consistent with the Atlantic Charter, it would also secure a Indian commitment to fighting off the Japanese. A delegation headed by Sir Stafford Cripps was dispatched to India to negotiate a devolution of power to Indian authorities in exchange for Indian Army support in the war. Churchill subordinates, probably acting with his tacit approval, purposely undermined the negotiations. Fortunately Japanese defeats at Coral Sea and Midway diverted their attention away from the Indian peninsula. Later, after the decision was made to mount the first joint offensive in North Africa rather than attempt a cross channel invasion of France, Churchill, acting on the advice of subordinates, including Lord Louis Mountbatten, mounted an ill conceived raid at Dieppe on the French coast. It was a disaster, with nearly half of British troops engaged being killed, wounded or captured. With these setbacks, lapses in judgement, stubbornness, and reliance on poorly chosen subordinates, it was only Churchill's willingness to accede to U.S. leadership, and his position as the face of resistance to Nazi Germany that allowed him to stave off attempts to bring down his government.

Hamilton devotes a significant portion of the book to the decision by Britain and America to make northwest Africa the site of its first offensive. As he presents it, the success of Operation Torch is most attributable to FDR's political and strategic genius. Pressure on the United States and Britain to mount a cross channel offensive as soon as possible grew as 1941 ended. The U.S. Joint Chiefs including Chief of Staff George Marshall along with Secretary of War Henry Stimson, were pressing for just such an attack. Winston Churchill realized early on this would be a monumental mistake. U.S. troops had yet to experience combat and would be unlikely to stand up to seasoned German troops, the allies had yet to mobilize the men and materiel they would need for such an attack, and the Germans had heavily fortified the most obvious points of attack at Caen and Cherbourg. FDR, after initially appearing to favor such an invasion, came around to Churchill's view and advocated for French northwest Africa as the site of the first offensive. Convincing his own staff to go along despite their convictions it would only divert needed materiel from an eventual cross channel attack, and would probably fail on its own merits, was a stellar example of FDR's ability to know where and when to press an advantage. Allowing his subordinates to make their case freely, he held firm. Eventually, in frustration they advocated moving the primary theater of operations from Europe to the Pacific. Calling their bluff, FDR asked them to provide him the detailed plans they must have been relying on to make such a bold suggestion. Unable to do so since they had impetuously made the suggestion out of frustration, they eventually fell in line with the President. The invasion proceeded and Operation Torch was a success.

Finally, I was very impressed by Hamilton's use of primary sources from Axis leaders. Most significant of these was the diary of Nazi Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels. While many of his entries can be termed whistling past the graveyard, some were very incisive as to the mindset of Allied leaders, the potential success of an Allied invasion of the French coast, and as regards Operation Torch. It provided a very interesting counterpoint to the views of Allied leaders.

Overall I think this is one of the best FDR biographies I have ever read. The detail was incredible, the

arguments he makes regarding FDR's skill as a political leader are detailed and very persuasive. The prose is well formed and extremely easy to follow despite the enormous amount of information being thrown at you. Other than my disappointment that it ends with 1942 and that it does not appear Hamilton will be producing another volume, I have nothing but praise for this book.

Elizabeth S says

An extremely interested perspective on the given war years (1941-1942). I've read other books that cover those years, but this one tells the story from a different perspective. I enjoyed following the play-by-play between the military leaders and President Roosevelt. There was a lot of balancing of politics, individual personalities, military needs, and logistical realities. I am looking forward to the author's installment covering the rest of WWII.

I received this book for free through the Goodreads FirstReads program. Thank you!

Alan Vanneman says

This the first of a projected trilogy on Franklin Roosevelt's role as commander in chief during World War II by the noted British historian Nigel Hamilton. Unless you are a WWII or an FDR buff this is probably more than you want to know, but if you are either of the two, you will find this an excellent read. Hamilton, who began his career as a military historian with a three-volume biography of Field Marshall Montgomery back in the eighties, has been a student of World War II for decades. The greatest "defect"--perhaps the only one--is Hamilton's almost invariable conviction that FDR was always right, on every issue, rejecting the American military's over-ambitious plans for an invasion of France in 1942, and rejecting Churchill's "plan" of, basically, "never".

Hamilton amasses a great deal of detail to back his arguments, and I generally agree: Roosevelt was right, over and over again. Particularly helpful are "real time" quotations from letters and diaries that let us know what Roosevelt and the other major players were thinking when they made their decisions. Roosevelt understood, as his generals did not, that in 1942, and in 1943, that neither they nor their soldiers ready to face the German army. He also understood, as Churchill was not willing to admit, that Germany could only be defeated through a series of great land battles, culminating in the invasion of Germany itself.

Churchill never wanted to invade Europe: He believed, probably correctly, that Britain simply could not endure casualties on the scale of World War I (750,000 dead, plus almost a million wounded) and would probably have been willing to sacrifice most of Europe to Stalin in the utterly vain hope of holding onto the British Empire of his youth, which was already falling apart.

Roosevelt, on the other hand, had been against the "armistice" that ended World War I (he was assistant secretary of the navy at the time) and always believed that the Allies had made a huge mistake by not invading Germany and conclusively defeating their armies in battle. This was a (relatively) easy decision for Roosevelt to make both because the U.S. had vastly superior manpower and because U.S. casualties in World War I had been (almost) negligible.

Volume II of Hamilton's work, *Commander in Chief*, which I'll also review, is similarly impressive.

Vheissu says

How FDR Won the War

Memorial Day 2014 offers readers two versions of America's entry into the Second World War: Nigel Hamilton's, *The Mantle of Command: FDR at War, 1941-1942* and David Kaiser's *No End Save Victory: How FDR Led the Nation into War*. Both reach essentially the same conclusion, that Franklin D. Roosevelt's unique vision and personal leadership skills more than anything else prepared the nation to fight and win the postwar peace. One, *The Mantle of Command*, is biographical while the other, *No End Save Victory*, is historical. The periods considered by the two books overlap, but are not identical; *The Mantle of Command* begins with the Atlantic Conference and ends with Operation TORCH, and *No End Save Victory* begins—briefly—with an overview of events after Versailles and ends with Pearl Harbor. Of the two, *No End Save Victory* is more scholarly and judicious while *The Mantle of Command* is hyperbolic and incendiary, although not without documented reason.

As demonstrated by another of his books, *JFK: Reckless Youth*, Hamilton excels at demolishing the reputations of public figures. In particular, *The Mantle of Command* is certain to offend admirers of Winston Churchill, Douglas MacArthur, George C. Marshall and Henry Stimson, while vindicating admirers of the president. Roosevelt, as Hamilton writes, consistently overruled or out-maneuvered opponents of his all-out strategy to defeat Nazi Germany and establish a postwar order based on the Four Freedoms while delaying as long as possible America's entry in the war in order to prepare the nation materially and psychologically for battle. In so doing, he fended off the optimism and bellicosity of Churchill and Stimson and the pessimism of Marshall, tolerating the mendacity and arguable incompetence of MacArthur.

Beyond that, Hamilton's characterizations of the other leaders are downright defamatory. Churchill was an incompetent military leader and imperialist, inalterably opposed to Roosevelt's Four Freedoms, at least as far as the British Empire was concerned. MacArthur solicited bribes from the government of President Quezon and entertained notions of a coup d'état against Roosevelt. Marshall was blatantly anti-British, insisted on a premature invasion of France, and dragged his heels intentionally to sabotage the success of TORCH. Stimson aided and abetted Marshall's "conspiracy" regarding TORCH, expressed defeatism regarding Britain's ability to survive, and remorselessly excoriated FDR in private. Hamilton spares no sympathy for anyone but FDR, including Eleanor Roosevelt who, he reminds us, lived a separate life at Val Kill where she entertained "queer" visitors (**not** Hamilton's invective).

Whereas Hamilton describes FDR's military advisors as "mutinous," Kaiser calls them "cautious," which might also describe his approach to the subject. Kaiser demonstrated his chops as an historian in books like *Politics & War: European Conflict from Philip II to Hitler*. Like that earlier work, *No End Save Victory* will be of greater interest to the serious scholar than the general reader, although he agrees with Hamilton regarding the indispensable role played by Roosevelt. He unnecessarily frames his analysis in terms of an argument put forth by William Strauss and Neil Howe in their book, *Generations: The History of America's Future, 1584 to 2069*, placing FDR and his contemporaries as members of the "Missionary" generation. I find this "generations" framework to be neither convincing nor useful, but to his credit, Kaiser at least attempts an analysis based on more than character assassination.

Kaiser, like Hamilton, provides an important correction to the historical record written by those who, unlike FDR, survived the war to tell about it, fluffing their own resumes while demeaning the role of the president

(e.g., Winston Churchill). He persuasively argues that Roosevelt did not mislead the nation but rather frankly admitted as early as 1938 that a free America and totalitarian Germany could not co-exist on the same planet. Roosevelt was right and his advisors wrong about the inevitability of a two-front, world war, and the ability of Britain and the Soviet Union to withstand German aggression. The Tripartite Pact was an implicit declaration of war against the United States, and the president responded with alacrity to the world crisis. Admiral Kimmel was singularly responsible for the poor defense of Hawaii. Of particular interest to me is Kaiser's repetition of Lynne Olson's claim in her book, *Those Angry Days: Roosevelt, Lindbergh, and America's Fight over World War II, 1939-1941*, that Hap Arnold was the source of the leaked "Victory Program" to the *Chicago Tribune* in December 1941.

So, take your pick. If you like sober scholarship over breathless biography, go with *No End Save Victory*; if you are looking for a quick read with "kiss-and-tell" personality conflicts, *The Mantle of Command* will entertain you this Memorial Day.

Elgin says

Perhaps the best book I have read this year. Nigel Hamilton's well researched book gives a behind-the-scenes look at FDR's thoughts and plans in the years prior and just after America's entry into WWII. This is the amazing story of the clear thinking, thoughtful, and brilliant man that led us from the Depression to eminence on the international stage. There are many books about the Generals and troops who fought in WWII...but the true genius behind our entry to the war and the development and maturing of our fighting men and strategy was FDR. This is an inspiring story of leadership and the luck of having the right man in office at the right time. He thought clearly about our capabilities, need for development, Allied politics and seemed to lead the country on the only path to victory, in spite of pressure from his aids and generals to embark on a path that would well have been disastrous.

I read this book immediately after reading a biography of Churchill and Orwell (also excellent.) However the two authors' takes on the Prime Minister and the President were somewhat different. Thomas Ricks portrays Churchill as "playing Roosevelt masterfully" in convincing him to ally with Britain. Hamilton portrays Roosevelt as the master diplomat and manipulator who knew what he wanted and made sure he got it. Perhaps both are true. It is interesting how different authors or historians put different spins on people and events. Of course that's what makes history interesting...there is rarely one impetus for events or one path to resolution.

Final note - thank God that Donald Trump was not President during WWII. If he had we would all be goose-stepping in jackboots and saluting the rising sun!!!

Mac McCormick III says

I picked up *Mantle of Command* at the Little White House gift shop while visiting the Historic Site on vacation this year. It looked like it would be an interesting read and it would be nice to have a book on FDR that came from his Little White House at Warm Springs. *Mantle of Command* essentially takes a look at President Franklin D. Roosevelt's leadership as Commander in Chief during the early stages of World War II, essentially from the Argentia Conference in 1941 to the Torch Landings in North Africa in 1942. Hamilton's intent was to show that Roosevelt was not being led by the nose by Churchill, as some would

have you believe, but was the true leader and decision maker in the direction and strategy of the early days of World War II after the United States' entry into the war. In my opinion, however, Hamilton goes beyond biography and History into hagiography. It seems that from Hamilton's perspective everything that Churchill, Stimson, Knox, Hull, Marshall, King, and others do wrong and everything that Roosevelt does is right. Furthermore, he is downright hostile toward Churchill and Stimson in particular. He goes too far and the book lacks objectivity; it feels like he started out with a premise and instead of exploring that premise only attempted to prove it. I have to admit that I was profoundly disappointed with this book after having good expectations of it. I don't like giving bad reviews, but this is a History book that I just can't recommend.

M Tucker says

In *The Mantle of Command* Nigel Hamilton focuses squarely on President Franklin Roosevelt as not only Commander and Chief of US military but also how he dominated the direction of the war effort of the Allied coalition he dubbed the United Nations to include Great Britain and the Commonwealth nations. This is a much needed, although not unique, work that investigates the relationship between President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill, Roosevelt's direction of the US high command and Roosevelt's influence in development of Allied grand strategy. There are other works that have recently been published that cover these topics but they do not emphasize President Roosevelt's paramount importance to the direction of the war and clearly explain how he manipulated Churchill, that is exactly what Hamilton's exciting book does. Some authors only focus on the war against Hitler and that is exactly what Hamilton does not do although his analysis of what happened in the first year of America's war with Japan is a bit lacking.

Hamilton's book is written from President Roosevelt's perspective and he laments the fact that Roosevelt did not have an opportunity to write his own memoir. He emphasizes the often underappreciated yet profound contribution of President Roosevelt's involvement in directing the war effort. This work is the first of two parts beginning with the Atlantic Conference (RIVIERA) that took place in August of 1941 and ends with the US landings in North Africa (Operation TORCH) in November, 1942.

The author has done a fantastic job of highlighting how in August, 1941 Roosevelt immediately took command of planning Allied war aims even before the US entered the conflict and did so in his subtle, friendly yet relentless manner. At that meeting Roosevelt would dictate what would be discussed and what agreements would be decided and this without having any direct military involvement in the war as yet.

Hamilton develops his story primarily focusing on key events of America's first year of the war and how President Roosevelt played a commanding role. It is interesting to note that even though Hitler began rearming Germany in 1935 and so had five years to prepare, he was totally unprepared and unable to mount an amphibious invasion of Great Britain while the US pulled off a major amphibious invasion in its first year, having only two years to prepare. That was the result of President Roosevelt's vision and leadership and a demonstration of America's industrial might.

A key event that Hamilton spends some time on is describing President Roosevelt's attempt to pressure Churchill to grant India Dominion status after the war with the possibility of complete independence. Roosevelt felt this was very necessary. As the Japanese Army moved through Burma threatening India it was feared that Indian troops might refuse to fight or opt to fight for the Japanese. I had no idea so much time and effort was put into this and how much pressure was put on Churchill; who was ready to resign over it. Hamilton emphasizes the weakness of the British Army in defending its colonies against the Japanese, and in battling Rommel in the African desert, making the point that it was a major reason Roosevelt decided from

the beginning that the US would be the senior partner in the alliance.

Another key event, what the author describes as the centerpiece of the book, was the intense disagreement that rose up between Roosevelt and his military chiefs over the invasion of Northwest Africa. Hamilton calls it a mutiny or a quasi-mutiny. Some might think this is too strong a description but Secretary Stimson, General Marshall, Admiral King and General Arnold did initially refuse to consider an African invasion and insisted on a cross channel invasion either in 1942 or 1943. If that would not be planned for then they insisted that America should put its major effort into the Pacific and only carry out strategic bombing of Germany making the claim that defeat of Japan would hasten the defeat of Germany. I had always thought that when Roosevelt shot down their argument that was the end of it but both Marshall and Stimson persisted. Stimson persisted the longest and even bet President Roosevelt that the African invasion would fail. I find that to be a truly extreme reaction bordering on the grotesque. Stimson could certainly disagree and worry about the outcome but to actually bet against success, to feel vindicated only when great numbers of American soldiers and sailors floated dead in the water, is to my thinking unconscionable.

While discussing the “mutiny” the author quotes part of the instructions written by the President that Marshall and King would follow during their visit to London. The quote is, “It is of utmost importance that we appreciate that the defeat of Japan does not defeat Germany...” Then Roosevelt says, “Defeat of Germany means the defeat of Japan, probably without firing a shot or losing a life.” (pp 349-350) Roosevelt again mentions that same opinion on page 360: “...helping Russia and Britain to contain Germany this Autumn and undertake an offensive in 1943 has a good chance of forcing Germany out of the war, in which case Japan could not conduct war in the Pacific alone for more than a few months.”

To me these represent an even more ludicrous notion. It demonstrates President Roosevelt was just as capable of making asinine arguments as Marshall, King and Stimson and that, in 1942, he had a very naïve understanding of the resolve of both Germany and Japan. “Japan could not conduct war in the Pacific alone for more than a few months.”?!? I find it unbelievable that Roosevelt could even come up with that thought. Did he really think Germany was somehow aiding Japan in the Pacific?

While Hamilton does not ignore the war with Japan I was disappointed with his coverage after the Battle of Midway. The author says on page 360: “The threat of further expansion of Japanese conquest in the Pacific was now almost nil...thanks to the Battle of Midway.” In August of 1942 the Guadalcanal Campaign began and that conflict lasted for about five months. It was a titanic struggle and America’s victory definitely marked the turning point of the war with Japan; not Midway.

Of the five carrier duels recognized by most historians that took place during the war, four took place in 1942. Two of those were during the Guadalcanal campaign, after the Battle of Midway, while also featuring something like seven surface engagements, mostly at night. The IJN still posed a tremendous threat to the US Navy during the Guadalcanal campaign and the horrendous losses the US Navy suffered during that campaign were kept secret from the American public for years. It would have been very interesting to know how much President Roosevelt knew of this battle considering the author spent a reasonable amount of space describing the creation of his map room in the White House and how he kept track of every ship movement to include the known location of enemy submarines. President Roosevelt considered himself a Navy man and I feel sure he would have paid close attention to the Navy’s struggle at Guadalcanal. Yes, Midway was a stupendous victory for the US, four of the six IJN carriers that attacked Pearl Harbor were sunk, but the Japanese began the war with more carriers and still had superiority. Of the six US carriers that operated in the Pacific during 1942 only two survived to see action in 1943. Actually those two, Saratoga and Enterprise, survived the war. In 1942 the US Navy fought tooth and nail with the IJN and barely achieved victory. Two US carriers were sunk during the Guadalcanal Campaign and both Saratoga and Enterprise suffered damage.

The results of this enormous clash were startling. The IJN would limit operations against US shipping to submarines and would not oppose any US landings or engage the US Navy again until the Marianas operations in 1944. That is nothing less than astounding and all the loss of life and shipping did have a very positive result. 1942 was the pivotal year of the naval war with Japan and it was not until the Guadalcanal Campaign ended could modern historians mark a turning point in the war. Of course those responsible for conducting the war could not consider the IJN defeated or even reluctant to take offensive action after Guadalcanal. The IJN still posed a very real threat. It would not have required much more than a few extra pages for Hamilton to have covered this better and it is not true, as he says, that “the situation at Guadalcanal [was] “much better” at the time of the North Africa invasions. The “much better” quote comes from Admiral King’s diary written on 6 November, 1942 and does not reflect the actual situation in the Solomon Islands. What was his diary entry on say November 15 or 16? The Naval Battle of Guadalcanal was fought between November 12 and November 15, 1942. While it was a US victory the cost was very high. The US Navy lost fewer ships but two Navy Admirals gave their lives along with their men. No comment from President Roosevelt for Mr Hamilton to mention? Rear Admiral Daniel Callaghan had been President Roosevelt’s Naval Aid from July 1938 until May 1941. He and Rear Admiral Norman Scott received posthumous Medals of Honor for their actions. So King was being optimistic and I’m sure the news of this battle deflated Roosevelt’s ebullience following the successful North African landings.

Nigel Hamilton has written an excellent and engaging piece of history that many think, and the author too, corrects a misconception that President Roosevelt was primarily engaged in encouraging America’s moral during the terribly trying times of the Second World War. While I agree that of the several books that have been written on the subject of: the Roosevelt-Churchill relationship, Roosevelt and his military chiefs and Allied grand strategy, this is largely true, I do know of one book by Joseph Persico that seems to cover this as well. That will be my next read while I wait for Hamilton’s continuation of this story.

This is an excellent and very entertaining read, I would definitely recommend it with an important mention that Guadalcanal was a much more significant and desperate battle than the author lets on. He does do a wonderful and a very important job of illustrating President Roosevelt’s indispensable leadership that began even before the US declaration of war and continued throughout. To be fair to the author he does end this book with the Armistice Day commemoration of 1942 so he may cover the rest of the Guadalcanal slug fest in his next volume. I can only give the book four stars because of Hamilton’s neglect of what happened after Midway and his characterization that Guadalcanal was a settled victory for the US at the time of Operation TORCH.

Steven Kaminski says

The more I read history the more I discover that my History class in high school didn't teach me anything & really sucked. This book is a broad look at FDR's leadership during WW II but there was tons of stuff in this book that I didn't know and was shocked about...

- When Churchill first met FDR...they were supposed to meet secretly but Churchill brought members of the press pissing FDR off...Churchill had drafted plans for America to jump into the war and to fight alongside Britain. But FDR instead negotiated a statement of shared principles for the Atlantic Charter and didn't declare war. Why? Because of politics & reality. The isolationist movement in America is was huge and FDR knew that any antagonizing of that movement would hurt other political programs he needed support for. But even greater in the background was something I didn't think through: America wasn't ready to go to war. They didn't have the military hardware in place, they didn't have a big enough military to get involved

in the European conflict. FDR disagreed with his generals as well ordering one fleet to the Pacific and one into the Atlantic to project that America was much stronger than it was.

- FDR liked Churchill because of his fight and his desire to fight. But in reality he saw Churchill based on his results as absolutely incompetent. Every single battle the British fought before America got in the war they lost. They were getting their asses kicked everywhere. But in the statements that eventually brought America into the side of the Allies he made clear to Churchill that they would only come in IF the British gave up control over almost all of their colonies. Churchill was furious but he really didn't have a choice either.

- Before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor (and MacArthur in the Philippines) the military had placed those sites on heightened alert so they should have not been as unprepared for the attack but it was devastating. All of FDR's advisors wanting him to give Congress a speech for over an hour educating America on the threat. FDR overruled his advisors & made a speech of just over 300 words. It was powerful, concise & got people inspired. When he asked Congress to declare war he was very careful to just declare war on Japan because of the isolationists in Congress. It was only after Germany declared war on the US that America went into a full partnership with the British.

- FDR in his leadership style listened. He would deliberately pick people he trusted to go to areas where he needed more information & they would report back. When the Admiral in charge of Pearl Harbor was summoned to Washington he expected to be demoted, But instead FDR listened to him as the admiral was very candid. So honest in fact the President sent him on a nationwide tour to educate the public and the military allowing him to keep his rank.

- MacArthur had a HUGE ego. In WW I he had been given 7 Silver Stars for bravery. But in the Philippines he was a political disaster. He often would send out public cables that would make himself look good. He over promised to his own troops and when they were overrun blamed Washington. He blamed Washington for his Air Force being destroyed even though he had been warned of an attack NINE days earlier. It eventually got to a point where the War Department openly questioned his sanity. His own troops nicknamed him 'Dugout Doug'. He was disgraced in Washington when during the war he accepted a payment of almost \$5 million dollars for 'services rendered' to the Philippines. He also participated in (and I didn't know this) an attack on veterans after WW I who were marching peacefully in Washington for bonuses they were owed. He ordered bayonets fixed killing many of them.

- The Doolittle Raid (where the first bombing runs were made upon Tokyo) humiliated and surprised the Japanese. So much so they turned around a navy engaged in active battles to retreat back to the mainland.

- For over a year FDR fought a battle with his generals over where to land forces in the European theater. FDR wanted to land where German troops were overextended (in North Africa). His generals were all opposed. So opposed they went all on the record on paper, they actively worked to undermine the battle planning, demanding that the President focus on Japan (even though the generals had no plan in place) & they even leaked plans to the public. What became known as Operation Torch was a public success but even more greater a success that the military should have civilian control over its decisions. I had no idea how bad it had gotten it was almost to the point of mutiny. The Secretary of War (Stimson) asked General Marshall if he was ready to take over the military if they took away FDR's authority and he was shocked into silence...he knew the opposition had gone too far.

Really great book...

John says

World War II seems to hold an endless fascination for me and I've read a lot of history and biography associated with this truly global event. The Mantle of Command is simply superb, certainly in the top five of all the (several dozen) WWII non-fiction books I've read.

Hamilton writes in the Acknowledgements, "My fascination with FDR goes back to 'American Caesars' a biography of the last twelve US presidents, which I published in 2010. Researching the opening chapter on President Roosevelt, I found it hard to believe that no military biographer or military historian had tackled his military leadership in World War II as commander in chief in a full scale work."

A decent review would take me hours to compose - which I decline - so you'll just need to take my word that if you're interested in WWII history and/or FDR, this is a must read book. The reader does need to understand that Hamilton used selective (from my perspective, critically important) decisions in FDR's career as Commander in Chief – a comprehensive approach would require many, many volumes. But the author brilliantly illuminates the critical assumption of command by the president, not just of his own generals and politicians, but command over the entire Allied United Nations war management in 1942. It must pain an English historian to document the broken reed that was the British Empire and the British military in 1942, following, one upon another, British defeats on land and sea. Unlike any volume ever published, Mantle of Command shows how and why FDR took complete control of the war in 1942, overruling his Secretary of War and Joints Chiefs who were set to make an attempt to invade northwest Europe in 1942. Hamilton explodes prevailing myths about many key figures including McArthur, Marshall, Stimson and King.

I suggest, before you begin the book, turn to the back and read the first several pages of the Acknowledgements (to the point where he starts thanking people).

Hamilton's second volume in the 'FDR at War' series covers the year 1943 - I intend to start it immediately.
