



The Mask of Command: Alexander the Great, Wellington, Ulysses S. Grant, Hitler, and the Nature of Leadership

John Keegan

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

The Mask of Command: Alexander the Great, Wellington, Ulysses S. Grant, Hitler, and the Nature of Leadership

John Keegan

The Mask of Command: Alexander the Great, Wellington, Ulysses S. Grant, Hitler, and the Nature of Leadership John Keegan

John Keegan's brilliant look at the meaning of leadership

In *The Mask of Command*, John Keegan asks us to consider questions that are seldom asked: What is the definition of leadership? What makes a great military leader? Why is it that men, indeed sometimes entire nations, follow a single leader, often to victory, but with equal dedication also to defeat?

Dozens of names come to mind...Napoleon, Lee, Charlemagne, Hannibal, Castro, Hussein. From a wide array, Keegan chooses four commanders who profoundly influenced the course of history: Alexander the Great, the Duke of Wellington, Ulysses S. Grant and Adolph Hitler. All powerful leaders, each cast in a different mold, each with diverse results.

“The best military historian of our generation.” –Tom Clancy

“A brilliant treatise on the essence of military leadership.” –The Philadelphia Inquirer

“Fascinating and enlightening... marked by great intellectual liveliness... Mr. Keegan knows how to bring fighting alive on the page.” –The New York Times

The Mask of Command: Alexander the Great, Wellington, Ulysses S. Grant, Hitler, and the Nature of Leadership Details

Date : Published October 4th 1988 by Penguin Books (first published 1987)

ISBN : 9780140114065

Author : John Keegan

Format : Paperback 400 pages

Genre : History, Military, Military History, War, Military Fiction, Nonfiction, Leadership

 [Download The Mask of Command: Alexander the Great, Wellington, U ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Mask of Command: Alexander the Great, Wellington, ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The Mask of Command: Alexander the Great, Wellington, Ulysses S. Grant, Hitler, and the Nature of Leadership John Keegan

From Reader Review *The Mask of Command: Alexander the Great, Wellington, Ulysses S. Grant, Hitler, and the Nature of Leadership* for online ebook

Alex Irwin says

This brilliant leadership novel explains a few leaders of the past, how they got there, what they did and why they did it. John wrote about Alexander the Great, Wellington, Ulysses Grant, and Adolf Hitler. Keegan went into great detail explaining how they become such powerful leaders and why they did those things. This is a very good Historical Non-fiction novel that contained tremendous amounts of details and information. I learned very much reading this book, it goes into details that most classes or even other books, would skip straight over. John went into such great detail in this book so that these details may never be lost. *The Mask Of Command* explained very well these leader's experiences and their lives. I would have never known that Hitler was a soldier in the First World War and learned all he could about war being a soldier and a message runner. Hitler was a strategic and war genius, he was good at what he did. These are all details that I would have never learned if I hadn't read this book. I personally liked this book very much, it was a bit hard to read as it was jam packed with details and information but it was very interesting. I would recommend this book to anyone interested in learning more about historic commanders.

Robert Krenzel says

John Keegan wrote several books that I enjoy dusting off and re-reading from time to time, and *The Mask of Command* is among them.

Keegan explores generalship in the Western World as it evolved over the centuries, using four historical figures: Alexander, Wellington, Grant, and Hitler.

He explores how these men commanded; how they imposed their will on their followers, and how they portrayed themselves to their men. Alexander was the prototypical heroic leader, who always led from the front, but was more capable of destroying than building. Hitler: the false hero who condemned millions to slaughter, but faced no danger, while portraying himself as the messianic leader who sacrificed himself for the Reich.

What struck me this time was in the conclusion. Thirty years ago Keegan described the requirements of a commander-in-chief in the nuclear age. He describes a leader who is prudent and educated; one who can show rational restraint. The contrast with a leader who is impulsive, divisive, and promulgates a program of hatred while promising to make his country great again is chilling. It cannot be said that we were not warned.

Scott Pierce says

Had to go with a 5 star review as this study of leadership had an impact on me personally, and on many of the military leaders of my generation.

On Alexander's Companion Cavalry: "Men whose worth in their own eyes and those of their equals was determined by disregard for danger and contempt for the future. To do the right thing in the present moment, and to suffer the consequences as they might be."

The changes in heroic leadership were driven by bigger armies, with the need to delegate, and also the use of mercenaries, which reduced the sense of loyalty.

Wellington on duty - "I have eaten the King's salt."

Command Imperatives:

Kinship - troops must have some distance, but also know you are with them

Prescription - presence and theatrical ability

Sanction - but fairly

Action -

Example - must get to the front to see

Post-heroic leadership needs to be intellectual and can't be overwhelmed by data

Eric says

"Where to stand, how often to be seen? In front always, sometimes or never?" Keegan puts these questions to the warmakers of the West, from the *Iliad* to NORAD, from the hacking and thrusting of the Greeks' "toil of war" to Armageddonite button-pushing in air-conditioned underground silos, and pays extended individual attention to Alexander the Great, the Duke of Wellington, Ulysses S. Grant, and Adolf Hitler, their command styles and cultural assumptions. The middle two are among my favorite people in history. There's something comic about the gruff, hawk-faced Duke and his always outnumbered little army of often incompetent gentry types who had purchased their officer commissions, and redcoat rankers the Duke called "the mere scum of the earth," "fellows who have all enlisted for drink," but who with drill and terrifying discipline (the Duke was a great flogger) made for the finest infantry in Europe, however prone to spectacular orgies of hooliganism. "I remember once at Badajoz entering a cellar and seeing some soldiers so dead drunk that the wine was actually flowing from their mouths! Yet others were coming in not at all disgusted...and going to do the same. Our soldiers could not resist wine." I have always gotten a kick out of the Duke's cool, curt verbal orders ("drive those fellows off"; "now is your time"), his way of impugning the ability of an opponent by saying things like "that fellow doesn't know his business"; his austere stylishness and air of undemonstrative omniscience.

For the next two hours he was engaged at close range to the French in deploying his battalions, hurrying forward reinforcements, siting his artillery positions and, at one moment, galloping to escape French cavalry. He just won the race, jumping the bayonets of the 92nd Gordon Highlanders ('Ninety-second, lie down!') to land out of reach of the French lances.

Keegan calls Wellington "perhaps the most perfect embodiment of the gentlemanly ideal England has ever

produced”—a paragon of “reticence, sensitivity, unselfseeking, personal discipline and sobriety in dress, conduct and speech, all married to total self-assurance”—and recognizes a related if more rough-hewn ethos in Grant:

In 1861, on the eve of the Civil War, Grant, aged thirty-nine, with four children at home and scarcely a penny in the bank, had made no mark on the world and looked unlikely to do so, for all the boom conditions of mid-century America. His Plymouth Rock ancestry, his specialist education, his military rank, which together must have ensured him a sheltered corner in the life of the Old World, counted for nothing in the New. He lacked the essential quality to be what Jacques Barzun has called a “booster,” one of those bustling, bonhomous, penny-counting, chance-grabbing optimists who, whether in the frenetic commercial activity of the Atlantic coast, in the emergent industries of New England and Pennsylvania or on the westward-moving frontier, were to make America’s fortune. Grant, in his introspective and undemonstrative style, was a gentleman, and was crippled by the quality.

And like Wellington, Grant wrote good, clear prose while on horseback and under fire, an ability Keegan particularly prizes. In his memoirs Grant says prose style was a conscious study of his military education; a subordinate said that he had to read Grant's battlefield orders but once to get a precise vision of the field and what action Grant wanted done upon it. The clarity of communication is, as Hector's arm was once, one of few guards in the chaos of war.

Tony Taylor says

John Keegan asks us to consider questions that are seldom asked: What makes a great military leader? Why is it that men, indeed sometimes entire nations, follow a single leader, often to victory, but with equal dedication also to defeat?

Dozens of names come to mind...Napoleon, Lee, Charlemagne, Hannibal, Castro, Hussein. From a wide array, Keegan chooses four commanders who profoundly influenced the course of history: Alexander the Great, the Duke of Wellington, Ulysses S. Grant and Adolph Hitler. All powerful leaders, each cast in a different mold, each with diverse results.

"THE MASK OF COMMAND is as good as military history can get."

Arjun Ravichandran says

An examination of the changing essence of (military) leadership through the profiling of 4 military leaders operating at different points in history, this book can more accurately be termed as the rise and fall of the hero archetype.

The author begins by noting that a society's army is a reflection of that society, and so too is the nature of generalship. He then begins to adumbrate the rise of generalship and the heroic archetype from the prehistoric indistinguishability of combat and ritualistic display, before detailing the emergence of the archetype blazingly embodied in the leadership of Alexander. In the latter, political and military leadership

are commingled in the same person, as the Macedonian city-state with its primitive political culture saw no issue with the strongest and most able warrior leading the state, thus giving full reign to the heroic archetype.

Fast forward close to two millennia later, as we are brought to the battlefields of Waterloo and the generalship of Wellington, and the focus of the author's investigation becomes clear - beneath the polished prose, the effortless grasp of subject matter beyond the military historian's ken, and the wealth of information about battle tactics, military psychology and topography, the actual focus of the book (as its title would indicate is) : the mask of command and how it differs with time and clime, as different groups of people have different expectations of (or different solutions to) the exercise of raw power.

Wellington's time and place is of a sophistication that is qualitatively distinct from that of Alexanders' kinsmen, and it shows in how Wellington exercised his command ; the title of the chapter focusing on him is labelled "The Anti-Hero", and here the distinct separation between political power on the one hand and military power on the other is clearly evidenced. The details of Wellington's command simply proceed to service this point.

So too does the book proceed to its two remaining figures, Ulysses S Grant on the one hand, and Adolf Hitler on the other, the former exhibiting the "Unheroic" leadership style, and the latter the "False Heroic". In Grant's case, the title is no slander, but once again a reflection of the leadership style that grew out of a continent open to technological progress and founded on democratic principles - both of which mitigated against Grant employing any variant of a heroic style of leadership. In Hitler's case, his leadership style, a clumsy but shockingly effective employment of the ancient heroic archetype, is an aberration ; a curious throwback in a world rapidly modernizing and progressing towards increased political sophistication and the general deemphasis on all-consuming and all-encompassed violence that had been contained in the heroic ideal. Where Hitler failed, and thus evinced the False Heroism of the chapter title allocated to him, is in the exercise of the very real physical, oral and existential risks associated with that ideal.

The author concludes that in the era of nuclear proliferation and increased global interconnectivity, the time to put away the heroic ideal once and for all has finally arrived, as the complexities and the dangers of the brave new world can only be taken up appropriately by those possessed of caution, poise, intelligence, and sang-froid - precisely the anti-thesis of the hero.

This is a well-written book, with wonderfully crafted and chiselled prose that you come to expect from John Keegan, with a surety of touch over not only his subject matter, but a variety of subject matter that he feels are of import to whatever military/political point he is making.

Even though the book is about leadership, it's not really a quick read perfect for management graduates or whatever - his analysis rather, as I have outlined, is more about the changing nature of leadership as evinced in the military sphere of human affairs, and what that says about us and our societies, especially the political organization thereof. Another factor mitigating against general and superficial enjoyment of this book is the relatively high level it is written at - while you do not have to be a military enthusiast, or a battle connoisseur to appreciate this book, some historical knowledge, a familiarity with maps as well as a knowledge (or ability to gain knowledge) of military jargon would be probably be necessary.

Bap says

Reading John Keegan is like sitting down with an old friend, a very smart and interesting old friend. He

contrasts styles of military leadership. Alexander the Great is the heroic leader on the front lines fighting with his men, risking his life, leading the way. He then contrasts Wellington and Grant who put on few airs but largely kept off the front lines. He disparages the chateau generals in the First World War who blandly sent men to their death but were estranged from the front living lives of luxury amidst slaughter. He then jumps to Hitler who considered himself a general but was big time crazy in his bunker engaging in tirades and filibusters creating intense boredom. Strangely, while he lived a spartan existence, he also refrained from spending time with the troops. This book is a walk through history which is never dull with Keegan as your companion.

Rachael Hewison says

I had a bit of a love/hate relationship with this book. Some chapters I found fascinating, others I found were a real struggle to get through.

Keegan chose four brilliantly contrasting people to concentrate on; all with completely different leadership styles in four very different theatres of war. I was particularly fascinated by the chapters concerning Grant since he is not someone I know much about at all. The Alexander section I found the hardest to read, particularly the descriptions of his battles; I think diagrams would have been particularly beneficial.

The last chapter about nuclear threats came a bit out of no where but was particularly powerful and definitely gave food for thought when I finished it.

Heather Stein says

In my last year of high school, Mr. Goodman, my world history teacher, organized a formal debate lasting a fortnight in order to assess which countries were most responsible for the outbreak of WWI. Were it not for that experience and Keegan's *The First World War*, I would probably not be where I am today. I've since moved away from military history as a field of study, focusing more on political theory and transgression in the late medieval era, but it remains a passion of mine. So, when a friend offered to lend me a copy of *Mask of Command* I couldn't pass it up.

Keegan, for all of his being one of the world's foremost military historians, suffers from what I dub "Harold Bloom" syndrome: He rewrites essentially the same books over and over again. That said, this specimen is fantastic. Using the example of four extraordinary generals, Alexander the Great, Wellington, Grant and Hitler, he analyzes their differing styles of leadership and command. Keegan offers a framework for comparison as he goes along arguing that the key question for ANY general, not just these four, is the extent to which they must share the danger with their troops. While each individual chapter provides a well-written, informative and insightful account of the particularities of situation and style of each general, the conclusion ties it all together very nicely. I learnt a lot from this book and think it is a great example of non-fiction palatable to both academic and amateur alike.

That said, there are a few problems with the book that caused me to groan. Firstly, it definitely suffers from a euro-centrism that undermines Keegan's authority. Only because this IS Keegan writing am I willing to trust his assertions without the formidable footnotes I would demand of any other writer. I have lost the quotations to back up this criticism, but I remember it was particularly prominent in the section about Wellington's

background in India.

Lastly, the conclusion is divided into sections, each addressing different "imperatives" of command and providing a brief synopsis of how context, character and technology played out the success or failure of each general: Kinship, Prescription, Sanction, Action and Example. This conception of human history as teleological, i frankly can't agree with (see Eurocentrism criticism above). Furthermore, the argument borders on the ridiculous when the culminating section is a "validation of nuclear authority." Yes, i realize that, in 1987, nuclear war was still a very real threat as Keegan wrote. However, today, we are not nearly as occupied by nuclear warfare as by biological warfare and acts of terrorism committed by groups of individuals rather than armies. *Mask of Command* provides a very dated account of contemporary military leadership - but that doesn't in the least take away from its analysis of generalship in the past.

It took me over a month to slug through, but it was mostly the Hitler section that i had trouble with - not because it was poorly written but because it is difficult to get excited by a tale of defeat. Grant was an interesting choice for study - as numerous heated arguments about whether Lee or Grant was the better general have evidenced. I recommend this as a heavier read to just about everyone.

Amanda says

This is a very enjoyable and informative book. There are four commanders whose profiles are contrasted with the same questions of leadership. The repetition of each questions and the historical events from the professional life of each commander informs the definition and function of a successful heroic commander.

In the book, the description of each commander's profile was very opinionated and although I think that there were all well-informed, I believe that the judgement that was made about the humility of Grant wasn't adequately proven until you read the entire novel and work to extract that the authour is biased towards passive politics. Despite the assumption, the description of each commander gives a personal touch at the beginning of each chapter that captures your attention. After being acquainted with the commander, the zeitgeist is depicted; the battlefields are described so that they become immersive rather than static. Overall it is a engaging read with a lot of good observations about what kind of performance is expected from a heroic commander.

Sean Chick says

I found the part on Alexander to be good, and Hitler analysis dead on. However, the Wellington and Grant parts can only be considered redundant and shallow. In Wellington's case, it begins well enough, with a superb rendering of his experiences at Waterloo. After this it falls apart into claptrap and the usual Anglo hero-worship. Wellington was a great general, but Keegan does not take time to discuss his shortcomings in maneuver warfare, charismatic leadership, and personnel management. Keegan instead takes Wellington's word on almost everything, forgetting that he was a deeply arrogant man who gave other limited praise in order to bolster his achievements. This is a stunning example of infatuation ruining history. Also, while it is true that gunpowder forced a general to be more or less behind the lines, frontline leadership was still common enough. Wellington exhibited it several times, as did Napoleon. Keegan could have investigated this in the form of Ney, who in leading both corps and army formations, tended to lead up front, which at times both hurt and helped him. However, if he had done this, then Keegan would not have been able to bow

at the altar of Wellington.

Grant offers in a way a better example of lead from the rear, even though Lee, Rosecrans, and Sheridan, among others, understood the need for occasional Napoleonic heroics. Like Wellington, Keegan does not discuss shortcomings. The only ways Grant seems different from Wellington is in his modesty (which Keegan aptly calls false) and the democratic society that he came from. Yet, Grant does not seem especially democratic and if anything such societies make the military's job of training and ordering more difficult. Generals exist in undemocratic worlds, and this contrast is far more fascinating than a few platitudes on how Grant was a product of his society. I agree with the later point, but William S. McFeely already illustrated that in his brilliant biography. All Keegan seems to offer is a few notes on deference to Congress. The whole passage on Grant seems like a thought unfinished.

Jack says

Overall this was a good military leadership discussion. I enjoyed the comparison of Alexander, Wellington, Grant, and of course, even Adolf Hitler. The historical discussion and comparison of the leadership styles with the modes of warfare technology provide an interesting discussion of leadership changes. Alexander from the front, always victorious. Wellington not so close, but in the thick of bullets whizzing about. Grant, always everywhere on the battlefield but in artillery range of the Confederates. Hitler ensconced in his different HQ's hundreds of miles from any front completely oblivious to frontline happenings, but always on the radio. It helps having a good understanding of all the times under discussion. I am very poor at Civil War history so I needed to look up quite a bit on Grant. I gave this one four stars and I was happy to read it.

Leslie says

I read this while I was working on my dissertation, along with several other books by John Keegan. He really is the best military historian writing in English right now. He makes military matters comprehensible to people who are neither military buffs nor militarists (I'm neither, and much military history is written for people who are). He starts with a brief discussion of pre-heroic military leadership, then traces the changing nature of both war and our notions of leadership and heroism through studies of Alexander the Great (an example of traditional heroic leadership), the Duke of Wellington (anti-heroic leadership), Ulysses S Grant (unheroic leadership), and Adolf Hitler (false heroic leadership), then ends with a discussion of what heroism and heroic leadership could mean in the "post-heroic" nuclear world. Keegan writes clearly and well, and he understands war in cultural, moral, and ethical as well as technical terms. Many political figures like to dress themselves up in the trappings of military heroism, hoping thereby to fortify their claims to being leaders; Keegan will give you some context for assessing those claims for what they're really worth.

CD says

There are two books by author John Keegan that need to be read together or one after the other. The Mask of

Command is one and The Face of Battle is the other. Neither series nor followup work(s) these two books are complimentary and cover similar territory, but from different angles.

The Mask of Command examines in a unique fashion what great commanders did and did not do. Keegan does not seek to forcibly find the similarities as much as the unique capabilities that each of his four chosen subjects brought to their era and commands. Three of them, Alexander the Great, the Duke of Wellington, and Ulysses S Grant were successful beyond wildest imagination and thus became legendary. The fourth subject, Adolf Hitler the definition of epic failure, however not in the obvious way that Germany lost the War and Hitler killed himself, is presented by Keegan as the soldier he truly was.

Each of these great commanders brought unique skills and were truly people of their age in a way that was serendipitous. Luck, right man, right time, but also the right preparation was vital. The preparation and its end result was wildly different for each of the four. The persona and self imposed behaviors that are written about are each of their Masks assumed to allow for the greatness.

Alexander was a heroic ancient warrior who got into the mix and individually and personally shed a great deal of blood. Alexander wasn't above using killing as a political tool. He was required to be constantly proving his own worthiness to have succeeded both his father and others, great warriors among them, as the leader and commander of the great forces under his command. Drinking, debauching, individual combat, and political machination all were things he had to excel at to maintain his role.

The Duke of Wellington, one of the greatest figures in the history of the British Empire, was obsessed with *noblesse oblige* to the extreme. His personal discipline to the study and practice of blood and iron may never have been exceeded. Keegan avoids like many biographers and writers the adulatory hero worship that results in so much of the Wellington story being hagiography. Wellington's life and career including becoming Prime Minister is mentioned, but Keegan focuses on his time in the saddle. Literally as this was the era of Cavalry and commanders being mounted on horseback. Wellington's greatest strength as a commander may have been his common touch and care of his soldiers. Wellington also was quick to be in the thick of battle to be best able to direct his troops, though by his era a commander was not expected or required to be a front line combatant. He led from the front certainly as often he was 'ahead' of the front and where the action would be next. Wellington also may have had the greatest anticipation of his opponents moves and this would prove the key to Waterloo, Napoleons great errors aside.

Grant who would fail at nearly everything but war and autobiography is Keegan's third subject. A professional soldier who though educated beyond almost any of his non military contemporaries was so ill struck by fate that he couldn't find work as an engineer and during a peacetime sojourn failed at farming and nearly at every business he tried. Grant had those great leadership abilities including but not limited to being able to withstand the horror of war, a innate understanding of the men he commanded, like the previous two as well the ability to deliver both oral and written orders that were clear and correct in what they needed to say. Grant was actually the best Civil War General in terms of a modern strategy and logistics. Like those he studied, Grant knew, along with Sherman, that the war had to be taken to the enemy. It was not merely a holding action and thus the formulation of what would be known as Sherman's march to the Sea as the penultimate act of 'taking it to the enemy'. Grant would be at great personal risk at times and engaged in actions that add to his 'story' that modern commanders might never have taken.

The rest of this work while divided between the aforementioned section regarding Hitler and final words to summarize, is also a warning against many of the actions of the past being emulated, even if in similar circumstance. Keegan as a teacher of military students at Sandhurst makes a strong case with these studies of the great that becomes a warning against future heroic behavior in military leadership. From the lessons

learned of societal cost to the not winnable finality in Nuclear Exchange, this book ends as a cautionary document. Keegan says it best with his closing sentence, "Today the best must find conviction to play the hero no more."

An important book for those studying any facet of the leadership, command, and heroic behavior.

Matt says

If I were to recommend one military history to someone.

Stephen says

4.0 stars. Terrific book that analyzes and explores what it takes to be an effective and capable commander in light of the ever changing nature of the war. The book looks at four leaders that had vastly different styles but were all extremely effective commanders in their own right: Alexander the Great, the Duke of Wellington, Ulysses S. Grant and Adolf Hitler. A terrific read.

Simon Mcleish says

Originally published on my blog here in March 2000.

The Mask of Command is a companion to Keegan's earlier book *The Face of Battle*, published just over a decade beforehand. That book dealt with battle as experienced by the common soldier, while *The Mask of Command* is about the nature of military leadership. They have the same structure, a general introduction and conclusion framing some case studies, here Alexander the Great, the Duke of Wellington, Ulysses S. Grant, and Adolf Hitler. The title indicates something of Keegan's attitude to command: he sees it as an art of persuasion related in some way to acting, involving hiding the true nature of the commander. The illustration chosen for the front of this edition fits well with this, though not related to any of the leaders mentioned; it is a photograph of the Sutton Hoo helmet, which hides the man inside it so that you cannot see his features. (The photograph shows the helmet unworn.) We do not even know precisely who the helmet was made for.

Keegan's analysis of each of his case studies hinges on the relationship between developing styles of leadership and the idea of the hero. Each subject reacted in a different way to this compared with the others, Alexander deliberately cultivating it, Wellington deprecating it, Grant ignoring it, and Hitler creating a propaganda version of it. These reactions, as well as saying something about the personalities of these men, also reflect the changing nature of warfare itself and the most efficient role to be taken by a general. (Keegan encapsulates this in the question "How frequently should the general be in the front line?" - always, sometimes, or never.)

The most interesting analyses are those of Alexander and Hitler; that of Wellington overlaps considerably with the description of Waterloo in *The Face of Battle*. Grant is perhaps less easily describe, a less extreme personality, and the study of his methods of leadership doesnot really take off.

The final philosophical section, which consists of an analysis of what command actually is, how one man can persuade others to risk their lives, together with an application of this theory to the idea of command in the nuclear age, is fascinating. (Keegan is fairly pessimistic, denying even the possibility of command in the age of "Mutually Assured Destruction", when the executive trying to persuade others to fight is of necessity one of the very few with any likelihood of survival.)

Though I disapprove of warfare, I find the reasons behind it and its methods fascinating, and Keegan's writing always seems to provide insights.

ActionScientist says

I really liked this book. It was my initial introduction to Alexander, within the context of the evolution of generalship since his life 2,500 years ago. In addition to Wellington and Grant, the book also covers Adolf Hitler under the chapter heading 'False Hero' and shows what a deluded putz he actually was in WWII. There have more 'false heroes' since. They start violent wars.

The book is, in my opinion, missing a chapter. It kind of ends in the nuclear age, admonishing modern leaders to tend towards doing nothing, or "post-heroic command". With regard to dropping nuclear bombs on each other, I would agree with that, however we're heading towards a whole new kind of war. To ensure our long term survival, the job of the warrior, our biosphere needs an entirely new kind of heroic warrior to emerge, individuals with the moral fortitude required to take a stand in lead-by-example ways.

Ted says

This is a meditation on the nature of command, and therefore the nature of war. Keegan explores manner in which four famous military figures exercised command, and how the technological and social backgrounds of the wars in which they exercised command shaped their manner of command. Alexander the Great exemplifies the heroic mode of command, in which the leader exercises authority through personal charisma and by example. The Duke of Wellington is a post-heroic commander, guiding his troops rather than leading them, and securing his legitimacy as the representative of a distant sovereign. U.S. Grant is the anti-heroic commander, for whom logistics, intelligence, and psychology are as important, more important, than personal bravery or prowess. Adolf Hitler is the false heroic commander, who exercises power through propaganda and ideology, but who remains distant from the men he directs.

Each section is well written, and concise. I finished the book with a strong desire to read more about Wellington in particular, and a willingness to learn more about mankind's strangest and most destructive, and at the same time, apparently universal, endeavor.

Ctgt says

3.5 stars

My brother in law is a huge Keegan fan and loaned me this book but it never really struck a chord with me and at times it was a bit dry. I know this was written in the late 80's but his statement from the conclusion concerning the nuclear age made me shudder

Mankind, if it is to survive, must choose its leaders by the test of their intellectuality; and, contrarily, leadership must justify itself by its detachment, moderation and power of analysis.

I haven't seen leaders on either side of the aisle, or anywhere for that matter, with those qualities.
