

Harding University

## Scholar Works at Harding

---

History & Political Science Department Faculty  
Research & Publications

College of Arts & Humanities

---

6-2017

### Review of *The Last Cavalryman: The Life of General Lucian K. Truscott, Jr.* by Harvey Ferguson

Jared Dockery Ph.D.

Harding University, [jndockery@harding.edu](mailto:jndockery@harding.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.harding.edu/history-polsci-facpub>



Part of the [Military History Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Dockery, J. (2017). Review of *The Last Cavalryman: The Life of General Lucian K. Truscott, Jr.* by Harvey Ferguson. *Michigan War Studies Review*, 2017 (045), 1-2. Retrieved from <https://scholarworks.harding.edu/history-polsci-facpub/1>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Arts & Humanities at Scholar Works at Harding. It has been accepted for inclusion in History & Political Science Department Faculty Research & Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholar Works at Harding. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@harding.edu](mailto:scholarworks@harding.edu).



**HARDING**  
UNIVERSITY



*The Last Cavalryman: The Life of General Lucian K. Truscott, Jr.* by Harvey Ferguson.

Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 2015. Pp. xxi, 423. ISBN 978-0-8061-4664-1.

Review by Jared Dockery, Harding University (jndockery@harding.edu).

---

According to Dwight Eisenhower, Lucian Truscott Jr. was the sixth most valuable American officer in Europe during the Second World War.<sup>1</sup> Though his wartime contributions included founding the Army Rangers and commanding the 3rd Infantry Division, VI Corps, and Fifth Army in the Mediterranean theater, he was long neglected by biographers. But now, in less than a decade, three Truscott biographies have appeared.<sup>2</sup> The newest of them, Harvey Ferguson's<sup>3</sup> *Last Cavalryman*, handles its subject in a highly sympathetic way.

Lucian Truscott's journey through life was not an express ride but a local run with lots of stops: teenaged teacher, cavalry officer, polo champion, premier army instructor, founder of the U.S. Army Rangers, battle commander, army commanding general, visitor to a pope, CIA insider, and confidante to a president. When the ride ended and life let him step down, those around him remembered him as a loving husband, a dedicated father and grandfather, a good friend, a talented leader, and an exceptionally bright star to his country. (367)

Truscott began his professional career as a public school teacher in Oklahoma in 1911, at age sixteen. He joined the army as a second lieutenant in 1917. His unit, the 17th Cavalry, missed serving in France during World War I. In the interwar period, he advanced through the ranks and became one of the best polo players in the army. He both studied and taught in the Cavalry School at Fort Riley and the Command and General Staff School at Fort Leavenworth. As an officer of the 3rd Cavalry Regiment, he had the sad duty of helping to drive out the piteous "Bonus Expeditionary Force" from Washington, DC, in 1932.

Understandably, Truscott's Second World War experience gets most of Ferguson's attention (nineteen of the book's thirty chapters). He was posted to England in 1942 with instructions from army chief of staff George C. Marshall to ensure that some American troops gained early combat experience against the Germans, so they might qualify to lead larger American units that would arrive later. To this end, Truscott proposed the creation of the Army Rangers and selected Maj. William O. Darby to lead them—an inspired choice.

A strength of Truscott's wartime service was amphibious warfare. After observing the disastrous Canadian raid at Dieppe in 1942, he led a nine-thousand-man infantry and armor sub-task force ashore at Port Lyautey, Morocco, in November. He commanded the 3rd Infantry Division in the invasion of Sicily the following July. The 3rd remained in reserve during the opening days of the assault upon the

---

1. Alfred Chandler Jr., ed., *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower*, vol. 4 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins U Pr, 1970) 2466-69.

2. Besides *The Last Cavalryman*, H. Paul Jeffers, *Command of Honor: General Lucian Truscott's Path to Victory in World War II* (NY: NAL Caliber, 2008), and Wilson A. Heefner, *Dogface Soldier: The Life of General Lucian K. Truscott, Jr.* (Columbia: U Missouri Pr, 2010). The latter is a solid piece of scholarship.

3. Ferguson, who served in the US Army 3rd Infantry Division in the 1960s, holds a master's degree in public administration and had a long career in law enforcement.

Italian mainland that September, but came ashore at Salerno nine days later and was plugged into the line. In January 1944, Truscott and his division participated in the landings at Anzio, after which he was promoted to command the entire VI Corps, which was chosen for the invasion of the French Riviera, code-named Operation Dragoon, in August. By then, Ferguson argues, the general “probably knew more about leading amphibious landings than anyone else in Europe, maybe the world” (261).

Appropriately—given his status as the “last cavalryman”—Truscott relied heavily upon confiscated mules and horses in both Sicily and Italy. The mules hauled supplies, especially in the hill country of the Italian mainland. The Germans paid brutal tribute to their effectiveness by slaughtering the animals to keep them out of Allied hands. Meanwhile, Truscott’s men scouted on horseback; one unnamed general observed that “what Truscott did in Sicily was to turn his infantry into cavalry” (182).

As a combat commander, Truscott felt deeply the responsibility of sending men to their deaths. Before the landing at Port Lyautey, Truscott reflected that his “own mistakes and the mistakes of others in preparing this command for battle would be paid for in the lives of Americans for whom I was responsible. It was a sobering thought” (119). At his Memorial Day speech at the American cemetery in Nettuno, Italy, in 1945,

The general, without speaking notes, walked to the microphone, acknowledged those seated before him, and turned his back. He faced the graves before him and spoke only to his fallen soldiers. In his distinctive gravelly voice, Truscott apologized that they were there and asked their forgiveness if any mistake by him had caused their deaths. He promised that he would never speak of the glorious dead because he saw no glory in having to die while still in your late teens or early twenties. (3)

After the war, Truscott served within the Central Intelligence Agency between 1951 and 1959, including four years as its senior representative in Germany.<sup>4</sup> In his brief account of these years, Ferguson notes that Truscott authorized construction of a secret tunnel into East Berlin to tap Soviet and East German phone lines. He also prevented a CIA assassination attempt against the Chinese Communist premier Chou En-lai (351).

Ferguson does, however, criticize Truscott’s “less than stellar” management of the Fifth Army’s 92nd African-American Infantry Division (366). He believes the general should have relieved the 92nd’s unsympathetic commanding officer, Maj. Gen. Edward Almond.<sup>5</sup> He also claims Truscott conducted an extramarital affair with Congresswoman Clare Boothe Luce (R-CT) in Italy, citing the general’s amorous letters (preserved in Luce’s papers at the Library of Congress).<sup>6</sup> Ferguson calls the dalliance “likely a serious personal regret” (366) for Truscott, though it did not cost him his marriage. By contrast, another Truscott biographer, Wilson Heefner, refers to Luce simply as the general’s “war-time friend.”<sup>7</sup>

*The Last Cavalryman* is equipped with twenty-three black-and-white photographs, ten maps, twenty-eight pages of endnotes, and a six-page bibliography. Ferguson uses Truscott’s own published memoirs,<sup>8</sup> as well as his papers and those of his family and Clare Boothe Luce, besides relevant secondary literature. Though his book is a well written and serious study, it is less erudite than Heefner’s. One will appeal to nonspecialist readers, the other to scholars and advanced students.

---

4. The author does not convey the full extent of Truscott’s authority: he headed up the entire CIA operation in Germany and supervised fourteen hundred personnel. See Heefner (note 2 above) 272, 281.

5. See, too, Heefner (229).

6. See, also, Ralph G. Martin, *Henry and Clare: An Intimate Portrait of the Luces* (NY: Putnam, 1991).

7. Note 2 above, 248.

8. *Command Missions: A Personal Story* (NY: Dutton, 1954) and *Twilight of the U.S. Cavalry: Life in the Old Army, 1917–1942*, ed. Lucian K. Truscott III (Lawrence: U Kansas Pr, 1989).