

The New York Times

Bernard E. Trainor, 89, General Turned Military Analyst, Is Dead

By **Richard Goldstein**

June 4, 2018

Lt. Gen. Bernard E. Trainor, a Marine combat veteran of the Korean and Vietnam Wars who forged a second career as a military analyst and co-author of three books taking a highly critical view of American policy in the wars with Iraq, died on Saturday at his home in Potomac Falls, Va. He was 89.

His wife, Peggy Trainor, said the cause was cancer.

After leading infantrymen in two wars and serving as a senior commander at Marine headquarters in the Pentagon, General Trainor turned to journalism. He was the military correspondent of The New York Times from 1986 to 1990 and later an analyst for ABC News and NBC News.

In their trilogy of books, published from 1995 to 2012, General Trainor and Michael R. Gordon, who was the chief military correspondent of The Times, drew on classified documents; interviews with military personnel, American officials, Iraqi officials and their rivals; oral histories; and the authors' own visits to battle sites.

The final book, "The Endgame: The Inside Story of the Struggle for Iraq, From George W. Bush to Barack Obama" (2012), analyzed American intervention in Iraq beginning with the capture of Baghdad in 2003 and ending with the departure of the last American troops in December 2011.

General Trainor and Mr. Gordon concluded that while "potential flash points" in sectarian strife remained in the aftermath of America's military presence in Iraq, "the greater threat to the country's American-initiated experiment in democracy" was "the authoritarianism" of the Iraqi prime minister, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki.

"By the time the American military left, Iraq had still not passed a major milestone in the life of any successful new democracy: the peaceful handover of power to an opposition party," they wrote.

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They credited the “surge” of American troops undertaken by President Bush in 2007 with giving many Iraqi citizens, including former insurgents, “a partner they could trust.” But they also found that the heightened American military presence had not led to any reforms in Iraq’s factionalized government. They faulted both President Bush and President Obama for missteps.

“The Endgame” showed “how crazy it is to start a war without good plans for how to finish it,” Gideon Rose wrote in *The New York Times*.



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In *Naval War College Review*, the military scholar Jon Scott Logel wrote that “perhaps ‘Endgame’ is the best attempt to understand the complex relationship of Maliki with other Shiite groups, the Iranians, the Sunnis and the Kurds” in their competition for power.

In their first book, “*The Generals’ War: The Inside Story of the Conflict in the Gulf*” (1995), General Trainor and Mr. Gordon took a critical look at the American military strikes in early 1991 that repulsed Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait — the campaign known as Desert Storm, begun by President George H. W. Bush.

General Trainor and Mr. Gordon cited a lack of coordination among the branches of America’s armed forces and criticized their “emphasis on a quick victory,” arguing that it allowed much of Mr. Hussein’s Republican Guard to escape and left him with loyal troops to bolster his regime and suppress his Shiite opponents.

“The book’s strongest sections are those providing detailed analysis of the chaos — and that does not seem too strong a word — over when to finish the war,” the BBC war correspondent Mark Laity wrote in *The Times*. “By analyzing the role of the American high command, it throws a light

on the American military that provides lessons for the future as well, and sadly most are rather uncomfortable.”

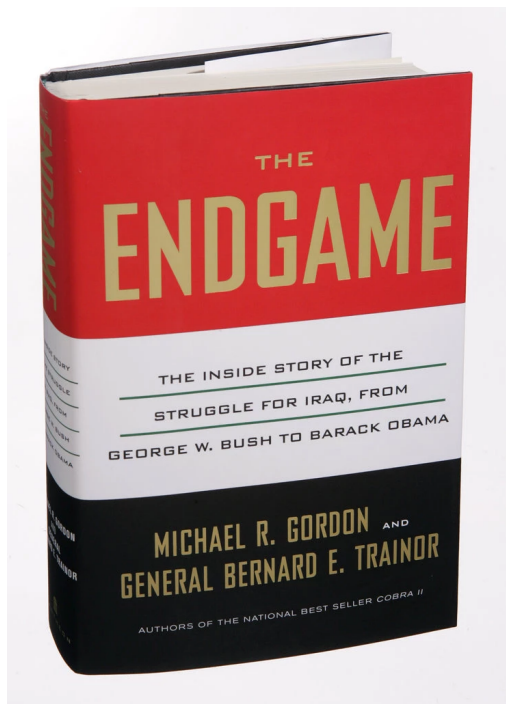
In their best seller “Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq” (2006), which looked at the first few months of the war begun by President George W. Bush in 2003, General Trainor and Mr. Gordon sought “to provide an inside look at how a military campaign that was so successful in toppling Saddam Hussein’s regime set the conditions for the insurgency that followed.”

In citing what they called “the misreading of the foe,” they contended that Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld and Gen. Tommy Franks, the commander of American troops, “believed that their victory would be sealed with the seizing of Baghdad,” although the Americans were not fighting “a purely conventional war” but a foe that included paramilitary forces loyal to Saddam Hussein and dispersed throughout Iraq.

General Trainor and Mr. Gordon wrote that “having failed to prepare for post-combat burdens, undertaken the war with minimal acceptable forces and canceled the deployment of badly needed reinforcements, the Bush administration compounded the problem by disbanding the Iraqi army, putting more than 300,000 armed men on the streets, and denying local elections that would have allowed the Iraqis a measure of control over their own affairs.”

Reviewing the book in The Times, the military writer Sean Naylor wrote, “In richly detailed, almost dispassionate prose, the authors present a damning indictment of the Bush administration’s national security team.”

Bernard Edmund Trainor was born in a Manhattan hospital on Sept. 2, 1928, and grew up in the Bronx, one of two sons of Ann (Whelan) Trainor, a homemaker, and Joseph Trainor, who auctioned fruit arriving in New York for sale at grocery stores. Bernard graduated from Cardinal Hayes High School in the Bronx.



“The Endgame,” published in 2012, was the final volume of a trilogy on the wars in Iraq written by General Trainor and Mr. Gordon.

Patricia Wall/The New York Times

He enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1946 as a private and received his commission after graduating from Holy Cross College in 1951 with a bachelor’s degree in history. He received a master’s degree in history from the University of Colorado in 1963. While attending the Air War College at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama in 1969, he was cited for “best paper dealing with politico-military thought.”

He was an infantry platoon commander in the Korean War and served two tours in Vietnam, as an adviser to a Vietnamese special operations group and later as a battalion commander. Upon his promotion to lieutenant general in 1983, he became the deputy chief of staff for plans, policies and operations at Marine Corps headquarters. He retired from the Marines in July 1985.

As The Times’s military correspondent, General Trainor covered United States-Soviet relations, the civil war in Nicaragua, the Iran-Iraq war and Pentagon affairs. He was later director of the national security program at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard and a senior fellow of the Council on Foreign Relations.

He and his wife, the former Peggy Hamilton, were married for 59 years. In addition to her, General Trainor is survived by their four daughters, Claire Lemoine and Kathleen, Theresa and Saxon Trainor; and five grandchildren. His daughter Saxon is an actress and acting coach. His brother, Joseph, died earlier.

Apart from his analysis of international conflicts, General Trainor wrote in a very personal vein of his combat experiences, relating to his time leading Marines in Korea and Vietnam, and the mark they left on him.

In a Times article in 1987, he told of the flashbacks he had experienced when he took his family to see the Oliver Stone movie “Platoon,” a dramatization of American infantrymen fighting in the Vietnam War.

He remembered “day after day of stalking an enemy rarely seen but always present” and “then suddenly an explosion and the shrieks of those who are still able to scream out.”

“A weary foot has found a hidden land mine.”

As he put on his coat to leave the theater, General Trainor wrote, “one credit line caught my eye: ‘Dedicated to those who fought and died in Vietnam.’ ”

“That one line hit me hard,” he wrote. “I couldn’t speak, and my stomach knotted. While my daughters walked out of the theater to our parked car, I took a solitary walk to get control of myself.”

“I didn’t realize that I had seen so many familiar faces in the film,” he added, likening the soldiers portrayed in the movie to those he had commanded in war. “Neither did I realize, until then, that for 15 years I have been keeping an anguished genie bottled up inside of me. He nearly escaped. I quickly put the cork back in the bottle that afternoon, but he’s still there trying to get out.”

Correction: June 4, 2018

An earlier version of this obituary misstated the number of grandchildren who survive General Trainor. There are five, not four.

Daniel E. Slotnik contributed reporting.

A version of this article appears in print on June 5, 2018, on Page B11 of the New York edition with the headline: Bernard E. Trainor, General Who Became A Military Analyst and Author, Dies at 89