Petain certainly would have been in that select company but for the fact that he lived on for about 15 years too long. In another sense, of course, nothing should detract from Petain's accomplishments or triumphs in World War I. There is a body of opinion, howsoever small or muted, that is firmly of the view that even in World War II Petain was the shield to de Gaulle's sword, that he simply did what he believed he had to do to secure the French from indignities beyond what had already been inflicted.

The most imposing avenue to radiate from the Place de L'Etoile in Paris, next only to the Champs Elysees is named after Foch, who is buried, if I recall correctly, at the Invalides with other military heroes round Napoleon's tomb. From the war front at the second battle of the Marne, Foch had sent to his then superior Joffre, the dispatch which possibly best epitomises the distilled courage, buccaneer definance, and indomitable spirit of a true soldier in adversity: "My centre is giving way, my right is pushed back, situation excellent, I am attacking." Joffre's own reputation and lustre were irretrievably tarnished by the failure of his tactics at the Somme.

In World War II, the French army's was more of a supportive role, and it may have been difficult to meet the rigorous criteria for preferment to the rank of marshal. Generals Leclerc and, later, de Lattre de Tassigny were, nevertheless, elevated, but posthumously. General de Gaulle's own role in World War II was more political than military. In grasp of strategy, or in terms of military ability, however, he could, in the view of most experts, hold his own in any company.

The US army, relative to the British and the French, is short on tradition. In World War I, the Commander of the American Expeditionary Force, Pershing (West point 1896), was given the special rank of General of the Armies; at least in part to enable him to parley on equal terms with the Marshals of France and Field Marshals of Britain. No one else, before or since, has been conferred that particular rank or title. Subsequently Pershing served as Chief of Staff of the US. Army.

In World war II, a similar problem arose, and more so since the US, after Pearl Harbour, bore the major brunt of the fighting, among the Western powers. Four generals were conferred the 5 star rank -- with the formal title of General of the Army -- MacArthur, Marshall, Eisenhower, and Bradley. There was also another 5 star general, Hap Arnold (West Point 1907), who, however, would more appropriately fall in the category of Air Force General.

