MacArthur had topped the class of 1903 at West Point. He is also possibly the only topper -- or one of a very few -- to make it to the pinnacle of his profession. He was, and possibly still remains, the youngest person to be appointed US Chief of Army Staff. Marshall graduated not from West Point but from the Virginia Military Institute -- in 1901. Though the same age as MacArthur -- both were born in 1880 -- he was a mere colonel when MacArthur had completed his extended term as Chief of Army Staff in 1935. Marshall got his first star only in 1936, and from then on moved swiftly up the ladder to eventually become chief of staff -- an office he held throughout World War II. After retirement he served both as Truman's secretary of state, and then as secretary of defence. He also won the ultimate accolade -- the Nobel Prize for Peace -- the only professional soldier to do so to my knowledge. He was, thus, truly first in war and also in peace.



Ike graduated from West Point in 1915, and was placed 61 out of a class of 168. Bradley -- though about 3 years younger -- graduated in the same year from West Point. He was placed 44, or 17 places ahead of Ike. The West Point class of 1915, because of World War II, was the "class that the stars fell on." 59 of them became general officers. Two of them, as mentioned, wore 5 stars; there were also two 4 star or full generals, and seven 3 star or lieutenant generals. In the yearbook of that class, Eisenhower wrote of Bradley in glowing terms. "Some of us will some day," Ike wrote, "be bragging to our grandchildren that 'sure General Bradley was a classmate of mine.'

Bradley, who in World War II served as one of Eisenhower's field commanders, later succeeded him as chief of army staff, and became the first chairman of the joint chiefs of staff when the post was created. Eisenhower considered him as "America's foremost battle leader."

Ike, of course, attained even greater heights, although he was, according to many, more of a political general. It was never suggested that he was a military genius (though he was), but he was thought to possess the necessary command personality for a multinational force. In a sense, he superseded Bradley to become Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces in Europe, and succeeded Marshall as chief of army staff after the war. After retirement, he was successively President of Columbia University, the first Supreme Commander of Nato and, ultimately, twice elected president of the United States.