



# ALEXANDER THE GREAT

LESSONS FROM HISTORY'S  
UNDEFEATED GENERAL

**BILL YENNE**

FOREWORD BY GENERAL WESLEY K. CLARK

# Alexander the Great

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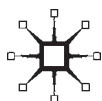
# Alexander the Great

Lessons from History's  
Undefeated General



Bill Yenne

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ALEXANDER THE GREAT

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# Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	vii
General Wesley K. Clark	
Prologue	1
Introduction: Born into a State of War	5
1. Auspicious Beginnings	15
2. Long Live the King	24
3. From Granicus to Gordium	29
4. Turning Point at Issus	40
5. The Takedown of Tyre	52
6. From Gaza to Alexandria	60
7. Decision at Gaugamela	68
8. To the Victor Go the Spoils	81
9. Last Stand at Persian Gate	89
10. From Persepolis to the Caspian Gates	96
11. The King of Asia	103
12. The Crossroads at Syr Darya	112
13. On the Frontier	121
14. Men Fly over Sogdian Rock	127

15. Into the Headwaters of the Indus	132
16. Siege at Aornos	138
17. Triumph at Hydaspes	144
18. Ever Eastward	155
19. The End of the Road	160
20. A Macedonian against the Malhi	165
21. From Great Rivers to Waterless Wilderness	172
22. Back to Persis	177
23. Final Days in Babylon	183
24. What Was and What Might Have Been	190
Epilogue: Lasting Legacy	194
<i>Note on Sources</i>	198
<i>Index</i>	200

*Illustrations appear between pages 102 and 103.*

# Foreword

ALEXANDER THE GREAT WAS THE FIRST GREAT MILITARY COMMANDER OF the West. Before him were legends or mere mortals; after him, all were emulators. No one since has moved as far, as rapidly or as successfully given their respective technologies: not Julius Caesar, not Hannibal, not Genghis Khan, nor Gustavus Adolphus, not Napoleon, and not the armies of Hitler or Stalin.

Bill Yenne's fast moving and insightful biography of Alexander is the best yet at drawing out the lessons from history's first and greatest undefeated general. It is more than a record of battles and campaigns; rather, it is a remarkable and compelling life story.

Alexander's life was to fight and conquer, to craft and lead armies, to seek and solve complex tactical and strategic challenges, whether they were military, logistical or geographic. He sowed fear in the psyche of his enemies, and reached deeply into the hearts and minds of his followers to grasp the deepest wellsprings of motivation, courage and commitment. No one has ever done all this more successfully.

Alexander was, first and foremost, born into the role. Son of the most prominent and successful military leader of his day, Philip of Macedonia, Alexander was brought up in the company of warriors, weaponry, physical challenge, personal leadership, court intrigue, Greek city-state diplomacy and raw ambition.

His physical gifts were awesome. Strength, coordination, stamina, eyesight—even his physical appearance was impressive. By age 16 he was mature enough physically and emotionally to command a wing of an army.



And, at the same time, he was tutored by the best minds of contemporary civilization, including Aristotle. To put it in modern lexicon, he was a lot more than just a “warrior spirit,” though he certainly had that. He was also an innovative problem-solver and a non-doctrinaire visionary who continued to push the boundaries of Western civilization technologically and intellectually.

Alexander was inordinately self-confident—but with good reason. He had proven himself from his earliest days. His extraordinary innate physical and mental qualities were trained, disciplined and hardened emotionally and physically in a way none of his adversaries—nor the over two thousand years of would-be emulators—could have ever replicated. He had seen battle, rivalries and war from his earliest experiences.

Leading from the front was Alexander’s trademark. He was in the thick of the fight, and often in the front rank. He must have seen and smelled the fear and blood-lust of close battle, and thrust and swung his weapons with extraordinary effect. By his example he challenged others. And he must have learned and grown stronger with each bout and battle.

For there is this about combat—it is learned by experience. The lessons are not altogether transferrable in words or logic. And by having fought and survived time and again he must have built an enormous store of “battle-savvy,” that killer instinct of when to thrust, when to pivot and when to parry. In modern lexicon, his skills and learning might be best understood as a professional athlete, say an NFL quarterback, who consistently delivers something beyond the playbook, whose instincts and on-the-field presence carry the team beyond the coach.

But to carry the analogy forward, most of his opponents were not even in the same league. They hadn’t been schooled and hardened in the incessant conflict of Greece; they hadn’t been coached and tutored by the best; and they hadn’t been seasoned by so much leadership and responsibility from an early age.

At West Point, we studied his lessons tactically—all the principles of war that we study date back to Alexander. The principles of the objective, mass, maneuver, the offensive, economy of force, security, surprise and simplicity. He used maneuvers to break up the enemy’s plans, and to seize and maintain the initiative. He was active—he im-

posed his plans on the enemy. He was adaptable, and relentless in pursuing decisive tactical advantage. In battle after battle, open battlefield, siege and pursuit as Alexander marched through Asia—feats wonderfully described by Yenne—these principles shine through. His legacy has thus formed the basis for over two thousand years of Western military thought.

No less remarkable were Alexander's strategy, logistics and communications. He kept his army focused on long range objectives. He periodically halted, refreshed and reorganized. He maintained contact with the reaches of his far-flung and growing empire by courier. His battles flowed into campaigns, his campaigns into seasons, and the seasons into more than a decade of systematic conquest. He didn't overcommit, outrun his logistics or collapse back on his line of communications—all of which are signs of strategic error.

Equally remarkable was his diplomacy and governance. He rewarded friends, formed governing structures and created loyalties even among those whom he defeated and who were of widely diverse cultures. He did everything but establish succession—but then, he hardly expected to die of disease at the age of 33 either.

Today, our battlefields are too lethal, and the scales too vast for the kind of up-front tactical leadership by the highest level commanders. Gunpowder, rifled weaponry, the machine gun and artillery all increased the lethal zone. Today, high powered optics, electronic intelligence collection and synthesis, satellites, aircraft and missiles have further extended the battlefield. What can be seen can be hit, and what can be hit can be killed—this is the mantra of modern precision weaponry. Command is exercised electronically, even in real-time. Top commanders seldom face their opponents physically and in-person, and rarely smell the fear of the impending clash of arms.

Still, the legacy of Alexander endures to inform and will inspire generations to come. He did it all, without defeat. He was in the cockpit of command earlier, longer, at greater personal risk and more successfully than any who have followed. May he be studied for the right purpose, and the lessons used for the right aims. This is what we must hope and strive to ensure.

—General Wesley K. Clark (*ret*)