

Mattox, Henry E. *Army Football in 1945: Anatomy of a Championship Season*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 1990. Pp. xii, 242. Photographs, appendix, bibliography, chapter notes, index. \$35.00.

Nominations for the greatest college football team of all time are as numerous as dandelions on spring lawns. They come from many different eras and from locations as diverse as Harvard, Yale, Miami, Texas, Oklahoma, Southern California, Ohio State, Penn State and most other states. However, few have gone as far as Henry E. Maddox. His book *Army Football in 1945: Anatomy of a Championship Season* was written with an almost religious zeal in an attempt to promote the 1945 United States Military Academy team as college football's best ever.

Army Football in 1945, apparently Maddox's first book, traces the development of Army football from the early 1940s through the outstanding 1945 season. Mattox's purpose seems to have been to provide an in-depth narrative of the building of the outstanding 1945 Army team and a recounting of that dream season.

According to Mattox, Army football had hit rock bottom in 1940 with a 1-8 record, a crushing 48-0 loss to Penn and a 40-0 defeat by arch rival Navy. Relying heavily on manuscript collections held at West Point and thirty-eight interviews with former Army coaches, players and some opponents, Mattox traces the rebuilding of Army football.

The first step in the rebuilding process was the hiring of Earl "Red" Blaik as the head coach. His hiring was controversial because he was not an army officer as all of the previous West Point head coaches had been. But Blaik was familiar with West Point because he was a graduate in the class of 1921 and was later an assistant coach there.

Mattox's interview with Blaik which was discussed early in the book demonstrates one of the weaknesses and also strengths of the work. He introduces Blaik with little biographical information. It would have been nice to know if he played high school or college football, and where he had coached and his coaching record. Plus Mattox failed to ask key questions such as why Blaik decided to leave Dartmouth for West Point. Both of these problems are apparent in most of the interviews reported. It is extremely important to place the interviewee in context in works which rely heavily on interviews. But the large number of interviews Mattox conducted do give the book freshness and life.

Blaik was immediately successful in improving Army's record to 5-3-1 in 1941, his first season. But his continued success was based on his being able to get a weight restriction of 181 pounds on incoming Cadets raised and, of course, the coming of World War II. A decision was made early in the war by top army brass and supported by Dwight Eisenhower (a former West Point halfback) and Douglas MacArthur (who corresponded on a regular basis with Blaik) to promote West Point football as a symbol of Army power and skill.

The recruiting of players for West Point became a priority as both high school and Army base teams were scouted. Mattox does a fairly good job of tracing the

recruiting efforts of the West Point staff and retelling the events of the 1942 through 1944 seasons, although he does dwell a bit too long on rehearsing some of the game accounts.

The 1945 Army team was clearly outstanding. Blaik was often forced to use his third and even fourth teams to keep the scores within reason. Despite showing mercy, Army crushed powers such as Duke (48-13), Notre Dame (48-0) and Penn (61-0). The closest games were with Michigan (28-7) and Navy (32-13). Army outscored its nine opponents by 412-46. The Cadets were a unanimous choice for National Champion, although the team voted not to go to the Rose Bowl because they didn't want to lose their Christmas vacation.

Maddox contends that the 1945 Army team was the best college football team of all time. His strongest argument was the strength of the Army schedule. No less than six of the nine teams Army crushed were in the top twenty. But he also used other factors such as scoring differential, total offense and the number of post season honors the players received. However the question is really moot.

Army Football In 1945 shows a lot of work and initiative on the part of the author. Unfortunately he does not have the writing experience nor does he have the ability to provide the richness and texture that is necessary to keep this story moving.

Marshall University

C. Robert Barnett