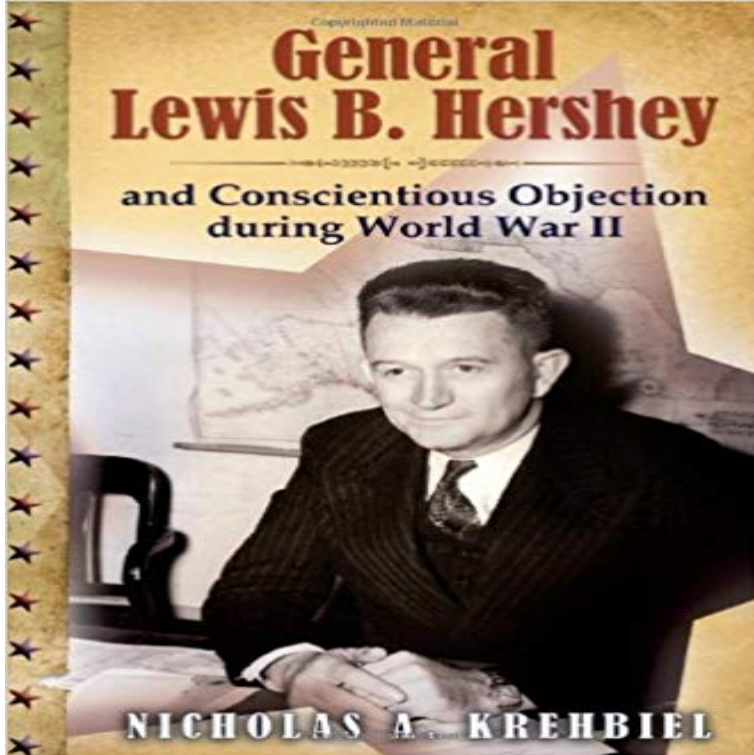


General Lewis B. Hershey and Conscientious Objection during World War II (American Military Experience (University of Missouri))



During World War II, the United States drafted 10.1 million men to serve in the military. Of that number, 52,000 were conscientious objectors, and 12,000 objected to noncombatant military service. Those 12,000 men served the country in Civilian Public Service, the program initiated by General Lewis Blaine Hershey, the director of Selective Service from 1941 to 1970. Despite his success with this program, much of Hershey's work on behalf of conscientious objectors has been overlooked due to his later role in the draft during the Vietnam War. Seeking to correct these omissions in history, Nicholas A. Krehbiel provides the most comprehensive and well-rounded examination to date of General Hershey's work as the developer and protector of alternative service programs for conscientious objectors. Hershey, whose Selective Service career spanned three major wars and six presidential administrations, came from a background with a tolerance for pacifism. He served in the National Guard and later served in both World War I and the interwar army. A lifelong military professional, he believed in the concept of the citizen soldier—the civilian who responded to the duty of service when called upon. Yet embedded in that idea was his intrinsic belief in the American right to religious freedom and his notion that religious minorities must be protected. What to do with conscientious objectors has puzzled the United States throughout its history, and prior to World War II, there was no unified system for conscientious objectors. The Selective Service Act of 1917 only allowed conscientious objection from specific peace sects, and it had no provisions for public service. In action, this translated to poor treatment of conscientious objectors in military prisons and camps during World War I. In response to demands by the Historic Peace Churches (the Brethren,

Mennonites, and the Society of Friends) and other pacifist groups, the government altered language in the Selective Service Act of 1940, stating that conscientious objectors should be assigned to noncombatant service in the military but, if opposed to that, would be assigned to work of national importance under civilian direction. Under the direction of President Franklin D. Roosevelt and with the cooperation of the Historic Peace Churches, Hershey helped to develop Civilian Public Service in 1941, a program that placed conscientious objectors in soil conservation and forestry work camps, with the option of moving into detached services as farm laborers, scientific test subjects, and caregivers, janitors, and cooks at mental hospitals. Although the Civilian Public Service program only lasted until 1947, alternative service was required for all conscientious objectors until the end of the draft in 1973. Krehbiel delves into the issues of minority rights versus mandatory military service and presents General Hershey's pivotal role in the history of conscientious objection and conscription in American history. Archival research from both Historic Peace Churches and the Selective Service makes General Lewis B. Hershey and Conscientious Objection during World War II the definitive book on this subject.

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