



Gen. Peter Pace's portrait, center, is more somber than those of Gen. Colin L. Powell, left, or James L. Jones.

A simple portrait evokes the struggles of war

Along the halls of the Pentagon, former Joint Chiefs chairman Peter Pace stands out

BY GREG JAFFE

Hundreds of portraits of generals and admirals hang like wallpaper along the Pentagon's endless corridors.

Few of these paintings, if any, stop people in the way that the image of Gen. Peter Pace does.

Pace, who served as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the worst years of the Iraq war, is depicted in front of a simple backdrop the color of dried

blood. His shoulders are slightly stooped. His head is just barely bowed. "He looks like he is thinking about his career, the people he left behind and the Marines he lost," said Marnie Burke, who served as Pace's photographer and now works for his successor. "I think there is a lot he has lost."

In a building designed to produce swaggering displays of American power, the spare oil painting captures a rare moment of humility, honesty and even sadness.

Pace was not the kind of chairman who

made waves during his relatively short tenure as the military's top officer. Congressional critics blasted him as too docile and unwilling to stand up to Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld. They persuaded Robert M. Gates, Rumsfeld's successor, not to nominate Pace for a customary second term as chairman in late 2007.

In the narrow confines of the Pentagon's E-ring, though, Pace's portrait outshines those of such luminaries as Gen.

PORTRAIT CONTINUED ON A7

The portrait, painted by Peter Egeli, is meant to evoke some of the difficulties Pace faced while leading the Joint Chiefs of Staff through the most difficult years of the Iraq war.



SHARON CHEN/WASHINGTON POST

In Pentagon's halls, a somber face stands out

PORTRAIT FROM A1

Colin L. Powell, who leans jauntily on his desk, and Gen. Omar Bradley, the last five-star general and the first chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

Corridor art critics say Pace's somber portrait evokes something elemental about the pain of battle that is mostly absent from the hallways of the U.S. war machine. "I don't know why, but it is the portrait I key in on," said Lt. Col. Alayne Conway, a spokeswoman for the Joint Chiefs.

Pace chose Peter Egeli from a list of about a half-dozen painters who regularly are hired by the top brass to do Pentagon portraits. In contrast to most generals, Pace didn't give Egeli a lot of guidance. "I left it in his hands," the general said. "I thought since he was the artist, he would know best."

Instead the two men — both of whom were Marines — chatted about Pace's four decades of military service, which began with the battle of Hue City, one of the longest and bleakest fights of the Vietnam War. "I had to talk to him about Hue City because it is fundamental to who I have been since 1968-1969," Pace said.

The general can still rattle off the names of four young Marines who died under his command 40 years ago: Lance Cpl. Guido Farnaro, Lance Cpl. Chubby Hale, Lance Cpl. Whitey Travers and Cpl. Michael Witt. A fifth Marine, Staff Sgt. Freddie Williams, was passing in front of Pace when he was killed by a sniper's bullet aimed at Pace's chest. "His death prevented mine," Pace said.

Decades later, as chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Pace led the military at a time when violence in Iraq was peaking and the early gains of the Afghan war were crumbling. Egeli says he tried to capture all of those experiences.

The spare red background, which grows darker toward the bottom of the picture, is designed to focus attention on Pace. "You could say it is a troubled red," Egeli said. Pace's slightly stooped posture and the sense of melancholy in his face, the artist said, is supposed to show him thinking of ways to improve the effectiveness of U.S. forces in the two wars.

On the day his portrait was unveiled, Pace fell into a contemplative state of mind that mirrored the moody portrait. "I certainly made some wrong estimates," he said at the 2009 ceremony. "And I certainly made some recommendations that if I could take them back and change them, I would, given the knowledge of today." But he gave the best advice he could with the information available to him at the time, he said.

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Standing beside the general was 1st Lt. Andrew Kinard, who lost both legs as a young platoon commander in Iraq's Anbar province. Pace and his wife first encountered Kinard in 2006 at the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda. The young Marine had just arrived from Iraq and was in a coma.

When Kinard regained consciousness several weeks later, Pace and his wife returned to the hospital and struck up a relationship with the Marine. Two years later, the general invited him to the unveiling.

In the year since the Pace painting was hung alongside the portraits of the 15 other chairmen of the Joint Chiefs, it has won a bevy of admirers in a building that isn't normally associated with art appreciation.

One day last week, Army Col. Rich Daum was waiting outside the "tank," the conference room where the Joint Staff conducts its secret briefings and the service chiefs candidly debate war policy. Pace's portrait hangs right outside the door to the secure room.

"I think it is better than the others," said Daum, gesturing to the row of paintings lining the corridor. Some of Daum's colleagues began to rib him for having an opinion about Pentagon art. "To me, he looks like a very devout, serious man," the officer countered a bit defensively.

Most of the other portraits in the Pentagon are crammed with images and artifacts that seem designed to testify to the subject's grandeur and his importance in history.

"Those paintings are telling you about the public person," said Brandon Brame Fortune, a curator at the Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery who agreed to visit the Pentagon to view Pace's portrait. "They are designed to capture the subject in his official military capacity."

The portrait of Gen. Richard B. Myers, Pace's immediate predecessor, is chockablock with images of a still-smoldering Pentagon from Sept. 11, 2001, and smaller depictions of the Air Force general in battle fatigues paying a visit to troops overseas. The main image of Myers stands almost protectively between the viewer and the major historical events playing out behind him.

The Powell painting links the first black chairman to early African American service members

with the inclusion of a small image of the Buffalo Soldiers, a black cavalry regiment formed in the mid-1860s, just after the Civil War.

By contrast, the Pace painting is more private and personal, said Fortune.

The general's hands are folded modestly in front of him. He is ducking his head just a bit and gazing slightly away from the viewer. The absence of any background distractions focuses all of the attention on Pace.

"People are responding to that sense of introspection," Fortune said. "I really believe they are connecting with the simplicity of the painting and the quiet drama."

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