

The General Is In

AS A MEMBER OF THE EARLY GRASS-roots Draft Wesley Clark campaign, I am very excited about Clark's announcement that he is running for president ("Who Is This G.I.?" Sept. 29). Your articles describe Clark as being bold, confident, driven and brilliant, with a desire to make himself understood and respected. He is also criticized for being unpopular and an outsider, but, as you point out, "[some] of the resentment against [him] is just plain jealousy." The election of the president is not a popularity contest. I'm fed up with the good-old-boy network that has the interests of friends above the well-being of our country. When it comes time to vote for our next president, I will choose the intense, independent-minded candidate who believes in diplomacy first. Clark will help America regain respect from our allies, who have been insulted and alienated by our current administration. With Clark as our next president, I will feel proud to be American again.

LINDA McLENNAN
CARMEL, CALIF.

I STRONGLY DISPUTE YOUR PORTRAYAL of Gen. Wesley Clark as an obsessive, relentless, driven, practically friendless man "who made more enemies than he defeated." I have known Wes Clark from the time he and I were teenage roommates at West Point. You quote a "friend" who never saw him relax. Wes and I played pinball in Colorado (he whipped me), tobogganed onto a frozen river in the Finger Lakes, shot eight ball one-on-one in the NATO chateau and played Foxtail catch in front of his dumbfounded bodyguards. Wes roared with laughter when we escaped his military-hospital intensive-care ward in Japan, even as he cried out in pain from nearly ripping open the stitches from his Vietnam wound. Your claim that Wes is a brown-nosing Eddie Haskell is ludicrous. Wes was fired as Supreme Allied Commander for speaking out against his bosses. He has always been an independent thinker. In 1972, I returned from a year at a European university and made an appointment with West Point's academic dean, a colonel, to review my cadet records. When the colonel saw my sandals and ponytail, he immediately postponed the meeting and culled the records. Wes, a captain, invited me to attend the political-science class he was teaching there, and even asked me to speak. He didn't give a hoot what the big brass would say. As you report, Wes Clark is indeed in-

tense, brilliant, bold and independent, with extraordinary confidence. But he is also a warm, humorous, charming human being.

THEODORE P. HILL
ATLANTA, GA.

I APPRECIATE THE COVERAGE GIVEN TO the possible impact on the Democratic field by Wesley Clark's candidacy for president. Your articles, however, left me feeling that he may be politically too untested, temperamentally too reactionary and too late in entering the race. But after seeing him speak at a rally recently, I observed a man of sharp intelligence, clear

decorated Vietnam War veteran and Purple Heart recipient, and an author of two books on war and diplomacy, Clark is an excellent candidate. His appearance on the ballot would also represent symbolic payback for many veterans who have had their loyalty impugned for questioning the motives behind this administration's war in Iraq.

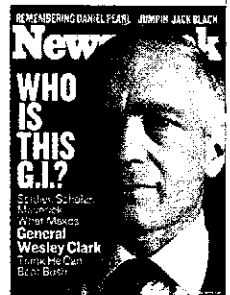
DOUG MARTIN
MIDDLETOWN, MD.

YOUR OTHERWISE EXCELLENT INTRODUCTION of Gen. Wesley Clark nearly buried an important item: his Jewish roots. When both international terrorism and the

MAIL CALL

An Officer, a Gentleman and a Candidate

Most readers responding to our Sept. 29 cover story on Gen. Wesley Clark were elated and optimistic about Clark's entry into the Democratic race for president. "Who is this G.I.?" reiterated a Vietnam vet, quoting our cover headline. "Simply put, the next president of the United States." A woman from California enthused, "Wesley Clark stands in front of us, answering to the urgency of the times." Many consider him "the most able and electable person around," as one put it. Another praised him as a man of wide experience, saying "Clark has a proven military record, has learned the lessons of history and is capable of independent thought and action." Some, though, noting his past support of Republican Presidents Reagan and Nixon, questioned Clark's party affiliation. "Is he truly a passionate supporter of Democratic issues," one speculated, "or is he just taking the party for a ride to the White House?"



vision and genuine warmth who appeared confident and comfortable in his own skin. Democrats concerned about Howard Dean's weakness on the national stage now have at last a credible, exciting and independent-minded alternative.

BILL RYAN
CONCORD, N.H.

BEFORE THE UNITED STATES GOT bogged down in the occupation and reconstruction of Iraq, the Bush administration did a superb job of appropriating the flag and turning the concepts of patriotism and love of country completely upside down. In order to redress this situation, the Democrats have no other choice but to select Wesley Clark as their presidential candidate for 2004. Not only will Clark appeal to independents, but he could also have the support of many Republican-leaning veterans who have become disaffected with Bush administration policies. As a retired four-star general with 34 years in the Army, a former commander of NATO forces, a

Arab-Israeli conflict stand near the heart of American foreign policy, that connection (whatever the general's declared religious preference) is relevant and deserves further scrutiny. This voter, for instance, would like to know how those roots might affect Clark's instincts as he approaches that crucial, long-term foreign entanglement. Howard Dean, to his credit, insists we should be evenhanded. Would Clark be this impartial?

JAMIESON SPENCER
ST. LOUIS, MO.

YOUR ARTICLE ON WESLEY CLARK CONTAINED interesting tidbits about Clark's life, but the only detail you offered about his experience as NATO commander was an anecdote that seemed to glorify an insubordinate officer. Where were the details about how the general seamlessly maintained a potentially fractious multinational coalition that disarmed a dictator and prevented thousands of innocent deaths in Kosovo? I would have liked to know more