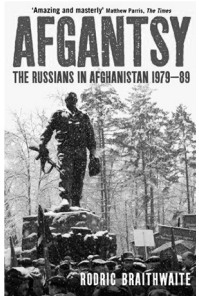
Book Reviews

Recent Works on Afghanistan

Afghantsy: The Russians in Afghanistan, 1979-89

By Rodric Braithwaite



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417 pages

$29.95

Reviewed by Ali A. Jalali, Distinguished Professor at the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies, National Defense University, former Interior Minister of Afghanistan and author of several books on Afghan military history

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the decade-long military operation of the Russian forces in the remote Central Asian country has been the subject of numerous studies focused on how the Soviet Army fought and lost the asymmetric war against the Western-backed Afghan Mujahedin guerrillas. The US-led military intervention in Afghanistan, in the wake of the 9/11 al Qaeda-linked terrorist attacks in the United States from bases in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, has spurred renewed interest in studying the military history of the turbulent land, particularly the Soviet war against the Afghan resistance in the 1980s.

Rodric Braithwaite's *Afghantsy: the Russians in Afghanistan, 1979-89* is one of the latest books on the subject and the most comprehensive story of the Soviet experience in Afghanistan. The author uses a variety of primary sources, which are all listed with full citations in the order of presentation at the end of the volume. As it is based almost exclusively on Russian sources, it is, in fact, the Russian perspective of the drawn-out conflict. From the Soviets' "road to Kabul" to their entanglement in the "disasters of war" and eventually to "the long goodbye," Braithwaite walks the reader through the minutiae of the Soviet soldiers' saga, for the most part in their own words. It is a story of how the Soviet leadership, its military, and individual servicemen behaved in the face of a difficult situation. Further, the tome exemplifies the effect of the brutal war on Soviet soldiers, their families, and the Russian public at large.

The author shares the common assertion of Soviet military historians that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was defensive in nature and aimed at ending a "chaotic situation" in the Soviet Union's immediate neighborhood. However, the author acknowledges the invasion came against a backdrop of a long history of Russian interests in Afghanistan. "It took the Russians two hundred and fifty years to go to Kabul," he writes. The ambition to expand southward in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and efforts to secure its frontiers against "undesirable neighbors" and protect the pacified areas from lawless tribes beyond them have long been the hallmark of Russian strategy in the greater Central Asia and Afghanistan. Afghanistan was the ultimate prize of the Great Game that the Russian and British empires played in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and served as a peaceful battleground for the East-West ideological battle during the Cold War. The author takes note of a number of previous irritations in Russo-Afghan relations following the Russian conquest of Central Asia: Russian troops' encroachment on the Afghan territory in 1885 and capture of Panjdeh—a border town between Herat and Marv; the Red Army's furious pursuit of Central Asian rebels across the Afghan border in the 1920s; and Stalin's military

intervention in northern Afghanistan in 1929 to support the beleaguered Afghan King Amanullah.

The bloody Communist coup of 27 April 1978, was led by the Moscow-backed People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), overthrew the Daud regime, and opened the way for wider involvement of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. But, as General Lyakhovski, a Soviet chronicler of the war and an Afghan war veteran, was quoted as saying: the April coup was the beginning of "tragedy not only for Afghanistan but for the Soviet Union as well." Although Braitwaite does not see reliable evidence that the Russians were behind the coup, the PDPA leaders were closely linked to the Soviet Committee for State Security (KGB) since the early 1950s and were under Soviet control. Whatever role the Soviet Union did or did not play in staging the coup, the Communist takeover was not the immediate reason to put in motion the forthcoming Soviet invasion of the country. The actual milestone of the intervention came in March 1979 with the explosion of violence in Herat. The anti-Soviet uprising took a heavy toll on Soviet citizens and thousands of Afghans who died in the rebellion and its aftermath.

The author offers a compelling analysis that although the Afghan government was able to put down the Herat uprising, "a slow burning fuse had been lit," leading to the invasion nine months later. Following the Herat disturbance, the Soviet leaders rejected the Afghan government's persistent requests for the deployment of Soviet troops to counter rising insurgency. During the next several months, unrest and armed resistance continued to spread throughout the country. The author particularly highlights the infighting within the PDPA which grew increasingly bloody until it culminated in September with PDPA General Secretary Nur Mohammad Taraki's murder by Prime Minister Hafizullah Amin. As Braithwaite writes, the murder of Taraki, a Brezhnev favorite, was the last straw and led to the mood in Moscow shifting in favor of military intervention to depose Amin and install a more reliable Afghan leader. The choice was Barak Karmal, the leader of the Parcham dissident faction within the PDPA who was living in exile in Eastern Europe. Meanwhile, Soviet military preparation for contingencies started as early as April 1979 with several special purpose units deployed to Afghanistan between April and September.

In pursuance of the Soviet General Staff classification, the author divides the conduct of the Soviet war into four phases: the invasion (December 1979-February 1980), military operations to pacify the country (March 1980-April 1985), *Afghanization* of the war (April 1985-end of 1986), and the withdrawal (November 1986-February 1989). The nature of combat action, structure of forces, command and control issues, and level of cooperation with Afghan government forces are outlined in each phase. The study is rich with the personal experiences of the Soviet fighters and brief on actual military operations, which are mostly anecdotal. It reviews only two large-scale operations in detail: the Panjsher Operation in 1984 and Zhawar/Magestral Operation in 1985-86 in Paktia-Khost provinces.

Braithwaite's chapter on "Nation Builders" is the most unconvincing part of the book. In line with official Soviet assertions, the author gives the impression the occupiers were involved in nation-building projects even while the war against the Afghan resistance was ongoing.

However, the amount of Soviet building effort pales in comparison with the destruction caused by the occupation. This period would be better described as nation spoiling than nation building. High on the delusion of revolutionary makeover of a traditional society, the "nation-building" project was ideologically driven and, as the author agrees, was an "ultimately futile attempt to build socialism." The Soviets and their Afghan allies were so out of touch with the realities of Afghan society that President Taraki told a visiting Soviet official in July 1978 to "come back in a year, by which time the mosques would be empty." What actually happened was the opposite—protesting attempts to impose alien values on them, most Afghans moved closer to their Islamic faith—a shift eventually exploited by religious extremists to influence the political scene. The occupiers were determined to destroy the socio-political system the resistance was tried to preserve.

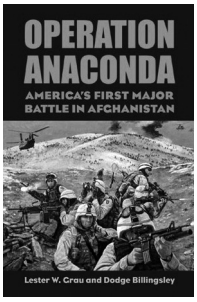
The author provides many examples of the brutality of Soviet soldiers who deliberately killed members of the civilian population. Yet the author sounds apologetic by asserting that civilian casualties during the civil war of the 1990s and the American-backed campaign to expel the Taliban in 2001, "equaled, if not exceeded, the horrors that occurred between 1979 and 1989." On the contrary, during the civil war the number of civilians killed was estimated in tens of thousands, while conservative estimates by the United Nations and Amnesty International of Afghan deaths during the Soviet war are over one million. The Soviets never attempted counterinsurgency but made efforts to destroy the rural areas to deny sanctuaries to the resistance and force the population to move to major cities for easier control or to drive them into exile. Twenty percent of the Afghan population (more than five million people) was driven into exile in Pakistan and Iran during the Soviet conflict.

Since the study draws heavily on Russian sources and narratives, it emphasizes the Soviet experience of the war, thus limiting the Afghan perspective and misrepresenting certain realities. The book offers the most comprehensive and useful details of how the Soviet Union became entangled in the Afghan imbroglio, why it decided to invade, how it fought the Afghan resistance, and how and when it made the decision under Gorbachev's leadership in 1986 to leave. However, when the study does reference the Afghan narrative, it often makes ill-founded assertions based on historical inaccuracies. The references on the Afghan Mujahedin forces are the most disappointing part of the book. They are impaired by unrealistic assessment.

The author's dash through Afghan history and culture is also replete with factual errors and problematic interpretations about the political system of Afghanistan and its ethnic issues. One of the most serious mistakes is to list the Taraki-Amin crackdown on the Karmal-led Parcham faction as having occurred in 1979; it actually took place a year earlier in the summer of 1978. Barak Karmal was not a Pashtun. Anahita Ratebzad was not the first Afghan woman appointed to a senior political position under the Communists as the author asserts; there were many women serving as cabinet ministers, parliament members and other senior officials in the 1960s and 1970s before the Communist takeover. Tashkent is in Uzbekistan, not Turkmenistan; Yakub, the head of the Afghan Army under Amin was not Amin's son-in-law nor was Ahmad Akbar, the security chief, his cousin; and the 40th Army was

under the Turkistan Military District, not the Turkmenistan Military District. Shaving the heads of Afghan recruits is not against the Afghan culture. The 21 February 1979, demonstration in Kabul was a spontaneous public uprising, not an event staged by an American Central Intelligence Agency agent. There has never been an Anglican Church in Afghanistan near the Pakistani border. Soviet prisoners were never incarcerated in the Afghan Pul-e Charkhi Prison. The author's acceptance of the Soviets' claims that despite the brutalities they committed the Soviet soldiers "got on with the Afghan population rather well—better than the NATO soldiers who succeeded them" is incongruous. Finally, throughout the book Afghan geographic names are inaccurately transliterated from Russian into English. "Punjsher," a well-known location has been distortedly spelled as "Pandsher."

Despite the various inaccuracies, *Afghantsy: the Russians in Afghanistan, 1979-89* has its own merits and is the best available source for a comprehensive account of the Soviet experience in Afghanistan. No doubt the study dispels many myths of the Cold War and clarifies many unanswered questions about the Soviet military occupation of Afghanistan during the 1980s. However, because of its exclusive focus on the Soviet side of the story, it does spawn many misrepresentations about the realities of the Afghan battleground where the Soviet-Mujahedin struggle was played out. For a more balanced view, this book should be read along with other studies such as Peter Tomsen's *The Wars of Afghanistan: Messianic Terrorism, Tribal Conflicts, and the Failures of Great Powers*.



University Press of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, 2011

459 pages

$39.95

Operation Anaconda: America's First Major Battle in Afghanistan

by Lester W. Grau and Dodge Billingsley

Reviewed by Colonel Robert M. Cassidy, US Army, a military professor at the US Naval War College, served as a special assistant to the operational commander in Afghanistan in 2010-11

Les Grau and Dodge Billingsley offer keen insight in their historical account of Operation Anaconda. Both authors are eminently qualified to write such a book. Les Grau is an Afghanistan expert and has written prolifically about the Soviet-Afghan War. Dodge Billingsley is a daring combat journalist who covered the first Russian-Chechen War of 1994-96 and was on the ground in the Shar-i Kot Valley during Operation Anaconda. This book focuses on the tactical level, much like Grau's earlier work *The Bear Went over the Mountain*. This poorly planned and executed operation shines a light on the conspicuously regrettable arrogance and ignorance engendered in the Pentagon and US Central Command during the first years of the Afghan War. The detailed anatomy of the March 2002 debacle in the Shar-i Kot Valley is an enduring testimony to strategic failure of significant magnitude mainly because various officials and planners in the Pentagon did not comprehend or plan for any long-term outcome in Afghanistan or Pakistan. To be certain, in the 2001-02 period, US military thinking, doctrine, and organization were focused almost exclusively on potential adversaries. Ultimately, this book recalls the fundamental risks in engaging in wars without fully understanding

the enemy, our own capabilities, and the type of conflict we were about to enter into.

The book's beginning includes a cogent quote attributed to Field Marshal William Slim: "preparation for war is an expensive, burdensome business, yet there is one important part of it that costs little—study." This aptly sets the context for *Operation Anaconda*; there were few people in the US defense community in early 2002 who knew much about Afghanistan or about fighting irregular forces in the Hindu Kush. As a result, the Pentagon and CENTCOM failed to understand and apply the many lessons from the Soviet-Afghan War. The United States undertook the early Afghan War with too few forces and ad hoc and convoluted command and control arrangements. The leadership in the Pentagon mistakenly inferred the Soviets had failed in Afghanistan because they had committed too many forces. A large part of the explanation for the Soviets' failure, however, was that they had too few of the right type of forces, fought with the wrong tactics, and were hamstrung by a convoluted command and control. Anaconda was, to a degree, a metaphor for the first eight years of the war—years that saw forces employing untenable tactics encumbered by ludicrously complicated command and control arrangements. Anaconda violated almost every axiom that students of military art and science learn. It was an ad hoc and poorly planned fight, with terrible interservice coordination, abysmal command and control, and far too few forces. In fact, these forces essentially occupied the enemy's engagement area in a disastrously piecemeal manner.

Operation Anaconda does a good job of detailing the poor command and control interservice coordination between the Army and the US Air Force, and the almost cavalier attitude that characterized a number of the Sea, Air, Land (SEAL) teams. These self-imposed obstacles to effective military operations combined with the inexorable friction and fog of combat to make Operation Anaconda a close-call in terms of which side was victorious. It was really only the audacity and tenacity of some very good junior and mid-level tactical leaders that prevented the operation from becoming a debacle. The alarming and incredible insight that comes from this account is how closely many of the mistakes in the battle mirrored the blunders evident in Operation Urgent Fury in Grenada two decades earlier. Similar operational omissions and errors that cost lives in Grenada were repeated. It was the experience of Grenada that precipitated the US Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. Indeed, this legislation's primary purpose was to improve joint command and control and cooperation among the services, and between special and conventional forces. Yet, 16 years after Goldwater-Nichols, identical command and control blunders and fratricidal gaffes were repeated in a remote Afghan valley.

The positive side of this story is that since that forsaken battle, now almost a decade ago, the current campaign, resources, and leadership in Afghanistan are the best since the war began in October 2001. The combined operations of coalition and Afghan forces have taken away the Taliban's momentum and sustained unambiguous gains, having driven the Taliban out of key areas and safe havens in places like Helmand and Kandahar. Even still, command, control, and interoperability of the services, conventional forces, and all types of special operations

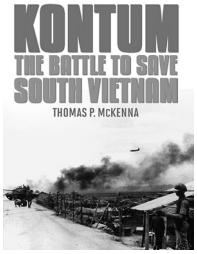
forces, have truly witnessed unprecedented effectiveness and lethalness in places like the Helmand River Valley.

This reviewer needs to make two final points. One is that this book comes with an excellent documentary assembled by the authors. This video amplifies some interesting facets of the operation and is a useful supplement to the book. The second aspect is there are some factual errors in the book. An example appears in the beginning of the book where it mistakes the date for Pakistan's 1971 war with India as 1973. Another example is an error that lists the date of the 1991 Persian Gulf War to repel Saddam Hussein's forces from Kuwait as 1981 (on page 47). Finally, in the concluding chapter, the authors claim that until this battle, the US military had not had a major fight in more than a decade. But the October 1993 Battle of Mogadishu was a major battle of commensurate intensity resulting in a number of casualties and deaths.

New Scholarship on the Fall of South Vietnam

KONTUM: The Battle to Save South Vietnam

By Thomas P. McKenna



Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2011

376 pages

$34.95

Reviewed by Sean N. Kalic, is an Associate professor in the Department of Military History at the US Army Command and General Staff College and the author of *US President and the Militarization of Space 1946-1967*

Thomas McKenna in *Kontum* writes a thorough and insightful account about the Easter Offensive launched by the North Vietnamese in Spring 1972. McKenna rightfully asserts that the massive operation conducted by the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) was the largest military offensive since the Chinese incursion across the Yalu River in Korea in October 1950. Furthermore, he makes the argument that the NVA launched the massive invasion "because they thought that the Vietnamization was succeeding." Additionally, he makes a very strong point that this major combat action took place as President Nixon announced a reduction of 20,000 troops in Vietnam. This point becomes significant as McKenna highlights the fact that no US ground forces participated in the fight. So as to not confuse the point, McKenna provides a detailed discussion of the role of Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MAVC) advisors in the Easter Offensive. In addition, McKenna, who was an Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) advisor in Kontum, highlights the role the United States Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, and Army aviation assets played in the fight to blunt and repel the North's attack. For McKenna the triumph of ARVN and US advisors during the Easter Offensive serves as a critical success within the larger public understanding of Vietnam as a failure, especially in the post Tet Offensive period.

To advance his sound and well-supported argument, McKenna focuses on providing the reader with a detailed understanding of the overall strategic situation in Vietnam in the spring of 1972. In addition to balancing the demands of the desire of the United States to withdraw and significantly reduce its military commitments to South Vietnam, while preparing and building ARVN forces for the eventual overall withdrawal of all US forces, McKenna skillfully elaborates on the tactical capabilities and organization of the NVA. For McKenna, a significant point is that the North Vietnamese Army was equipped with weapons from the Soviet Union and China. The NVA possessed modern T-54 tanks and shoulder-fired SA-7 anti-aircraft surface-to-air missiles. Yet these modern advancements contrasted with the recruiting needs of the NVA which required harsh impressment tactics to build the necessary manpower to launch the North Vietnamese invasion. Beyond just providing statistics and commentary on the nature of the NVA prior to the invasion, the chapters in which McKenna presents these significant points become critical to understanding that the war in 1972 was far from over and that despite the typical narrative that ARVN could not stand and fight, he highlights that they did with the support of US air power.

McKenna's analysis is spot-on and at times almost seems to provide some hope that the South Vietnamese can ultimately defend themselves against the expanding capabilities and strength of the NVA. However,

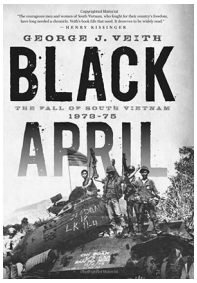
McKenna is quick to note that these hopeful sentiments are quickly tempered by the reality that ARVN forces range from totally incompetent to very capable and strong fighting units. The main problem he points out was that South Vietnam failed to have a unified and committed military that could readily defend itself against additional attacks from the North without the aid of the United States. In the end, he conveys a tragic story in which the eventual downfall of South Vietnam is inevitable.

Although McKenna's objective is to highlight the actions that took place at Kontum, he also provides a general overview of the entire Easter Offensive as it raged in the II and III Corps across South Vietnam. Even though McKenna admits that his book is not a complete history of the Easter Offensive and he strives to present only enough information to understand its context, he does indeed end up providing a very strong understanding of the situation in South Vietnam in the spring of 1972. However, as a result of his intent, McKenna leaves the reader wanting a more comprehensive account of the actions taking place in other areas. To satisfy this wish, it would be best to read McKenna's book in conjunction with *Abandoning Vietnam and An Loc* by James H. Willbanks. Willbanks, who also served as a US Army advisor in Vietnam during the Easter Offensive, provides a thorough understanding of the broad military and political context in *Abandoning Vietnam*, and a specific history of the battle of An Loc, which took place during the Easter Offensive as well. In many ways these two additional works provide complementary material to McKenna's and reinforce his overall thesis. Together, these works provide a comprehensive understanding of the nature of the war in Vietnam at a time when many people did not realize that a significant conventional military fight was occurring. This is not to say that McKenna's work does not stand on its own but rather, in conjunction with the works written by Willbanks, the reader gets a more detailed understanding of the overall significance of the Easter Offensive in the history of the US involvement in Vietnam.

Beyond being just a history of the Battle of Kontum, McKenna's well-written and balanced account provides exceptional insights in the NVA, ARVN, and the withering commitment of the United States. Kontum deserves serious attention by people interested in understanding the political, military, and tactical history of the major conventional operations that took place in the Spring of 1972. In the end, McKenna impressively supports his thesis. He logically argues that although the NVA launched the Easter Offensive to end Nixon's presidency, break the willingness of ARVN to continue fighting, and test the commitment of US air power, they failed to achieve any of their objectives. They were ultimately forced to negotiate with the United States, while refitting and rebuilding for their invasion in 1975 which was ultimately successful.

Black April: The Fall of South Vietnam, 1973-75

By George J. Veith



New York: Encounter Books, 2012

587 pages

$29.95

Reviewed by Dr. William J. Gregor, Professor of Social Sciences at the School of Advanced Military Studies, US Army Command and General Staff College

Black April: The Fall of South Vietnam, 1973-75 is the first of two volumes in which the author, George J. Veith, intends to provide a comprehensive analysis of the last two years of the war in Vietnam. This first book covers the military aspects of South Vietnam's defeat and addresses five critical questions: (1) when did the North Vietnamese decide to renew the war; (2) how did they disguise their decision and construct a surprise assault on Ban Me Thuot; (3) why did President Nguyen Van Thieu withdraw his regular military forces from the Central Highlands; (4) what triggered South Vietnam's fall militarily in 55 days; and (5) was the South Vietnamese military inept? The second volume will discuss the political and diplomatic efforts to implement the Paris Peace Accords and the social and economic events that had a profound impact on the war. Given the length and detail of this military account it was probably necessary to divide the work into two volumes. Unfortunately, limiting this volume's scope to military decisions, actions, and events prevents the author from presenting a totally convincing explanation of South Vietnam's collapse. Readers might supplement their understanding of this excellent volume by reading Dr. Henry Kissinger's *Ending the War in Vietnam* while awaiting volume two.

Although many books explaining the fall of South Vietnam have been published, most of them date to the 1980s and none of their authors could take advantage of recently declassified documents, both American and North Vietnamese, that detail high-level decisionmaking. George Veith has exploited the newly available archive materials along with translations of North and South Vietnamese published general and unit histories, and interviews with the senior military participants. For example, his bibliography lists memoirs published in Vietnamese after 2000, and an account of the fall of the Saigon government through South Vietnamese documents published in 2010. Mr. Veith acknowledges in the introduction the problems that arise with the use of Communist official histories and the skepticism needed when trying to use journals published by Republic of Vietnam military associations. However, when the author deals with high-level military decisions and orders to subordinate commands, the text is usually drawn directly from archival documents and messages. Regrettably, the reader might not notice this because quotations taken from documents sometimes appear between quotation marks, other times in block quotes.

Despite the author's claim, *Black April* is more a detailed, narrative account of military actions, events, and decisions than a clinical analysis of those decisions or an explanation of the events. This fact does not diminish the value of the book because it allows readers to interpret the facts themselves and mitigates what some might consider this book's anticommunist bias. However, it does mean that some evidence a reader might expect in a military history is not present in the book. For example, despite the fact that 72 percent of the book deals with the 55 days of the

Great Spring Offensive, there is no detailed assessment of the overall availability of supplies, repair parts, operational ready rates of aircraft, or air and sea lift capabilities. The impact on operations of those factors are discussed in the accounts of various battles and actions, but absent that aggregate data, the assessments about the impact of those factors on military capability are qualitative and relatively subjective. Nevertheless, the author's judgments are reasonable given his account.

Following Mr. Veith's historical account may initially be difficult for anyone not familiar with the Vietnam War or Vietnam's geography. The author succeeds in presenting the military situation and military decisions from the perspectives of both the North and South Vietnamese, and, where applicable, the American perspective. He does this by discussing operations in each corps or front area and by weaving back and forth in time and in ever-shorter time periods. Thus, for example, the text might discuss North Vietnamese operations in II Corps from 12 to 15 March, then visit politburo decisions in Hanoi during that period, and then turn to South Vietnamese tactical actions in II Corps in the same period. Paying close attention to the shifting time periods is an absolute must. Some readers may also find keeping track of Vietnamese place-names daunting. Fourteen maps aid the reader, but even though they are very well designed, the reader might still wish to use the Internet to supplement the maps. Fortunately, the author's clear style and skillful weaving of the full account will ultimately result in the reader being able to assemble a clear picture of the campaign and the military commanders. Veterans and students of the Vietnam War will find the detail rewarding.

Many of those who will read this book never experienced either the Vietnam War or the acrimonious antiwar political debate. The passage of time has undoubtedly faded the memories of the military veterans and antiwar activists. Removed from the heated arguments of the time and armed with currently available documentary evidence, many of the assessments made in the 1970s appear foolish or naïve. For example, congressional Democrats called for formation of a coalition government containing communists as a precondition for peace. However, in the event a coalition government formed, North Vietnam's politburo planned to use it to infiltrate and overthrow the government of South Vietnam. The American left argued that the Saigon government suppressed the will of the people and absent the dictatorial Thieu regime, the South Vietnamese would quickly reconcile with the North. However, nowhere were the advancing Communist forces greeted as liberators and in the few instances when the Communist forces called for local populations to rise up, they refused. Democrat members of Congress opposing assistance to South Vietnam appear to have been dupes of the North Vietnamese regime because they argued that cutting off aid to South Vietnam would bring President Thieu and the North Vietnamese to the bargaining table. They were not aware that in April 1973, Le Duan and General Vo Nguyen Giap had formed a secret committee to plan the conquest of South Vietnam within a two-year period. Every congressional denial of aid reinforced the North's determination to conquer South Vietnam by force and by October 1973, the return to military struggle was finalized and the small political-struggle faction silenced. After that

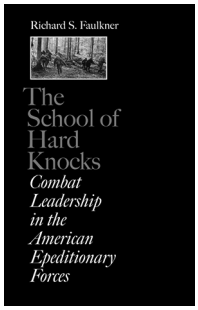
decision, the North Vietnamese government adjusted its public posture to reinforce the empty arguments in the US Congress.

Black April makes clear that the military forces of South Vietnam were neither inept nor cowardly and that during the Great Spring Offensive they often got the better of their North Vietnamese opponents tactically. Unfortunately, the effect of two years of active North Vietnamese preparations and of declining military aid to South Vietnam could not be reversed. The Paris Peace Treaty in January 1973 had created military planning constraints that a South Vietnamese government could not ignore if it hoped to obtain much needed American assistance. Adhering to those constraints led President Thieu to deploy his forces in positions where they could not be easily extracted or supported. Thus, when North Vietnamese tanks and artillery attacked and seized Ban Me Thuot in March 1975, the South Vietnamese government had neither the forces required to regain the city, nor the reserves nor transportation needed to cover a withdrawal. The South Vietnamese army might have fared better by stoutly defending its forward positions, but to what avail? The United States Congress had abandoned the US commitment to South Vietnam. Absent US assistance, the government of South Vietnam could not prevail. This detailed military account of the final days of South Vietnam provides a valuable correction to previous accounts. Given the numerous myths that have been perpetuated within the military about the Vietnam War, *Black April* is a must read for serving soldiers and Marines.

New Perspectives on World War I

The School of Hard Knocks: Combat Leadership in the American Expeditionary Forces

By Richard S. Faulkner



College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2012

416 pages

$65.00

Reviewed by Colonel Dean A. Nowowiejski, PhD, United States Army, Retired, whose dissertation analyzed the American military governor of the Rhineland, MG Henry T. Allen, who previously commanded the 90th Division in the AEF

With *The School of Hard Knocks*, Shawn Faulkner has made a long overdue and critical addition to the historiography of American combat in World War I. He joins the recent contributions of Mark Ethan Grotelueschen, *The AEF Way of War: The American Army and Combat in World War I*; Edward G. Lengel, *World War I Memories: An Annotated Bibliography of Personal Accounts Published in English Since 1919* and *To Conquer Hell: The Meuse-Argonne, 1918, The Epic Battle That Ended the First World War*; and Mitch Yockelson, *Borrowed Soldiers: Americans Under British Command, 1918*, in substantially expanding our understanding of just what happened to the United States Army in World War I. Faulkner's emphasis is on the development and performance of small unit combat leaders during World War I, and his analysis is so thorough, the ultimate story so depressing for those who have led American soldiers, that the result is compelling but tragic. Faulkner mines his sources thoroughly and excellently, and covers all aspects of junior combat leader development, from training before commissioning through leadership of small units on the battlefield. His focus is on captains, lieutenants, and sergeants at the tip of the spear, principally infantry leaders of platoons and companies. Faulkner's exegesis really falls into two parts. The first is a very thorough explanation of how combat leaders were selected, trained, and sent to Europe. The second is about what happened to them when they arrived.

Faulkner begins by analyzing the legacy of officership in the American Army leading into World War I. He lays bare the ineptitude and class prejudice of the Regular officer corps, who were not prepared for the rapid expansion of the Army, and imparted to officer trainees pride in their rank and disdain for enlisted soldiers. Though Regulars readily adopted the ideals of progressivism, they did not know how to lead citizen soldiers in a mass Army. Similarly, the officer corps never learned to overcome the inherent tension between initiative by subordinates and control by superiors. Control by senior officers won out, and imaginative, competent junior leadership died.

This legacy passed through the various officer training programs into the American Expeditionary Forces (AEF). Faulkner explores in depth the commissioning programs, the Officer Training Camps (OTC) and Central Officers' Training Schools (COTS) that produced the bulk of the infantry lieutenants for the AEF. He gets inside the life experience of the recipient through cogent analysis of demographics of the training population and schedules. Faulkner reveals that these programs produced officers who really did not know what they were doing. The Army's makeshift officer training system produced combat leaders neither technically

nor tactically proficient because of shortages in instructors, equipment, and facilities, exacerbated by flawed tactical doctrine.

Part of what makes this book unique is that Faulkner goes inside the doctrinal literature of the time, successfully tracing important evolutions in tactical concepts, but giving the explanation from the standpoint of training's effect on the receiver. He reveals the contradictory and confusing nature of the tactical doctrine of the AEF, beginning with officer training stateside, and ending with updated concepts that were attempted in the Meuse Argonne. What reveals is that there was no uniform doctrine, formation, or common understanding for infantry companies and platoons regarding how to fight. One of his best chapters is on the combat physics of World War I. To succeed would have required infantry leaders who knew how to properly employ their machine guns, mortars, and cannon as supporting weapons. They would have had to adjust artillery while attacking, because this was what the physics demanded. They did not possess the means to do so.

A principal contribution of this work is Faulkner's ability to take present-day understanding of what is required to lead men in combat, and then details how American leadership in World War I failed to meet those standards. What he reveals is what one would expect to contribute to unit cohesion in forces today. Care for soldiers, identification and respect between leader and led, common identity forged through shared hardship, and simple leader competence, all failed in the American forces. Incredible turbulence meant that American soldiers in combat often did not even know who their officers were. The AEF's elaborate school system disrupted the development of unit cohesion while contributing little to tactical competence, as it robbed junior leaders from units repeatedly and at the wrong time. Officers cared for themselves before their men, and did not know the basics of leadership and tactics. Fear of failure and a leadership climate where officers did NCO business condemned all to failure. Faulkner lays bare the problem of straggling in the AEF and why it existed. The end results of all these problems were needless casualties while officers bungled to find their way toward the basics of leadership.

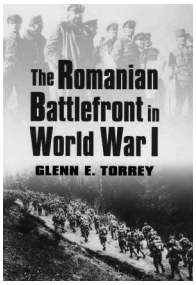
Faulkner's prose is clear and often elegant. His research is meticulous, and his explanations so thorough as to be sometimes exhausting. If there is one salient suggestion for this work, it is that any future editions will add a bibliographic essay so that the tale of how Faulkner mined his sources and how he broke the code of variety and depth in World War I materials can be told. He clearly is a master of the extensive literature and source material. Most of the photographs in the book are from the author's personal collection. He must have collected these strikingly appropriate images over time, and that in itself might be part of the bibliographical tale.

This book is essential reading for professional Army officers because of its revelations about flaws in our institution, for those with interest in the history of leadership and World War I, and for national defense policymakers to know what organizational mistakes never to repeat when mobilizing the nation for war.

The Romanian Battlefront in World War I

By Glenn E. Torrey

Reviewed by Colonel James D. Scudieri, Department of Military Strategy, Plans, and Operations, US Army War College



Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012

422 pages

$39.95

This book, amongst a steady publication of Great War titles lately, contributes to a far-less-studied theater among western works. Historian Glenn E. Torrey pledged to present a balanced survey of military operations and events on the Romanian Front, as well as to showcase the long-neglected Romanian Campaign in 1917. In seventeen chapters plus epilogue and conclusion, he does so admirably.

The early chapters set the stage. There is sufficient background on the Romanian state and pre-war politics. King Carol died in October 1914. His nephew Ferdinand generally has a reputation of being weak and indecisive. He was quite aloof socially, the opposite of popular Queen Marie, granddaughter of Queen Victoria and Tsar Alexander II, and very pro-Entente. Given Ferdinand's general reticence, Torrey categorizes Premier Ion C. Brătianu as a virtual dictator.

The tightrope diplomacy in which a minor power had to balance key interests and allies is a case study in its own right. Strained relations with Russia from the 1880s over the loss of southern Bessarabia ultimately did not trump the pre-eminent drive to acquire Transylvania with its ethnic Romanians, territory in the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

The text provides a comprehensive assessment of the Romanian Army, the military instrument to deliver the prize. Bloodied in the recent Second Balkan War, it had some significant liabilities. There was a top-heavy officer corps and a relatively weak noncommissioned officer corps. More significantly, its training and doctrine had not benefitted from sophisticated, ongoing, comprehensive assessment on the nature of the next war. There were few opportunities to incorporate the painful experience of other armies during two years of war, 1914-16. A weak industrial base precluded widespread force modernization (e.g., the proportion of machine guns, field, and heavy artillery). Convoluted diplomacy often prevented imports to fill the void in any significant numbers. Inadequate force modernization and levels were severe constraints in an army built around massive (27,000 soldiers) infantry divisions. Torrey assesses that mobilization was excessive. The navy was essentially a riverine force for operations on the lower Danube; the Austro-Hungarians dominated the upper Danube. The aviation service was only a year old at the time of intervention in the war.

Planning highlighted the challenges from volatile diplomacy. Romania was a secret member of the Triple Alliance from 1883 until 1913. Hence, war plans had focused against Russia. Concerted planning for a war against Austria-Hungary began in the tumultuous summer of crisis in 1914. Unsurprisingly, the main effort would be the northern front, an attack northwest across the Carpathians into Transylvania. The southern front, Romania's recently-acquired Dobrogean region, was secondary.

Romania's road to war was long. The text reviews the two-year neutrality, replete with a host of domestic issues and much diplomatic

haggling. The chances that Romania would side with the Central Powers were slim. The conditions of her entry still occupied the Allies for some time. Ferdinand rose to the occasion; he essentially told the formal Council that the country was going to war. Romania joined the Allies in August 1916. A French Military Mission under General Henri M. Berthelot would exercise a strong influence, along with Russian and British advisors.

Despite long-running strategic challenges, Romania's leaders committed to the prosecution of a two-front war. Torrey covers these operations very well, essentially a chapter for each major effort. The Romanians achieved strategic and operational surprise and hence great, initial success in their long-awaited, popular offensive into Transylvania. The same was not the case for the Dobrogea to the south. Available Romanian troops, an economy of force, were still committed to a forward defense, with no plan to trade space for time. Combined operations with the Russians proved difficult. Bulgarian elements attacked with the same fervor which the Romanians demonstrated in Transylvania, seeing the Dobrogea as long-lost, national lands.

There is comprehensive examination of the Romanians' elementary, strategic choices in the fall of 1916 and their consequences. The Romanians opted for an ambitious counteroffensive in the south, on the Dobrogean front, known as the Flămânda Maneuver. It failed and Central Power retribution was sweeping and swift. Romania faced powerful, combined offensives. German Gen Erich von Falkenhayn led Austro-Hungarian and German forces in the north, ejected Romanian forces from Transylvania within forty days, and entered Romania proper. To the south, German General August von Mackensen led German, Bulgarian, and Turkish troops through the Dobrogea and into the heart of Romania. He captured Bucharest on 6 December 1917.

Success for the Central Powers was neither easy nor cheap, but they had broken the Romanian Army and shaken the nation state to its foundations. Romania survived, but lost two-thirds of its territory and vast resources, largely Wallachia besides the Dobrogea. Torrey reviews the cost with some fascinating statistics, including casualties; lost equipment; and expropriated resources, especially grain and oil.

The Entente rallied to the aid of the rump Romanian state, a little-known case study in building partner capacity quickly under adverse circumstances. The text provides a thorough analysis of this reconstruction of the Romanian Army with thematic topics (e.g., reconstruction [reorganization], epidemics, morale, instruction [training], and rearmament), backed by detailed statistics, all well documented. The Danube fleet and aviation service received similar attention. The overwhelming bulk of military trainers were French, with due recognition of national and cultural clashes.

Romania fought with skill and determination in 1917, and Torrey recounts these actions with flair in detail. Three major battles at Mărăşti, Mărăşeşti, and Oituz between late July and early September stymied complete enemy conquest. Romanian success had come with much effective Russian help, despite the March Revolution. The Bolsheviks, however, left Romania isolated and too weak to continue the war alone. Romania agreed to an armistice at Focşani on 5 December 1917, yet

provided "peace-keeping" forces to ensure order in the newly-declared "Moldavian Republic" in Bessarabia. Further, tortuous negotiations resulted in the "Preliminary Peace"of Buftea on 5 March 1918. The Treaty of Bucharest followed on 5 May.

The events of 1918 were no less amazing than the last two years. Domestic and external events reflected complex chaos. Romanian leaders struggled to achieve some unity and maintain national spirit with viable institutions. They conformed to treaty obligations to concede only minimums as late as possible. Accommodation rested upon realistic pragmatism, not a genuine spirit of cooperation. Army demobilization, perforce gradual, did not preclude the preservation of a properly-equipped core. Somewhat hesitantly and at the proverbial eleventh hour, Romania mobilized formally on 9 November 1918 and reentered the war on the side of the Allies on 10 November, less than twenty-four hours before the armistice took effect on the Western Front. The King and Queen returned to Bucharest five days short of the two-year anniversary of von Mackensen's triumphant entry.

American readers tend to focus on that Armistice and the Treaty of Versailles, but the Great War required many more armistices and treaties to end conflict around the world. Indeed, fighting continued. Moreover, even major combat operations in the region had very much been for, with, and among the people. Romanian troops now fought to stem the rising tide of Bolshevism from a broken Russia amidst the breakup of the Hapsburg empire and the receding tide of a defeated Germany, and within the context of a web of multitudes of ethnic tensions. Romania's major effort was against the new Soviet republic declared in Hungary by Béla Kun. While balancing constantly-changing diplomatic imperatives, Romania advanced all the way to Budapest, taking the Hungarian capital on 3 August 1919.

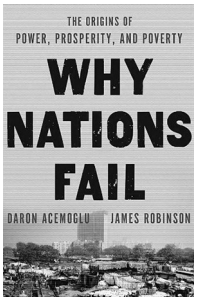
Romania's war had been a painful see-saw between ecstatic victory and abject defeat, but the Treaty of Trianon in March 1920 nearly doubled the country's territory and population. Romanian diplomats had argued vociferously for the Allies to honor the promises from 1916. The Army had been the key instrument to achievement.

Torrey's monograph is a major case study in the constant exchange between politicians and generals, and how they wielded landpower to accomplish well-known, long-held, and ambitious policy goals. Torrey tells this story carefully and well. His mastery of Romanian sources was already well established; he consulted French and German materials, along with very select British and American, as well. The selection of photos laced throughout complements the text most effectively. The style of maps, many adapted, can be rather busy, but they are important. This work represents a commendable effort to recount a forgotten front and close a long-incomplete account.

Insights from Political Science

Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty

By Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson



New York: Crown Publishers, 2012

464 pages

$30.00

Reviewed by Janeen Klinger, Professor of Political Science, who teaches a seminar on nation-building at the US Army War College

The causes of political instability and state failure have become growing concerns for strategic leaders and national security professionals because the United States is much more likely to deploy force in countries experiencing such conditions than to engage a peer competitor in a conventional war. The authors of *Why Nations Fail* provide a compelling explanation for state failure that is all the more rare because it has value for both practitioners and scholars of national security. The good news to be derived from the authors' thesis is that problems associated with state failure need not be viewed with a sense of fatalism because the causes do not grow from some immutable material factor like geography or ethnicity, but rather are manmade. The bad news is that the causes of instability lie with institutional configurations which, while manmade, can prove intractable. Consequently, the prospects for successful stability and nation-building operations may be quite slim. The authors begin to support their thesis by comparing conditions between Nogales, Arizona, and Nogales, Mexico, to show that neither geography nor ethnicity can account for differences. The value of the analysis provided by the authors for both the academic and policymaking audience will become apparent from the following summary of their thesis and the evidence they use to support it.

The authors begin by noting that today's successful states share common institutional configurations that they label inclusive. In the economic realm, inclusive institutions include such things as a patent system and a guarantee of property rights which, among other things, encourage investment and innovation thereby laying the basis for economic growth and generalized prosperity. Inclusive political institutions are those characterized by a pluralism that ensures power is constrained and broadly diffused. The interaction between inclusive economic and political institutions generates a self-reinforcing virtuous circle. Because prosperity is generalized throughout the social system, no single group has an incentive for concentrating political power in its own hands to perpetuate its rule. The evolution of the United States illustrates the consequences of inclusive political and economic institutions.

In contrast, today's weak and potentially unstable states are those with institutional configurations that the authors label as extractive. As the label itself suggests, extractive economic institutions are predatory in the extent to which they concentrate and channel wealth into the hands of a narrow elite. Because such extractive economic institutions create wide disparities in wealth, the elites have little interest in investment or innovations that diffuse prosperity in a way that jeopardizes their affluence. Examples of extractive economic institutions include grants of monopoly or serf-based agriculture. In a setting where wealth becomes

excessively concentrated, political control is necessary to protect economic interests, so elites will resist any pressure for broadening political participation. Therefore, extractive economic arrangements are reinforced by extractive political institutions generating an interaction that creates a self-reinforcing vicious circle where wealth is channeled toward one narrow elite that has too much to lose by expanding political power to other groups. The evolution of Hispanic America with the legacy of the encomienda system introduced by the conquistadors illustrates the consequences of extractive institutions.

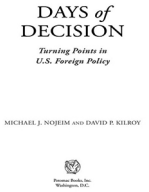
But what accounts for the origin of institutional configurations in the first place? Here the authors introduce historical contingency with the notion that key events—or critical junctures in their terminology—interact with existing conditions that may mutate institutions in the direction of inclusive or extractive ones. One example of a critical juncture that affected institutional development in Europe was the Black Death. The plague, which significantly reduced populations and therefore the labor supply, was a major factor contributing to the divergence of institutions in Western and Eastern Europe. In the West, there was a gradual dissolution of feudalism's reliance on serf-based agriculture while in the East, labor shortages led elites to double down on extractive arrangements. Another example of a critical juncture and one with far-reaching consequences for conditions today, was European colonialism that, as the authors point out, left a legacy of extractive institutions throughout the world.

While the analysis provided in the book contains some repetition in elaboration of the thesis, the reader who is patient working through it will be rewarded by the extensive variety of examples the authors use to illustrate their thesis. The examples range from the ancient world of the Aztecs and Romans to the western revolutions in England and France, providing a rich historical narrative. Other examples focus on countries of current policy concern like Somalia and China. The reader will come away from the book with a greater historical appreciation of the processes of economic and political development and an understanding of the relevance of historical experience for countries facing development challenges today.

Although a brief book review cannot do justice to the many nuances in the theory presented, this book's ultimate strength lies with the fact that it is valuable for both scholar and practitioner. From a scholarly standpoint, the book is broadly comparative in a mode that is rarely attempted today. As such, the authors combine the best of a social science approach in an effort to derive generalizations that apply across time and space with the best of history through their recognition of the role of contingency. Moreover, the authors incorporate concepts from some classic social science like Robert Michels' notion of the iron law of oligarchy and Joseph Schumpeter's idea of "creative destruction" as a reminder of the lasting value of older scholarship. For the national security professional, the book offers a caution about using their framework to make predictions or policy prescriptions. Despite the fact that the analysis does not provide a handbook for those engaged in nation-building operations, it goes a long way toward explaining the contours of today's world.

Days of Decision: Turning Points in U.S. Foreign Policy

By Micheal Nojeim and David Kilroy



Reviewed by COL Joel R. Hillison, Ph.D., Director of First Year Studies,
Department of Distance Education, US Army War College

Washington, DC: Potomac Books, Inc., 2011

366 pages

$34.95

Readers who enjoyed America's First Battles as junior officers will find value and a tinge of nostalgia in a recent book by Micheal Nojeim and David Kilroy. Their book, *Days of Decision,* is an interesting compilation of key turning points in US foreign policy and a refreshing contribution to the literature on US foreign policy and security studies. The book covers twelve turning points in US foreign policy, from the sinking of the Maine to the 11 September 2001, terrorist attacks.

The thesis of the book is that, over the last century, sudden crises or major policy initiatives have significantly altered the direction of foreign policy. While this is not a startling revelation, the authors extrapolate four hypotheses from this position. First, they make the point that political and historical context matter. Nojeim and Kilroy do a nice job of setting the political, historical, and strategic context in each of the case studies examined. Second, they suggest that foreign policy is usually left to the elites until a crisis brings US foreign policy into the domestic spotlight. For example, the Arab-Israeli War and subsequent oil embargo in 1973 turned America's attention to the Middle East, where it has been fixated ever since. Until that crisis, the public was generally ambivalent about the region. Third, while elections are primarily determined by domestic issues, a president's historic legacy is most often determined by foreign policy triumphs or failures. (The most glaring exception in the book was the 1968 election, in which the Tet Offensive and civil unrest in the United States doomed Johnson's prospects for re-election.) Finally, the authors present the argument that foreign policy debates among top ranking governmental officials are an integral component of major policy shifts, thus dispelling the rationalist notion that states are monolithic entities that act on well-defined power interests. In fact, these debates demonstrate that interests and policy are often contested. These four hypotheses are addressed in each of the case studies examined in the book (the sinking of the Maine, the Lusitania crisis, the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Korean War, the Sputnik crisis, the Cuban missile crisis, the Tet Offensive, the United States opening to China, the Arab-Israeli War, the Islamic revolution in Iran, the fall of the Berlin wall, and the attacks of 11 September 2001). The case studies were selected because they sparked considerable debate within the government, brought foreign policy into the national spotlight, and led to a significant change in the direction of US foreign policy.

Perhaps the most relevant case study for contemporary strategists deals with the opening of relations with China. The authors provide a nice summary of the historic tensions between the United States and China. The authors also make the point that President Nixon's previous anticommunist stance gave him the domestic credibility to pursue closer relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC). Through a series of well-timed signals and progressive concessions, President Nixon and his administration were able to mend fences with a seemingly implacable

foe, dramatically changing the global strategic environment and establishing the foundation for future cooperation ultimately facilitating our close (albeit wary) economic relationship with China today. While there was no definitive crisis bringing this change in foreign policy about, Nixon was able to move his new China policy into the domestic spotlight, first through an unlikely interaction with China (ping-pong) and then through Nixon's high visibility, election year visit to China. This was a key achievement in the president's tarnished legacy.

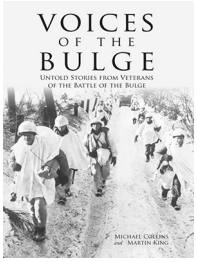
For policymakers and strategists looking for an alternative to the ongoing containment of Iran, the China case holds some hopeful parallels. The crisis in Syria and growing isolation of Iran due to its nuclear activities might provide a permissive environment for both the United States and Iran to reassess their current policies. The American public is focused on continuing domestic economic issues and weary of tremendous expenditures of blood and treasury in both Afghanistan and Iraq. This environment echoes the public mood of exhaustion and mistrust of the government in the aftermath of the Tet Offensive. The US withdrawal from Iraq, and pending departure from Afghanistan, might also ease Iranian suspicions and provide them with some domestic political space for compromise. Reaching a strategic accommodation with Iran would enable the United States to conserve scarce military and economic resources and invest them more productively in Asia, just as the breakthrough with China in the aftermath of Vietnam allowed the United States to restore its international reputation and permitted a more intense strategic focus on the Soviet Union.

While insightful and well-written, the individual hypotheses are not particularly new to the study of foreign policy. For example, most practitioners understand that political and historic context matter when foreign policy is being decided. (This was a theme throughout the America's First Battles case studies as well.) It is also not a revelation that domestic politics often trumps foreign policy during election cycles, nor that foreign policy often determines a president's legacy. That said, this book is an instructive review of turning points in US foreign policy. It provides a well-reasoned framework for analyzing current crises and preparing for potential shifts in policy direction. The four hypotheses provide a logical framework for assessing our current strategic pivot towards Asia, or our response to the global financial crisis. This book is worth reading for foreign policy enthusiasts and senior political and military leaders who are struggling to develop effective policies and strategies during times of crisis.

The Human Face of War

Voices of the Bulge: Untold Stories from Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge

By Michael Collins and Martin King



Minneapolis: Zenith Press, 2011

314 pages

$29.00

Reviewed by Colonel James R. Oman, USA Ret., Director, Senior Service College Fellowship Program, Defense Acquisition University, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Maryland

The exceedingly popular genre, characterized by a collection of veterans recounting their personal experiences accrued during the course of a particular operation or campaign as exemplified by *Voices of the Bulge: Untold Stories from Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge* is clearly coming to an end. The US Department of Veterans Affairs estimated that 740 World War II veterans perished on average each day in 2011. Stated another way, approximately 270,000 veterans are believed to have died in 2011 with a projection of 248,000 or 679 veterans expected to die per day in 2012. At the end of World War II, there were 16 million members in uniform. At the beginning of 2012 these numbers dwindled to an estimated 2.9 million survivors, with the youngest in their mid-80s. I suspect this epic tome represents one of the last of its kind as the relentless passage of time silences their once vibrant voices.

Authors Martin King and Michael Collins spent more than a decade conducting interviews, walking the ground throughout the Ardennes region, and completing their research. The data they collected would become the *Voices of the Bulge*. Their work provides fresh insight into this massive, pivotal battle that was fought throughout Belgium from the middle of December 1944 through the end of January 1945. King is a military historian, serves as a lecturer, and is a consultant for the History Channel. He currently lives in Belgium. Undoubtedly, his many visits to the battlefield as a tour guide for groups of veterans, military members, dignitaries, and the like have deepened his understanding of the ebb and flow of the battle as well as contributed to his extensive research. Collins lives in Connecticut, serves as a historical interpreter and museum staffer for the Veterans Research Center and four museums. Collins also has a familial tie to the battle through his grandfather who fought in World War II while serving as a member of Patton's Third Army within the European Theater of Operations. The motivation to see where his grandfather fought inspired him and his parents to visit the Ardennes in June 2006. As luck would have it, their tour guide was King. The seeds planted during this chance meeting inspired a partnership that flourished and produced this epic tale. Their work honors those who did not survive the conflagration as well as veterans living and deceased.

The massive German counteroffensive, code name Wacht am Rhein (Watch on the Rhine), is often called the Von Rundstedt Offensive or the Ardennes Counteroffensive; however, it is most commonly referred to as the Battle of the Bulge by Americans and the British. This operation represented Adolf Hitler's strategic gamble to reverse Germany's fortunes and stave off defeat by fracturing and destroying the Allied forces advancing from the West. Hitler struck through the Ardennes

for a variety of reasons, not the least of which was his hope to replicate his earlier successes, specifically those events that occurred in May 1940, when a similar dash led to the capitulation of France and the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Force from the Continent. Germany would throw more than 200,000 soldiers assigned to 14 infantry and five panzer divisions into the fray. These forces were supported by more than 1,600 artillery pieces and nearly 1,000 tanks as they attacked westward across an 80-mile front. Ultimately, more than 600,000 American soldiers would be involved in the ensuing response that unfolded over the upcoming thirty plus days. The US forces would sustain nearly 90,000 casualties—killed, wounded, and missing. The Battle of the Bulge was the largest operation, with the most casualties, in the long history of the US Army.

Collins and King recount day-to-day actions, reactions, and responses. They begin with the opening German salvos on 16 December 1944 as the Germans attacked across the weakly held Belgian front and conclude with the reduction of the Bulge and stabilization of the front at the end of January 1945. The vast majority of the book is focused on the first twelve days of the battle. The authors use a variety of sources to recount the daily operations and allocate one chapter for each day of the battle through 27 December 1944. The recollections, vivid accounts, and dramatic descriptions of the fighting provided by the veterans, more than 60-plus years after the fact, indelibly illustrate the highly personal human dimension and lasting impact on each participant. The accounts come primarily from US Army soldiers, both enlisted and officers; a handful of Belgian civilians; and a few German soldiers. The manuscript concludes with a brief review of events from 28 December 1944 through the end of January 1945, a time frame which the authors aptly call "The End Game."

Prominently featured in the book are numerous firsthand accounts shared by a diverse collection of veterans, many of whom demonstrated extraordinary feats of courage, as they fought in the Battle of the Bulge. Several of these veterans are Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) James "Maggie" Megellas, who fought as a member of H Company, 3rd Battalion 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division in Italy, Holland, Belgium, and Germany, and is recognized as the most decorated officer in the history of the Division; Francis Curry, a Medal of Honor recipient and a member of the 30th Infantry Division who was recognized for his heroic stand near Malmedy on 21 December 1944; and Ted Paluch, who as a member of the 285th Field Artillery Battalion was one of a mere handful of survivors from the infamous Malmedy Massacre, to name just a few.

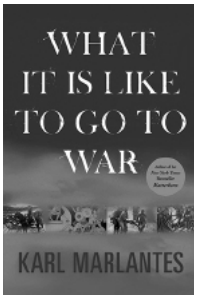
Adding to the richness of the *Voices of the Bulge* are the more than 90 black and white photos taken at the time of the fighting or in its immediate aftermath, five detailed maps, and several biographical sketches. One relatively unique feature is the inclusion of a 47-minute DVD that accompanies the book. The DVD highlights Paluch, Megellas, Curry, and several other veterans and provides the "voice" to go along with their stories and pictures found within the text.

While the events of the Battle of the Bulge have been examined and written about by many, Collins' and King's approach of having veterans share their highly emotional experiences both honors and records the

deeds of their service as these members of the Greatest Generation fade onto the pages of history. As such, *Voices of the Bulge: Untold Stories from Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge* is worthy of a thoughtful read.

What It Is Like To Go To War

By Karl Marlantes



New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2011

272 pages

$15.00

Reviewed by Henry G. Gole, whose biography of Colonel Truman Smith, the military attaché in Berlin, 1935-39, to be published in the Spring of 2013 by the University Press of Kentucky

Karl Marlantes wrote the bestseller and prize winning novel *Matterhorn*, based on his experiences as a Marine Corps platoon commander in a rifle company in Vietnam in 1969-70. In his nonfiction, *What It Is Like To Go To War*, he takes his readers back to that time and place and to the four succeeding decades in which he examined his conscience and came to terms with killing and reentering civil society. This absolutely unique and lucid personal account and analysis will be read with profit by scholars, general readers, and most particularly, by veterans of close combat.

Note that Marlantes is very specific in defining just what he means by "close combat": close enough to throw a hand grenade at a foe or to fire a rifle at another human being the shooter can see. Clarity on this point is important to him and essential to the book. Laymen tend to lump all Vietnam veterans in one heap. Those who have engaged in close combat do not. In a "combat zone" there are relatively safe places. A rifle company is not one of them.

The author is qualified by experience, education, temperament, and skill as a writer to make penetrating observations. Many are graphic, bold, and shocking. Some are erudite; some are ethereal; all are worthy of careful consideration.

Maturation from the late 1950s and into the 1960s cultivated two strains in his personality constantly visible in his writing. One is an intellectual appetite fed in his Yale and Oxford years and demonstrated on almost every page of the book. The other is an aspiration to join King Arthur's court of noble men—or to accompany Don Quixote on a quest—manifest in both his choice of military service and his display of courage in Vietnam.

He tells us that he wrote the book to come to terms with his experience of close combat. That could have been accomplished in a personal journal, but he believes he might help other combat veterans "integrate their combat experiences into their current lives." He also thinks he might provide young people contemplating joining the military "with a psychological and spiritual combat prophylactic, for indeed combat is like unsafe sex in that it's a major thrill with possible horrible consequences." (He is too wise to expect young men to read and heed his advice.) Finally, he wants policymakers to know what they are asking of the young.

His method is to reflect on a point important to him, to illustrate it with an anecdote or a combat experience, and to mull it over in sparkling prose that has the reader hanging on every word. His chapter headings

identify themes: "Temple of Mars," "Killing," "Guilt," "Numbness and Violence," "The Enemy Within," "Lying," "Loyalty," "Heroism." The concluding three chapters indicate his concern for the need to integrate the earlier violence into current lives: "Home," "The Club," and "Relating to Mars."

Mastery of our language and the creative use of poetic devices and images make his pronouncements memorable. To illustrate: Asking warriors to "adjust" to home after close combat "is akin to asking Saint John of the Cross to be happy flipping hamburgers at McDonald's after he's left the monastery." And regarding military training: "Boot camp doesn't turn young men into killers. It removes the societal restraints on the savage part of us that has made us the top animal in the food chain."

His title might have been "What It Is Like To Return From War." He writes that it was ten years after killing a man that he felt any emotion about it. Then deep remorse lasted months, a pattern for the next three decades. He knows that warriors must learn how to integrate the experience of killing, to put the pieces of their psyches back together again. But, "It is unfortunate that the guilt and mourning reside almost entirely with those asked to do the dirty work." He believes that "drugs, alcohol, and suicides are ways of avoiding guilt and fear of grief. Grief itself is a healthy response." Those called upon to fight violate many codes of civilized behavior. They must come to terms with stepping outside conventional behavior. He cites T. E. Lawrence (*Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 1922): "What now looks wanton or sadic seemed in the field inevitable, or just unimportant routine." Then a truism in his own words: "The least acknowledged aspect of war, today, is how exhilarating it is."

This reviewer gives this book very high marks. The most comparable works are philosopher and World War II veteran J. Glenn Gray's *The Warriors: Reflections on Men In Battle* and professor of English and WW II veteran Samuel Hynes' *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War*, both of the highest quality. A small sample of other first-rate accounts of close combat and the reactions of warriors are commended—from WW I: Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, a memoir; Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, a novel constantly in print since 1929; and from WW II: Sledge, *With the Old Breed*; Fraser, *Quartered Safe Out Here*; Masters, *The Road Past Mandalay*; Fussell, *The Boys' Crusade*; from the French war in Indo-China: Grauwin, *Doctor at Dien Bien Phu*, and from the American war in Vietnam: Nolen, *Ripcord*.

Another small sample of books dealing with shell shock, battle fatigue, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)—whatever name is given the after-effects of the combat experience on young psyches—is particularly appropriate at this time. It would include these from WW I: Moran, *Anatomy of Courage*; Barker, *Regeneration;* Remarque, *The Road Back*; from WW II: Manchester, *Goodbye Darkness*; from Vietnam: Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*.

One deeply regrets the current clear need to understand what it is like to go to war and what it is like to return from war. Karl Marlantes has joined a short list of authors whose experience, sensitivity, and skill enable them to share wisdom with those among us who would understand.