

B O O K S

REVIEW BY JEFFREY C. ALFIER

*Behind the Lines: War Resistance Poetry
on the American Homefront since 1941*

by Philip Metres

Iowa City, Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2007

They have made war till we were dead from weeping.

—the goddess Iris to Helen, *The Iliad*

IN *BEHIND THE LINES: WAR RESISTANCE POETRY on the American Homefront since 1941*, English professor and poet Philip Metres explicates how war resistance poetry on America's homefront in war time has made historically discernible the moral ambiguities of war and its detriment upon society at large. As such, Metres rightly credits the contribution of both the American soldier-poet's first person witness as well as the poetry of war's other tragic victims, including all "who live at the end of the missile trajectory" (4-5). What is the relevance of war resistance poetry? Situated amid what has been known loosely as the peace movement, it contributes to the society's broader pattern of literary and journalistic expression, deconstructing the official narrative of our wartime presidential administrations to offer a "collective subjectivity other than the nation-state," with its potential of state-sanctioned patriotic lyric (6). Moreover, "No other literary genre has been as conducive a performative, immediate, and often homespun symbolic" medium (11). It thus becomes poetry not only of published

anthologies, but of the street and the subway as well. As such, *Metres* clarifies how the poetry of the past is useful as “a vital resource for social change” (233).

In Part I, *Metres* covers the wartime internment and poetic activities of major American poets Robert Lowell, William Stafford, and William Everson—all conscientious objectors during World War II. These men used their poetry to extend ethical and artistic principles of the suffering individual, and to give voice and expression beyond dissidents as they worked out their resistance to war “in their own idiosyncratic ways” (92). The focus of Part II is the Vietnam War era, and *Metres* redresses the belief that antiwar poetry produced during that era was somehow non-memorable in the life of the literary canon. On the contrary, it confronted “the increasingly technological and bureaucratic formation of modern war itself,” as poetry readings made concrete the abstract and bureaucratic language of the US government and military (96,103,126).

Moving into our current era, Part III opens with the Gulf War, and of special interest to current readers is *Metres*’ discussion of book-length poems on that conflict, especially Barrett Watten’s odd but telling work, *Bad History*. Separate chapters on the war resistance contributions of poets Denise Levertov (1923-1997) and June Jordan (1936-2002) enhance *Metres*’ thesis, arcing the timeline between the Vietnam War and the Gulf War. Today’s readers will take special note of *Metres*’ study of post-911 poetry of grief and conspiracy, writing which continues apace today. In 2003 alone, the Iraq War saw the publication of four war resistance anthologies. Organizations such as Poets Against the War were born, giving common Americans a wide venue of war resistance.

To be maximally effective, war resistance poems should be joined, when and where possible, to “placard writing, media press releases, writing to government officials, and song writing,” along with various modes of theatrical expressions (234-235). War resistance poetry is, above all, a populist movement. The current reviewer concurs with the assessment that the most vital purpose of the poetry is its potential for rendering “the poem as an instant memorial against the hegemonic version of a clean war” (165).

Metres culled hundreds of sources and includes excerpts of dozens of poems that illustrate that war resistance poetry served, and serves, American society by producing “counternarratives, images, and linguistic play in ways that created afterimages as powerful as the photographs that would begin to alter public opinion” about the morality of war (126).

Metres does not foster an uncritical acceptance of all war resistance poetry; for some of it “seems too often shrill and veers into a circular address” (174). Too much of it is bland or clichéd polemic, better suited to being letters to editors than inscribed as poetry. In the end, *Metres* goes far beyond giving us a chronology and description of America’s war resistance poetry; rather, his work proves an incisive

cultural critique. This book is highly recommended not only to those interested in poetry but also to students of literary and sociological studies of war and peace.

REVIEW BY ROBERT MILO BALDWIN

CADA O VIỆT NAM: Vietnamese Folk Poetry

by John Balaban

Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2003

IMAGINE IN 1971, A VETERAN OF VIET NAM, not a soldier who fought in the war but one who had completed “alternative service” by treating children wounded in the war (ix), returning to rural Viet Nam where the war still raged, and, as a young American, turning on his tape recorder to record the folk poems of peasants unafraid to sing their songs (xi). Who would have the courage to do that in Iraq? That’s what John Balaban did in Viet Nam, speaking to “farmers, housewives, boat builders, fisherman, seamstresses, herbalists, and older sisters minding their siblings” (xi). Often he taped at night, after the work day was done, a kerosene lamp lit, and mixed with the singer’s voice would be a background of mortar and rifle fire (xi). Most of what he recorded had never been written down (xi). All of them are *ca dao* (pronounced “ka zow” or “ka yow”) (4), and he recorded over 500 of them (xii), translating just 49 in this slim, fine volume. As one village proverb says, “Go out one day, come back with a basket of knowledge” (xii).

There is both knowledge and beauty here. Most of these *ca dao* are brief, often only one couplet of 14 syllables, and while passed down through an oral tradition, they are sung, not spoken (4). Like stones worn smooth over generations of use, many of these poems, perfected and polished through the ages, now seem “jewel-like” (12). Like this one:

*Oh, girl, bailing water by the roadside,
why pour off the moon’s golden light? (6)*

For the Vietnamese, who hold poetry in high esteem, a poem should not be too obvious, but should contain an undercurrent with a deeper meaning (13). So what may appear to be a simple expression through a clear image may mean something quite different. Consider this, titled by Balaban as “Linked Verses”:

*The wind plays with the moon; the moon with the wind.
The moon sets. Who can the wind play with?*

*The wind plays, plays with the moonflower.
The bud is yours, but the blossom is mine.*

*The wind plays through watercress and chives.
A pity that you have a mother, but no father.*

*The wind plays. How can one please a friend's heart?
The Milky Way is shallow in places, in some places, deep. (19)*

To mistake the beauty of this poem as nothing more than a description of a natural scene would be a mistake of ignorance and lack of imagination. In contrast, take the complaint in “The Body Is Pain” by a guard assigned for three years to a lonely outpost: “In the well, one fish swims alone and free” (29). Or, in “A Tiny Bird,” the lament of a lover about to leave:

*A tiny bird with red feathers,
a tiny bird with black beak
drinks up the lotus pond day by day.
Perhaps I must leave you. (33)*

To think we dropped napalm on a nation whose peasants sing poetry as beautiful and allusive as this. But these poems, and this collection in particular, do not dwell on the war. Their words are timeless and often show us the innate hope of the human spirit, as in “The Painting”:

*The stream runs clear to its stones.
The fish swim in sharp outline.
Girl, turn your face so that I may draw it.
Tomorrow, if we should drift apart,
I will find you by this picture. (49)*

Path, Crooked Path

by John Balaban

Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2006

Path, Crooked Path is a poetic journal of John Balaban's journey through diverse cultures around the world. He begins with Highway 61 in America, continues with a long suite on Miami, stops for a view from the Acropolis in Athens, drinks vodka with a Slavic poet in Paris, wanders with stray dogs on a street in Romania, translates one of Ovid's poems on banishment, spins the tale of an Arab emissary's encounter with Vikings on the Volga, and translates Bulgarian poems, one of which contains the haunting line, "So quiet one hears the footfalls of the dead" (26). This eclectic collection contains many ghosts, some of which still loom large from Balaban's early years in Vietnam, as in this magnificent poem, "Lunch with a District Chief, Outside Hanoi":

*My American friend, who is vegetarian but not making
concessions,
thinks the translator said, "Can you eat dark meat?"
But, of course, it is "dog," not dark. Puppy, not poulet.
By the third or fourth bite, the translation is corrected,
and my friend swallows, smiles, and says it's good
out of deference to our host, a decent man
who was shot through the lungs during our war,
who was sent home to die, and who is now smiling
at the chance, at last, to talk to these Americans. (12)*

To survive such a war, our attempt to kill the “enemy,” and then sit across the table from the man who would have killed you, who you yourself would have killed, with only the desire to talk—this is a matter to be understood not after war, but before war.

As Balaban eloquently says in “Varna Snow,” not far from Tomis where Ovid lived out his remaining years in exile, where Roman ruins lie, where Huns, Turks, Russians, and now the U.S. Navy have provided temporary occupation, “Only poetry lasts” (66). And Balaban, at his best, writes that kind of poetry.

REVIEW BY ROBERT MILO BALDWIN

Spring Essence: The Poetry of Ho Yuan Huong

by John Balaban

Port Townsend, WA: Copper Canyon Press, 2000

BY THE TIME HO YUAN HUONG was born near the end of the 18th century, 900 years had passed since the Vietnamese had driven out the Chinese, but even so the Confucian order had survived in Viet Nam until she came of age, at which point it was collapsing (3, 6). Although some Vietnamese women had traditionally been able to achieve high positions, including the management of wealth, advising rulers, even sometimes leading armies, they still faced numerous social obstacles, and rarely were they tutored in literary studies (4). And while some women might obtain elevated positions, the Confucian system allowed a man to abandon a woman for gossip, jealousy, lack of children, or an incurable disease (4). The bias against women was such that a pregnant, unwed, upperclass woman could be sentenced to death by an elephant trodding on her abdomen, killing both the mother and unborn child (121).

The strictures of morality were such that sex was a forbidden literary topic, and even the nude was banned from art (5). In such a world was born Ho Yuan Huong, daughter of a concubine. As John Balaban says, it is surprising she wrote at all (3), much less that she became a master of the art of poetry, writing mockingly of corrupt Buddhist practices, the inequity of marriage for convenience, the ability to buy an official post, and double entendres in which a poem within the poem might reveal sexual meaning.

While Ho Yuan Huong's poetic attacks on male authority might seem normal for fin de siècle Americans and other Weserners, for her time it was shocking and personally risky. (4)

Her name, which means “the essence of spring,” as in a form of perfume (6), belied her wit. According to legend, she was famous for her ability to immediately compose “perfectly structured poems” (7), and would often be challenged by young men studying for imperial exams. When one young scholar fainted from shock at the difficulty of her verse, then recovered to finish the poem, she remarked, “Not bad,” and married him (7). A believer in *duyen* (pronounced “zwee-en”), meaning true love, she remained married a mere 27 months before her husband died, forcing her thereafter to marry for convenience as a second wife—essentially a concubine like her mother (8). Her second husband she despised so much, her elegy for his death is caustic (8, 28, 118). Yet her poetry in Balaban’s translations seems far removed from such bitterness, as in “Autumn Landscape”:

*Drop by drop rain slaps the banana leaves.
Praise whoever sketched this desolate scene:
the lush, dark canopies of the gnarled trees,
the long river, sliding smooth and white.
I lift my wine flask, drunk with rivers and hills.
My backpack, breathing moonlight, sags with poems.
Look, and love everyone.
Whoever sees this landscape is stunned. (19)*

Of course this is not merely a poem of a natural scene, for what was an image of nature was often, for Ho Yuan Huong, an image of something quite different. She knew what life had to offer, as in “Spring Watching Pavilion”:

*Love's vast sea cannot be emptied.
And springs of grace flow easily everywhere.
Where is nirvana?
Nirvana is here, nine times out of ten. (115)*

Balaban’s translations are exquisite, like jade in a clear pool. The work of this poetess, little known in the West, is a superb addition to the ever-increasing canon of translations finding a home in our contemporary literature.

REVIEW BY BRIAN DILLON

The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry

by George Walter, editor

London: Penguin Books, 2006

ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH THE WORK of any of these poets? Have you even heard of them? Eva Dobell, E.A. Mackintosh, Jessie Pope. Edward Shanks. The newest version of *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry* includes at least two poems by each of these authors. Writing from her experience as a nurse during the war, Dobell depicts the distracting charms of the gramophone on the wounded in hospital, and her retrospective thoughts on the tunes that continue to play in her head, and she slyly indicts her contemporaries who approved of the enlistment by the underage boy now crippled and in her care. The cynical claims Mackintosh asserts should be on recruitment posters: "Lads, you're wanted! Over there, / Shiver in the morning dew, / More poor devils like yourselves / Waiting to be killed by you". Such lines suggest he did not fight and die in France under any superficial patriotic illusions. Perhaps best known as the (alleged) unnamed antagonist Wilfred Owen sarcastically labels "My friend" in the final lines of his intense portrayal of a gas attack, "Dulce et Decorum est," Pope, represented here by four poems, taunts men into enlisting, praises their heroism as well as the newly employed women at home who have slipped into the men's jobs, and even defines without any apparent irony the new "type of manly beauty": he must "have one member in a sling / Or, preferably, missing." Like a number of poets in this volume, Shanks gives voice to the war dead: In "Armistice Day, 1921" they prefer their graves to the impoverishment endured by their comrades who survived. "Would we be as our brothers are / Whose barrel-organs charm the town? / Ours was a better dodge by far-- / We got *our* pensions in a lump sum down." None of

these poets had been included in the previous editions of this Penguin book, edited by Jon Silkin (initially published in 1979 and revised in 1996). Their presence in George Walter's edition, along with that of other lesser-known poets, signals a shift in canon formation, a deliberate effort to emphasize poems read during and in the first few years following the war.

Silkin's lengthy introduction philosophically defined the moral position achieved by the best of the war poems. The poems he included fit into one of four "stages of consciousness": 1) passive expressions of patriotic support for the war, 2) anger against various demographics (including religious authorities, politicians, other non-combatants), 3) compassion, typically for one's comrades in the trenches, and 4) the merging of anger and compassion motivated by a desire for societal change to oppose war. These categories declare both his standard of moral and aesthetic criteria, as well as the effect he hoped his choice of poems would have on his reader: "It's no good, that is, hiding the actions of murder behind pity; only by showing forth the actions clearly do we stand a chance of understanding them, and changing ourselves." Silkin makes room for poets who fit all four categories—Rupert Brooke, Siegfried Sassoon, Owen, and Isaac Rosenberg, respectively (though Silkin acknowledges his categories are not as neatly fixed as my brief summary may imply and that the appropriate category for a number of individual poems is rarely immediately obvious). His argument, illustrated by close readings of specific poems, continues to deserve thoughtful consideration by every serious reader of First World War poetry.

Walter does not intend to improve readers of his volume. Instead, he challenges what he considers to be a monochrome treatment of the war that has occurred as a result of elevating Owen and Sassoon to the highest canonical thrones. Without mentioning Silkin, odd as that may seem, without promoting specific works he values most, Walter complains that "modern anthologies tend to only favour those poems which stress the horrors of the war, which are compassionate about the suffering of those who endured it and, preferably, translate that compassion into anger towards war and those who perpetuate it." The consequence includes "a highly distorted but enduring image of what the poetry of the First World War is actually like," as poets such as Dobell, Mackintosh, Pope, and Shanks get pushed to the margins. Resurrecting marginalized poets must, inevitably, come at the loss of some poems by those most esteemed. Seven of Owen's poems favored by Silkin have been dismissed, two others that Silkin rejected added, so that whereas Silkin's selection of Owen trumped in quantity all others with eighteen, Walter relies on thirteen. Rosenberg is reduced from seventeen to seven, Edward Thomas from twelve to five. Curiously, Walter adds thirteen Sassoon poems not found in Silkin, and Ivor Gurney's value markedly shifts upward, going from Silkin's seven to Walter's sixteen. Readers may miss the weird sexist fury of Sassoon's "Glory

of Women,” which condemns women who through their munitions factory jobs or emotional encouragement support the soldiers; yet Walter includes “The Kiss,” Sassoon’s 1916 poem seemingly in praise of (or at least not overtly angry about) his bayonet, “Sister Steel.”

Sassoon’s reputation is too firmly established for any new anthology to re-shape a mini-canon of the best of his work; the same principle applies to Owen and perhaps Rosenberg. By respecting readers’ choices in the era of the fighting and the years immediately following—that is, by selecting poems primarily printed during and in the immediate aftermath to the war—Walter demonstrates an allegiance to what English readers valued roughly ninety years ago. (Unlike Silkin, who included representative poems by French, Italian, German, and Russian writers, this volume excludes nearly all non-British voices, with the exception of a fistful of American poems.) Thus five sonnets and one additional poem by Brooke allow readers to assess why his poems from the war’s first year held such massive appeal during the ‘teens and into the ‘twenties. In contrast, the first selection of Owen’s poems, published in 1920, “soon sank without a trace.” Today Brooke’s poems strike many readers as stylistically brilliant yet naïve in their political insights: “Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour” (“1914: Peace,” with the annoying implication of the British as the Chosen Ones), and the longing to die and enrich a spot of foreign soil with an English corpse that will lie forever “under an English heaven” (“1914: The Soldier”).

Why such disparity in the immediate and current reception to both Brooke and Owen? “For a nation in mourning for its dead, [Brooke’s] poetry offered consolation to the bereaved whilst at the same time transforming their sacrifice into something which transcended the squalid realities of post-war life.” Roughly a decade after the war’s end memoirs by Sassoon and Robert Graves and the novel and film of *All Quiet on the Western Front* rejected the Brooke-styled argument that the war provided a welcome escape from dreariness, that soldiers were “as swimmers into cleanness leaping” (“1914: Peace”). Sassoon, Graves, Remarque, and others forever stained that pool. In 1931 a new, fuller volume of Owen’s poems was published with a lengthy prose passage by Edmund Blunden. Relying on Owen’s correspondence during the war, Blunden provided a detailed stamp of biographical authenticity; he contextualized the poems and (inadvertently) guided interpretations of them essentially through to the present. For decades, as readers interpreted the poems through the biographical lenses provided by Blunden and others, Owen served as the poster-boy of English First World War literature: the articulate, sensitive martyr for doubtful political causes, whose poetic details display the veritable grit and ooze of the trenches. (Recent criticism of Owen’s work, which Walter does not note, effectively undermines the reading of his poems as unambiguously anti-war.)

With Walter's impatience with the "Owenesque model of the ideal war poem—authenticity plus sensitivity," what other thematic concerns emerge in the works of lesser-known poets? Poems brimming with pride in England's role and in individual service, the sentimental strain, stand in the same company as anonymous Soldiers' Songs, which colorfully announce where various Sergeants can stick various items "When this bloody war is over." Consider some of the work of the eighteen female poets included here: Jessie Pope's speaker challenges men to enlist ("Who's for the khaki suit- / Are you, my laddie?" in "The Call"); May Herschel-Clark's proclaims pride in the role of a mother of a dead soldier who had loved "country, honour, truth, traditions high" (in a sonnet that echoes the style and anticipation of the noble death expressed in Brooke's frequently anthologized "1914: The Soldier"); Theresa Hooley's chokes on fears after returning from a war film when worrying that her little son's body, fresh from the bath, might one day be subjected to what she's seen on the screen (in "A War Film," which uses ellipses to suggest cruelties beyond what her language will acknowledge); Vera Brittain's anguish over the death of her soldier-lover, the lost opportunity to be a mother, the sudden entrance to solitude (in "The Superfluous Woman," a devastating title appropriate for a Greek tragedy). Brittain's poem appears near the end of the volume in the fifth of five categories Walter places the poems in: "Peace." (The previous four are "Your Country Needs You," "Somewhere in France," "Action," and "Blighty"; each of the five categories is broken down into three sub-categories.) As "The Superfluous Woman" and other powerful poems in this final section indicate, peace refers to a subjective concept.

These categories suggest the wide-ranging perspectives offered by the various poems. (The Table of Contents lists all the categories but not the poems. While titles and first lines are indexed, and while each short biographical statement about the poets at the back of the book concludes with a list of his or her poems in this volume, such a scaled down Contents page frustrates quick access to specific poems.) The brief biographies serve a useful purpose, as many readers may be unacquainted with so many of the poets. In addition to his "Glossary of the Western Front," especially helpful for situating the location and defining the importance of French places named in the poems, Walter provides endnotes for many of the poems. These Notes are straightforward and factual and do not attempt to steer the reader to a specific interpretation. Non-British readers may appreciate the definitions for the variety of landscape terms, for example, used in John Masefield's "August, 1914"—wold, Downs, brae. There's a flash of poetic subtlety in the reminder that the poppy "flourishes in disturbed ground." Many of the Notes highlight allusions to the Bible and remind us how frequently Christian perspectives shaped—and mis-shaped—poets' responses to war. Marjorie Pickthall's "Marching Men" fits this latter category (as too many of the poems do), blunting meaningful insight, presenting all soldiers as uncomplicated, unthinking victims: "Under the level

winter sky / I saw a thousand Christs go by. / They sang an idle song and free / As they went up to calvary.” Conventional Christian beliefs provided a framework for clarifying and justifying the experience that satisfied many poets and readers then; for most readers today, such a framework, it seems likely, will distort the picture and offer no meaningful comfort. Yet it’s crucial that readers today understand how readers’ responses may shift profoundly in less than a century.

“Have you forgotten yet?,” the title of the final sub-category, questions our ability to revive any profound comprehension of the First World War experience. “High Wood” by Philip Johnstone seems to mock efforts to recover the past. The poet imagines a tourguide in some distant future leading a vaguely-focused group through trenches along the Somme:

Observe the effects of shell-fire in the trees
Standing and fallen; here is wire; this trench
For months inhabited, twelve times changed hands;
(They soon fall in), used later as a grave.
[. . .] This mound on which you stand being . . .
Madam, please,

You are requested kindly not to touch
Or take away the Company’s property
As souvenirs; you’ll find we have on sale
A large variety, all guaranteed.
As I was saying, all is as it was,
This is an unknown British officer,
The tunic having lately rotted off.
Please follow me—this way . . .

The path, sir, please,

The ground which was secured at great expense
The Company keeps absolutely untouched,
And in that dug-out (genuine) we provide
Refreshments at a reasonable rate.

Though first published in February, 1918, the tone and the premonition that remembrance must be active, not passive, sounds like it could have been written last weekend. Walter admits that Johnstone left no biographical trace. Fortunately, his poem survives to challenge us. So do many of the poems in this new edition of *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*.

REVIEW BY P. DIANA BLACK

The Afghan Campaign: a Novel

by Steven Pressfield

New York: Broadway Books, 2006

PRESSFIELD'S CHOICE OF TITLE FOR THIS NOVEL suggests a contemporary theme and the ambiguity, I suspect, is not accidental. The book is about Alexander's 330 BCE conquest of the East, but as his army struggles to subdue the region, we cannot avoid considering the implications of Pressfield's insights to our current conflicts in modern Iraq and Afghanistan.

As with his previous historical fiction, Pressfield deftly immerses us in the historical moment, providing a first-person experience of ancient warfare. His narrator, Matthias, is an infantryman who joins Alexander's army at eighteen with his childhood friend, Lucas. Several thousand miles from home and enveloped by two alien cultures—the culture of soldiers at war as well as that of the native tribes—Matthias finds himself strangely bereft of noble motivations and instead overcome by fear and horror. In his first battle, he is unable to kill an unarmed and bound old man, an incident which shames him into suppressing his instinct to preserve human life so he can master the work of slaughter.

Like all wartime *bildungsromans*, this novel tracks the deterioration of Matthias' noble ideals as he's confronted with the reality of war. When Matthias and Lucas leave home at eighteen, they are "mad for glory, like every other youngblood" (10). After months of grisly fighting culminating in slaughters of entire Afghani villages, Lucas says that what he hates most about the Afghan is that "he has dragged us down to his level." Then he asks, "Is this Macedonian honor?"

Flag, a hardened vet, replies, "There is no honor in war, my friend. Only in poems of war." Pressed for an explanation, Flag states that *victory* is all that matters:

“Victory,” repeats Flag, addressing all of us. “Nothing else matters. Not decency, not chivalry. Look war in the face. See it for what it is. You’ll go crazy if you don’t.” (155)

Unlike many writers whose philosophical dialogues reek of self-servitude and fit uncomfortably into the storyline, Pressfield’s are natural. Before his characters have opinions about warfare and politics, they—and by extension, we the readers—have undergone months or years of trauma. They have been attacked by women and children, marched for months on short rations, lost friends, and executed rows of bound enemies. By the time Pressfield’s characters utter more than a sentence, we want to hear them speak. No human, we feel, could butcher other people and not have an opinion worth hearing. Following a particularly grueling battle, Matthias’ childhood friend Lucas attacks Costas—the chronicler of war who travels with the party as a “wax-scratcher” who uses “phony phrases...to make shit like this sound like it makes sense” (152-3). The young warrior wants to know why the chroniclers can’t just “tell it straight,” and Costas replies that the public only wants “certain kinds of stories” and “there’s no demand for the other kind.”

“You mean the true kind,” says Lucas. Costas’ reply—“You know what I mean”—leaves us to fumble with the uncomfortable reality that his work, like that of all “wax-scratchers,” is ultimately about profit, not truth.

Pressfield explores the “truths” of war stories from other angles, as well. His soldiers sanitize their letters home, rationalizing the omission of the brutality and sexual indiscretions of their lives on the march. Flag sergeants and officers create fictitious, honorable deaths for a soldier who has overdosed on booze and cheap opium in order to preserve the feelings of his family. Matthias himself is ordered to sign an untrue statement about Lucas’ death. Matthias refuses—from a latent sense of honor or simply to grant Lucas his last wish—and we hurt for him. At the same time, we see the political expediency of the lie, and the painful insignificance of the truth. We’re left to question what we really know of war, if anything, while paradoxically understanding and forgiving war’s necessary lies.

While Pressfield’s other novels routinely include foreign terms, he outdoes himself in this book, seamlessly incorporating an entire lexicon of soldierly slang. Young “scuffs” enlist for a “bump” or two, a bump being 18 months. They “bonze” wherever they can “find a patch of dirt wide enough to hold [their] bones.” Their “mooch” is often “quickbread,” half-fried over a campfire and eaten on the “chop” to their next destination. His slang is incorporated so well that it feels natural, adding to the realistic feel of the jaunt. A glossary is included, but the average reader would probably find it unnecessary.

Perhaps Pressfield's most powerful point is embedded in his observations of the Afghan culture itself. Even when the Macedonians adopt "a new kind of war" which includes methods reminiscent of Old Testament genocide to subdue the enemy through sheer terror, the tribesmen do not capitulate. They refuse to meet the Macedonian army in pitched battle and would rather die than surrender. Women and children join the fray and live by the code of the tribesman, or they die by his hand. In one chilling scene, Matthias watches a man murder his own daughter for showing mercy to captives. Only after several months of battle with no discernible progress, Alexander reexamines his enemy's culture to find an effective means to subvert the insurgency. At this point, we question whether we learn from history at all, because Alexander's mistakes foreshadow our own: he underestimates his enemy, overlooks the crucial differences in his enemy's culture, and eventually achieves only a surface victory and strained peace.

While Pressfield's stories are not overtly political, there's still an edge in them that refreshes and invigorates us. Not only is this book gripping entertainment, but we'd benefit from serious consideration of the implications of his observations, as well.

REVIEW BY P. DIANA BLACK

*The Last True Story I'll Ever Tell: An Accidental Solder's
Account of the War in Iraq*

by John Crawford

New York: Penguin, 2006

WHEN I RETURNED FROM IRAQ IN DECEMBER 2004, having served a mere four months on LSA Anaconda, my friends and family asked what it was like. The broadness and innocence of the question stumped me. I asked what they meant but they couldn't clarify, so I tried to express the emptiness and loneliness—my prevalent memories of Iraq—the squalor in which I lived, and how it feels to be a walking target all day, every day. I quickly learned that my inquisitors didn't want to hear that, so I adopted a simple response: it was hot and nasty and it stank.

Even now, four years later, I'm still not sure what people want to hear when they ask about Iraq, but I'm certain they aren't interested in how it feels to be a part of the machine in a godforsaken country or how I didn't believe the war was just. Most civilians, I suspect, want to hear something inspiring or patriotic, amusing anecdotes, adrenaline-charged tales of everyday heroes, or the occasional sadly romantic vignette. They want sanitized war stories in which we are morally superior to the enemy. I think they want to believe—and I can't blame them—that we're all patriots, that we're "volunteers" in the true sense of the word, that we're in harm's way only for good reasons, and that we all behave admirably amid chaos. In short, I think most people expect a made-for-television, patriotic version of the war, and I can't give it to them.

Neither can John Crawford. Instead, he delivers the war through his eyes, with all its ups and downs, uncut. In his bluntly eloquent memoir—the title of which

acknowledges our instinctive rejection of unpleasant truths—Crawford does not politely spare our sensibilities or protect our naïveté. Instead, he couches day-to-day simple amusements and the occasional heroic act in the surreal world of pervasive exhaustion and boredom. His narrative immerses us in the cynicism and the day-to-day vulgarity of infantrymen and the sickening sights and smells of Iraq. Crawford shows the deterioration of civilized men into wary animals, and how distance and violence slowly destroy their marriages. As his Guard unit is transferred from one division to the next and the months pass, we watch his fear, stress, disillusionment, and estrangement from wife and country transform him from a typical college student reluctantly doing his duty into a man who hates the enemy and craves violence—a transformation we don't want to acknowledge, as it morally implicates us all for sending him into this hell.

Crawford was two credits shy of an anthropology degree from Florida State University and on his honeymoon when his Guard unit was activated in 2003. He admittedly had joined the Guard for a free education and didn't believe our invasion of Iraq was justified, but he did his duty. His unit crossed the berm the same day as the 3rd ID, and was passed—but not “attached”—to the 108th Airborne, 1st Marine Expeditionary, 101st Airborne, and then to the Armored Division. Crawford's unit stayed in theater for fifteen months, when the projected deployment time was three to six months at most. He hints that his unit was passed around “like a virus” because their battalion commander and the rest of Headquarters Company, who had missed the initial invasion, wanted to earn their combat infantry badges and get some leadership time in theater (18). He doesn't assert this as a truth, but in a world where perception is reality, he doesn't have to.

The book, written from the perspective of a lower-enlisted man who “no longer has any affiliation with the military,” is also instructive for officers, as it presents an unapologetic critique of out-of-touch, ineffective and insincere leadership. One striking example of this occurs when a soldier is shot in the throat during a routine trip. Another soldier, Mears, radios Headquarters and asks for a medavac at the bank; Headquarters says to calm down and asks for their grid. Mears replies: “We're at the fucking bank! You have the grid written on the wall right in front of you! We need a medavac fucking NOW! Doc is hit bad! Over.” The “Quick Reaction Force” takes forty-five minutes to leave the compound—some of them on the wrong frequency or taking longer routes than necessary—and “one officer on battalion staff threatened to pursue disciplinary action against [Mears] for cursing on the radio.... They never seemed to understand that we weren't there to write reports or have soccer games with the locals” (91-92). Crawford closes this damning commentary with the following observation:

That night we had a company meeting, where the battalion commander and the chaplain tried to speak words of encouragement to worried and angry soldiers. We were a team, they said. They told us to persevere and stay strong. Every soldier is important to the chain of command, and they were suffering right beside us. It was a good speech, but when the time came, neither the chaplain nor the battalion commander could remember the names of either of our soldiers who were hit. (96)

Crawford acknowledges how his peers' familiarity with the area, stupidity in making an appointment at the bank the day before, and low defense posture made the attack successful, but he doesn't politely overlook Headquarters' disorganization and lack of awareness which almost cost a soldier his life, or the detail which highlights the insincerity of his commander's "we are a team" speech.

Crawford isn't a hero and he isn't a moral paragon. He sometimes does the right thing, such as turning in his squad leader for looting an Iraqi house, but then he confesses he did it for the wrong reasons. He turns down a few hundred dollars of shut-up money, but admits to us, "Offer me a few hundred thousand and I'll be tempted" (47). In the course of their deployment, he and his peers steal beer from the locals and take a random Iraqi motorcycle for a joy ride, leaving it where it breaks down. They also take drugs:

Steroids weren't illegal in Iraq, and are illegal in the army only on paper. As for drugs that make you stronger and more aggressive, the army could only pray we were all participating. Me, I was more of a Valium and Prozac type of guy, anything to chill me out, get me a buzz. (63)

They sometimes behave like a bunch of frat boys, but they are never the epitome of American pride we want to believe represent our country abroad. They are real people with real flaws.

Perhaps because combat is our *raison d'être*, military culture subtly encourages us to perpetuate the lie that we are somehow immune to war's psychological fallout. No matter what happens, we're "fine." The lie is functional: the person who admits weakness in a combat situation gains nothing while risking losing others' confidence, but the person who adopts the lie protects her professional image and boosts her self-confidence. Adopting this façade is the only reasonable choice for the deployed soldier, but it provides him no escape from the stresses of deployment. Because we all furiously pretend the lie isn't there, Crawford's acknowledgement of it and of its natural consequences is refreshing. On one occasion—torn between his need to appear strong and his desire for a pharmaceutical escape because he isn't—he goes to the medical tent for a morphine injection on the pretense of physical illness. He says "I had problems with admitting I needed help.... To be

seen in the aid station is to admit weakness” (123). As the doctor prepares his IV, Crawford notes the condition of two real patients nearby and adds, “I would have hated for someone to mistake me for a heat casualty like those other two broken dicks” (124). This episode demonstrates the paradox inherent in the lie: physical weakness is unacceptable, but pharmaceutical escape is not, even though it’s a sign of a longer lasting, more debilitating weakness.

Crawford wrote this book to “simply make people aware, if only for one glimmering moment, of what war is really like” (xiv). In his quest, he spares no detail. We smell the ever-present raw sewage, we feel the heat, his grogginess, the grit, and his frustration and impatience with his chain of command. When he says, “Our lives were crumbling so that we could pretend to help people who pretended to appreciate it” (174), we understand and forgive his sarcasm. This is the work of a man who’s been stripped of ego. What remains is a window into his world. Those who really want to know how deployment and war feels should start here.

REVIEW BY ELIZABETH A. MUENGER

*Worshipping the Myths of World War II: Reflections on
America's Dedication to War*

by Edward W. Wood, Jr.

Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2006

EDWARD WOOD'S BEAUTIFULLY WRITTEN and articulately argued little book should be on the bedside reading table of presidential advisors, state department movers and shakers, military historians, and all concerned citizens who have given thought to the growing frequency and intensity of the world's armed hostilities. Despite its small dimensions and relatively brief length, *Worshipping the Myths of World War II* presents a cogent argument on a national need for the United States to rethink its past "history," its present, and most urgently, its future. It is a book that resides appropriately on a bedside table, for its content is the stuff of the bedtime mind, ready to muse more thoughtfully, more expansively, more soberly. It is a book to be read slowly, perhaps in small doses, so that its echoes stay with the reader during his waking day, nagging, pricking, at his consciousness.

A badly wounded combat soldier during World War II, Wood describes the circumstances of "his" war, how he volunteered while in college, only to be barely trained for line duty and combat in an intensified, condensed program that left him unprepared for the realities of war. His wounding, on his first day of combat, left him with physical destruction and psychological burdens that haunt him still. In this respect his story is not unlike that of thousands of World War II veterans who are forced to live simultaneously in two places—the day-to-day present, and the shattering moments of their combat experience and aftermath. Like so many others, Wood has made for himself a rewarding life, though not without years of struggle against his "double" existence.

Where Wood's book leaves the trail, however, is that he chose to think deeply about the forces that continue to propel the United States to violence as a tool of state. Why, in the years following Second World War, when so many had gone through the horror of war firsthand and been forever changed by it, did the country not take a long look at alternatives to war, ways of avoiding the call to arms as the nation confronts evil? One may argue that the nation did seek a path of world peace, in its support for the founding of the United Nations, but Wood points out that even then, in the 1945-47 period, both the United States and the Soviet Union were regrouping into the Cold War stance that both countries pursued for the ensuing forty years.

All this is merely a recapitulation of past history, the backdrop to Wood's real thesis, which is that the United States has based much, if not all, of its foreign relations and international politics on what Wood labels the "Four Myths of World War II." They are seemingly straightforward: the myth of the "Good War," the myth of the "Greatest Generation," the myth that we fought the war almost single-handedly, and finally, the myth that the only way to the confront "Evil" of the scale we saw then—Fascism, Nazism, Pearl Harbor, the Holocaust—is to confront it with armies and war.

The detailed discussions of each of these issues form divisions of the book. Wood argues each part with contemplative perspective. He considers the literature that has promoted those myths, along with the films, novels, and memoirs that portray a more complicated view of the war, where ambiguity lingers disturbingly. How can there be a "good" war; is the "greatest" generation the greatest because they fought in a "good" war, or was the war "good" because the "greatest" generation made it good? Did the United States really bear much of the burden of the war, "win" the war? Do we really have a right to our rose-colored memories, when in comparison with the other combatants, we suffered no invasions to speak of, no grinding exhaustion of almost six years of war, no decimation of the population like that which occurred in Europe and the Far East? Wood insists that we, as a nation, are held hostage by the preponderance of these myths, which continue to push us toward armed solutions to international problems.

In the last chapter Wood outlines steps that could arrest the tendency to "minuteman" responses—the quick grabbing of one's musket as one dashes to the fray. These ideas are for dreaming, for they insist that, as with our national attitude toward slavery for the first two hundred years of our history, ideas *can* be changed, culture *can* be redefined, and we *can* successfully develop another path toward the solutions of international hatreds. Wood's book will not be popular in some quarters, for it is challenging, confrontational, and committed in its vision. Our country, however, is indeed at a crossroads—do we continue down the road of the "big stick," having lost the friendship and respect of many other countries,

or do we work to change direction, to a more realistic understanding of what constitutes a “threat,” and then work for a non-violent solution? Wood is in the company of the truth-tellers—Wilfred Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves, Ernest Hemingway, James Jones, Norman Mailer, Joseph Heller, Paul Fussell, Samuel Hynes, Tim O’Brien, Tobias Wolff, Brian Turner, and host of others less well-known. We should listen.

REVIEW BY ELIZABETH A. MUENGER

A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier

by Ishmael Beah

New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007

TO SAY THAT THIS BOOK IS A PAINFUL READ is to ignore its wonder, for in Ishmael Beah's story lie not only the horrors of his experiences as a boy soldier in the Sierra Leone government's army in the mid-1990s, but also the sophistication of his thought and the honesty with which he confronts his own past. *A Long Way Gone* is a work that both appalls and inspires. It is a book that anyone concerned with military conflict and its sociology, childhood psychological trauma, or moral philosophy will read, and that all of us should read. Beah's story, often with tragic ending, has been experienced by children of both genders in Uganda, Democratic Republic of Congo, Algeria, Angola, Chad, Somalia, Sudan, Liberia, and Côte d'Ivoire in just Africa, not to mention other areas of the world. Over 30 countries have, over the past two decades, been using child soldiers; the numbers are currently estimated at over 250,000 young victims (UN).

Ishmael Beah was born in 1980. In 1993, when he was twelve years old, he was absorbed into the then government's army which was waging an ineffectual war against successive groups of anti-government rebels. Since gaining its independence from Britain in 1961, the pattern of corrupt and persecutory government, rebellion, government overturned by rebels, more abusive government had been almost constant, so an unstable environment was almost a way of life for Sierra Leoneans.

Beah, however, had his world pulled out from under him one day when he, his brother, and a friend were on their way from their village to a larger town in order to participate in a talent show. The boys had formed a rap and dance group four years before and were eager to show off their newest song and dance numbers. The

morning after they arrived in the town, news came that a rebel group had attacked their home village. Inhabitants had fled and all was chaos. No one knew how many had survived, and the town where the boys now were expected a similar attack that same day. The boys decided to try to return to their village to search for their families. The nightmare that they discovered was one that would be repeated almost endlessly for the next two years. The village had been destroyed, and was empty except for its corpses. Eventually, the boys themselves would become active participants in that continuing nightmare.

For the next several months, the boys, now a group of six, dodged their way through jungle and abandoned villages in search of their families, whom they assumed were on the move just as they were. Beah relates the heartbreaking discovery that he had missed his parents by only a few hours, as they stopped in a nearby village. By the time the boys arrived at the village, it had been sacked and burned by rebel troops, and there were only the ruins of a burned house where his parents had been staying. At one point Beah and his older brother were captured by the rebels, and Beah's brother was chosen to join the rebel troops while Beah was in the group that was going to be shot by the new recruits. Government troops on the heels of the rebels interrupted the plan, and the brothers and their friends escaped back to the uncertain haven of the jungle.

Eventually, Ishmael and his friends were convinced to join the government forces simply to protect themselves and to gain revenge against the killers of their families and friends. Ishmael became a favorite of the Shakespeare-reading lieutenant who was in charge of the battalion. It was this lieutenant who, three years later, chose Ishmael for inclusion in a group of young soldiers who were rescued by UNICEF officials for rehabilitation. His painful journey out of the three years of terror and slaughter is perhaps the most wrenching section of the book, for Beah struggled fiercely with his memories and the nightmares and migraines that plagued him. Eventually, in 1996, he so impressed the rehabilitation staff that he was chosen to speak before the first United Nations Children's Parliament, a week-long conference to discuss issues affecting young people all over the world. Friends he made during that brief time in New York would later sponsor and "adopt" him when he fled Sierra Leone in late 1997, after civil war again broke out. He finished high school in New York and went to graduate from college.

The most remarkable aspect of *A Long Way Gone* is the narrative voice of the now 28-year-old Beah, an articulate, reflective, and mature man, by all accounts and appearances a gentle man. His struggle to come to terms with his new life, his past experiences, and his writing, however, was complicated. His sensitivity to how his past might be received stopped him from sharing anything about himself for a good part of his college career—"I never spoke about my personal background in high school or . . . [college,]" he says.

A few people, a few friends over time found out—I guess because they stumbled upon certain things. . . . I didn't think that as a first introduction—"Hi, my name is Ishmael, I used to be a child soldier" would do any good. There's more to me than that. When people get to know me, they will learn about my past. I don't think I cared whether or not anyone judged me. I know what happened to me, and why. (Hagan, 18-19)

When he did begin to write, one of his professors asked him about his outlook—

I once asked Ishmael how he managed to stay so light and bright, given all that he had seen. It was an awkward moment, really, and I feared I had strayed too far. He replied that he had to focus on what was good in the world, that he didn't see the value of dwelling on the past. I was weeping then. . . but he continued, saying that writing had helped him understand his life, really helped him. (Hagen, 20)

Ishmael Beah's miracle is not that he survived (miracle enough,) but that his spirit and his humanity did. Read the book.



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REVIEW BY JAMES GLEASON BISHOP

Planning for Conflict in the Twenty-First Century

by Brian Hanley

Westport, CT, and London: Praeger Security International, 2008

CONVENTIONAL WISDOM HOLDS THAT MILITARY officers, while still employed in the profession of arms, don't publicly criticize their leaders. Economic wisdom holds that officers don't jeopardize their retirement or chance of promotion. During "The Revolt of the Generals," for example, safely-retired Maj. Gen. Paul Eaton called then-Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's handling of the Iraq war "incompetent strategically, operationally and tactically" during a Sept. 25, 2006, Senate forum. Brian Hanley is not a retired general with nothing to lose. He wrote *Planning for Conflict in the Twenty-First Century*, which is highly critical of military strategic and educational policy, while serving as a lieutenant colonel in the Air Force. "Highly critical" understates the unblinking analysis Hanley gives to current joint war doctrine. ("I chose joint doctrine," Hanley said in an interview, "because that's how we fight our wars.") He calls the writing in the *Capstone Concept for Joint Operations*, the nation's premiere strategic-planning document, "slipshod thinking buried beneath heaps of pseudoscientific baffle-gab—sludge bereft of even a trace of ore." President Bush's 54-page 2006 National Security Strategy, Hanley writes, "reads like a blend of investment firm prospectus and sectarian covenant, rather than a clearheaded statement of strategic objectives."

Concerning his criticism of the status-quo, Hanley writes, "It is far better for us as a profession to criticize ourselves in the national interest, rather than to be taught no end of a lesson by a latter-day Stalin or Hitler." This is the book of an officer who considers it his duty—in the highest sense of the word—to give a frank assessment, not shrink from conflict or nod in unison with the party line. During

our interview, Hanley said, “When I write, it never occurs to me to ask myself, *Will someone be offended by this?* I’m interested in the truth, and since when did I give up my Constitutional right to tell the truth?”

The brain of an army matters, he argues, and military education currently lets that brain atrophy. Worse. By educating technocrats and corporate managers instead of military leaders, Hanley claims, we spur the officer corps to a career of mediocrity in word and deed.

Planning for Conflict is an important book; it is also a fun one. Arguing that military planning and education needs to emphasize the humanities, he writes, “Lucid writing is the reflection of clear thinking. It is not an exotic pastime, such as keeping a reptile farm or painting figures on porcelain teapots.” Hanley has followed his own dictum. Here is a lucid critique of military planning and of the education that fosters planning. Noting that the Armed Forces have created an Office of Force Transformation (OFT), Hanley quotes three bloated sentences defining transformation strategy from a 40-page pamphlet, *Military Transformation: A Strategic Approach*, then notes dryly, “These passages bring to mind an elephant giving birth to a mouse. In *Military Transformation*, thousands of words are deployed to communicate a rather pedestrian thought: ‘we need to update our hardware and administration.’”

Hanley said he wrote the book in a six-month binge, but all six chapters display evidence of a lifelong love of good books and clear thought. The subtitle of his previous book is telling: *Samuel Johnson as Book Reviewer: A Duty to Examine the Labours of the Learned*. Hanley has made the examination of the learned his duty and his pleasure. After his critique of current military planning and education, Hanley envisions an ideal joint-war university steeped in the literature of war, with highly-qualified officers and civilians serving as professors. Course content moves beyond the current conventions of slogging through military doctrine and reading articles from business school celebrities.

The final three chapters in *Planning for Conflict* dissect three World War II case studies—1940 France, Stalingrad, and the early North African Desert War—to solidify his point that a commander’s intellect and morality matter. He tells of Field Marshall Irwin Rommel discovering in the summer of 1942 that the British had approved a tactic of depriving food and sleep to German prisoners in an effort to extract information. Rommel publicly protested and cautioned that the treatment would be reciprocated. Shortly thereafter, the British revoked the order, using unencrypted radio communications so Rommel would be sure to hear. After relating a similar incident preventing impending tit-for-tat executions of French and German prisoners, Hanley comments, “These incidents show that commanders can indeed mitigate the native brutality of war, and that war does not necessarily degenerate into savagery.”

Since a commander's intellect matters a great deal, Hanley argues, his or her education matters a great deal. Currently, we are training technicians and MBAs to go to war, with potentially disastrous consequences, including, he notes, the shabby planning surrounding the Iraqi invasion: we won an easy tactical victory, but failed to attach those tactics to sound strategy. He takes Gen. Tommy Franks to task for having the outlook of a "technician and manager" instead of a strategic military leader. In *American Soldier* "...very little is said about the governing purpose of the campaign, which was not combat operations—a straightforward matter of applying suitable force against a feeble and disorganized opponent—but the replacement of one regime with another."

Planning for Conflict contends that training in the humanities is also essential to the long-term success of the Armed Forces: "One primary reason that the United States has not in recent times produced a military theorist of the caliber of [strategist Carl von] Clausewitz or [Civil War-era naval officer Alfred Thayer] Mahan is because we continue to encourage, indeed demand, that officer candidates have a strong grounding in the engineering sciences." Of course the military needs engineers, but a humanities education "sharpens the mind in ways that engineering cannot." His points cut deep into established military training. Not only does our military technology need transformation; our military education does as well. Hanley's reminder reveals the heart of his argument: "War—as distinct from combat—remains an intellectual activity."

Hanley writes with a refreshing clarity of thought and precision of language, especially for anyone who has suffered through required Professional Military Education. In chapter 2, "Transformation Ballyhoo....," he argues that military planners have taken a dangerously wrong direction, opting for the homogeneity of an effects- or capabilities-based approach—in which we focus on what effects our weapons will cause or what weapons our enemies possess—abandoning the age-old wisdom of knowing one's enemy. Even at the level of definition, his clarity is evident. War is "a contest of wills settled by violence." The aim of military strategy is "a better peace." By comparison, he gives the Department of Defense's definition of strategy: a "prudent idea or set of ideas for employing the instruments of national power in a synchronized and integrated fashion to achieve theater, national, and /or multinational objectives." Hanley shines light on the backwardness of the definition. One doesn't start with objectives—physical targets—and build up to a strategy. His thinking is too good to miss: "You don't ... seize Normandy, Paris, Antwerp; cross the Rhine so that you can invest the Ruhr Valley before driving on Berlin—and then based on those objectives decide to expel Nazism from Western Europe. . . . Rather, you work from the strategic end—unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany—and then decide between alternative sets of objectives." After quoting the *Quadrennial Defense Review's* page 1 "fundamental imperatives"

(which Hanley says would be nearly indistinguishable from the fundamental imperatives of a cosmetics retailer by replacing the word “war” with “competition”), he offers a clearer aim of the Armed Forces: “The military exists to intimidate our nation’s enemies, and failing that, to liquidate them once ordered to do so by the President of the United States.”

Hanley has put to good use graduate degrees in English from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Oxford, as well as two years’ experience teaching at the Joint Forces Staff College and eight years at the US Air Force Academy. He serves as a member of the US Naval Institute Editorial Board and has published widely in both academic and military venues.

This was a difficult book to review, not because the book was difficult to read—quite the opposite—but because with few exceptions, each idea Hanley covered—the current state of military education and strategy, the ideal joint university, and historical examples of why intellect matters—was done so articulately, further summary would amount to what Robert Frost called an explanation of his poetry: saying it again in worse words. However, with all the wit and insight between the covers of this book, Hanley or his publisher should have been able to compose a better title. Several chapter titles would have served better, notably, “Lessons Not Learned: Strategy, War Plans, and the United States Armed Forces” or, even better, “The Brain of an Army.”

Planning for Conflict should be on the shelf of every military leader, and it should be required reading at the Joint Forces Staff College. However, as Hanley points out, during his tenure, the Joint College, whose courses merit graduate-level credit with numerous universities, didn’t require its students to read books.