

2005

Generation Kill: Devil Dogs, Iceman, Captain America, and the New Face of American War,

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Recommended Citation

Bonadonna, Reed (2005) "Generation Kill: Devil Dogs, Iceman, Captain America, and the New Face of American War," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 58 : No. 1 , Article 17.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol58/iss1/17>

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Moreover, the continuing differences within administrations over what Vietnam means has been actively harmful to American policy. The deeply hostile relationship between George Shultz and Caspar Weinberger, based on their differing views of the post-Vietnam use of force as a tool of American foreign policy, damaged the Reagan administration. Similar ongoing antagonism between Colin Powell and Donald Rumsfeld has done considerable harm to U.S. post-11 September strategy and policy execution.

Record briefly ponders whether the 1991 Iraq war constitutes a third seminal case that could serve as a historical marker, but then suggests not, because it did not entail “bloody and soul-searing foreign policy disasters.” Yet it suggests another key issue, namely the recurrent American failure to tie in a war’s military ending with political and strategic objectives. Examples include the abandonment of Europe in the aftermath of World War I; the failure to take Berlin in April 1945, when doing so might have forestalled some of what was to come in the Cold War; and the premature cease-fire ordered by George H. W. Bush, which is not unconnected with why we occupy Iraq today (which in itself may yet become another instance).

Reasoning by historical analogy has many pitfalls. While analogy may be helpful in making decision makers ask the “right questions” in a current crisis, “past employment and deployment of the Munich and Vietnam analogies suggest that they can teach effectively at the level of generality, but are insensitive to differences in detail.” Whatever the utility of reasoning by historical analogy as a tool of policy formation and

implementation, it is clear that policy makers will continue to be influenced by past events and what they believe those events teach. It is also clear that a presidents’ (and key advisers’) knowledge of history varies widely and that reasoning by historical analogy is but one of a host of factors at play in presidential decision making, that “every president’s knowledge of past events is different and is subject to political bias.” Perhaps the greatest actual effect of historical analogy is how it frames the worldviews of key protagonists, not how it may lead to “the right answer” in new situations.

The 2003 Iraq invasion and its aftermath make this book particularly interesting and topical. While the cases discussed end in the 1990s, surely the “lessons” of Munich and Vietnam (and likely the first Gulf War) influenced the post-9/11 views of President George W. Bush and other key actors about how to react to al-Qa’ida and what to do about Iraq and Saddam and other perceived threats. In fact, one of the reasons the Bush administration has come under such fierce criticism in the national security realm is that its decisions and actions are so counter to the general run of post-Vietnam American policy, as described in *Making War, Thinking History*. This book provides a good framework for thinking about the vital security issues the United States faces today.

JAN VAN TOL
Captain, U.S. Navy



Wright, Evan. *Generation Kill: Devil Dogs, Iceman, Captain America, and the New Face of American War*. New York: Putnam, 2004. 354pp. \$24.95

Generation Kill may be the best war book to have such an interesting title since *The Naked and the Dead*. The book's author, *Rolling Stone* contributing editor Evan Wright, was an embedded journalist with 1st Recon Battalion when it made its rush north into Iraq at the head of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF) during the 2003 invasion. The title might lead one to expect a sensational account of young people desensitized by video games and brutalized by rap music engaging in random acts of violence—a book perhaps combining titillation and moral censure in an uneasy mixture. It would be a mistake to pass up Wright's book because of its title. He has produced a thoughtful, well written story that people in the military should read. This book perhaps belongs to the genre of "hip" journalistic accounts of war like Michael Herr's *Dispatches* about Vietnam, or Bob Shachochis's *The Immaculate Invasion* about Haiti. Lacking any military background, Wright proves to be a quick study, as a good journalist must be. His fresh viewpoint provides valuable insights into the world of a Marine unit in combat.

The title does betray one of the book's few incorrect assumptions, which is that the generation of young men in their late teens and early twenties who fought in this war are different in some essential way from the Marines of the past. Wright says that the Marines of Iraq belong to "what is more or less America's first generation of disposable children," but his observations about the men of 2d Platoon, B Company, 1st Recon are similar to those made by Phillip Caputo and James Web about the Marines of Vietnam. Many were dispossessed, underprivileged,

"disposable," or abandoned. Wright also marvels at the disparity in social origin among the enlisted ranks. It was ever so. A writer in World War II observed that the Marine Corps seemed to be made up of a combination of dead-end kids and boys named Percival. The language, music, and mores have changed, but more continuities exist than Wright appears to realize.

Just as the people who fought and are fighting in Iraq now are both different from and similar to those who fought in previous wars, the conflict is both similar to and different from those of the past.

The invasion of Iraq was distinguished by a rapid advance into an enemy country, unexpected resistance by irregulars, and a great preponderance of accurate firepower on the part of U.S. forces.

None of this was exactly unique or unprecedented, but all these factors gave the war its tenure and feel for those involved. Wright experienced all this, and he lets us know again and again that the sum of these characteristics was to make problematic the notion and practice of rules of engagement (ROE). Marines found themselves moving quickly through unfamiliar and often hostile territory, opposed by an enemy who usually wore no uniform and who was often unscrupulous about using civilians for deception and concealment. These Marines had at their disposal enormous firepower, and in general they hit what they aimed at, but where to fire and how much?

No one encountered these questions more often than the men of 1st Recon. Based on his observations, Wright states that the ROE give the illusion of order amid chaos, when in fact it is left up to the individual or small unit leader to make a determination in a situation

that may be changing from minute to minute. The decision will be based on instinct born of training, individual disposition and character, and the perception of immediate danger. These perceptions were often as limited as those of soldiers in any war. For all our new technology, the fog of war descended as quickly and completely as a desert sandstorm, and even on sunny days and clear nights it could blank out an individual's surroundings beyond a narrow range.

These are points worth having driven home, and Wright's descriptions of the events he witnessed are vivid and often moving. Some of the best writing is in the quotations of the Marines of 2d Platoon. When the Marines accidentally shoot and kill an Iraqi child in her father's car at a roadblock, a corporal later states, "War is either glamorized—like we kick their ass—or the opposite—look how horrible, we kill all these civilians. None of these people know what it's like to be there holding that weapon."

Wright's book represents American war writing in its maturity. He avoids the pitfalls of glamorizing or moralizing. Many of the Marines he writes about are complex men. The staff sergeant nicknamed "Iceman" is an efficient and a somewhat emotionally remote professional fighting man who is also a sympathetic figure. It would be easy for Wright to dislike General James N. Mattis as a man of a different generation and completely different outlook, especially once Wright learns that he and the rest of Recon Battalion have been functioning as a diversion, a virtual decoy, during the attack north. The portrait of Mattis that emerges, however, is understanding and even admiring. Wright has the common sense to

realize that sometimes leaders must risk their own in war, and that he himself must have the courage to accept his role as a tactical pawn when his profession as journalist requires it.

Recon units are different. They probably contain a higher percentage of the "natural warrior" type than do other Marine Corps units. These fine-tuned combat thoroughbreds often come across as sensitive and complex. Despite the implications of the title, it is often these young men, rather than the elders, who display the greatest humanity and restraint. The Marines of 2d Platoon were sometimes surprised to find that they preferred saving or preserving life to taking it.

Make no mistake, these are the Marine breed—"Generation M." No apologies are needed for the wars they fought. We should be humbled and instructed by their example. After the rush of combat comes reflection, and after the battle is the effort to restore and rebuild. Courage will always be required of soldiers in war, but it is also required of us to be wise, if we can.

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Saccone, Richard. *Negotiating with North Korea*. Hollym International Corp., 2003. 215pp. \$22.95

Perhaps the potentially most volatile part of the world is North Korea. Talks between the United States and North Korea seem to be a series of impasses, confrontations, brinkmanship, threats, and blusters. The usual explanation for this state of perpetual frustration for U.S. negotiators is that they are dealing with an enigmatic regime that has no