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The Pepperdogs

William E. Turcotte

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been stationed in Castine, Maine, and is geographically aware of the area; I have walked the earthen ramparts of Fort George and the various other entrenchments around Castine. It would have been most helpful to the general reader had additional detailed military maps been included with each phase of the expedition. Well placed photographs of the area would have further added to the historical understanding of the events, as would photos of the various earthworks, trenches, the defensive canal, and Fort George, which all still exist as historical landmarks.

JAMES B. GOODMAN
Commander, U.S. Navy
Naval War College



West, Bing. *The Pepperdogs*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002. 365pp. \$25

The Pepperdogs ranks with *The Hunt for Red October*. It is a work of fiction constructed around reality, brimming with action and genuine insight into the emerging warfighting capabilities of the new ground soldier. West develops his story around a Marine reconnaissance team. That team, the “Pepperdogs,” is made up of six reservists of varying civilian backgrounds; all have extraordinary courage, physical and mental strength, expert tactical skills, and total team commitment.

The Pepperdogs set out on their own to rescue a team member captured by rogue Serbian guerrillas who specialize in casual atrocities. West’s story takes place in Kosovo, mostly in mountainous terrain and in the harshest of winter conditions. In pursuit of the kidnapers the team undergoes nearly constant

attack, endures brutal weather, and creates an increasingly difficult political situation for senior national security leaders who believe the Pepperdogs are risking diplomatic solutions. There is at one point the suggestion that even the murder of one Marine would not be worth upsetting diplomatic peace initiatives. The Pepperdogs make political matters worse by leaving a path of destruction while ignoring direct orders to end their chase.

Setbacks are many, but perseverance and tactical teamwork always (well, almost always) gets them out of tight spots. One remembers those great moments when the cavalry arrived and everyone cheered. But this team is different from the cavalry; the Pepperdogs take performance-enhancing drugs and rarely need to rest. One team member creates an Internet website that provides the public with real-time information on their progress and problems. The public cheers them on, reducing the policy-making flexibility of political leaders. West skillfully introduces the Internet as a source of potential direct information from individuals in the battle to the public. That information would have obvious constraining effects on future national security decision-making latitude and would yield different perspectives on progress and problems.

The suspense and many sudden turns of fortune keep the reader glued to the story. One cannot help but choose sides between the Marine team and political leaders who wish to halt the pursuit of the kidnapped Marine. Even if the team succeeds and its members become public heroes, they may be court-martialed for disobeying orders.

Bing West is well qualified to write an insider's story of modern small-unit tactics, having had experience of Oval Office-level decision making and the conflicts faced by senior military leaders between political direction and unnecessarily risky situations. West was a Marine reconnaissance leader in Vietnam and has studied small-unit action since the 1960s. He was a Naval War College professor and a former assistant

secretary of defense. West has maintained a close relationship with the Marine Corps through his design of combat decision-making simulations.

The Peppercorns is a great read—as was, by the way, West's earlier Vietnam-centered book *The Village* (Pocket Books, 2003, paperback).

WILLIAM E. TURCOTTE
Professor Emeritus
Naval War College