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Brave Decisions: Moral Courage from the Revolutionary War to Desert Storm

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150 Naval War College Review

Marine Corps the advanced-base mission—to defend and eventually seize advanced bases for the coal-driven, steel Navy.

Before that, certain junior naval officers, and some senior ones, wanted the Marines thrown off their new battleships. The officers regarded these “policemen” aboard their ship as an insult, a relic of the press gangs of the old sailing navy and an impediment to enlisting better sailors.

Shulimson writes, “While some naval progressives worked behind the scenes to remove Marine guard detachments from the new steel Navy, others in the Naval War College explored avenues of naval strategy that would obviously require landing forces, in all probability Marine landing forces.” Captain Alfred Thayer Mahan believed that the Marine Corps would be the “backbone of any force landing on the enemy’s coast.”

During the Spanish-American War, the Marines’ landings at Guantanamo and Cavite in 1898 heralded their new purpose, “to seize a base for the fleet.” However, the Navy could not take the cities of Santiago or Manila, because it had no force to hold them; the Army was not ready, it had its own agenda. The Navy suddenly realized it had to have men who could establish advanced bases and project its power ashore. Without them, it would be tied to the U.S. mainland; with them, it could leap across the oceans, and the United States could become a world power.

Nothing is ever neat and clean in history. In 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt continued to remove Marines from naval ships anyway. He too

wanted them to defend naval bases on foreign shores. However, the Marines were not ready for so swift a change-over. They struggled against and eventually defeated Roosevelt’s order.

But Roosevelt was right about the future. Six years later, the Corps had in place the 1st Advanced Base Brigade, and Colonel John Lejeune landed more Marines at Vera Cruz than had been in the entire Corps at the beginning of Shulimson’s story. And then on to Belleau Wood.

J. ROBERT MOSKIN
author of
The U.S. Marine Corps Story

Maihafer, Harry J. *Brave Decisions: Moral Courage from the Revolutionary War to Desert Storm*. New York: Brassey’s, 1995. 224pp. \$23.95

As promised by his provocative title, Harry Maihafer carries us through a series of fifteen vignettes in which an American leader faced a moral crossroads and chose the “harder right” rather than a safer path.

Most of the author’s selections of moral supermen are among our nation’s storied leaders—Ulysses S. Grant, Robert E. Lee, Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson, John “Black Jack” Pershing, Douglas MacArthur, and Norman Schwarzkopf—which, if anything, is one of the book’s flaws. Of course, it is easier to sell books expanding upon the great captains rather than such relatively unknown moral leaders of our country as George Thomas of the Civil War, Earnest Harmon of World War II, or

Julius Becton of the post-Vietnam War era.

Ultimately, uncovering these kinds of decisions (some far from the battlefield) is easier among better known leaders whose lives are well documented. Yet Maihafer does offer the reader a lesser-known subject, Daniel Morgan, who as much as anyone proved early the creed that U.S. Army Rangers "lead the way." It was Morgan who chose to keep his weary force formed-up at the critical battle of Cowpens, which some scholars argue turned the corner of the Revolutionary War.

Indeed this book is slanted toward the Army general on the battlefield. Maihafer is a 1949 West Point graduate and a retired colonel. So it is likely that his work will be read more frequently at Leavenworth than at Annapolis, although themes of moral fiber do transcend the color of one's uniform and focus rather on the strength of a leader's heart and spine. As Omar Bradley reminds us in the introduction, "morally difficult decisions are ten times harder and more important than those involving physical courage."

Not every page takes the reader into harm's way—unless one considers the arrows and barbs of Washington as particularly dangerous. For example, it is captivating to read about the courage of Maxwell Taylor, who turned down the chance to assume chairmanship of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on principle, and the somewhat maligned Alexander Haig, better known for declaring "I'm in charge here" while Secretary of State than for his moral courage as advisor to the National Security Council.

This book is an important effort, easy to read, and useful for the student of military ethics. Too little has been written about the impact upon one's moral character when an unpopular decision has been made. It is a welcome and comprehensive analysis of moral decisions made by moral leaders.

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McDougall, Walter A. *Let the Sea Make a Noise: A History of the North Pacific from Magellan to MacArthur*. New York: Basic Books, 1993. 793pp. \$30

One does not often have the occasion to review for a serious professional journal a work that is, in the author's words, "a long book . . . that tells many stories, and I composed it . . . from memory, on an airplane, sound asleep." It is a book that has the construct "not of a historical novel, but of a novelistic history written, though it be serious nonfiction, in a spirit of magic." *Let the Sea Make a Noise* is a delightful and unusual book about the history of the North Pacific from the time of Magellan to the near-present. But lest the sober-minded reader be prematurely put off, it is also a serious, perhaps profound, work.

Its underlying artifice is that the author falls asleep flying over the Pacific, while trying unsuccessfully to start writing this very book on his laptop. In a literary device borrowed from the *Aeneid*, he is "summoned" in his