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Lejeune: A Marine's Life, 1867-1942

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Merrill Bartlett

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Nimitz, and King, and their uneasy struggle to control the sweep of events in which they found themselves. Reynolds has thus offered us an account of the architecture of our naval air power, its battles for political survival, and the extraordinary complexity of its war effort.

Deliberately or not, Clark Reynolds, historian *par excellence*, has written what may well be the definitive history of naval aviation. This is an eminently superior book.

EDWARD L. BEACH
Captain, U.S. Navy, Ret.
Washington, D.C.

Bartlett, Merrill. *Lejeune: A Marine's Life, 1867-1942*. Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1991. 214pp. \$24.95

Bartlett's biography of John A. Lejeune may soon replace Lejeune's autobiography of 1930, *Reminiscences of a Marine* (reprinted by the Marine Corps Association in 1979), as the definitive source of information about the man who is regarded by most as America's premier "Soldier an' Sailor Too."

Bartlett thinks that Lejeune richly deserved the towering reputation he enjoyed even before he wrote his autobiography. Lejeune had served with unparalleled distinction in not one but two U.S. Marine Corps. The first was really a colonial constabulary composed of first cousins of Kipling's Royal Marine, who was always "doin' all kinds of things . . . like landin' himself with a Gatling gun, talkin' to

them 'eathen kings." In that Corps, the shy, brilliant bayou boy more than held his own with ferocious seniors like Littleton Waller, Tazewell Waller, and frenetic juniors like Smedley Butler.

But when that generation of "bush-whackers" became an embarrassing anachronism, Lejeune and his followers invented a second, vastly more complicated Marine Corps and lived just long enough to see it usher in the Golden Age of Amphibious Warfare by storming ashore to glory on Guadalcanal.

The most obvious superiority of the new publication is that Bartlett has given us, where Lejeune did not, illuminating notes at the end of each chapter. Another advantage is the mountain of material that has come to light since the death of Lejeune in 1942.

A random side-by-side, page-by-page comparison of the two books establishes Bartlett's as the more readable, perhaps because he does not handicap himself, as Lejeune did in his penultimate paragraph of his book, with the "earnest hope that no word I have written will cause any one pain." (The general obviously did not know that autobiographies are *supposed* to cause pain.) Bartlett often acknowledges his debt to *Reminiscences*. He displays his respect for the book, General Lejeune, and the reader by not nit-picking.

The author reveals much about Lejeune in the few sentences he devotes specifically to *Reminiscences*: "Lejeune was 67 and the Superintendent of Virginia Military Institute

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when a wartime comrade, publisher Gordon Dorrance, conspired with Lejeune's wife and three daughters to get him to "tell his story." Viewing the 750-page manuscript Lejeune produced in two years, Dorrance asked him to reduce it "by 200 to 250" pages. Perhaps what he removed or watered down was his side of the several controversies that swirled about him during his nine-year commandancy. We'll never know. The edited version was published to both critical and financial success—but there are no copies of the original 750-page manuscript extant.

Thus, with a sympathetic friend for a publisher, and no hard-nosed editor to scribble in the manuscript's margins, Lejeune had only his conscience to help him decide what could fulfill his hope to cause no one any pain.

But, although the book was a continuing success with its large audience of World War I veterans, some eyebrows were raised by another of Lejeune's closing sentences: "There is no rancor in my soul toward any man." Although most would concede that if Lejeune could forgive the hated Hun he could forgive anybody, still readers yearned to know his side of the many rumors about friction between him and, for example, high-ranking Army generals and Navy admirals and certain Marine generals. However, when it became clear that Lejeune did not want to make any more enemies than he already had, the questions faded.

It is to Bartlett's credit that he followed his hunch that Lejeune had not

been as forthcoming as he might have been. As he doggedly followed the old, cold paper trail, he came early on to Lejeune's Naval Academy classmate Eli K. Cole, with whom Lejeune had much in common. Both were brilliant visionaries and bold, resourceful leaders with impeccable records. But unlike Lejeune, Cole had a mean streak, and when he contended twice against Lejeune for the commandancy he lost out both times.

Cole deserved and got numerous mentions in *Reminiscences*, all of them highly laudatory; but another view of the relationship was revealed in two letters from Lejeune to his older sister. In 1904 Lejeune referred to Cole as "about the best friend I have in the service," but by 1910 he had become "the man I am most afraid of among my juniors." To a veteran researcher like Bartlett, the letters were not particularly surprising. Some men mellow with age, others grow prickly—and Lejeune's opinions of Cole, which had drastically changed in six years, might have changed yet again between 1910 and 1930, when *Reminiscences* was written.

The foregoing commands our attention not so much for what it says about Cole or Lejeune, but for what it tells us about his sister Augustine Lejeune, who, unbeknownst to him, kept every letter her brother ever wrote to her. Having read these letters, which had been donated to the Library of Congress, Bartlett will say only that the collection "bears evidence of tampering." So what? 2

Like most of his contemporaries, Lejeune chose to keep controversial and damaging correspondence out of his collection of personal papers. But the papers of Army Major General James G. Harbord, a long-time and close friend of both Lejeune and Marine Major General Logan Feland, includes two letters in which Feland, angry because Lejeune would not support his efforts to become Lejeune's successor as Commandant, characterized Lejeune as a double-crosser "who works in an under-handed way always. . . . I know him like a book and there is nothing too low for him to do."

Then is it fair to say that Bartlett's book about Lejeune is not a book about a man but a book about a book? Hardly. In his concluding "Notes on Sources," *Reminiscences of a Marine* is cited by Bartlett as "useful in identifying the key junctures in his career"; but perhaps it may have been more useful to Bartlett and the readers if certain questions had been raised that clearly Lejeune never had any intention of answering. For example, why is the autobiography some 250 pages shorter than the original manuscript? Why did Lejeune devote a large number of pages to the three wartime months he spent in Europe and only twenty-five pages to the nearly nine years of his commandancy? And why is there not one word about the most controversial moment of his career, the relief of General Barnett?

Who cares? Merrill Bartlett does, and if you don't watch him, he will have you caring too. In Bartlett's mind

the swarthy little man who came unbidden out of the Louisiana wetlands a century ago is a metaphor for the Marine Corps of both the past and present.

Bartlett views his Corps the same way Kipling viewed his: "We're most of us liars, we're 'arf of us thieves, and the rest are as rank as can be. But once in a while we can finish in style (which I 'ope it won't 'appen to me)."

Is that all that John Lejeune was ever really up to, living his life so that he could finish in style?

CLAY BARROW
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Cordesman, Anthony H. and Wagner, Abraham R. *The Lessons of Modern War*. Vol. I, *The Arab-Israeli Conflicts, 1973-1989*. 394pp. \$55. Vol. II, *The Iran-Iraq War*. 647pp. \$55. Vol. III, *The Afghan and Falklands Conflicts*. 471pp. \$55. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1990.

What military professional could resist the opportunity to learn the lessons of modern war? Not I. The title of this three-volume work proved irresistible. Unfortunately, my admiration for the authors' efforts to tackle such an ambitious undertaking has been tempered by an irritating weakness in their final product.

The introduction to the entire work can be found in the first volume, and the authors' conclusions are found in the third—which incidently, appears to be nothing more than a compilation