

1993

## Cradle of Valor: The Intimate Letters of a Plebe at West Point

Cole C. Kingseed

Dale O. Smith

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

---

### Recommended Citation

Kingseed, Cole C. and Smith, Dale O. (1993) "Cradle of Valor: The Intimate Letters of a Plebe at West Point," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 46 : No. 2 , Article 32.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol46/iss2/32>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

Exclusion Zones," is among the best chapters.

The book, which was in the printer's hands during the Gulf War, is a series of analyses of international law issues relevant to naval operations in peace and war, some points of which may elicit two or more views on the law, even as the conduct of naval operations in peace or war may be subject to debate before and after the event. For example, Professor Mark W. Janis criticizes NWP-9A's recitation of the traditional rules of neutrality. Professors A.V. Lowe and Thomas A. Clingan take sharp issue with the Janis view. This sort of divergence on the law can be disconcerting to a line officer used to the certainty of rules stated in official publications such as NWP-9A. There is a three-point response. First, NWP-9A itself often notes the uncertainty of the law on some situations. Second, these debates reinforce the recommendation above, that a line officer seek the advice of a judge advocate before acting; preparedness is an old principle of leadership. Third, the line community has had its own intellectual disputes, with respectable authority on either side; recall the large-deck vs. small-deck carrier debate.

*The Law of Naval Operations*, like NWP-9A, is an outstanding achievement despite the occasional opinions of authors that may vary from positions taken by others or are otherwise questionable. Therein, indeed, lies the book's usefulness and strength. Its publication demonstrates the commitment of the college that sponsored

it to promote reasoned discussion and possible amendments of the *Handbook* through constructive criticism in the context of academic freedom. *The Law of Naval Operations* thus fulfills its goals, as stated in Professor Robertson's Preface, of bringing "broader attention to the publication of the *Handbook* and [to stimulate] a renewed debate on naval operational law and the law of armed conflict at sea."

GEORGE K. WALKER  
Naval War College

---

Smith, Dale O. *Cradle of Valor: The Intimate Letters of a Plebe at West Point*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: Algonquin Books, 1988. 268pp. \$16.95

In recent years, there has been a veritable avalanche of monographs, manuscripts, and other literature commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of World War II. The names of Eisenhower, Marshall, MacArthur, Patton, Bradley, and a host of other army commanders have long been enshrined in the Valhalla of military heroes. Although their paths to greatness varied due to time and circumstances, a common thread binds this remarkable collection of military giants. With a few notable exceptions, the vast majority of America's premier battlefield commanders began their journey to greatness among the Hudson River highlands surrounding the U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

## 174 Naval War College Review

In *Cradle of Valor*, retired Major General Dale O. Smith, U.S. Air Force, presents an intimate look at the West Point of the interwar period. In his introduction, John Eisenhower describes the Military Academy as a time-honored institution that has provided leadership to the Army and Air Force through seven wars. Although West Point's role in defending the country is universally acknowledged, Eisenhower asserts that few institutions are less understood.

But this work is more than a chronicle of West Point cadet life between the world wars. It is also an intimate look into the life of the American family that sent the nineteen-year-old author to the Military Academy in the summer of 1930. Preserved in numerous letters to his family, Smith's account of his plebe year is as captivating as it is entertaining. What emerges from these pages is the tremendous pride and personal satisfaction associated with attendance at West Point. Graduates from any of the service academies will thoroughly enjoy this book.

As a member of the graduating class of 1934, Smith was too young to share the exalted rank of some of his predecessors in the war, but he was old enough to serve at mid-level command positions. His class provided numerous brigade commanders and a few brigadiers by the time the war ended. Although Smith achieved the rank of major general, he derived his greatest satisfaction on the sunny afternoon he received his commission

on Trophy Point. It was the culmination of an experience that taught him to behave with confidence, gave him training in manners and morals that never left him, and imbued him with a self-discipline that he could never have found elsewhere.

Smith realizes that change is inevitable, but cautions reformers to be wary of changing the system unless recommendations are tempered with the understanding of what it takes to create a successful and loyal officer corps. Like most "old grads," he regrets the passing of the West Point of his generation, but takes immense pride in the institution that has produced the military leaders who have won our nation's land wars and preserve the country's lofty principles. Whatever the future brings, quotes Smith, West Point will continue to develop leaders who extol the military virtues of Duty, Honor, and Country.

COLE C. KINGSEED  
Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army  
U.S. Military Academy  
West Point, New York

---

Gardiner, Robert, ed. *Warship 1990*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1990. 255pp. \$32

A book that is essentially a collection of articles of varying quality and subject matter—even within an area apparently so specialised as warship design and history—is not easy to review. *Warship 1990* is no exception. Its contributors are from six different countries, and the topics range over two centuries and several continents—