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## Offshore: A North Sea Journey

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tutional response which is the author's thesis.

The sections on Cuba, Nicaragua, and Panama are brilliant, deriving a subset of institutional variables for the Central American region. The sections on South America focus heavily on Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and Peru. Collectively, they portray the author's "corporatist" model for the South American military forces, in contrast with the "partisan ethic" which he considers determinative in Central America.

Mexico and Colombia are sadly absent. Few statistics are offered on such topics as Latin America's admirably minute history of border wars, protracted wars, and mass mobilizations in comparison with other world regions. The influence of the European military missions and the internal sharing of that influence among the South American countries receive treatment from Professor Philip, but the early Hispanic ethic of the military priesthood, a la Alcántara, Calatrava, and Santiago, is absent.

For American readers the book needs to be retitled *The Military in Latin American Politics*, since Central America and the Caribbean are excluded from the notion of "South America" as Europeans view it. For all students of the Western Hemisphere south of the Rio Grande, the book is required reading—historiography, institutional history, political science, and economics all require it.

Things may have changed in the United States since sociologist Edward B. Glick wrote, in 1971,

"Conventional [U.S.] campus wisdom to the contrary, studying the military . . . does not automatically make you a Dr. Strangelove." The anti-intellectual emotionalism evidenced among U.S. academics on current military events in Central America since 1977 suggests that analytical scholarship on the western shore of the Atlantic significantly trails its counterpart thrust on the east bank. So Professor George Philip's book is also required reading for all U.S. Government officials who deal with foreign policy, and for the general citizenry who care.

In my early days of doctoral study on Latin America, I remember Professor McAlister, that doughty self-proclaimed descendant of Scottish shepherders, saying, "Some of my colleagues forget that the Latin American countries are entitled to have armies if they want to." Now, from London, comes Professor George Philip, telling both how and why with meticulous facts and sound reasoning.

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Alvarez, A. *Offshore: A North Sea Journey*. Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1986. 190pp. \$15.95

Send a poet/*New Yorker* writer to the North Sea oil patch and you expect a diatribe about oil company rapine, oil spills, and the like. Instead, *Offshore: A North Sea Journey*, by A. Alvarez, is full of the fascination men have for large-scale technological marvels—the awe inspired in a five-

year-old's trip to the local fire station.

Alvarez made two trips in 1983 to Britain's Brent field. It is one of several oil development fields just west of the line separating the United Kingdom and Norwegian sectors of the North Sea, north of the Shetland Islands and the 61st parallel. *Offshore* is an impressionistic travelogue *cum* oral history of the development of the fields north of the 61st parallel; the movers and shakers who made and make it happen; and the burly alchemists who risk their lives, and sanity to draw the elixir of the 20th century from the earth's lower cretaceous crust. It is a mostly romantic look—by a romantic for romantics—at what Alvarez calls the North Sea mixture: Dazzling high tech plus a great deal of elbow grease.

Although the first offshore well was spudded 40 years ago off Louisiana, the 61st parallel fields presented unique challenges for the oil industry: deeper water (500 feet), Arctic conditions, and the distance from the fields to logistics bases and pipeline terminals. It was worth the incredible expense and, until recently (layoffs are rife), the North Sea has given the nation, on which the sun had almost set, a new challenge and economic boon.

Fortunately, Alvarez provides only the eyes. He allows the population of these 700,000-ton, 1,000-foot-tall, football field-square, steel island cities to speak for themselves—from the engineers, helicopter pilots, roughnecks, toolpushers, and saturation divers to the land developers and

politicians who provided and profited from the logistics base at Aberdeen, Scotland, and the Shetlands' Sullum Voe pipeline terminal.

They candidly explain why they leave home and family, fly for hours through fog to an artless steel platform battered by some of the worst weather on earth, to work 12 hours a day with loud, dirty, dangerous machinery; and why they return. Money is part of it. Part of it is the alien, even hostile places (Alvarez missed the 100-mph winds and 100-foot seas) that inspire in some men an ineluctable lust for deserts, jungles, anaerobic mountain peaks, and space—the final frontier to which the North Sea development has often been likened. In one memorable chapter on saturation divers, a 23-year-old describes the fears and epiphanies of his four-week stints 500 frigid, outer space-like feet below the earth's surface. Not surprisingly, many if not most of Alvarez's voices are ex-military.

Making one's living on oil rigs is like combat or walking on the moon: it is an ineffable experience and you have to be there. "It was like being let in on some marvelous secret of human ingenuity and audacity." The synthesized voices of Alvarez, the writer and poet, open a window on the Brent field that a Glaswegian roughneck or Dorset helo driver alone cannot. *Offshore* should silence all doubts about sending journalists up in the space shuttle. Make it a poet.

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