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Peacekeepers at War: A Marine's Account of the Beirut Catastrophe

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● “. . . how a commander recognizes and gives credit for work well done is like an x-ray into a corner of his heart that reveals a facet of what kind of leader he is.”

● “Next time around, I would not waste more than ten years’ service as ‘a good soldier and nothing more,’ but start in my first year broadening into a professional in attitude and endeavors.”

● “. . . when reaching up and touching my first stars I remember thinking: ‘These are just little pieces of metal cold and hard to the touch. Not at all the kinds of things worth the heartbreak and needless bitterness that failure to wear them so often brings.’ ”

JOHN VAN ALSTYNE
Colonel, U.S. Army

Petit, Michael. *Peacekeepers at War: A Marine's Account of the Beirut Catastrophe*. Winchester, Mass.: Faber and Faber, 1986. 229pp. \$17.95

Petit begins his book with the explosion that killed 241 Americans billeted in the four-story Battalion Landing Team headquarters building at Beirut International Airport in October 1983. Although he was not in the building at that time, he arrived on the scene very quickly. The narrative then “flashes back” to thoughts Petit once had of enlisting in the Foreign Legion and his choice of the Marine Corps instead. We go through boot camp with him, to his first assignment as a clerk at Parris

Island, his subsequent transfers to Camp LeJeune and finally the 24th Marine Amphibious Unit (MAU) headquarters in Beirut, where he served as an operations clerk.

A good deal of this book is not very different from the many war novels that have been written since World War II: an author's view of recruit training, competent and incompetent NCOs, too many regulations, the food, the spit and polish, good friends, other acquaintances. But this book is different; not because it is fact rather than fiction, but because it vividly and emotionally portrays the day-to-day existence of a young American in a very hostile environment. Granted, the author makes too many observations about daily Marine life. Nevertheless, his observations, from a corporal's level, of national policy, employment of military forces, and the ambiguities of “peacekeeping,” are forcefully presented. I do not know whether or not these observations are accurate, but the point is, he tells us how a “grunt” views these things when grunt logic is the sole source of information. All the arguments about “sending signals,” “political response,” and rules of engagement make little sense when the response to a rocket attack (on you) is to return fire with illumination rounds.

Interspersed with the discussion of the political realities in Beirut are many vignettes about Marine Corps life in the field. They awaken fond and not so fond memories: problems with rules of engagement in Vietnam, the quality of the local military

forces, good times at the slopchute, hours of boredom, and moments of terror.

I am not sure that I would recommend this book to the kinsmen of the 241 men who died. I am certain, though, that all levels of military leadership would benefit if they would study lessons learned. There are no new ones in this book, but many old ones are reconfirmed.

WENDELL P.C. MORGENTHAUER, JR.
Naval War College

Van der Vat, Dan. *The Ship that Changed the World: The Escape of the Goeben to the Dardanelles in 1914*. Bethesda, Md.: Adler & Adler, 1986. 252pp. \$17.95

Van der Vat tells the story of how a small German Mediterranean division evaded detection by the British and French Mediterranean fleets in August 1914, and how it was then used to draw Turkey into the war on the side of the Central powers. In consequence, Russia's main trade route (90 percent of her foreign trade) was severed, her war effort crippled, and the tsarist regime fatally weakened. The ultimate legacy, Soviet Russia, has shaped much of world history since.

The book is divided into four parts and, unfortunately, the weakest—Prelude—is the first. The maze of interests in the eastern Mediterranean before 1914 is enough to break the will of even the most intrepid reader, and van der Vat has little luck making sense of it. Once through the tangle of

intrigue and out to sea, the going is easier. The evasion story is dealt with in the French, British and German versions, thus it is a thrice-told tale. It would have been better to integrate the three into a single account, but the organization works well enough. The inquests also come in three parts—the French, the British board of inquiry, and the court-martial of Vice Admiral Troubridge. The book finishes with a recounting of German-Turkish naval actions, including the German-led bombardment of Russian ports in October 1914 that thrust Turkey into war.

Although the book is a popular account, without the encumbrances of full documentation and notes, the author has drawn on a wide range of material. It offers the first serious observation of the French role, an important feature since they had the best chance to catch the *Goeben* in the early going and were responsible for Allied Mediterranean naval operations. German sources, as well, add to the overall comprehension.

There is much in this story for both the professional and the casual reader. Both the French and the British Commander in Chief, Admiral Milne, had opportunities to engage the *Goeben* with superior forces, but the focus of attention came to rest on Vice Admiral Troubridge. Troubridge, with four old armoured cruisers, lay to the east of the *Goeben* on 6 August 1914. He planned to engage her in poor visibility to offset both her 6-knot margin of speed and her much heavier and longer ranged main armament. When the hour for interception came, it was