

1984

## The Pentagon Reporters

James Wentz

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then either accept, reject, or modify some of the ideas derived from those disciplines as they apply to military leadership.

I disagree that uncovering basic laws of characteristics of good military leadership is too hard. If the subject is worth writing about, it is worth rigorous and scientific inquiry that attempts to objectively identify these characteristics. Nowhere in the book is a discussion of what such a research design might look like, except that Dr. Korb poses some important questions that might be the frontispiece of such an inquiry. These are:

- How can the system provide for the effective assignment and promotion of military professionals?

- Is it possible to determine what abilities a potential leader should possess?

- Is leadership a subject that can be taught? If so, how?

- How can unit leaders be perceived as such when military command is centralized to such a high degree?

- Can the military maintain its community basis; units their social cohesion?

Perhaps a research design that starts with those military persons who, by the standards of the services, are good leaders might lead to the discovery of important characteristics of military leadership. Once identified, these "leaders" could be further investigated by asking those who were their followers if and why these individuals were perceived to be good leaders. Response bias aside,

I believe that followers know who they would like to go to war with and who they wouldn't, and they probably can identify why they feel that way.

FRANCIS G. SATTERTHWAITE  
Naval War College

Sims, Robert B. *The Pentagon Reporters*. Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1983. 177pp. \$5.50

At last! A scholarly work about the Pentagon press corps, and its ways of doing business, that is entertaining, informative and does not read like a textbook.

Bob Sims is a descriptive writer of quality. His considerable E-Ring experience, as the public affairs assistant to secretaries of the Navy from both political persuasions, gives him a valuable insight into both the workings of the Pentagon bureaucracy and the men and *woman* (yes, just one) who constituted the Pentagon press corps in 1982. Captain Sims wrote his book while serving as a senior research fellow at the National Defense University. He was able to weave his historical research, interviews and insights into a highly readable manuscript that brings to life the people, and their motivations, who report defense news.

The Pentagon press corps is more mature, and more geographically stable, than their news media colleagues at other Washington institutions. For instance, the Associated Press' Fred Hoffman has toiled at the Pentagon for 22 years, and is not loath to sharply correct transient newsmakers and spokespersons who are

less than precise in their statements about past defense policies and programs. Ike Pappas of CBS News, until he was reassigned to other duties recently, had been a regular in the Pentagon newsroom for seven years. However, Sims has detected a trend by senior news editors to rotate their reporters more frequently than before, to keep them being watchdogs, rather than lapdogs, of the "beats" to which they are assigned.

Sims traces the relationship between the military and the news media, which has always been adversarial, but only rarely hostile. He explores the motivations, thought processes, attitudes, deadline pressures ("Speed. Accuracy. Speed.") and professional competitiveness of the reporters who collect, interpret, and disseminate military news. That news contributes to the public's opinion and understanding of DoD policies, programs, and personnel. Some of these correspondents also exert significant influence over Congress' understanding of military matters. For instance, George Wilson of the *Washington Post* only slightly overstated what Capitol Hill insiders have known for at least 25 years. "The only thing politicians read are the newspapers. They don't have time to read briefings. They don't have time to read reports that the Pentagon sends them. So when you go to a Congressional hearing, you'll see that about half the questions are provoked by what the guy reads over his coffee in the newspaper—which is usually the *Washington Post*."

*The Pentagon Reporters* covers all

elements of the Pentagon press corps; the wire services, daily newspapers, news services (Scripps-Howard, etc.), news magazines, technical and policy publications, broadcasting, foreign news agencies (Reuters), and US government outlets such as the US Information Agency and the Voice of America. Sims interviewed the newsperson representing each medium to ascertain his personal background and the inspiration that brought him into journalism, and the twists and turns of fate that placed them in the newsroom of the Pentagon. In this book the people he interviewed discuss journalism ethics, attitudes, leakers, show-offs, and whistle-blowers. They explain why they are uncomfortable when their patriotism or loyalty or honesty is questioned. In general, according to Sims, the reporters' ultimate national defense goal is the same as the goal of those in the defense establishment they report about—they want a strong and safe America. Sometimes, Sims continues, their profession calls on them to pursue that goal in ways that seem inconsistent, often wrong, to those who are not journalists. They report defense news, not manufacture it. But they are not infallible. And they, correctly, have their pointed critics. Caspar Weinberger was quoted as saying, "I have . . . the greatest respect for the profession, and it is only that respect that leads me occasionally to point out things that are in error."

What is most notably missing in Sims' book is a skeptical appraisal, or ranking, of the best and worst of the

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news media representatives who cover the Pentagon, and why. But perhaps that omission is an inevitable consequence of an active-duty officer writing about influential persons with whom he continues to have frequent contact. Nevertheless, this is a first-class piece of research and writing and should be read by every military officer who wants to better understand and appreciate the influence of military reporting, and military reporters, on their professions.

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Hosmer, Tephem T. and Wolfe, Thomas W. *Soviet Policy and Practice toward Third World Conflicts*. Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1983. 318pp. \$23.95

In assessing the behavior of the Soviet Union in the developing world, several generally discernible patterns can be analyzed. In *Soviet Policy and Practice toward Third World Conflicts*, Hosmer and Wolfe have outlined some of the overall strategy that seems to be at the heart of Soviet expansionism since the Second World War. Given the current Soviet/Cuban involvement in the Caribbean and Central American regions, the book is a particularly timely study of the USSR's policy and attitude toward the Third World.

The work is very tersely and concisely written, and probably originated as a Rand Corporation study, as both the authors have worked in that organization. It

contains a number of simple maps, an excellent bibliography, and extensive notation. As such, it functions well as a basic outline of Soviet adventurism since WWII, and could be quite useful as a guide to more in-depth research. It was obviously written to provide the reader with an overview of major trends, and it succeeds admirably in that capacity. In the first part of the text, the overall Soviet involvement in the developing world is traced from an economic, political, and military standpoint. The second section is concerned with more specific analysis of military action in the Third World, including particular emphasis on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as a possible paradigm-shift to an even more adventurous policy. The book concludes by offering some thoughts on future trends in Soviet involvement as well as possible US responses to such maneuvers. It is well-organized and cleanly written throughout, setting out factually and impartially the Soviet record in the developing countries. The authors refrain from discussing US response along the complicated road from 1945 to the present, as that would have been beyond the scope of their work.

The most convincing section of the book is contained in the final two chapters, where Hosmer and Wolfe discuss possible future trends in the Third World and propose several US responses. The authors convincingly point out factors that suggest increased Soviet adventurism (improvements in Soviet power projec-