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Delta Force

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Europe further, bury *détente* and lead to a new round of peace movements.

Whither The Alliance? Barnet does not guess at this. He has merely told the tale as *he sees* it. At the very least, his account should help to educate American leaders to past US folly and make them more sensitive to global realities. As a historian, Barnet is neither a traditionalist (the United States is never wrong) nor a revisionist (the United States is never right). What he really seems to be saying is that in fact the postwar era has come to an end and, thus, also should any policy assumptions based on the initial postwar political arrangements. A new American world view is badly needed, perhaps to restore the Alliance with a fresh set of assumptions. First, however, we must brush away the cobwebs of rhetoric and bad history. Mr. Barnet has contributed materially to this end in his meaty book.

CLARK G. REYNOLDS
Charleston, S.C.

Beckwith, Charlie A., and Knox, Donald. *Delta Force*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983. 300pp. \$14.95

Big dumb grunt.

Open-faced honesty, simplicity. What you see is what you get. One of the modern day adventurers who show up in long-range reconnaissance units or special forces outfits—long on guts and bravado. A man with the single-mindedness of St. Bernard, the rescuing cleric.

Only Beckwith's cloth is camouflage, his missionary endeavor: to design, build and train a unique Army

unit for saving hostage souls. A chivalrous knight of nobility, sophistication and Machiavellian plots he is not. More like an NFL fullback of the fifties with a pair of brass knucks and alum on his jersey sleeves, alternatively cussing and spitting at the opposing line, the officials, the coaches, his own teammates as he plows his body into the stack on the next play. No O.J. Simpson here, no gliding to the outside or cutting back across the grain when the hole crashes shut or never appears.

Beckwith's *forté* is blood, sweat, tears, cheers, and a lot of wishful thinking. He exhibits a child-like fascination for the British SAS, a special operations unit he served with early in his Army career. Beckwith then spends more than the next decade of straight-ahead hammering on the Army for the need of a unique Army unit, fashioned in the British mold—at times he sounds like a teenager in his emulation—to be used in terrorist hostage situations.

There is good news: Beckwith succeeds, Delta Force will be formed. Immediately, however, there are internal Army squabbles, jealousies, plots and counter-plots to thwart Delta Force, or to have other Army units take on the new mission assigned to Delta Force. There is yet more good news: Beckwith succeeds again, Delta Force is intact, potent, and has access to the requisite-caliber soldiers to man and train the elite hostage rescue unit.

The timing is well-nigh providential as Beckwith is finishing almost 2 years of training Delta Force, when

Khomeini seizes 53 hostages in the American Embassy in Tehran in November 1979. After weeks of study, confusion, and indecision in Washington, Beckwith sees the fulfillment of nearly 20 years of effort—Delta Force is given the Tehran hostage rescue mission.

Now comes the bad news, the salami sandwich part. The array of forces includes the Navy aircraft carrier *Kitty Hawk*; a squadron of 8 Navy RH-53D helicopters; a Marine squadron of pilots and crewmen to man and fly the Navy helicopters; a flight of USAF MC-130s to carry Delta Force to Desert One; Delta Force (93 men) to rescue 50 hostages held in the chancellery; a separate force of 13 men put together and trained in Germany to rescue 3 hostages held in the Foreign Ministry Building near the chancellery; a USAF flight of EC-130s to refuel the RH-53Ds at Desert One; a 12-man Army roadwatch team to secure Desert One for the 130s and the choppers; a 12-man Army team of drivers to drive the trucks transporting Delta Force from their final hide site into Tehran and the American Embassy compound; and the overall commander of the rescue mission positioned at Masirah Island off Oman. Strike One.

The above *mélange* is to arrive at Desert One, the choppers arriving last after a 700-mile night low-level leg over hazardous terrain; refuel the choppers; transfer Delta Force to the choppers for a 200-mile pre-dawn leg to a hide site. There is a 30-minute timing window. Strike Two.

At Desert One an Air Force colonel is designated Desert One Commander (whatever that means); Beckwith has command of Delta Force and all other Army personnel proceeding on to Tehran; and a Marine colonel has command of the 8 RH-53Ds flying in from the *Kitty Hawk*, which command is passed to the Marine lieutenant colonel when the colonel's RH-53D develops instrument problems and returns to *Kitty Hawk*. Strike Three.

Desert One, knowingly, has been sited astraddle a highway. The 130s land, and immediately a Mercedes bus appears, followed by a gasoline truck which is promptly dispatched by an antitank weapon, a third Iranian vehicle appears and escapes. Beckwith is cussing and spitting. And anxious. The sandstorm delays the 6 choppers that finally make it an hour and a half late, and then there are 5 as the crew of one RH-53D say they have a hydraulic problem. The ball game is over. Beckwith packs it in. The subsequent crash and tragic loss are anticlimatic.

And now comes confession time—the book. It is impossible not to love Beckwith, to ache with him, to empathize. His reach exceeded his grasp, and that is to be admired and cheered. The tragedy—and very deeply disturbing factor—is that not one leader up the chain of command knew it. Where are the combat veterans who understand how to plan and execute a combat raid over 900 miles into hostile territory? Where are the tough, military minds who understand men and machines, how

many are required, and how to drive them to mission accomplishment?

The lessons learned from Desert One are legion. Not one is new:

- Perhaps most importantly of all, the mission statement must be clear. Was the mission to rescue 53 hostages, 50? Or to rescue as many as possible? Beckwith aborts when he learns one RH-53D has hydraulic problems, leaving 5, and “the mission” requires 6. Five RH-53Ds could have carried the full complement required to rescue the 50 hostages in the chancellery. Or one RH-53D could have been recycled to pick up the remaining 13 man team trained to rescue the remaining 3 hostages in the Foreign Ministry Building. Or 13 men could have been distributed over 5 choppers (the things that were done by choppers in Vietnam that were “impossible”!). Or . . . Or . . . Or . . .

- A raid, which is a combat operation, must have a single commander, on scene, to influence the action.

- A combat operation involving all 4 Services operating aircraft and helicopters at night over 700 miles of unfamiliar and hazardous terrain cannot be held to a precision time schedule. There must be backup helicopters and alternate plans for most reasonable eventualities.

Long on guts. Short on smarts. Read Delta Force for how *not* to do it if—God forbid—the need arises again.

MYRL ALLINDER
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Knox, MacGregor. *Mussolini Unleashed, 1939-1941; Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy's Last War*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982. 385pp. \$29.50

Over the years, Mussolini has acquired a reputation as a swaggering, almost well-intentioned buffoon, a comic-opera dictator quite incapable of the thoughts and deeds of a Hitler, the personification of 20th-century evil.

A reputation thoroughly undeserved, says MacGregor Knox in his important reassessment of the apogee of *Il Duce's* career. Mussolini lacked the means that the German state and economy put at Hitler's disposal; he may not have shared Hitler's racialist obsessions. Nevertheless, previous interpretations of Mussolini's regime “have tended to underestimate its brutality, the vigor and extent of its expansionist ambition, and the degree of domestic support its aims enjoyed until their price became fully apparent.”

In building his own case, Knox takes issue: with the academic historians, whose propensity for underestimating the force of irrational motives and actions, he thinks, has led them to underestimate Mussolini's drive to achieve his grandiose ambitions; with such Italian liberals as the philosopher Benedetto Croce, who saw *Il Duce's* regime as a historical aberration, odious but ephemeral; with Mussolini's leading biographer, Renzo de Felice, who for all his penetrating insights into his subject, is inclined to see what is most unadmirable about the dictator