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## The 'Stan

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*The 'Stan*, by Kevin Knodell, David Axe, and Blue Delliquanti. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2018. 128 pages. \$16.95.

*The 'Stan* is among the initial offerings of Dead Reckoning, the new graphic-books imprint of the Naval Institute Press. This is a bold and welcome step, comparable to the institute's decision to offer works of fiction, beginning with Tom Clancy's *Hunt for Red October* (1984). Graphic books always will be associated with the comics industry; however, since the groundbreaking publication of Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1980), followed by such works as Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2000) and John Lewis's trilogy *March* (2013–16), the genre increasingly has been seen as serious literature. Although *graphic novel* still describes the genre, it long ago ceased to encompass works of fiction alone.

*The 'Stan* is a glossy, full-color collection of seventeen separate personal vignettes, gathered primarily during the first ten years of the war in Afghanistan. These are soldiers' stories told in soldiers' language. They mainly reflect the experiences of junior, enlisted, U.S. ground-force personnel, although at least one story belongs to a Special Forces master sergeant, and two are from junior officers. A Marine and a former Afghan interpreter are given shared credit for one vignette and one story comes from a former Taliban ambassador and Guantánamo detainee.

The stories are snapshots in time, most taken through a very narrow lens. Although they are true to an individual's recollection of experience, there is usually minimal or no context

into which to place these accounts. A soldier's observation that the members of her unit taped individual knives to their weapons does not mean the Army has stopped manufacturing weapons with bayonet lugs or that there were no U.S. bayonets in Afghanistan. A single recollection of a weapon malfunction cannot be a legitimate indictment of the quality of all U.S. equipment. However, many of the stories are thought provoking, and all have the potential to raise larger questions pertaining to the war.

Readers will process the stories through the lens of their own perceptions, and each story will be some reader's "favorite." In this reviewer's opinion, among the most notable of the minimemoirs are "Commando Shopping Spree" by Master Sergeant Scott Satterlee, USA; former U.S. Army specialist Alison Parton's "From Hooters Waitress to Soldier"; and coauthor Kevin Knodell's "War and Fireworks." The most enigmatic offering is "Operation Donkey Haul," an anonymous contribution featuring a handful of soldiers belonging to the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division.

In this genre, no one carries more responsibility than the illustrator. Blue Delliquanti is an established author and artist. She delivers an acceptable, if not breathtaking, product. Her style in *The 'Stan* is identical to that in her comic *O Human Star* and her coauthored graphic novel *The Accidental Candidate*. In *The 'Stan*, human figures, especially U.S. military personnel, are blocky and somewhat identical. Delliquanti uses a muted color palette that makes vibrant primary colors all the more striking when they do appear. Her depiction of violence falls somewhere between the abstract and the exceptionally realistic.

Given that Delliquanti has collaborated with coauthor David Axe before, it would be interesting to learn why the authors picked her for this task.

Coauthors Kevin Knodell and David Axe are both freelance journalists / war correspondents. Axe has produced graphic novels before, most notably his extremely self-focused, slightly fictionalized *War Is Boring* (2010). Knodell currently produces the *Acts of Valor* comic series for *Naval History* magazine. Axe provides the preface to *The 'Stan*. To his credit, he is quite candid about his feelings about the war and his condemnation of the actions of the United States. His position is strong enough to raise legitimate questions regarding *The 'Stan's* potential political agenda, the possibility of cherry-picked memoirs, pointed sequencing of stories, and so on. Neither Knodell nor Delliquanti gets a similar opportunity to address the reader. This is a missed opportunity both for *The 'Stan* and for *Dead Reckoning*. Without a preface, the memoirs would have at least appeared to stand or fall on their own merit. Had Knodell and Delliquanti provided their points of view, either separately or in conjunction with Axe, questions regarding agendas and biases might be fewer. It is also understandable that many readers would want to know more about how the authors selected the stories and collaborated on the book. Why were other stories discarded, if they were? Delliquanti's voice potentially would be more welcome than Axe's, as she, more than anyone, brings the memoirs to life.

*The 'Stan* represents a notable effort. Although readers' opinions about its overall quality will vary, it deserves an audience. More importantly,

*Dead Reckoning* and the U.S. Naval Institute deserve applause for taking this first step. It will be very interesting to see what comes next.

RICHARD J. NORTON



*Bombs without Boots: The Limits of Airpower*, by Anthony M. Schinella. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2019. 300 pages. \$44.99.

In our war colleges, professional journals, the halls of Congress, and countless bars and ready rooms, the argument has been running since the early twentieth century with Italian general Giulio Douhet and General William "Billy" Mitchell, USA. On one side, advocates of airpower offer a vision of rapid and potentially low-cost warfare; on the other, critics assert that boots on the ground remain the essential standard of military control.

Anthony Schinella has waded into this fray and, while unlikely to end the debate, his book *Bombs without Boots* offers a new and thoughtful discussion of the limitations and utility of airpower when used without commitment of ground forces. Carefully constructed and exquisitely sourced, *Bombs without Boots* is an exemplar of what analysis of a thorny and fundamental military issue should look like.

Schinella frames his arguments around five case studies spanning almost twenty years: Bosnia (1995), Kosovo (1999), Afghanistan (2001), Israel in Lebanon (2006), and Libya (2011). Schinella describes, with extraordinary thoroughness, the strategic, geographic, and political situation that confronted airpower planners in each case. He then explains