

BOOK REVIEWS



***Boyd: The Fighter Pilot Who Changed the Art of War.* By Robert Coram. Little, Brown and Company, New York, 2002. 485 pages. \$27.95.** Reviewed by Major Dennis P. Chapman.

Robert Coram has brought us a vivid description of a remarkable man who, though operating largely unknown to the public, made a tremendous contribution to the national security of the United States during a period of service spanning most of the Cold War. That man was U.S. Air Force Colonel John Boyd, and an extraordinary man he was. Possessed of astonishing imagination and creative power, Boyd was the driving force behind at least four different far-ranging intellectual efforts, each of which had a direct and profound impact on the way America fights. He developed the first comprehensive doctrinal manual for air-to-air combat in U.S. Air Force history; he developed a revolutionary concept – the Energy-Maneuverability (E-M) Theory. This theory, which was for designing and evaluating combat aircraft, was based upon how fast an aircraft can *gain* or *lose* energy in order to achieve a position of advantage against another pilot. He was also the driving force behind development of the F16 fighter, working relentlessly to ensure that the aircraft would enter production as the trim, agile killing machine he envisioned and not as a ponderous flying brick encumbered by excessive, ineffective technological gadgetry. Boyd's greatest achievement and his most far-reaching contribution, however, wasn't in the air; it was in his development of a time-based theory of war focused on ground combat. The heart of this effort was his four-step "Observe-Orient-Decide-Act" decision-making model – the now-famous "OODA Loop." In essence, Boyd argued that to be successful in combat, a commander must "get inside" his adversary's decision loop. This involves not only making decisions faster than the enemy, but also disrupting

the enemy's decision loop, forcing him to make decisions based upon outdated, inaccurate, or irrelevant information so that he becomes disoriented, demoralized, and ultimately unable to act.

The chief weakness of the book is Coram's lack of objectivity about Boyd's significant personal flaws and about his relationship with the Air Force. Boyd was a volatile and mercurial man who could be petulant, self-absorbed, and arrogant. He could be abrasive – even abusive – and had a flair for humiliating those he deemed his enemies. Coram trots out examples of the foibles of the general officers Boyd so disdained as evidence of their venality and incompetence, but he easily forgives equally egregious behavior by Boyd himself, as if to imply that in Boyd's case such faults were indicative of his passion, integrity, and depth of commitment and therefore acceptable. Finally, Coram depicts the Air Force as hell-bent on stifling Boyd and suppressing his ideas. The reality, however, seems more ambiguous. Only a small percentage of officers ever reach the rank of full colonel, and only a few of those receive commands. Yet Boyd achieved both, possibly due to the quiet support and glowing endorsements on his officer evaluation reports (OERs) by several general officers during his career. Furthermore, as controversial as he was, Boyd was able to bring much of his work to fruition while still on active duty, often using Air Force resources. So, while the Air Force bitterly opposed Boyd at many junctures on the one hand, it also advanced, nurtured, and protected him on the other, facilitating his work and enabling him to realize his great potential.

All in all, I highly recommend this book. A lively and pleasant read, it is also quite informative and presents the essence of Boyd's ideas in a straightforward, easily understood manner, making the book a rewarding effort well worth the modest investment of time and money that it requires.

***All the Way to Berlin. A Paratrooper at War in Europe.* By James Magellas. Ballentine Books, New York, 2003. 309 pages. \$24.95.** Reviewed by Christopher Timmers.

When offered the opportunity to review this book, I simply could not refuse. As a former rifle platoon leader in B Company, 1st Battalion, 325th Infantry, I knew I would have a certain bond with James Magellas that would be difficult to explain to those who had never served in an airborne unit or commanded young Soldiers. Historically, the 325th Infantry was a glider regiment in the 82nd Airborne Division and made many of the same assaults that a young First Lieutenant Magellas did as a member of H Company, 504th Parachute Infantry. My "battles" were in the early '70s, a good 30 years after Magellas had earned a number of valor awards, including the Distinguished Service Cross, Silver Star, Bronze Star, and Purple Heart. By the time I had joined the 325th, the regiment had been transformed from a glider unit to a parachute one. Both First Lieutenant Magellas and First Lieutenant Timmers had one thing in common: 48 jumps. None of mine had been in combat, but I think I was close enough to my men to feel an immediate empathy to a former platoon leader who had made such jumps.

Magellas's prose is smooth and moves quickly. It is the best in historical writing in that it makes actual events more interesting than fiction could ever be. Magellas fought in virtually every type of infantry unit action imaginable: from amphibious landings (Anzio) to parachute assaults (Market Garden), to sustained ground combat action (Italy, Belgium, Holland, Germany). The scope of his narrative takes the reader from North Africa to Italy to England, then to Holland, then France, and, eventually, into the heart of the Nazi empire, Germany. We all know of the heroics of the 82nd Airborne, but

Magellas lets us in on the price these victories demanded. Casualties were constant and high. After the amphibious assault at Anzio, he tells us that "1LT Roy Hanna who had landed at Anzio as the leader of the machine gun platoon, was sent down to command I Company *after it had lost all its officers.*" War is hell, Magellas agrees, but adds later, "War is the most brutal form of human endeavor, and those who choose to view it as a glorious national venture dishonor the memory of those young men who suffered and died in combat."

Magellas comes down hard on the higher ups, particularly in the intelligence community. British and American commands disregarded intelligence reports in 1944 from the Dutch underground as to the presence of two SS Panzer divisions in the vicinity of Arnhem. By ignoring these warnings, Allied commanders ensured that Operation Market Garden would be an unmitigated disaster, particularly for the British 1st Parachute Division. Another intelligence failure was to occur just a few months later when the Germans launched a massive strike in the Ardennes forest against a thinly manned front line of four U.S. infantry divisions. Two of these (the 99th and 106th) were green, largely untested units. The German attack, launched on December 16, 1944, resulted in the complete rout of these American units and the taking of more than 8,000 U.S. prisoners. But perhaps Magellas's most scathing expose of higher ups completely out of touch comes late in the book (p 251). His platoon is encamped on the Rhine River when he receives word that an assistant division commander is about to visit his unit's positions. "Sir, I am Lieutenant Magellas. Welcome to H Company." Magellas was filthy and unshaven and wore no insignia of rank, a practice common to front line officers. The newly minted brigadier asks, "Are you an officer?" And again, "When was the last time you shaved?" The brigadier general adds: "I expect officers to set a good example for the enlisted men." Magellas comments: "To me that was more than an offhand expression. I took it as a personal insult." As well he should have.

The Epilogue to this work is just as important as the narrative of battle.

Magellas gives us a detailed account of what many of these young paratroopers ended up doing. Some became police officers, others career military men, still others executives in industry or leaders in academia. In other words, these young men who took to jumping out of airplanes in the 1940's and fighting their country's biggest war ever, returned to being what they really were all along: loyal U.S. citizens who loved their country and contributed to its growth and prosperity.

This story of a heroic young man and his comrades needed to be written and deserves to be read.

***Operatives, Spies, and Saboteurs: The Unknown History of the Men and Women of World War II's OSS.* By Patrick K. O'Donnell. Free Press, 2004. 336 Pages. Price unavailable.** Reviewed by Second Lieutenant James A. Capobianco.

Claiming to be the first agent level history of the famed Office of Strategic Services, *Operatives, Spies, and Saboteurs* is created from interviews with more than 300 surviving OSS agents and supporting declassified documents at the National Archives. The book takes the reader on a journey from the bureaucratic inception of the OSS, through agent training and OSS operations in various countries and campaigns of the War. All descriptions and narratives are exclusively from the operator's perspective.

As the predecessor to the present day Central Intelligence Agency, the Office of Strategic Services pioneered intelligence gathering techniques, tactics, and safeguards which are reportedly still in use today. The brain child of William "Wild Bill" Donovan, the OSS emerged as the premier instrument for clandestine operations. Based upon the teachings and experiences of the British secret services, Donovan took the concept of "shadow war" to a new level. He centralized American clandestine efforts under one agency and then expanded their operational reach. The emerging techniques and endeavors of the OSS are detailed by the very agents who were tasked to achieve the impossible; infiltrate the German Reich, gather intelligence, coordinate resistance, and

propagate misinformation.

The reader is presented with a unique insight into the dark underworld of espionage, counterintelligence, guerilla tactics, and psychological warfare. Among the many agents depicted is Lieutenant William Wheeler, leader of a 15-man group, whose mission was to jump behind German lines into Northern Italy and coordinate resistance groups and gather intelligence. Agents such as Wheeler routinely found themselves isolated and operating deep inside hostile territory. They worked in small groups and survived with the aid of resistance and freedom fighters. Theirs was a mission of danger hidden behind a shroud of secrecy. If captured they were sure to be tortured and ultimately executed; there would be no rescue and their fate hinged upon the ability to construct a thin parapet of plausible deniability.

Operatives, Spies, and Saboteurs is interesting, historical, and even exciting; yet, the book suffers from the author's inability to seamlessly integrate interview excerpts and documented evidence. At certain points it is difficult to discern who is doing the narration; at other times, it is nearly impossible to grasp the relationship between an inserted quote and the already established text. Sadly, the author struggles in the presentation of his research and the result is a disjunct depiction of what is otherwise a very engaging historiography.

While this book certainly has its drawbacks, the raw content is too powerful and poignant to be outright dismissed. The harrowing experiences of the OSS agents are truly remarkable and before now, have gone largely unnoticed. For anyone who is even remotely interested in World War II, clandestine operations, or intelligence activities, this book is worth your attention.

RECENT AND RECOMMENDED

***Accidental Warrior: the Forging of an American Soldier.* By Andy O'Meara, Jr. Elderberry Press, 2002. 294 pages. \$29.95.**

***Battling for Saipan: The True Story of an American Hero — Lt. Col. William J. O'Brien.* By Francis A. O'Brien. Presidio Press, 2003. 370 pages. \$17.95.**

***Misguided Weapons: Technological Failure and Surprise on the Battlefield.* By Azriel Lorber, Ph.D. Brassey's, Inc. 2002. 293 pages. \$26.95.**

***Only the Dead Came Home.* By Andy O'Meara, Jr. Elderberry Press, 2003. 184 pages. \$19.95.**

***Storm From the Sea.* By Peter Young, Greenhill, 2002. 240 pages. \$18.95.**