

Book Reviews



***Reluctant Lieutenant, From Basic to OCS in the Sixties.* By Jerry Morton. College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University Press, 320 pages, \$19.95.** Reviewed by Major Keith Everett.

In this book, author Jerry Morton reminisces about his time in basic training and then Officer Candidate School (OCS) in the middle of the Vietnam War. His work is a pleasant stroll down memory lane for those who have experienced either basic training or OCS, or both.

Morton was one of the young men caught by surprise in the military draft of 1966. The preparation was geared for Vietnam. Morton vividly recounts his experiences first in basic training, then as an officer candidate in OCS. Although many advances were made through the years, many similarities still exist. Bayonet training is described in one chapter. Morton places the usefulness of bayonet training slightly behind learning how to clean the latrine. Cleaning the latrine well brought free time on Sunday, so was more valuable to most Soldiers. A good survey of average draftees during Vietnam is gained by reading this memoir. The big question of whether the Army adequately trained the officers and men who fought in Vietnam is never directly answered. Morton indirectly illustrates the social molding during training until most Soldiers did what was expected of them fairly automatically. The rewards of a no-hassle life, even for a little while, and the free time or a pass were more than enough to get cooperation out of a diverse group of people. Morton does question the Army's method of teaching Soldiers to shoot at traditional bulls-eye targets and then testing the same Soldiers by shooting qualification at a camouflaged silhouette target. He figures you should be tested under the same conditions you are trained, which makes sense.

Officer Candidate School brought other useful training events such as eating on the square. Through TAC Officer emphasis, a candidate quickly learned spit-shined boots, polished brass and a correct layout of equipment was more important than learning how to properly lay a World War II minefield.

The classes on laying a WWII minefield indicated the Army was a tad slow in adapting to new tactics and techniques in the 1966 and 1967 era. *Reluctant Lieutenant* is a pleasant and entertaining book with many familiar events for those who have gone through similar Army training. Anyone looking for a study on the effectiveness of Army training should look elsewhere.

Morton survived his basic training, graduated OCS to become a commissioned officer, and spent the rest of his obligation teaching at the JFK Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg, North Carolina. That master's degree in psychology came in handy after all. He later earned a Ph.D in psychology and spent 32 years as a school psychologist and educational administrator before writing his memoirs of his Army experiences.

***Operation Homecoming — Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Home Front, in the Words of U.S. Troops and Their Families.* Edited by Andrew Carroll. New York: Random House, 416 pages \$26.95.** Reviewed by Danielle Bostick, *Infantry Magazine* editorial intern.

Operation Homecoming is a phenomenal book that gives readers an inside perspective into what the men and women who serve in the U.S. armed forces are currently going through while fighting for democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan. The book is more than just a collection of eyewitness accounts, personal journals, stories, and poems written by those serving in the military and their family members; it is also a narrative about the emotional effects of war. While our men and women in uniform are overseas fighting, we are at home debating whether the continuation of the war is worth their sacrifice. Many people feel disconnected from what the Soldiers are currently enduring both physically and psychologically and can only imagine what the deployments must

be like. In the preface, Dana Gioia claims that, "No one who reads the entire book will emerge with his or her views on the war unchanged — no matter what those initial views may be," which is true. *Operation Homecoming* provides readers with an array of viewpoints about the war, and the letters are taken from a diverse group of Soldiers without the political biasness.

The idea to have a collection of works written about the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan came from the National Endowment for Arts, which wanted to give military personnel and their families a way to voice and express their feelings through literary art. Workshops on writing were held by notable writers such as Tom Clancy, Mark Bowden, and Bobbie Nelson. Gioia, who is Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, states that, "Nearly 2,000 manuscripts were submitted for the anthology, totaling well over 10,000 pages..." And of that, only 5 percent made publication.

The collection of works documents the many facets of war. The first chapter of the book is about September 11 and Soldiers preparing to fight the war on terrorism. The first story, written by Captain William J. Toti, immediately captures the reader's attention with a compelling anecdote called "Antoinette." This story chronicles that horrible day as CPT Toti was working at the Pentagon on the fourth floor when the building was hit by American Airlines Flight 77. The following stories in the chapter discuss Soldiers' preparing for deployment and transitioning to a life of war.

Other chapters focus on Soldiers' experiences with Afghan and Iraqi citizens, the harsh realities of war, as well as the humor and boredom of deployments.

In addition to writings from Soldiers, there are some contributions from family members dealing with the absence of their sons, daughters or spouses stationed overseas.

The book also includes writings from family members dealing with the absence of their sons, daughters, or spouses stationed overseas. Many of these stories look at their everyday struggle to get through the day while stressed and overwhelmed with worrying about the endangered life of their loved ones. Some of the works published are actual letters and e-mails sent between family members and Soldiers.

The last chapter is about the Soldiers' return home. Some personal narratives have happy endings, while others are heartbreaking. The personal narrative of Paula M. Anderson, "Writing for Shawn," is about the emotional roller coaster and the life-changing adjustment that her family goes through upon the return of her severely burned husband. Lieutenant Colonel Michael Stroll recounts the honor he had of accompanying a fallen Soldier back home to his family and the experience he shared with the community as they paid respect to the family and the fallen Soldier.

If you're looking for a book that gives readers an idea of Soldiers' experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan then read *Operational Homecoming*, but if you're looking for a book that agrees or disagrees with the war then look elsewhere. The purpose of the book is to provide a public forum for the thoughts, opinions, and narratives of military personnel and their families to share with the general public through literary expression.

***The Longest Night — The Bombing of London on May 10, 1941.* By Gavin Mortimer. New York: Berkeley Publishing Group, 384 pages, \$16 (paperback).** Reviewed by Terrence McElhaney, *Infantry Magazine* editorial intern.

The Longest Night is a thoroughly researched account of the bombing of London on May 10, 1941. This was the climax of the Blitz, the German aerial bombing of London and the heaviest night of the bombing. During the Blitz most of the bombing brought upon England was concentrated on London, although the first major bombing was in the seaside town of Portsmouth. *The*

Longest Night focuses on London with the story's focus shifting between civilian life, the fire brigade and British Royal Air Force. The author also presents the German perspective from the bomber crews' viewpoint.

The book begins with a brief introduction to the history of the Blitz. Preparation for the war actually began early. Children were evacuated from London and 600,000 were predicted to be killed in the autumn and winter of 1939-40. However there was no major bombing that winter which led to complacency, by springtime the children had been returned to London, only to be evacuated again as other European countries began to fall. By that summer the heavy bombing that defined the Blitz had begun.

By May 1941 bombings were a part of life for Londoners. The majority of *The Longest Night* focuses on May 10, 1941. The reader is taken across London from a chilly but typical spring morning to that long and horrific night.

After being introduced to the Blitz, the reader receives a glimpse of the Paris office of Feldmarschall Hugo Sperrle. While looking at a map of London in his office, he made plans for the most devastating attack on London to date. The author gives the reader a step-by-step glance in the strategic planning of this attack.

After gaining an impression of the German perspective of the attack, the reader is returned to England. Here the book discusses life in London. The city has a changed landscape. We see that the famous Westminster Abbey and other London attractions are surrounded by sandbags. Some statues have been removed and stored in a safer location than the streets for which they were intended.

The Longest Nights reads more like a novel than a history book. This makes it an easy read. At the same time, the author, Gavin Mortimer, does not dumb it down so much that someone with a prior military background or knowledge of World War II would not enjoy it.

As May 10, 1941, progresses the reader gets a minute-by-minute account of London on that day. The day begins differently for some Londoners, for some it is a lazy Saturday and for others it is another work day. Despite earlier bombings, death,

destruction and fear, it is still an ordinary day. The city still hustles and bustles. There is a sense of calm before the storm in the introductory chapters as people go about their day.

The characters in *The Longest Night* unfold as people with lives that march on ceaselessly despite the nightly threat which looms over them. The people discussed are presented objectively, which is not surprising considering Mortimer is a journalist. There are many people mentioned, which may be difficult to keep up with. There is a list of key characters at the beginning of the book though, which helps the reader who can reference this list while reading.

In addition to the civilian aspect of war the author gives readers balanced insight into the military perspective. When describing weaponry and tactics, the details are so intricate that one can tell that Mortimer has done his homework. The reader rides along with the British fighter pilots, whose primary job was to shoot down enemy bombers over metropolitan London.

Although an excellent read, *The Longest Night* is not perfect. A map of central London would have helped the reader to better envision the events and places, because so many streets and neighborhoods are mentioned. Readers unfamiliar with London could put the places described into better context if they could reference a map.

Gavin Mortimer obviously spent many hours researching and writing this book, and there are times when the reader may feel bogged down by the sheer details. Sometimes unnecessary information appears or a certain incident or thing is described in extremely overwhelming detail. While the details can be intimidating at times, they also give remarkable insight into life at this early stage of World War II, seven months before America was attacked at Pearl Harbor and entered the war.

Mortimer's book is not only meticulous researched and written, but he has also written a book that will attract a wide range of readership from history buff to novice. Anyone can pick up *The Longest Night*, enjoy it, and learn something about that horrific night of May 10, 1941.



Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Justin K. Thomas, USN



Staff Sergeant Russell Bassett

Above, Soldiers with the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, climb down a stairway from a rooftop after searching it for hidden weapon caches during a cordon and search mission in Iraq.

At left, 3rd Infantry Division Soldiers patrol the streets of Tunis, Iraq.

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