Book Reviews

***Biggest Brother, The Life of Major Dick Winters, The Man who Led the Band of Brothers.* By Larry Alexander. New York: New American Library, a division of Penguin Group, Inc., 2005, 297 pages, $24.95 hardcover.** Reviewed by Major Keith Everett, U.S. Army Reserves.

Major Dick Winters' life story begins with a jump out of a C-47 transport plane with 16 other men. Larry Alexander, a reporter for the *Intelligence Journal* in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, combines interviews with Easy Company, wartime letters, and numerous interviews with Major Winters to develop this biography.

The leadership of Dick Winters was well documented and highlighted in the *Band of Brothers* book and television miniseries. *Band of Brothers* addicts will be thrilled at the addition of more details on the outstanding leadership demonstrated by Major Winters throughout World War II and his life and the lives of his men after the war. Winters' ideas on leadership finish the book in a short appendix. He talks of adjusting to the individual Soldier each day with different styles of leadership. I heartily recommend this biography to anyone wanting to learn about leadership under stress.

Winters' routine included a five-mile run each morning. The 15, 20 and 25-mile marches also served to harden the 101st Airborne Soldiers. Winters disciplined his men, but preserved their spirit by fitting the punishment to the transgression. He was flexible and ended or changed his punishment of men when the punishment was no longer needed or effective.

The men of the 101st Airborne were learning about the dangers of parachuting the hard way in these early days of airborne training. On March 8, 1944, one man was killed when his chute failed to open. Hard training was the norm at Camp Toombs, Georgia. Winters promoted the men demonstrating strong leadership and field skills at Camp Toombs to leadership positions under his command as combat created openings.

The contact with Captain Sobel was unfortunate for Easy Company, but is a fortunate one for anyone studying leadership. Sobel is an example of what kind of leader not to become. Sobel's cold and impersonal demeanor and his indifference for his men created a hostile atmosphere. Since Sobel was also harsh and unfair, resentment against him quickly grew. Sobel's inadequacy in the field also created an increased loss of respect from his company with each mistake. He decreased his chances for success exponentially by skipping training on basic field craft. A great leadership guidebook would include Winters' example for success and illustrate Sobel's example for failures.

Winters noted that his battalion and regimental leaders made no attempt to capitalize on training their Soldiers in lessons learned to further sharpen skills. He made a point of intensifying the training of his company, taking advantage of the time between combat missions to improve before the next assignment.

Winters carried a rifle, as it made him less conspicuous as an officer and gave him a little more firepower than the .45 officers usually carried. After promotion to battalion XO, Winters conducted court-martials of Soldiers caught stealing. Stopping looting is a command responsibility, but Winters hated conducting the court-martials of men he knew and respected.

If you loved the *Band of Brothers* book and the HBO miniseries, you will also enjoy this biography, as it gives more details on the man who led Easy Company through training and World War II. Someone could make an outstanding leadership seminar around Easy Company, much like what has been done with the fictional *12 O'Clock High* movie.

***No Uncle Sam: The Forgotten of Bataan.* By Tony Bilek (in collaboration with Gene O'Connell). Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2003, 260 pages, $34.**

***Bataan: A Survivor's Story.* By Gene Boyt (with David L. Burch). Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004, 237 pages, $24.95.**

Reviewed by Randy Talbot, TACOM Life Cycle Management Command historian.

Two recent memoirs from survivors of the Bataan Death March, and three years of imprisonment, offer insight not only of the march, but the camps where they were imprisoned. Taken together, Tony Bilek's *No Uncle Sam: The Forgotten of Bataan* and Gene Boyt's *Bataan: A Survivor's Story* provide us with two similar yet differing views of their imprisonment. Their stories — unimaginably painful and horrific — are filled with vignettes of terror and inspiration they both experienced and witnessed. The litany of atrocities perpetrated against them and their fellow Soldiers defy imagination, forcing us to reflect inward for understanding while we marvel at the inner strength and resolve these POWs exhibited. These are works of extraordinary graphic brutality that still haunt the authors 60 years following their release from captivity.

Analytical and historical treatments of the Bataan Death March offer us a glimpse of the absolute horror that our POWs suffered during the 55-mile march from Bataan to Camp O'Donnell, but fall short in their treatment of the incredible suffering these men went through. Eyewitness accounts and published works from survivors add to historical writings, which left us with a collective experience of their survival, but little more.

The official history of the U.S. Army in World War II mentions the march happened but stops there, concentrating instead on military operations. Stanley L. Falk's classic study, *Bataan: The March of Death*, provides a detailed study of the march routes, surrender negotiations, the failed Japanese plans to

handle the prisoners, and the brutality suffered by those who surrendered. But his work ends there, seven days after the surrender and the prisoner's arrival at Camp O'Donnell, leaving us to wonder what happened to those who arrived at this temporary barbed-wire compound. This void in the historiography of the Bataan Death March has painfully been filled, in what could be the last memoirs from survivors of the Japanese concentration camps in World War II. (Boyt passed away before his book was published.)

Boyt and Bilek's presentations could be interpreted as bitter, scathing indictments of the Japanese for what POWs were forced to live through. Boyt's book is introspective while Bilek's leans to a more descriptive account of survival interspersed with gallows humor, but they are much more than that. While recounting their stories, they searched inward to understand what it was about them that helped in their survival. No amount of training in the military, or a life of deprivation during the depression, provided Bilek and Boyd with a footprint for survival. To understand how they survived, we must understand their experiences.

Bilek and Boyt were at Clark Field in the Philippines when the surprise attack at Pearl Harbor began. Within hours, Clark was bombed as well, beginning the exodus of forces to Bataan that became a siege. Four months later, the United States military suffered its most humiliating defeat in our nation's history. Nearly 78,000 American and Filipino troops fought a successful delaying action as long as they could — with World War I-era Springfield and Enfield rifles and little else — against the advancing Japanese military in the remote Philippine jungle province of Bataan. Japanese forces encircled the beleaguered Americans who were running for their lives.

Running low on ammunition, unable to be resupplied, suffering from innumerable jungle-related diseases, and forced to scavenge for food to supplement their daily starvation level half rations, Major General Edward P. King surrendered his forces to the Japanese 14th Army. According to Falk, King — with orders not to surrender — was left with no real decision. Unable to mount further organized resistance to delay the inevitable destruction of his forces, surrender would offer them at least a chance at survival. He could not have known that his decision would start in motion one of the most horrific episodes of degradation, brutality, and survival in the annals of American military history. Boyt contemplated escape to Corregidor but knew he was not strong enough to survive; Bilek's commanders surrendered the members of his unit. Both began their captivity after being looted by the Japanese. Although neither had anything of value to be confiscated, that did not erase the fear of the unknown that awaited them.

They marched in the blazing sun that sapped their strength and were starved, beaten, and deprived of water. Resting was rare, stopping in small clearances where they could only sit. Thirst became an obsession, as prisoners left the formation to drink out of fetid pools of animal waste along the roadside. Boyt carried a bottle of iodine that the looting guards missed. It purified his water, thus saving his life while many others succumbed to dysentery, adding to the death toll.

Survival on the march was based on luck. Both Boyt and Bilek positioned themselves to avoid beatings from guards and passing Japanese soldiers heading south. Japanese soldiers in the trucks were apt to butt stroke the columns or place their swords out to cut the prisoners. Both witnessed this as the march started and both moved quickly to the inside part of the formation or on the right side closest to the woods. Boyt was very small to begin with and he could "hide" in the middle of the formation and avoid much of the beatings.

For those who survived the march, a lifetime in hell was just beginning. Three years of disease, beatings, death, forced labor, starvation, desperation, and the daily struggle to survive were countered by a will to live, and the strong bonds made between prisoners relying on each other as every day was another monumental struggle to get through one more day. It was 42 months of days; days when a drink of water meant survival or death; days wishing for death to end the beatings or indifference by the guards; days when the stench of death and filth fills the air while fighting through daily monotony, disease and starvation. Escape was impossible; they were in no condition to get very far, and should one escape, nine others would be executed.

POWs were sent to Japan in the cargo holds of freighters, fed very little and were under constant fear of attack from American boats. Boyt's ship was torpedoed; other "hell ships" were strafed and bombed by fighters. Once in Japan, treatment of the POWs was not as harsh; however, diseases such as beriberi and scurvy were as prevalent as dysentery was in the Philippines.

While Boyt spent two years in Japan working on cremation details and in a garden, Bilek's year in Japan was at Camp 17 (Camp Ju-Shichi) near Omatu on Japan's southernmost island of Kyushu east of Nagasaki. He worked in the coalmines and ended up suffering from injury, pneumonia, and beriberi once again. With no medicine other than food to combat the disease, Bilek spent nearly six months in the hospital receiving blood transfusions from "healthy" prisoners. Once cured, he had to learn to walk all over again. Within weeks, he was back in the coalmines, and marching one day to the site, he witnessed the devastating attack on Nagasaki. Shortly, both would be released amidst a flood of emotions for those who did not survive.

Each new book on World War II forces us to ask, "Is there anything else to learn about this war?" The answer is always yes. Nothing prepared Boyt and Bilek for what they endured. Together, they show us lessons in perseverance, adaptability to their environment, and uncanny luck. They are more than lessons in survival. Although depressed, they did not despair as desperation led to giving up and almost certain death. Making the best of every opportunity presented to them to survive, they depended on their savvy and an intense will to live, never once forgetting their comrades.

Although names and dates have failed them after 60 years, the memory of friends, brutality, camps, and their treatment are as clear to them today as they were so long ago. Both books are easily readable; following a new genre of memoir literature from World War II veterans, one of

openness and candor about the realities of war, and in this case, about survival. Both had reasons for writing their books. For Boyt, it was to leave a record of what happened to him and so many others that will never come home; Bilek's is one that wanted to set the record straight in a time of revisionism. Neither author apologizes for what they wrote; instead they force the reader to laugh at their humor, cry with them as they are liberated, feel the pain of their beatings, and shudder at the inhumanity they endured. But through it all, they show the strong bonds of camaraderie for their fellow POWs, and the memories of home that helped them survive.

***House to House: Playing the Enemy's Game in Saigon, May 1968*. By Keith Nolan. St. Paul, MN: Zenith Press, 2006, 368 pages, $24.95 (cloth).** Reviewed by Lieutenant Colonel (Retired) Rick Baillergeon.

Perhaps, somewhat ignored in the vast writings of the Vietnam War has been a period of fighting coined The Mini-Tet Offensive (officially known as the May Offensive). This offensive began on May 1, when communist conventional forces crossed the DMZ near Dong Ha. On May 5, communist guerrilla forces started conducting operations in and around Saigon. The communist objective was not to deliver a defeat on American ground forces, but to psychologically defeat the American public's support of the war before the upcoming Paris peace talks.

To oppose the attack of Saigon, four battalions of the 9th Infantry Division were deployed piecemeal to Saigon from their positions in the Mekong Delta. After two weeks of the costliest American fighting (in terms of casualties) in the Vietnam War, the 9th Infantry Division prevailed with a tactical victory. Yet, this tactical victory (as was the case with many victories at the tactical level) did not equate to strategic success for the United States. The above, oft-neglected period of the Vietnam War is the focus of Keith Nolan's superb book, *House to House: Playing the Enemy's Game in Saigon, May 1968.*

For those with an interest in the Vietnam War, the author may be quite familiar. In the past 25 years, he has crafted 11 books focusing on the Vietnam War and infantrymen. Among these books were the classics *Ripcord: Screaming Eagles Under Siege, Vietnam 1970* and *Battle for Hue: Tet 1968.* Clearly, Nolan has established himself as one of our leading military historians on the Vietnam War. This reputation is sure to be enhanced with his latest volume.

Although it is not truly articulated by the author, the purpose of *House to House* is essentially twofold. First, Nolan seeks to provide readers with significant details on the May 1968 battle in Saigon at the tactical level. As discussed earlier, this is a battle that is glossed over in most discussions on the Vietnam War. Second, and probably Nolan's key objective (as is the case in all of his books) is to enable readers to garner insight into the human dimension of war. The author wants his audience to understand the raw emotions, fears, and intensity that combat generates in the infantryman. Clearly, Nolan accomplishes each of these purposes in this book.

I believe readers will find two significant strengths in *House to House*. First, is the ability of Nolan to seamlessly shift from different small unit battles within the larger fight in and around Saigon. As readers will quickly discover, the overall fighting in the area was extremely chaotic. Yet, Nolan is able to provide distinct narration on various fights without confusing the reader. It is the rare author, who can juggle various actions and have them complement each other instead of degrade one another. Nolan displays this talent throughout *House to House*.

The second key strength within the book is Nolan's ability to start and complete this book. Although this may seem like a given and a trivial point, Nolan understands the importance of starting and finishing a book strong. The author utilizes his opening prologue to provide readers a concise summary of recent strategic and tactical activity leading to the May Offensive. Unquestionably, this sets the conditions for the rest of the volume and puts this combat action in perspective. Nolan concludes *House to House* with an epilogue neatly detailing the ramifications of the battle for all sides involved. It is expert analysis often missing from books that seem to abruptly end and leave you requiring more.

Besides the above strengths, I found several other characteristics or features that will appeal to readers. First, Nolan has truly mastered the ability to bring words to life. His narration of battle sequences is superb and makes readers feel that they are almost there. Second, as he has clearly demonstrated in prior books, Nolan has conducted exhaustive research in preparing this book. Most impressive is his use of dozens of personal interviews with the infantrymen who fought in this brutal battle. Finally, the author has inserted 32 relevant photographs (most provided to Nolan from Soldiers who fought in the battle) that are a tremendous aid in personalizing the book.

My only criticism with *House to House* is the quantity and quality of maps utilized in the book. Perhaps, like many of you, I believe a sharp, detailed map is an excellent complement to a writer's words. This is especially true at the small unit level. Unfortunately, Nolan inserts only four maps in his book, and these lack any graphics or unit locations for both sides. The addition of more detailed maps would have been value added to an already superb book.

Readers will find Nolan is not afraid to praise or criticize decisions or policies made by individual leaders (at all levels) during this operation or during the entire war. He is particularly effective in laying out his argument when he does criticize. He provides sufficient background for his opinion and answers the "so what" in most instances. I found this candor refreshing and thought provoking.

In summary, once again, Keith Nolan has written a book skillfully blending adept writing, impeccable research, and thought-provoking analysis. For those who have read prior Nolan efforts, this is what you have come to expect. You will not be disappointed with his latest volume. For those who have not yet had the opportunity, *House to House* is an outstanding initiation to his capabilities. It is sure to lead to further acquisitions in his body of work.

Never Quit the Fight. **By Ralph Peters. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2006, 350 pages, $27.95.** Reviewed by Chris Timmers.

From 2003 through early 2006, this collection of newspaper and magazine columns by Ralph Peters, a retired U.S. Army intelligence officer, address mostly the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Peters' insights are quick witted, insightful, and occasionally humorous. No reader will regard time spent with this book as wasted.

The fighting as it progresses in the Middle East as reported by the networks appears to be pretty much a one-sided affair: more U.S. Soldiers and Marines dying month after month while the media giddily tallies our losses, never mentioning the number of terrorists killed and captured. Or the increasing number of towns and cities secured. Or the new schools being built. Or the water treatment facilities and power plants brought on line.

The broadcast and print media in this country are nothing short of shameful in their reporting on the fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. But at last a balanced, objective assessment of these conflicts is available from Ralph Peters whose service in various intelligence assignments over 20 years renders him a bonafide, unimpeachable source and observer. He brings common sense and lucid analysis completely lacking in our newspapers and broadcast reporting. "…we shall hear no end of fatuous arguments to the effect that we can't kill our way out of the problem. Well, until a better methodology is discovered, killing every terrorist we can find is a good interim solution." Further, "And we shall hear that killing terrorists only creates more terrorists. This is sophomoric nonsense. The surest way to swell the ranks of terror is to follow the approach we did in the decade before 9/11 and do nothing of substance."

But don't think Peters is a flack for the Bush administration. The President and particularly the Secretary of Defense at the time, Donald Rumsfeld, come in for withering criticism on how they have managed the war. Having the Marines take Fallujah not once, but twice because of DoD dithering needlessly cost American lives. He is particularly harsh on the "suits" in the Pentagon who, having never served a day on active duty, think outsourcing is the answer to, and will adequately offset, an insufficient number of ground forces in both theaters.

And what about Muslims in this country? Where do they stand on this war? Peters answers crisply: ""…Arab or Iranian or Pakistani immigrants came here to *escape* from those realms of failure, not to import them to Detroit or Washington, D.C. They have the same practical ambitions everyone else's immigrant ancestors had: to build better lives for themselves and those they love."

So what should we do? What guidance do we have? Peters is straightforward:

* There is *nothing* we can do to satisfy religion-inspired terrorists. If we don't kill them, they will kill us.

* The war on terrorism cannot be won decisively and will endure beyond our lifetimes.

* We must think, plan, and act in terms of decades, not months.

* This is a *war*, not law enforcement.

* The best defense is a strong offense. We cannot wait at home for terrorists to strike.

* Nothing will make us invulnerable.

* Allies are valuable, but not indispensable.

* The Islamic world's problems are not our fault, and we are not to blame for terrorism.

* Our will must be stronger than our enemy's.

And what of our public relations "disasters" such as the prisoner abuse scandal at Abu Ghraib? Many media outlets are determined to turn Iraq into a failure, he claims. "The endless orgy of coverage of the Abu Ghraib incident … is insufferable. The successes and sacrifices of more than a hundred thousand soldiers go ignored, while a sanctimonious media focuses on the viciousness of a few ill-led criminals in uniform." In his most penetrating insight, Peters writes: "…Susan Sontag, writing in the *New York Times Magazine*, associated the prisoner abuse affair with the massacres in Rwanda and the Holocaust. Really? Does Ms. Sontag truly believe that Abu Ghraib equals Auschwitz? Does she *know* a single American soldier? How simple the world must look from behind her desk …"

Finally, Peters's most original observation (and there are many) is his comparison of hard core terrorists with the Aztecs.

"For all their Muslim trappings … the terrorists … have returned to … behaviors that Moses, Christ, and Mohammed uniformly rejected: *they practice human sacrifice*. The grisly decapitations … and the explosive-laden cars driven into crowds, the bombing of schools and the execution of kidnapped women are not sanctioned by a single passage in the Koran."

Space does not permit a total counting of Peters's spot-on findings. The only way to avail oneself of his insights is to buy the book. Reading even the first few chapters will be rewarding. And, as hackneyed as it is to say so, *Never Quit the Fight* should be required reading of all senior personnel at the Pentagon, especially those who have never worn the uniform.

Chief of Infantry Reading Lists

The Chief of Infantry Reading List is available online at https://www.benning.army.mil/catd/cald/readinglist.htm (will require AKO login/password). The list is divided into four categories: Junior NCO, Senior NCO, Lieutenants and Captains. In addition to the list, the Web site also contains a short narrative on each selection. The selected books include:

* *Malice Aforethought; The History of Booby Traps from World War One to Vietnam* by Ian Jones (Junior NCO)

* *Tactics of the Crescent Moon: Militant Muslim Combat Methods* by John H. Poole (Senior NCO)

* *The Sling and the Stone: On War in the 21st Century* by Thomas X. Hammes (Lieutenants)

* *In the Company of Soldiers: A Chronicle of Soldiers* by Rick Atkinson (Captains)

Specialist Micah E. Clare

A Soldier provides security for a passing convoy during an operation in Afghanistan.

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