

Book Reviews



***The Utility of Force. The Art of War in the Modern World.* By General Rupert Smith. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007, 431 pages, \$30.** Reviewed by Brigadier General (Retired) Curtis H. O'Sullivan.

Frances Fukuyam announced the end of history and General Rupert Smith the end of war, but both proclamations need to be expanded and clarified. What the general states is that industrial age war, with large conventional armies, is obsolete, and that it is now failing to meet its political objectives. The new paradigm is war amongst people, rather than between states. This creates a dissonance between the organization and training of existing forces and the demands of this new unstructured, amorphous, conflict. Despite the fact it is obsolete, the author devotes the first 149 pages to industrial warfare. He does not intend to give a definitive history but just those parts to illustrate his points. Though it follows a chronological sequence, it is thematic in intent. He writes in a lively style, and the selected material is interesting. He is weak on the lessons from our Civil War, which is understandable, as that period is not his area of expertise and it was a complex, confusing conflagration.

The series of historic paradigms lays the groundwork for his thesis. He then devotes the next 114 pages to military interventions that failed to resolve the political demands; where the battle was won but not the war. He concludes that there may no longer be clear-cut victories as we've known and come to expect; that we may have to accept less than perfect solutions; and that some things may go on forever rather than have a formal ending. Armistices, parades, and treaties are out of style. Smith closes on an encouraging note. All is not lost! We've adapted before and there is no reason we can't again. He offers "what is to be done" in his conclusion.

Notes and a bibliography aren't essential in this type of work but could have been useful. The case studies could have been clearer with a few simple maps. Overall, this is worth reading. Part Three, "War Amongst the

People," is particularly thought provoking.

***Chosen Soldier, The Making of a Special Forces Warrior.* By Dick Couch. New York: Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House, 2007, 396 pages, \$14.95.** Reviewed by Major Keith Everett.

The creation of a Special Forces Soldier is considered by many the toughest training mentally and physically in the world. Dick Couch, the commander of a SEAL platoon in Vietnam, has written his best book yet on the training of elite warriors with this step-by-step walk through of the tough selection process and then the brutal mental and physical strainer each Soldier struggles through to become a Special Forces Soldier. Any individual preparing to develop himself into the most lethal, effective combatant on the battlefield, a Special Forces Soldier, must find time to read *Chosen Soldier* between his ruck sack marches, long distance runs, and push-ups.

At a time when the Special Forces community is expanding exponentially, this work is timely and valuable in its contribution to the story of Army Transformation. Other Soldiers can learn from the Special Forces training regimen. Conventional Soldiers can learn how to fight a counterinsurgency war through OJT and by learning from the experts in counterinsurgency. Conventional Soldiers assigned the difficult task of training Iraqi soldiers must borrow from the Special Forces' methods of training foreign armies to get the job done.

Couch identifies several common denominators present in successful candidates graduating from the Special Forces Qualification Course. The most common factors in successful graduates are: Ranger School completion, a foreign language capability, top notch performances at land navigation at three day and night courses, and the ability to get along well with others.

The Special Forces Preparatory Course is a 30-day training period designed to prepare a Soldier for selection and the Special Forces Qualification Course. After the prep course, is the selection phase. A

key characteristic of the pre-Special Forces Assessment and Selection (SFAS) is the difficulty of obstacles in the course. Some of the points require lengthy detours around physical obstacles such as bogs and thick woods. This requires adaptation and a calculated adaptable plan. Conventional Soldiers are trained on a normal Army land navigation course in an area with no obstacles or insignificant obstacle and are accustomed to a straight line approach to each point with frequent compass bearings, a strict adherence to the pace count and sometimes a little help from paths to the points beaten down by thousands of previous Soldiers tromping through the woods to the points. The "secret" to successfully completing the ruck marches in the allotted time is to run/walk them. Each Soldier has to know how much running he can do without damaging his body, especially the feet. A ruck with close to half a Soldier's body weight is an unforgiving, unsympathetic, openly hostile object, or so it seems. During the selection process, psychological and aptitude testing consisting of three basic testing areas is administered. A test measuring a Soldier's ability to adapt and solve problems, the Test for Adult Basic Education (reading and math ability and capability to learn a language) and a version of the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (attitudes and behavioral traits). The Selection phase finishes out with tough team building exercises, such as moving a duffel bag filled with 500 pounds of sand along distance to a point on the map culminating with a 20-mile rucksack march for the more physical part of the training.

The actual Special Forces Qualification Course consists of four phases. Phase I ends with some mental exercises called Situational Awareness Reaction Exercises (SARC), since renamed the Human Terrain Adaptability Exercise. Each candidate's response to the given situation will be graded. Totally inappropriate responses will cost perhaps as much as a review board to

discuss one's suitability for Special Forces.

Some candidates are separated from the training after Phase I. The candidates passing on to Phase II will have extensive training in small unit tactics. Phase II begins the actual Special Forces training for overseas work. Regular army Soldiers are returned to their unit for two to six months while the X-ray (Soldiers who enlisted specifically for Special Forces training) will continue some training until the start of Phase II. Historically, one in 10 of the Soldiers choose not to continue the training.

Phase II is described as consisting of tactical scenario after tactical scenario to grade the leadership and fellowship of each candidate under the extremes of sleep and food deprivation over 35 days. Phase III varies according to the MOS selected by the candidate. Special Forces medic training takes a year. The candidates learn not only the material and how to apply it, but they also must be able to teach it to others. This force multiplying ability is what makes a Special Forces Soldier so valuable.

Phase IV builds up and concludes with a Robin Sage exercise where candidates are put in a team and given missions in simulated real world environments. Every thing learned is put to the test and evaluated here. The timing is still intensive and geared at working as an operational detachment. Language training and the survival, evasion, resistance and escape course (SERE) are additional phases to round out a Special Forces Soldier.

Couch's conclusion is the Special Forces Soldier is the most important military person on the battlefield in a counterinsurgency war. Only he has the primary task of blending with the population, digging out our enemies to negotiate, kill or capture them. Any Soldier considering training for Special Forces should start by reading *Chosen Soldier* to get ideas on how best to prepare for and survive the Special Forces training regimen.



SPC Richard Del Vecchi

Soldiers with the 3rd Brigade, 82nd Airborne Division participate in a mission around the city of Mahmudiyah, Iraq, July 3.

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