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Editor's Shelf

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Editor's Shelf

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The reprinting of Stephen Ambrose's *Duty, Honor, Country: A History of West Point* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999) reminds us once again of our nation's history and the contribution of the United States Military Academy at West Point. In his foreword, President Dwight D. Eisenhower alluded to "how little some things change," but in fact there have been unprecedented changes in the decades since Ambrose penned the original manuscript. That is precisely why this reprint of the classic is worth the modest investment. General Andrew J. Goodpaster (51st Superintendent) has provided a wonderfully complete and moving afterword to bring the manuscript up to date. His detailed account of the Academy's tranquil and turbulent times since the mid-1960s serves not only to provide a historical context, but to remind the reader of the many underlying principles that have accounted for the institution's and its graduates' success. Throughout history every great nation has kept in its treasure-chest an academy for advanced learning and military training. Steven Ambrose's history leaves the reader with a greater understanding of the relationship between our treasure, West Point, and the society it supports.

When I reintroduced the "Editor's Shelf," I mentioned one of its functions was to provide our readers with a broader range and greater number of book reviews. I also alluded to the fact that often a book is initially overlooked or simply not provided by the publisher, or that in some rare cases a reviewer is not able to complete the review. The latter applies to Robert S. McNamara, James Blight, Robert Bringham, Thomas Biersteker, and Colonel (Ret.) Herbert Schandler's collaborative work *Argument Without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy* (Public Affairs, 1999). When our staff received the paperback reprint of the book, we immediately recognized it as a work that had been commissioned to Colonel (Ret.) Harry Summers for review. Those who are friends of the Army War College and the military are aware of Harry's untimely death on 14 November 1999. *Argument Without End* is a product of Robert McNamara and his colleagues finally having the opportunity to meet with their Vietnamese counterparts in seven unprecedented conferences in Italy and Vietnam to discuss many of the issues surrounding the war. The result is an introspective analysis of the decisions on both sides that placed North Vietnam and the United States on a collision course. Unfortunately, the style of the manuscript, with the former Secretary writing introductions and conclusions for many of the chapters, encourages rationalizing hindsight. Most readers would appreciate an unbiased analysis of the "missed opportunities" and the reasons for the lack of communication; however, Mr. McNamara's willingness to share the blame with the North Vietnamese and other third parties comes across as just that--an attempt to share blame. In fairness to Mr. McNamara, one must acknowledge that he knowingly sets himself up for criticism and in a number of cases it is self-inflicted. Serious students of the military art and history will find the book revealing and a work that should be kept on the shelf for referencing "how not to conduct a war." I hope Harry would agree.

The George C. Marshall Center for Security Studies in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany, has initiated a series of "Marshall Center Papers" focused on comparative and interdisciplinary topics, including international security and democratic defense management, civil military relations, strategy formulation, defense planning, arms control, peacekeeping, crisis management, and cooperative security. The first in the series is authored by Dr. Peter van Ham and is entitled *Europe's New Defense Ambitions: Implications for NATO, the US, and Russia*. Dr. van Ham's monograph sets the tone for the series with his overview of the future for European defense capabilities. His analysis takes the reader to the heart of the contradiction between "Common European Security and Defense Policy" and the maintenance of a strong transatlantic alliance. *Parameters* commends the Marshall Center for initiating this series and heartily endorses Dr. van Ham's effort to all concerned with the continuation of the US-European relationship.

Lieutenant General William E. Odom, USA Ret., has produced what is being touted as the seminal work on the demise of the Soviet military with his *The Collapse of the Soviet Military* (Yale University Press, 2000). The author's background at the National Security Agency and as a key member of the Carter and Reagan administrations qualifies him to analyze and chronicle the rapid demise of what was at the time the world's second greatest military power. The author postulates that it was the relationship of the military to Mikhail Gorbachev and the Soviet leader's hatred for the

top-heavy and sluggish military that ensured its demise. Odom concludes that the rapidity of the Soviet military's fall was a surprise even to Gorbachev despite his avid campaign against it. Drawing on interviews with key actors in the Soviet hierarchy, Odom surmises that *perestroika's* destruction of the party-state foreordained the collapse of the Soviet armed forces. The author's analysis of Soviet war philosophy, including the theories of Marx and Lenin that decreed the necessity for a huge military and Gorbachev's reduction initiatives, leads the reader to conclude that the collapse of the Soviet military was inevitable. It is ironic that what is destined to be one of the most complete and introspective accounts of the demise of the Soviet military is authored by an individual who served as one of its greatest enemies.

Often in the race to record and exploit history authors are swept up in the maelstrom of the obvious. Certainly that has been true since the 50th anniversary of World War II. The number of mediocre books, monographs, and articles surrounding the war, and more especially D-Day, is approaching infinity. In what many have dubbed the most thoroughly researched and detailed book on the war, Lieutenant Colonel James Jay Carafano breaks that trend toward mediocrity in his excellent work *After D-Day: Operation Cobra and the Normandy Breakout*. Following the Normandy invasion, Allied armies had been stalled on or near the beaches for weeks. Finally, US forces were able to break the German stranglehold in Operation Cobra. The author refutes previous appraisals of some of America's greatest generals and credits the imaginative leadership and operational flexibility of the junior officers, noncommissioned officers, and individual soldiers for the success of the operation that put the Allies on the road to Berlin. Carafano captures all the intensity and realism associated with the individual battles that made up Operation Cobra by including a number of eyewitness accounts. The reader benefits from the author's superior ability to fashion the imagery of the battle, and it's a good thing, because there are no pictures to add insight and the maps are few. However, that being said, this readable and revealing book is a must for any student of World War II and military history desiring an unbiased appraisal of the actions that changed the course of the Normandy campaign. -- RHT

For details on publishers and prices of books mentioned, see "[Off the Press](#)" or call *Parameters* at 717-245-4943 (e-mail: carl_Parameters@conus.army.mil).

Reviewed 16 August 2000. Please send comments or corrections to carl_Parameters@conus.army.mil