

International Journal of Naval History

December 2005

Volume 4 Number 3

Walter J. Boyne. *Today's Best Military Writing: The Finest Articles on the Past, Present, and Future of the U.S. Military*. New York, New York: Forge, 2004. Notes. Notes on Contributors. Index. Pp. 397.

Reviewed by John Darrell Sherwood,
U.S. Naval Historical Center

The market for yearly anthologies of “best” articles in various genres appears to be insatiable. A quick search of *Books in Print* reveals such titles of as *The Best American Short Stories 2004*, *The Best American Mystery Stories 2004*, *The Best American Travel Writing 2004*, and *The Best Adventure and Survival Stories 2003*. “Best of” collections promise to deliver the finest writing in a given field to readers overwhelmed by the volume of articles being published. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that some enterprising author would eventually publish an annual anthology of the best military articles. The 2002 edition of the *Standard Periodical Directory* listed over 450 military related magazines and journals excluding military history journals. No military professional can possibly keep up with all this material, especially during wartime. Walter Boyne’s new volume will be greatly welcome by officers, enlisted personnel, and DOD civilians trying desperately to keep up with all the new ideas and information being generated in this field.

No single theme dominated Boyne’s choice of articles, but he is sensitive towards the needs of war-fighters engaged in The Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). Navy personnel involved in maritime interception operations, for example, will find insights from Spencer Tucker’s essay, “Lieutenant Andrew H. Foote and the African Slave

Trade.” In trying to interdict slave traders of the coast of Africa during the middle of the Nineteenth Century, LT Foot confronted many of the same challenges that destroyer commanders today grapple with in trying to intercept terrorists in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea. Army soldiers will enjoy “No Master Plan: The Employment of Artillery in the Indian Wars, 1860-1890” by Prisco R. Hernandez, and see correlations between how field artillery was employed in the Indian Wars and how it is employed today in Iraq. Forward deployed Marines at embassies and other outposts will similarly benefit from David Ulbriich’s “Clarifying the Origins and Strategic Mission of the US Marine Corps Defense Battalion.”

Thirteen out of twenty one articles in this anthology focus on historical events. The balance covers more current operations. One of the most chilling contemporary articles is Rex Kiziah’s “The Emerging Biocruise Threat.” Another one that air power professionals will appreciate is Darrel Whitcomb’s “Combat Search and Rescue: A longer Look.” Whitcomb not only discusses the evolution of CSAR, but why it is critical for the Armed Services today and how it should change to meet to the emerging challenges of the GWOT.

A retired Air Force colonel, the former director of the National Air & Space Museum, and the author of numerous military history books, Boyne points out in his introduction that many of the articles in his volume received awards, but that he never allowed these prizes to dictate his selections. One of the few shortcomings of his book is that he relied only on his own expertise to choose the best military writing of the past five years. For subsequent volumes, Colonel Boyne might consider enlisting a panel of experts to help him sift through the voluminous literature of this field. If formed, this panel also may want to consider translations of foreign articles, as well as web published material in its selection process. The Armed Forces desperately need works like this one and Walter Boyne has proven himself to be up to the task. With some refinement in his methodology and annual updates, *Today’s Best Military Writing* promises to emerge as a “must-read” for anyone in the field.



The Editors
International Journal of Naval History
editors@ijnhonline.org

© Copyright 2005, International Journal of Naval History, All Rights Reserved