

**Male Armor.** Jon Robert Adams. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008, \$17.50, paper, 160 pp.

**Reviewed by Brian Dumm, United States Air Force Academy**

Jon Robert Adams, in his study *Male Armor: The Soldier-Hero in Contemporary American Culture*, deconstructs the culturally substantiated notion of masculinity's inherency in war's performance by providing a limited archaeology of 20<sup>th</sup> Century American representations of manhood in war as envisioned in literature and film. Examining a small number of pertinent works, Adams exposes the American citizen's conflation of war with manhood, the wider American cultural paradigm that enables the mythologized equivalence between these two terms, and most stolidly, the disjuncture between civilian perceptions of war's relationship with masculinity and the disruptive narratives his examined texts offer to counter these popular perceptions. Further, Adams entreats the use of his analysis to "enunciate the 'direction or doctrine' that will finally end war," holding fast to a belief that by decoupling civilian conflation of war with masculinity in an accessible way, he can discourage the ready national recourse and the willing individual participation that make war practicable. His then is both a cultural study in a traditional, intellectual sense as well as a methodology for provoking cultural dialog regarding war in a practical, actionable sense.

In concert with his introductory and concluding remarks—which by themselves amount to important and worthwhile reading on a broader, thematic level—Adams traces with appropriate granularity the genealogy of manhood, masculinity, and the American male war hero from its post-World War II, Cold War position through its contemporary conception. While his account is not exhaustive, his research is illustrative, providing in-depth literary analysis while also offering a framework for engaging the issues beyond the immediate works of the study. Beginning with Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* and James Jones's *The Thin Red Line*, and moving through Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*, David Rabe's *Streamers*, and Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, and concluding with David O. Russell's *Three Kings* and Anthony Swofford's *Jarhead*, Adams reveals the bifurcation between the cultural myths about war's ability to create men/manhood from a civilian perspective and the depictions of the much different male hero presented in film and literature often and especially produced by veterans themselves. Adams contends it is the disjuncture between popular willingness to accept war as a guarantor of manliness and the apathetic if not antithetical view of war's relation

to manhood as depicted in literature and film that is in large part responsible for perpetuating war's performance; that is, if more citizens understood that war neither makes men nor proves the virility of America, perhaps America could more aptly avoid war's performance.

The extent to which Adams is successful at making plain the gap between civilian cultural constructions of masculinity as a function of war and the war experience itself is a service to both war literature studies as well as critical discourse on national identity vis-à-vis war. While principally an examination of 20<sup>th</sup> Century texts, Adams' line of inquiry both provides an historical context for contemporary dialog and offers numerous substantive contributions to the ongoing dialog itself. Provocative, insightful, and worthy of every page turn for the student as well as the expert in the fields of War Literature and Cultural Studies, *Male Armor* no doubt also holds resonance for the wider public. Indeed, it is the wider public to whom Adams most wishes to speak.

***Freedom's Forge: How American Business Produced Victory in World War II.***

Arthur Herman, New York: Random House, 2012. \$28.00. cloth, i-xiv, 413 pp.

***Reviewed by Christopher M. Rein, United States Air Force Academy***

Since the culmination of the conservative revolution in 1980, interests on the right have commissioned countless studies to challenge the liberal-consensus interpretation of events that dominated the previous half-century. Sadly, many of these revisionists have often either ignored or manipulated historical evidence in order to advance their own views. Arthur Herman's *Freedom's Forge* fits solidly within this genre.

Commissioned and funded by the conservative American Enterprise Institute (AEI), *Freedom's Forge* attempts to rewrite history by deemphasizing the collaboration of government, business and labor that supplied the Allies and the fighting men and women on the front lines who actually won the war and substitute instead an alternate reality where the private sector alone triumphed over obstructionist "New Dealers" in the Roosevelt administration and a labor movement supposedly dominated by communists to singly-handedly win the war. Herman actually seems to believe that, "their foes weren't German or Japanese soldiers but Washington politicians and bureaucrats, shrill journalists, military martinets, the denizens of Big Labor as well as Big Government." The attack

continues unabated throughout the work, recreating a fanciful, almost fictional world and unfortunately letting political bias and partisan screed get in the way of what could have been an interesting story.

The advance praise touts *Freedom's Forge* as "one of the last great, untold stories of the war," (dustjacket) but Herman's heavy reliance on secondary sources suggest that much of the story has already been told. In tracing the lives of William Knudsen and Henry Kaiser, his two protagonists, Herman relies heavily on a 1947 biography of Knudsen and a 1989 biography of Kaiser. The scanty archival research suggests that there really isn't much new to this story, other than the twisting to fit a conservative meta-narrative.

Knudsen and Kaiser seem to have been chosen as a framework for the narrative because both were self-made men who rose from humble origins to amass great wealth, a staple of conservative defenses of capitalism and the myth that anyone with talent can succeed. Herman goes out of his way to highlight other Horatio Alger-esque success stories, perhaps in an attempt to deflect criticism of all the captains of industry who inherited their wealth rather than earning it. But Kaiser's case in particular calls into question the private sector's ability to succeed without government support. We learn that Kaiser made his mark fulfilling government contracts let under the 1916 Federal-Aid Road Act, at one point even jumping from a moving train in order to reach a contract office on time and enter a bid. Kaiser's shipbuilding empire during World War II was fueled entirely by government contracts (highlighting the private sector's inability to anticipate and meet the national need for merchant shipping in the absence of any clear profit motive) and quickly collapsed in the post-war years. In detailing Kaiser's struggles during the incredibly prosperous 1950's Herman admits that "the one thing missing was generous government funding," resulting in "spectacular disaster," and that Kaiser's "reputation as America's entrepreneurial wizard was permanently tarnished."

Herman's work also suffers from an assumption that will rankle military historians: that production and materiel superiority are, in and of themselves, sufficient to gain victory in war. There are countless cases where a technologically inferior or under-industrialized opponent has triumphed in war. Allied production was undoubtedly a significant part of the eventual victory, but it was insufficient to attain victory alone. Without the indomitable British will to persevere in the face of long odds, personified by the Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, and the almost fanatical devotion of the Soviets to resist the Nazi onslaught, there would not have been a world for America to save. The emphasis on materiel superiority also minimizes the courage of the men and women in the trenches (Herman

prefers to highlight the number of senior executives who “died on the job” during the war!) along with the tactical, operational and strategic expertise of the military leaders who employed the weapons in coordinated and well-executed campaigns. Dwight Eisenhower is noticeably absent from the narrative, perhaps because his warnings about the dangers of the military-industrial complex have made him less than welcome in the halls of the American Enterprise Institute.

The work’s only saving grace is Herman’s writing style, which moves effortlessly across varied terrain to string his narrative together, a talent that earned him a Pulitzer nomination for his previous work, *Gandhi & Churchill*. It is a shame that such talent, in this case, is wasted on a flawed interpretation of events.

The real tragedy of *Freedom’s Forge* is that it misses a golden opportunity, in this era of increasing partisanship where compromise has become a four-letter word, to highlight a remarkable example of collaboration between industry, government and labor. While there was grumbling in all camps, including from Roosevelt’s supporters for letting the camel’s nose into the tent by inviting the industrialists to Washington to organize and direct the war effort, and from organized labor who resented frozen wages in a time of rising inflation, all three sides realized that they would have to find ways to cooperate in order solve the nation’s and the world’s most pressing problems. Such a narrative might have served to help reunite a fractured populace and reassure readers that the United States is still capable, as it once was, of providing critical leadership in addressing global threats. Instead, *Freedom’s Forge* will only widen the chasm, leaving the real story still to be written.

**The Envoy: The Epic Rescue of the Last Jews of Europe in the Desperate Closing Months of World War II.** Alex Kershaw. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2010, \$16.00 paper, 294 pp. photos, maps, index.

*Benjamin F. Jones, United States Air Force Academy*

Raoul Wallenberg’s fame is not as great as Adolf Eichmann’s infamy. But it should be. Wallenberg was the Swedish diplomat who attempted to save as many Hungarian Jews as possible from Eichmann’s efforts to ship them to Auschwitz. While neither man achieved his highest aims, and both received death for their efforts, the story of their opposition to each other is compelling. Eichmann’s rise up the Gestapo ladder, his work in eastern Europe, his escape to Argentina, his arrest by the Israelis and his trial in 1960 makes for a fascinating story on its own.

However, when countered by Wallenberg's work as a part of a larger American effort to save Jews under the aegis of the War Refugees Board, and quite possibly as an agent of the United States' Office of Strategic Services, it makes their two stories together one of that should be told to all those interested in human rights work, foreign policy making, or simple bare knuckled courage in the face of evil.

The contention between these two men and their fascinating relationship is brought out well by Alex Kershaw's quickly paced writing. Kershaw has established a reputation for ably telling stories that should be told. However, this is not a solid scholarly work as it relies on mostly secondary sources, many of which are outdated. The relationship between Wallenberg and the United States is not explored deeply enough and we are left wondering if the Swede charged off with a hint of a mission that he largely concocted himself, or if President Roosevelt, Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, or General William Donovan of the OSS who is not mentioned, are pulling the strings and providing resources and direction. By the time one is two thirds of the way through the story, it seems fairly clear that Wallenberg is on his own and would be unwilling, if not unable, to contact anyone outside of Budapest where he frantically searched for ways to protect Jews using fraudulent Swedish identity cards that he gave to any Jew he could. Nevertheless Kershaw does not make a convincing attempt to explain the larger context of the War Refugee Board, or Roosevelt's reasons for creating the Board while at the same time not providing the necessary resources and political leadership for it to have a more substantial impact in saving lives. It is perfectly plausible to conclude that Roosevelt created it in order to make his Treasury Secretary, the only Jew in his cabinet, content that actions were being taken to protect the war's most vulnerable people, while not using valuable resources for something he could not clearly explain to the American public. The records are now open and available; however, Kershaw does not discuss the Washington politics that could reveal a great deal about how and why Wallenberg was able to operate, but just barely so.

Politics in Moscow is another matter that needs more attention as Kershaw argues that Wallenberg's fate is shrouded in Soviet deceit and the post-war lies of Stalin's secret military police, the NKVD. Perhaps it still cannot be known, despite the long ago end of the Cold War and opening of various Russian archives but did Kershaw attempt to find out? Clearly he did not and repeats what Wallenberg's family has, after years of anguish and heart ache found out for themselves. Other works published at about the same time as this one, posit that Wallenberg survived in a Soviet gulag until the 1980s, but they are not mentioned as they would bog down the brisk writing or because they were based upon sources Kershaw could

not responsibly offer conjecture. In any case, readers are left with the fact that Wallenberg met a tragic and unjust end.

What is brought out well in the book are some of the stories of the Jews Wallenberg saved and the conditions in which doing so was possible. The interviews Kershaw conducted with some of those Wallenberg saved give the book a great deal of its immediacy and humanity. But the conditions in which Wallenberg and Eichmann operated make the book a valuable contribution for the general reader. Diplomatically, Hungary lurched between Hitler, armistice talks, and back into the hands of their own murderous fascist government before finally succumbing to Soviet occupation in the last year of the war. Wallenberg's successful sheltering of Jews could only occur due to the pretense of the pro-German Hungarian government's sovereignty. Hitler needed that pretense for his own purposes in the grander war effort and therefore, from his position in Berlin, was willing to let the Hungarians make decisions that impeded his murderous aims for the time being. But the "final solution's" orchestrator in Budapest, Lieutenant Colonel Adolph Eichmann, was too impatient and sought to keep the trains flowing to Auschwitz. In fact, he was so determined that when he sought trains and trucks the German army needed, or if his Gestapo superiors wanted Jews as live bargaining chips with the west, Eichmann ignored orders and still sent Jews to the ovens, forcing them to walk all the way to the Austrian border if necessary. Kershaw understands the environment that relied on this political chaos and one can see how an astute man such as Wallenberg could take advantage of it. Wallenberg's lavish dinner with Eichmann where he literally lifts the curtain to reveal a Budapest night sky blazing with Soviet artillery fire is a wonderfully written chapter and serves as a telling scene to the choices both men continually had to make.

Scholars familiar with the Holocaust will not need to read this work as there is little that is new here. General readers curious about ways the Holocaust could have been slowed will find this book rewarding. But most of all, *The Envoy* is about how a good and daring man tried, in a unique moment in time, to halt unremitting evil but was interfered with by apathy, neglect, and bureaucratic infighting while being rewarded with fear and ignorance resulting in his imprisonment and death. For both kinds of readers, why such conditions prevailed will have to be found elsewhere.

***Pearl Harbor Christmas: A World at War, December 1941.*** Stanley Weintraub. Cambridge, MA: De Capo Press, 2011, \$24.00, paperback, 224 pp.

*Reviewed by: Charles D. Dusch, Jr., United States Air Force Academy*

It seems that World War II history has become an unexceptional topic in today's world. "Everyone knows" what happened and nurtures some opinion regarding the war. The sweep of the war is readily placed in an historical context and juxtaposed against the Great Depression and the Cold War as the crowning achievement of the so-called "American Century." Its great, well-known battles like Stalingrad and Midway are examined as events unto themselves.

Consequently, Stanley Weintraub's *Pearl Harbor Christmas* is distinctly refreshing. This is a fascinating work of historical reconstruction which examines a roughly eleven-day period centered on Christmas 1941, when British Prime Minister Winston Churchill visited the American President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt at the White House to discuss Allied strategy.

*Pearl Harbor Christmas* reminds one of John Lukacs' gripping work, *Five Days in London: May 1940*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999) in which Lukacs argued the course of history was changed over five crucial days while the British cabinet wavered between accommodation with Hitler or continuing the fight. Similarly, Weintraub contends that the Christmastide meeting between Churchill and FDR was equally significant—the Americans were still reeling from the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor while the British Empire staggered against equally stunning reversals in the Far East. Meanwhile, Churchill doggedly remained committed to defeating Hitler first and keeping FDR faithful to that task.

Through Weintraub's masterful prose, the reader is immersed in a chaotic war in which the future was a great unknown. He skillfully re-creates the immediacy of the crisis while events which were largely disastrous for the Allied cause unfolded during those eleven days.

Cultural and social historians may be disappointed with the precious few glimpses of American wartime society during this period. The book is clearly about the political machinations between the British and American leaders as war raged around the globe. Additionally, there is little new scholarship offered since many of the author's sources include well-established literature. However *Pearl Harbor Christmas* clearly reflects Weintraub's life-long scholarship.

*Pearl Harbor Christmas* is a fast read for having so much detail, and it is difficult to put down—which graduate students will appreciate. Both scholars and history buffs will enjoy it too as a fresh examination of a well-trodden war.

Weintraub crafts a concise study of this pivotal meeting during that momentous Christmastide. Scholars will value the author's clarity and depth of expertise that surpasses previous works on this topic.

***Stalin's General: The Life of Georgy Zhukov.*** Geoffrey Roberts. New York: Random House, 2012, \$30.00, Hardcopy, 375 pp.

***Reviewed by Lindsay R. Zeller, United States Air Force Academy.***

I already knew a little something of Zhukov before Roberts's accounts, ironically through a short story called, "Times of Crisis," by Alexander Solzhenitsyn. In it, Solzhenitsyn invades and fictionalizes Zhukov's thought process while the former marshal writes his memoirs, struggling to be truthful and portray honest depictions of the leaders he knew (namely Stalin) while still remaining a good and loyal Communist. My interest piqued, I promised myself that, when the opportunity came, I would learn more about Zhukov the man, who is still, by and large, regarded as legendary, especially by the Russian Army. I wanted to know his faults and his strengths, his failings and his successes. What was he thinking when the Germans rolled over his homeland's countryside in Operation Barbarossa? Was he terrified? Was he looking to pass on the blame to escape Stalin's murderous temper? Was he worried about his family, fleeing his birthplace while Nazis burned the countryside in which he once hunted? What is the personal story behind one of the Soviet Union's most-decorated and lauded marshals of all time?

The answer is: I still don't know. This biography is an extremely well-researched military history lesson about Zhukov's life, with little meat about his personal life for me to gnaw my inquisitive jaws on.

Ultimately, this is not a damnation of Roberts's biography. Roberts had his own objectives which simply did not satisfy my expectations. In his preface, Roberts sets his goal:

My working title for the new project was "Zhukov: A Critical Biography" and the intention was to produce a warts-and-all portrait that would expose the many myths surrounding his life and career as well as capture the great drama of his military victories and defeats, and his journey on the political roller coaster...the result is what I hope will be seen as a balanced reappraisal that cuts through the hyperbole of the Zhukov cult while appreciating the man and his achievements in full measure.

Without doubt, he accomplishes his intentions. His accounts of Zhukov's military exploits and his political life after the war are extremely detailed, largely because of the wide-range of resources from which Roberts pieces together a cohesive picture. For example, in Chapter 7, Roberts utilizes over thirty sources to describe one of Zhukov's most notable strategic opuses, the defense of Moscow; his sources are diverse, ranging from other historians' accounts of the battle to personal reports Zhukov and his fellow marshals completed for the Stavka and the General Staff. This is just a small fraction of the various materials Roberts obviously poured over in order to create a comprehensive account of Zhukov's career, as he rose from peasant cavalry commander to living legend.

Roberts also manages to accomplish something that I find particularly difficult to express in historical accounts: he adds life to the maps included in the biography. Through exhaustive description, Roberts helps the reader understand the convoluted political decisions, personality conflicts, and strategic planning behind each and every line shift annotated on the maps. He depicts a front line that resembles the ebb and flow of a real-life game of *Risk*, explaining how Zhukov, with his intense sense of discipline, influenced or was involved in every major decision made during the Soviet campaign. Of particular interest are the sections involving one of Zhukov's more infamous orders—*Ni Shagu Nazad!* (Not a step back!)—a policy he iron-fistedly enforced in the defense of Moscow that later became Stalin's mantra for the entire Red Army. Westerners view the policy as beyond maniacal (and we probably always will), but Roberts studies with a certain intensity the reasons *behind* the order, stressing that, in the mind of Zhukov and Stalin, protecting the Motherland and repelling the Fascists were the *only* objectives in what they viewed as a fight for survival.

Equally impressive is the fact that Roberts does not allow himself to become caught up in the Zhukov personality cult. He is evenly critical of and awed by his subject. As Roberts clearly portrays, Zhukov embodied “willpower, discipline, decisiveness, and self-assurance under fire,” along with a “clarity of vision and purpose combined with a willingness to learn from experience.” But he also had a tendency to be bombastic and domineering, with seemingly little reflection on the sheer number of casualties that mushroomed under his command. Amongst other criticisms, Roberts points out that Zhukov, as Chief of the General Staff in 1941, was slow to “abandon offensive operations...and to instead adopt a strategic defense posture that might have better contained the...Blitzkrieg.” Yet Roberts's candor about Zhukov's faults and strengths as a military commander gives insight to the Zhukov that history *should* recognize. He takes Zhukov's comments from

his memoirs with a grain of salt, but also examines the validity of the “official” accusations made by Communist Party officials and other senior military leaders during Zhukov’s two dismissals.

Thus, Roberts clarifies the past regarding Zhukov’s true role in Soviet history, and he begins to paint a picture similar to the image Solzhenitsyn created in his short story—a man conflicted by loyalty and pride. However, the picture remains flat; Zhukov is a two-dimensional figure in this biography, because little research regarding his family and home life is provided. Roberts continuously glances at the surface of Zhukov’s family situation—his multiple affairs, his illegitimate child, his divorce from his first wife—but never delves deeper than that. Granted, Zhukov, as a good, conscientious Communist, would be very careful with what he said in his letters home, but the opportunity to study these equally important events in Zhukov’s life exists, through private papers, a vast collection of letters, and the recovered original manuscripts of his memoirs. This, essentially, is where my disappointment lies. My original questions about Stalin’s general were never answered because Roberts only acknowledges Zhukov’s intimate moments without every fully expanding on Zhukov *the man*.

Despite this shortcoming, Roberts’s biography is extremely thorough, excellent for a military historian interested in Soviet strategy during the war or a political scientist who wishes to more closely study the bipolar nature of the Soviet regime. He examines how popularity can be a dangerous thing—no matter which credo an individual’s government follows. Additionally, he brings up a somewhat veiled but comparably important issue with his close examination of Zhukov’s *true* history: do we in the West treat our senior military leaders the same way as Zhukov has been treated? Do we examine the likes of Patton, Westmoreland, Schwarzkopf, and Petraeus with the same level of objectivity and scrupulous attention, noting their deficiencies and mistakes along with their triumphs? Or, are we as bad as Stalin and Khrushchev during their purges, tossing military leaders to the side when they no longer serve our purpose? The honest answer is we are biased, especially depending on the outcome of a particular general’s war. However, *Stalin’s General* provides an exemplary start to a more impartial process. Befittingly, Roberts concludes on an observation Zhukov made in his later years: “It is young people who further our cause. It is very important that they should learn from our mistakes and our successes.”

***Between Here and Monkey Mountain.*** Laren McClung. Rhinebeck: The Sheep

Meadow Press, 2012, \$14.13, paperback, 71pp.

*Reviewed by Tammy L. Gant, United States Air Force Academy*

Of Laren McClung's collection of poetry, the reviewer Stanley Moss writes, "McClung's poetry walks on a tightrope of original knowledge, stretched between irrational poles." I think the analogy could go much further. About a year ago, I went to see Cirque du Soliel. The first half of McClung's collection reminded me of that night. It was brilliant and beautiful and literally breathtaking. The players flipped and twisted in unexpected ways. There were so many things going on I could not rest my eyes or my emotions. I can admit I was confused at times, but even so the show made my soul tingle. Like the players, McClung's words and images are often beautifully surprising. In "To the Day" she soars from a joke about dog weather to a child's fear of a tunnel to a walk in Little Saigon to the recollections of a refugee before landing with a sudden impossible twist neatly on loss and letting go. In "The Way It Is", McClung leads the reader gently through a dance about segregation, leaving us with a new word for the old tension. ". . . how I love the chiaroscuro / of our hands conjuring / boogie-woogie and I wonder, / who would dare run a rope / between us on the dance floor?" The simple shadow puppets of "Horse, Spider, and Monkey" dissolve into new ways of seeing the world.

Despite the beauty and the dazzle, I found some words, phrases or images frustratingly opaque. "Visitations" is a kaleidoscope of sights and sounds and tastes and textures that I experienced, but didn't quite understand. Perhaps I'm not the target audience, though. McClung dedicates the book by saying only, "for my family". This makes me wonder if only those in the front row can fully understand everything that's going on. The rest of us can find more than enough to content us, however, so I don't count this as a showstopper.

Moss also writes in his review, ". . . and there are war poems." Again, I find him guilty of understatement. Many of the poems are war poems in one sense of the phrase as McClung's inherited war surfaces unexpectedly in lines or images about daily living. In "Yard Work", a conversation about gardening recalls "the year of the monkey" in Vietnam where he "watched the lotus closely / . . . its homeostasis is almost human." In the poetry of the last thirty pages, however, the war is the daily living. Here, the timbre of the collection changes. Now reading is less like attending Cirque du Soliel and more like attending a storytelling festival. The setting is more intimate as the author invites us close to hear the stories of a soldier trying to make sense of Vietnam. It's story time, she tells us, because ". . . At sundown, / he

unlearns to lock up / a story . . .” The storyteller begins this series of war tales in her own voice telling the soldier’s tale. For example, “A fable of Tuy Hoa” repeats the phrase “he said,” making it clear this moment is a recollection of a told tale. The setting becomes even more intimate as the storyteller entwines her memories with the soldier’s. In “Thanksgiving” she recounts watching him kill a turkey as he recalls his first kill: “As he ties the legs he tells me: / . . . *In the free zone, we had orders to kill anyone. / The Cong were gone, but they left chickens / and those farm boys in my platoon / knew how to grab one by its head like this: / He slipped his hand over my fist— / the neck between two fingers. / Slap the sucker into the air—his arm / shot up then down like a whip.*” By the time McClung reaches the last section—a single poem entitled “Monkey Mountain”, the distance between storyteller and soldier is gone. In his own voice he navigates the confusion, boredom, intensity and profanity of war. He gets high with a monkey, listens to a radio broadcast of the moon landing, falls in love with a bar girl, kills people and watches others get killed. The closing image of the soldier’s story could be a metaphor of McClung’s collection. It is mysterious yet concrete, beautiful yet haunting. “When I rolled him from her / she was a sphinx opening her eyes into crescents. / Or a lotus in dark water.”

McClung’s poetry is riveting whether she’s walking a tightrope high above us or face-to-face in a soldier’s tale. She sometimes resists easy understanding, but the experience is worth more than the price of admission and enriches everyday life.

***The Storm Before Atlanta.*** Karen Schwabach. New York: Random House, 2010, \$16.99, hardcopy, 302pp.

***Reviewed by Tammy L. Gant, United States Air Force Academy***

Karen Schwabach’s *The Storm Before Atlanta* tells the story of two children fighting in the Civil War. As a ten-year-old in 1863, Jeremy Der Groot has grown up with the war, and he can’t imagine anything better than dying on the battlefield. But when he runs away to fight, he soon learns that war isn’t glorious; in fact it’s not even clearly defined. His story is interwoven with the story of another ten year old runaway. Dulcie meets Jeremy when she escapes slavery and is hired as a surgeon’s assistant in the same unit he serves in. In the course of the story, Jeremy and Dulcie befriend a young Confederate soldier (Charlie), and this unlikely trio learns how complex war and life and living really are. While the story isn’t eloquently told, it

offers young readers, and the adults in their lives, an opportunity to think about war and what comes after it.

“There are hundreds of sides to every story.” So says one of the characters in this middle grade (ages 8-13) novel. It soon becomes clear this is the central point of the story. In keeping with that theme, Schwabach wraps Jeremy’s coming of age around a song about the heroic death of “The Drummer Boy of Shiloh.” The first time Jeremy hears the song he is “spellbound” and he weeps at the beautiful tale of courage, sacrifice, and camaraderie. The song inspires him to join the Union Army so he too can die on the battlefield. When he finally joins a unit and meets the hardened and scarred men, he struggles to reconcile them to the weeping comrades in the song. Later, he’s disappointed in himself when he doesn’t act as courageously as “The Little Drummer Boy of Shiloh would have.” But when he finally learns there never was a Drummer Boy of Shiloh, he can accept it because “He’d seen battle, and knew it wasn’t anything like that song. . . . Ain’t no Drummer Boys of Shiloh nowhere. Ain’t no dyin’ surrounded by weepin’ comrades, ain’t no glory and no bein’ a hero. Just a lot of rain and mud and trying to stay alive.”

No other character experiences such emotional growth, but as a part of Jeremy’s development he can now see that those around him have more than one side to their stories too. Among his comrades he finally recognizes the woman who pretends to be a man so she can fight for her abolitionist beliefs and the ex-slave who passes for white and yet fights for the Confederates. He even recognizes what is likely a romantic relationship between two men in the unit (the hints are oblique but recurring). He can’t fully understand all that he sees, but he somehow knows that the war has changed society and after the war the world will need to make room for a variety of people: “[i]n a way that he sensed more than understood, the world didn’t seem to have a place in it for them, either. But they like Charlie and Dulcie, would make one.”

Not everything in the narrative is as satisfying as Jeremy’s emotional growth, however. Inconsistencies in the narrator’s voice were regular distractions from the story. The first two pages of chapter seven, for example, seemed contrived to provide historical facts on the war more than to drive the story forward; it suddenly seemed more like an encyclopedia than a novel. In fact the depth of research is everywhere noticeable in the text. Schwabach includes (not always smoothly) encounters with or references to “Northern Yanks;” the Peace Society and Copperheads; the history of North Georgia Indian mounds; details about how slaves spied for the Union army; and battlefield hospital tools and techniques, among other things. The inclusion of these historical facts and figures (as well as the notes and bibliography at the

end of the text) would make this novel a useful complement to a middle school history class, but they sometimes interrupt the reading experience. One place the research works well is in the battle scenes; the details of explosions, tourniquets and maggots will surely attract some reluctant readers.

Savvier young readers may find the conclusion unsatisfactory as Schwabach ends well before the army arrives anywhere near Atlanta. Indeed, the story ends on a downbeat without definite action or important insight (Jeremy's epiphany having come almost fifty pages before the end). The impending battle may come tomorrow or the next week, Jeremy may or may not write a letter to his incarcerated father, Dulcie may try to find her parents after the war or continue to assist the doctor in a freedman's camp, or they may both go to the family of one of their fallen comrades. All of these notes are left hanging in the air as the story ends.

This ending, though, could be used to open thoughtful discussion on the nature of war because it resists easy answers or tidy tales that make war seem knowable or manageable. Schwabach doesn't allow the reader to think war is something you can just close the book on and say "The End." The novel closes with these musings: "And after [the battle for Atlanta], who knew? How much longer could the war go on? All wars ended eventually. After them came a broken world that had to be fitted together again, as best it could be, and scattered, broken people to be fitted into it somehow. That would be long work." This book is written for the generation that comes after our current war and it encourages them to think about the challenge of fitting the pieces back together again while also making space for new ways of understanding each other. That makes *The Storm Before Atlanta* a worthwhile read for young adults and not so young adults too.

***What We Sign Up For.*** Lisa Siedlarz. San Antonio, TX: Pecan Grove Press, 2011, \$15.00, paper, 71 pp.

***Reviewed by James Moad***

Informed by a decade of war, Lisa Siedlarz's collection of poetry is a reflection on her younger brother, Kevin's, wartime experiences before, during and after serving in Afghanistan. Broken into five sections, her words are those of an observer shielded from the truth at first, consumed by her brother's absence, and ultimately, an honest and visceral reflection on war and its aftermath.

From her first section, a collection of nine pieces entitled, *Song of War*, we are taken back to a place and time we all remember—to events that inspired a defiant nation to stand up tall, unfurl old flags and call upon the young to fight in a war of retribution. She reminds us that, like her brother, a young plumber apprentice in the National Guard,

*Young and old fall to arms . . .  
a minimum wage workforce falls in  
to knock off Osama Bin Laden.*

Her poetry recalls the uncertainty and fear rippling across a nation, the war coverage and the names of the dead scrolling across the bottom of evening newscasts. She reacquaints us with those early years of uncertainty, and how on a New England day in October, she learned that Kevin would be going to Afghanistan.

*The raspiness of fallen leaves in your voice  
as you ask me to assume power of attorney.*

We are taken along on her journey as she reflects on Kevin in basic training, his return home for the holidays, the exhaustion and fear, pain and sadness before deploying halfway around the world. We discover what it means to wait at home for a little brother—existing in the void created by his absence as other young men return home in caskets.

*Morning Sun is criminally bright.  
The boys secure and hoist a flag  
Over the newly installed plaque  
In memory of the twenty year old pfc.*

The middle sections are Siedlarz's interpretation of her brother's experiences. Imparted through his memories and photographs, we are given a glimpse into the reality of life in a combat zone—the brutal harshness, pain, sadness and absurdity of this war. These poems are a series of beautiful vignettes that enlighten, inspire and remind us of how war transforms everyone it touches.

In the final section, *What We Don't See*, she takes us back into the heart of America—a nation still adrift in a war without fully understanding the consequences on those who have served and the families who suffer with them.

*Boys come home with hostile fire  
Looped in their minds. News clips gloss over  
Second and third tours, ignoring families  
Widowed to this label of freedom.*

*What We Sign Up For* is ultimately a requiem for past lives on both a personal and societal level, a reminder that war is always about absence, about departure and loss, and the forced changes that ensue before, during and after our soldiers return from war. Her imagery forces us to see and share in their experiences, taking us into the heart of the war at home and abroad, her words resonating like a bomb blast we can't escape.

*Somewhere someone waits for a phone call,  
Gets a knock on the door instead,  
The gold star as silent as a scream.*

This is a collection that will linger with me. Even now, I find myself going back to the first section of the book to feel that time and place again. In the end, her poetry is a stark reminder of what good poetry does—the best of it—which is, illuminate a feeling, emotion, or experience, and elevate it to a place where we can examine it—the rawness of something unfolding on a page in a way that makes us see it all anew.

***Black Wings.*** Kathleen Toomey Jabs. McClean, VA: Fuze Publishing LLC, 2011, \$19.95, paper, pp.303.

***Reviewed by Katherine Boyle, United States Air Force Academy***

*Black Wings* by Kathleen Toomey Jabs begins with a fatal aircraft accident onboard the USS JOHNSON involving Naval Academy graduate LT Audrey Richards. Her former roommate, LT Bridget Donovan, is skeptical about the crash and launches her own investigation to explore if occurrences from their Annapolis days have anything to do with Audrey's death.

Jabs's depiction of Academy life is dead on, from the frustration of women struggling to look appealing in uniform, the mental games played by the upperclassmen during basic training, to the stress of an honor hearing and

enduring the Dark Ages during the wintertime. Although describing the Naval Academy Class of 1990, many of the author's descriptions of the environment are still applicable to the service academies today. One with any experience of Basic Training or being a freshmen at an Academy cannot help but be amused at such passages, "All the grooming tasks seem silly, arbitrary, a waste of her time, just like learning the parts of an Army tank or cleaning radiator coils with a toothbrush because an admiral will be walking through the halls. She didn't expect military life to be so obsessed with minutia: loose threads, wrinkles, specks of dust."

Jabs comments on the treatment of women at the Naval Academy, providing an interesting comparison to how women are perceived in the military twenty years later. It is difficult to read about women always wanting or needing to prove themselves among a majority of male counterparts two decades ago, but there is comfort in knowing that today, women are much more accepted and comfortable at the service academies. The differences are amazing and there is an absolute admiration for those early female graduates of the Academies and all they endured.

The use of mystery throughout the novel demands the reader to continue turning the page. LT Bridget Donovan is working on the case from her position at the Pentagon, but the flashbacks back to Annapolis placed at every other chapter develop the relationships between Bridget and Audrey and their fellow Academy classmates. The dual storylines gives the reader various perspectives as one tries to build the background and history of the characters and apply it to the fatality. As Bridget tries to understand the legacy of the Black Wings, she searches all over Annapolis and for the people she used to know, bringing the reader along in the investigation, "She lowered her backpack and grabbed the rail. Her heart began to beat wildly. On the ground before her a giant shadow shaped like a bat darkened the road. Black Wings. The shape was quite clear."

Susan Shreve, author of fourteen novels, describes *Black Wings* as, "A chilling, fast-paced and intelligent story, wonderfully written." *Black Wings* is an enjoyable read that is highly relatable to any graduate of a service academy.