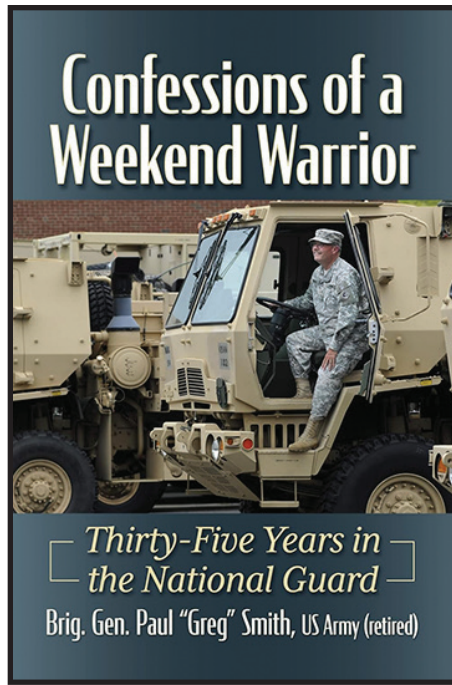


Corps Competency? represents a valuable and serious counterpoint. Furthermore, the author's criticism is supported by substantial evidence, making it difficult to refute. As with every human endeavor, *Corps Competency?* is not perfect. Although the author demonstrates the III MAF commitment to civic action with impressive statistics, he ignores the even more impressive numbers coming from U.S. Army formations. He also skips over the poor state of combined arms tactics in 1965, a product of the Marine Corps leadership's fascination with helicopters. Yet these are minor flaws that do not detract from the book's main analysis.

Corps Competency? does not present III MAF in a glowing light. In Vietnam, the Marines showed the ability to learn and adapt at the tactical level. However, their major command in Vietnam failed to properly analyze the situation on the ground, adapt to it, and exert effective control over its forces. The reasons for this abysmal failure are tied to service (or strategic) culture and personalities. Marine Corps training and education were focused on battalions and regiments. Marine doctrine was centered on amphibious assault and Marine Air-Ground Task Force concepts to the exclusion of anything else. On top of these issues, only a few of III MAF's commanders showed an aptitude for higher command. Most delegated authorities and responsibilities to an ad hoc staff that often could not cope. Even worse, the Marine Corps itself failed to learn any relevant lessons on corps command from the war, opting instead to select only lessons that supported its doctrine.

With the Marine Corps again undergoing a significant structural change, and with a new, unproven, and, according to some, unsuitable littoral combat concept at its center, one could wonder if history is repeating itself.

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CONFESSIONS OF A WEEKEND WARRIOR: THIRTY-FIVE YEARS IN THE NATIONAL GUARD

BY PAUL "GREG" SMITH

McFarland & Company, 2024

Pp. viii, 246. \$29.95

REVIEW BY NICHOLAS J. HURLEY

Many people have written and talked about the National Guard's transformation from a strategic reserve to an operational force over the past fifty years. The Reagan years, the end of the Cold War, the beginning of the Global War on Terrorism, and the subsequent changes to national defense strategy have all had a tremendous influence on how the Army funds, equips, trains and deploys the guard.

One thing that has remained constant throughout this period of transformation is the guard's role as a dual status force: in addition to maintaining their readiness for potential federal service, units provide support to state and local governments in times of emergency. This latter mission defined the career of the author, retired Brig. Gen. Paul "Greg" Smith, from fighting a flood during his very first drill in 1979 to commanding the Massachusetts Army National Guard in the aftermath of the Boston Marathon bombings in 2013. His thoughtful retelling of these and other events makes *Confessions of a Weekend Warrior: Thirty-Five Years in the National Guard* an entertaining and informative read.

The title of this book is entirely appropriate given its contents. Smith offers plenty of confessions, many in the form of anecdotes from his time as a junior officer in the late 1970s and early 1980s when the National Guard at times resembled, in his words, the "gaggle of card-playing, beer-swilling amateurs" that the American public made them out to be (2). He is just as quick, however, to point out how flawed this stereotype actually was, highlighting the professionalism, initiative, and adaptability he witnessed from reservists who made up for their lack of parade-ground spit and polish with a willingness to answer the call whenever their community needed them. This disparity between perception and reality is so significant at times that the title's reference to the "weekend warrior" comes off as tongue-in-cheek, given how frequently the author and his comrades found themselves in uniform outside of a typical drill period.

Besides telling the story of his time in uniform, Smith's self-proclaimed goals for this book are to "paint a realistic portrait" of the people who make up the National Guard and share his thoughts on leadership through lessons learned during his many years of service (2-3). He is successful on both counts. There are numerous references within the text to individuals with whom Smith served and how those associates affected his career. Although he depicts some of these interactions as cautionary tales, the vast majority are positive; Smith clearly has respect for many of the men and women with whom he served and is not afraid to praise and thank them, often by name, publicly.

Smith is equally candid when evaluating his leadership over the years, highlighting his successes and reflecting on instances where he believes he could have done better. While noting that this is not a book on leadership theory, Smith nonetheless finds a way to share his views and advice on the subject without preaching. He concludes many of his chapters about a particular assignment or event with a brief overview of lessons learned and how those lessons influenced his development as an officer and leader.

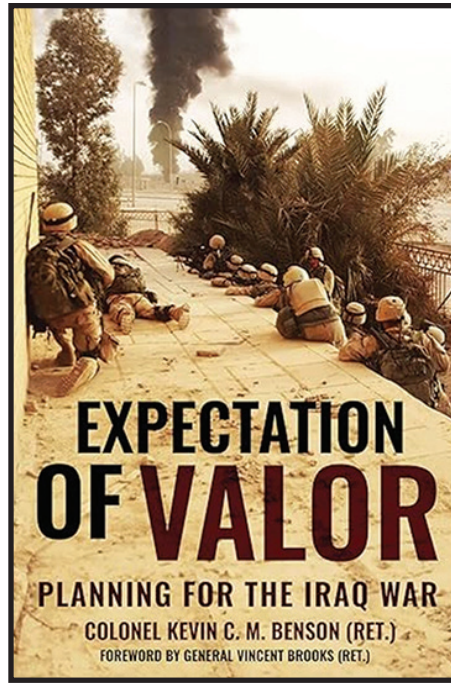
Although the text proceeds more or less chronologically, the chapters themselves could have benefited from more deliberate organization. Some pertain to a specific assignment or anecdote from Smith's career but interspersed among these are others more thematic in nature, offering his views on issues such as race, gender, and sexual

orientation in the military. Placing these latter chapters at the end of the book and consolidating the few that are less than five pages long would have allowed for better delineation between Smith's retelling of events and his thoughts on military life in general.

Given how introspective Smith is throughout much of the book, the lack of a final chapter discussing the legacy and impact of his long career is surprising. As it stands, he devotes just three pages to his decision to retire and his last day in uniform. In all fairness, Smith notes that on the day he relinquished command in 2014, he purposely avoided thinking too much about what was transpiring, finding it slightly overwhelming. Because this book was published ten years later, however, it would have been nice to know his thoughts after a decade of hindsight and reflection.

These issues notwithstanding, *Confessions of a Weekend Warrior* provides a unique and honest perspective on change and continuity within the National Guard across five decades and it will be of interest to a wide audience. As a primary source, it holds value for any scholar studying the guard's long-term transformation and its role in supporting civilian authorities. As a collection of war stories, Smith's often humorous account of the challenges, rewards, and eccentricities that come with being a citizen-soldier will appeal to anyone who has served time in the reserve components.

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EXPECTATION OF VALOR: PLANNING FOR THE IRAQ WAR

BY KEVIN C. M. BENSON

Casemate Publishers, 2024

Pp. xxii, 250. \$34.95

REVIEW BY NICHOLAS J. SCHLOSSER

Upon assuming duties as the director of plans, J-5, for the Third United States Army, in June 2003, Col. Kevin C. M. Benson found his staff working on a request for information from Deputy Defense Secretary Paul D. Wolfowitz. In the wake of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, U.S. national security personnel had been preparing diligently for a possible campaign against Saddam Hussein's Iraq. The Third Army, as U.S. Central Command's Combined Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC), would be responsible for any major land war against that country. Wolfowitz wanted to know why the United States could not invade Iraq; reach its capital, Baghdad; and depose Saddam using just one brigade. Benson assumed the question was a prank being pulled by his staff on their new commanding officer.

As Benson relates in *Expectation of Valor: Planning for the Iraq War*, his sobering and revelatory account of his tenure as the chief of plans at Third Army from June 2002 until July 2003, it was no joke. "It was an amazing question and was answered only after we did the math on the amount of fuel,

ammunition, water, and goods it would take to move one M1A1 Abrams tank and its four-man crew from Kuwait to Baghdad, and the support structure required to move that much fuel, ammunition, water, and food" (4). Ominously, Benson notes this would not be the last such query from his superiors in the Defense Department regarding Iraq.

Colonel Benson's task at Third Army was formidable. Arguing that Saddam Hussein's regime constituted an unacceptable threat to regional stability, President George W. Bush's administration concluded that the United States would need to remove the leader from power using military force. It fell primarily to Benson and his staff to create plans for how to do this. Yet, critically, senior leaders at the Defense Department—such as Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz—were convinced that the United States did not need to commit as many troops to the operation as Central Command's existing plans recommended. Benson thus had to plan a major campaign using far fewer forces than prescribed by accepted doctrine and then reconcile these plans with imprecise and contradictory guidance. As he notes, "In Washington, people were constantly talking about 'off-ramps' even though many of our units were not even on the highway" (71).

A 1977 graduate of the United States Military Academy, Benson's career included critical assignments as a planner at the XVIII Airborne Corps and Third Army. Altogether, Benson's experiences provided ample preparation for designing the deployment of hundreds of thousands of troops in a large-scale offensive. Although Benson references his schooling, especially at the School for Advanced Military Studies, throughout his account, he does so not to preen but to lay out a seeming contradiction. The military invested considerable time and resources into training Benson to become a professional planner, yet that same military leadership often dismissed his expertise and experience. Repeatedly pressed to "Think outside the damned box, Benson," the author lamented that "my particular 'box' remained bounded by Newtonian physics, wherein it took time to move mass over distance" (108).

Nowhere did Benson encounter more frustration than when he tried to prepare Third Army for operations after Saddam Hussein's fall, a period known as Phase IV of the operation. The author's account of this process dominates much of the book's latter half. Benson makes several attempts to