

Book Reviews

Jason Q. Bohm. *From the Cold War to ISIL. One Marine's Journey*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, www.usni.org, 2019. xiv+265 pp., illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. US \$39.95, cloth; ISBN 978-1-68247-457-0.

From the Cold War to ISIL. One Marine's Journey by Jason Q. Bohm is part memoir, part introduction to the Marine Corps and also a surprisingly complete modern history of the Marine Corps. Bohm is now a Brigadier General serving as the Chief of Staff to Naval Striking and Support Forces, NATO, in Portugal and he wrote the book while he was still a colonel. Bohm is refreshingly humble and his book is strikingly free of the pretension and self-importance that sometimes clouds the self-authored stories of senior officers. The book follows his career from Navy Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) at the University of Illinois through his successful tour as the first commander of the US Central Command Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force Crisis Response Central Command (SPMAGTF-CR-CC).

From the Cold War to ISIL is a smooth and easy read. Bohm clearly explains all of the Marine Corps-isms and terminology along the way. In fact, it is an ideal introductory book on the Marine Corps itself. The breadth of Bohm's assignments during his career and his lucid prose allow him to showcase the varied capabilities of the Marine Corps and their purpose without deviating from his own story.

An infantryman by trade, Bohm started his career leading an 81-millimeter mortar platoon. Bohm is clear that this first tour was a disappointment—he has missed the generation-defining Persian Gulf War. This sentiment would not be out of place among today's generation of Marines—many of whom, like Bohm, joined operational units just as the United States was drawing down forces and shifting away from combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. After his tour as a platoon commander in an infantry battalion, Bohm again served as a platoon commander for a Fleet Antiterrorism Security Team (FAST), a unit used to reinforce embassies and critical US infrastructure

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abroad. Here, Bohm has a unique perspective—he had to work directly with the ambassador and liaise with the potential Haitian invasion force. Many of Bohm’s other experiences in Iraq, Somalia, Okinawa and at a recruiting station in West Virginia, while interesting, are far more common and have been shared by thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of Marines.

Despite Bohm’s modesty, make no mistake that the career he narrates is an exceptional one. He joined the small ranks of the Corps’ general officers—at less than half of one percent of the active duty force. His assignments tell the same story. Bohm is repeatedly given command of Marines in independent and uncertain environments. While there is always a degree of change in officer assignments, there should be little doubt that at almost every stage of his career, Bohm would have been chosen from among his peers for duties and responsibilities that were especially challenging, or high profile. At the same time, it is striking the calibre of Marines Bohm has had the privilege of serving alongside, including a future Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps who served as Bohm’s senior enlisted advisor when he was a company commander. Bohm never disparages any other Marines or officers in the book and, in fact, usually notes their current job or the future rank they attained. Since Bohm is still serving on active duty, this is no tell-all or airing of dirty laundry.

The story peaks with description of Bohm’s time leading SPMAGTC-CR-CC. This is not a standing unit, but rather a purpose-built task force, designed by Bohm to deploy to the Middle East. The flexibility and adaptability of the SPMAGTC-CR-CC is a testament to the organizational nature of the Marine Corps, something that Bohm clearly explains. The unit arrives in Iraq rough-

ly at the high water mark of ISIL (also known as ISIS and Daesh) in Iraq and Syria and is immediately part of the action. Here, the story becomes more technical and Bohm is forced to use more jargon to describe the complicated US and coalition operations in Iraq, but this is a point where readers who are new to the Marine Corps and familiar with it will learn something. Bohm had not only a front row seat, but the driver’s seat—in the fight against ISIL in Iraq.

The story ends when Bohm returns to the US and he leaves the reader with concluding remarks, but without a concluding chapter to round out the book. This, and the lack of discussion about the future of the Marine Corps, leave the book feeling somewhat incomplete. But this may have been a conscious choice because of Bohm’s active-duty status, and the fact it was written before the ongoing changes to the Marine Corps were made public.

From the Cold War to ISIL is, in the end, exactly how Bohm describes it in the title and introduction. It is his personal journey through the Marine Corps. On the way, he includes shore lessons about the Marine Corps and ties his own story to the changes in the Marines Corps in recent decades. Unlike other memoirs of service, Bohm has not written a treatise on leadership, or lessons learned. This book is an excellent introduction or familiarization with the Marine Corps through the story of one exceptional Marine.

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Philip Bowring. *Empire of the Winds. The Global Role of Asia’s Great Archipelago*. London, UK: I. B. Tauris, www.bloomsbury.com, 2019. xviii+317 pp., illustrations, maps, glossary, notes, bib-