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Marquis, Susan L. *Unconventional Warfare: Rebuilding U.S. Special Operations Forces*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1997.

This is an outstanding account of the struggles by which US special forces acquired unprecedented size, broad missions, and eminence within the Department of Defense, following near demise after the Vietnam War. It is a much less satisfying description of what unconventional warfare is, and how it can be employed to advantage in our time. The author's emphasis may well reflect the US military establishment's powerful tendency to be guided by internal factors more than by what it is to accomplish. Hence the book is longest on how we got what we have, modest on what we've got, and sketchy on what it's all good for.

The book opens with a brief but good service by service history of US special operations in World War II and in Vietnam. It explains both the "specialty" and the utility of those operations. Special forces must get behind enemy lines by dropping from the air, by walking through difficult terrain, or by swimming - preferably at night. Once on the spot, they gather intelligence, kill some especially important individuals while rescuing others, destroy or capture key installations, or energize native guerrillas. Because the "specials" are unequipped to confront the enemy's main forces, their exemplar physical strength and their unusual capacity to adapt to foreign environments are intended primarily to avoid combat. Such troops are most useful when their target is small, very important to overall operations, and reachable only by stealth. For special forces to survive, much less succeed, security and intelligence must be flawless. Above all, special operations work best in the closest possible coordination with successful conventional forces. Any commander who confuses special forces with shock troops, or who thinks that special operations are magic bullets, wastes them. In World War II the effectiveness of the teams dropped behind enemy lines increased geometrically with the approach of victorious allied troops.

In Vietnam, US special forces largely failed although they performed many individual feats. That is because they were used for stand-alone operations or as mere adjuncts to conventional operations, rather than as the keys to unlock doors to strategic success. Marquis recounts a poignant incident in which some special forces in Vietnam were ordered to open a road - in an area inhabited by a tribe that hated the tribe whom they were leading. Never mind the theoretical and anthropological quibbling, headquarters said. Get on the team! Marquis does not mention that in Vietnam the misuse of every kind of force was an inescapable consequence of the fact that American commanders were fighting to win.

The bulk of the book is about the campaign to rebuild the components of American special operations on the foundations of the culture and skills left over from the Vietnam war and embodied in the Army's Rangers, the Navy's SEALS, and the Air Force's commandos. The *image d'epinal* that drove the initial quantitative rebuilding was the failure of the mission to rescue American hostages in Iran in 1980. By 1983, the Reagan administration had ordered enough long-range helicopters and trained enough personnel to render unlikely the repetition of that disaster. Then came the invasion of Grenada, in

which a plethora of special forces were disastrously misused. This additional *epinal* spurred further coordination. The bombing of the US Marine barracks in Beirut added the concern that in an age of international terrorism America must have more forces that can pop out of land, sea and air to strike enemies quickly and surely.

These images, however, would have counted for nothing had they not been ably used by a dedicated cadre of activists in the military, in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, on Capitol Hill and in the press. Marquis makes clear that the men who caused the establishment of special operations as almost a military service of its own, with its own unified command, its own Assistant Secretary of Defense, and its own "checkbook" were moved less by these images or even by cold calculations of military utility than by a love of the culture of the special forces.

By far the most instructive part of the book - though the most boring - is the account of the campaign for the establishment of the Special Operations Command, (SOCOM), and the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Special Operations, Low Intensity Conflict), (SOLIC). It took hearings, a press campaign, pressures and arguments within the services and the administration to achieve success. Most of all it took doing everything again and again and again, as opponents shifted ground and willfully interpreted previous actions and decisions that amounted to "yes," as saying "no." The bureaucratic infighting is wearying just to read about. The struggle burned up the careers of the most active activists. They won, but suffered for it. In Washington, no good deed goes unpunished. This account will strike a chord with anyone who has waged any battle for innovation in US defense. It certainly reminded me of battles in which I have been involved regarding missile defense, and the organization of the intelligence agencies. The most ominous note in that chord is the realization that even with an excellent network on the Hill, in the press, and in the Pentagon, the advocates of SOCOM-SOLIC would not have succeeded unless they had been able to point to piles of dead bodies supposedly resulting from the failure to take the actions they advised.

The book closes with descriptions of the fruits of the new organization. Here the author is obviously reaching. Having noted that better antiterrorism was one of the selling points for the reforms, she mentions no attempts to use the new tools for antiterrorist purposes. Indeed, most of the successes she claims for special forces in our time come from traditional psychological operations and civil affairs units, more or less arbitrarily added to the new special operations commands. The biggest success she mentions for actual special forces was the SEALs' contribution to the deceptive threat of a landing in occupied Kuwait in 1991. In other instances she relates the foolish use of SEALs in Panama to attack along a thousand foot aircraft runway, without cover, and the use of Army special forces to helicopter into a bridgehead - which any airmobile soldiers could do. The author raises the possibility that in its eagerness to find a special bailiwick for the special forces, the new headquarters might actually reduce their usefulness to ordinary military operations.

The book's final thought is that the current fashion for military operations other than war - what might be called lite missions - seem to be tailor made for the new special forces.

The author wishes loudly that the bureaucrats at SOCOM-SOLIC might think less about purely headquarters matters and give some consideration to actually using their new tools to do some good. But here is the rub. The book shows that not only the special operators, who might well be excused, but also the people whose business it is to think about what good the use of force might do are concerned with anything and everything but the connection between military operations and the results thereof. The author seems to be following fashion by deeming successful any mission in which the forces do what they were ordered to do, regardless of whether the mission was well conceived to achieve a worthwhile result or not. Unfortunately, the popularity among policy makers and academics of "lite" missions and of the forces that perform them seems to be due in no small part to the misconception that one does not have to think as rigorously about them as one would about real wars.

It would be unfortunate if America's increased capacity for special operations were to further encourage the sloppy thinking about the ends and means of war that has become endemic in our time.

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