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Unexpected Journey: A Marine Corps Reserve Company in the Korean War

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Mills, Randy K., and Roxanne Mills. *Unexpected Journey: A Marine Corps Reserve Company in the Korean War*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2000. 271pp. \$32.95

For authors unschooled in Marine Corps history and newly self-taught in the history of the Korean War, Randy and Roxanne Mills do an acceptable job in following the Reserve Marines of Company C, 16th Infantry Battalion, to Korea and back, from 1950 to 1951. The strength of their homage to their neighbor-veterans of southwestern Indiana is their sympathetic, sensitive reconstruction of personal combat experiences in Korea and the general trauma of sudden wartime service. Its weakness is their handling of contextual and organizational issues. The authors sometimes seem as mystified as their veterans did when they went off to war in 1950.

When Company C formed in 1947, its officers and noncommissioned officers were World War II veterans without troops. They recruited obvious candidates such as Boy Scouts, high school athletes, younger brothers of Marines, and adventurous farm boys. The Millses capture the bucolic, Currier and Ives character of 1950 Indiana (I was there as a teenager visiting my grandparents); the recruits might well have been the Indiana volunteers of 1861. The authors do not press the point, but the reinstatement of the draft in 1948 proved a mighty weapon for recruiters—join the U.S. Marine Corps and escape the Army. It was an empty threat, however, although the recruits didn't know it; virtually no one was drafted into the shrinking Army between 1948 and 1950. It appears that the excitement of field training, company athletics, and a

little spending money sufficed as a lure, and the requirements were minimal: drill usually on Monday nights and two weeks annual training duty (“summer camp”). There was no initial active duty training requirement, no boot camp. Company C, not aggressively officered, coasted through its limited training from 1948 through 1950.

No doubt there was tension between regular Army and reservists at the troop level, as the Millses note, but the Marine Corps wanted fresh reservists with no prior experience for its twenty-one infantry battalions, nineteen other combat and combat support battalions, and a mix of independent companies. The 1950 drill-pay reservists numbered almost forty thousand units, a small percentage of the nearly 129,000 Marine reservists, but the best source of unbloodied infantry replacements for a short-handed active duty force. The authors are vague on mobilization demographics, providing a roster of eight officers and 202 enlisted men at the station of initial assignment, Camp Pendleton but no statistics on delays and physical disqualifications.

The Millses are unclear about how Company C fared in its readiness triage at Camp Pendleton as the company disintegrated in three days into a pool of replacements. Reservists and half the drill-pay reserves were judged combat ready by virtue of prior active duty (more than ninety days) or two years of Marine training that included at least one summer camp and no less than thirty-six drills (with two camps). Another 30 percent were judged combat ready after two to four weeks of intensive field training and weapons instruction. Twenty percent went to boot camp and became “real” Marines the

old-fashioned way. The problem with the deployable 65 percent was their rank (too much) and lack of thorough weapons training. Other problems were little more than irritations born by all Marines, which was interpreted as prejudice by the reservists.

After the readiness triage, the book becomes a mishmash of personal Korean War experiences—especially combat in the frozen crucible of the Chosin Reservoir campaign—and operational history. The authors recount the personal experiences well but bungle the general history in several details (none fatal)—for example, *Major* Courtney Whitney was not FECOM G-2.

Their Indiana Marines have tales to tell, but the stories will not move non-deployable readers. They are nevertheless the true ordeals of real people.

There is good coverage of the veterans of Company C that includes forty-three interviews, several with wives. However, apart from the interviews, the Millses use predictable secondary sources, sometimes without much real understanding. (This reviewer served twenty-seven years in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, nine as a commander and staff officer in two infantry battalions, commanding 3d Battalion, 25th Marines, from 1980 to 1981.)

On balance, *Unexpected Journey* gives the 1950 Marine Corps reserve mobilization a human face and an emotional dimension. As a tribute to Company C, this book succeeds and deserves inclusion in the personal literature on the Korean War.

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Beach, Edward L., Sr., with Edward L. Beach, Jr. *From Annapolis to Scapa Flow: The Autobiography of Edward L. Beach, Sr.* Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2003. 344pp. \$34.95

This charming and insightful memoir is among the most vivid and enjoyable portraits of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century Navy ever written. Originally drafted in the 1930s following Captain Beach's retirement, it is the story of the fascinating career of an officer who began at sea by learning to handle sail as a midshipman in 1888 and ended by commanding a seventeen-thousand-ton steel battleship at Scapa Flow during the Great War. Full of equal parts delightful sea stories, harrowing maritime adventures, and thoughtful diplomatic insights, this is indeed a sailor's story. The volume was edited with loving care by the author's son, the late Captain Edward L. Beach, Jr., who was known for his famous work *Run Silent, Run Deep* (Naval Institute Press, Classics of Naval Literature series) and a dozen other histories and novels. Beach the younger inserts many wry and sometimes poignant asides that help to set in context his father's story.

And what a story! Beginning in the late 1880s, Beach senior served alongside Civil War veterans as he learned his trade in wooden sailing ships. He saw firsthand the naval renaissance of the late nineteenth century, powered by the intellectual energy of Alfred Thayer Mahan and Stephen B. Luce, and the political dynamics of Theodore Roosevelt. Beach began his commissioned service as an engineer and served as such until the merger of the engineering and line communities (amidst much