

## REVIEWS

### **“Once More into the Breach, Dear Friends . . .”**

Robert C. Freeman and Dennis A. Wright, *Saints at War: Korea and Vietnam* (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 2003), 500 pp.

*Reviewed by Robert M. Hogge, Professor of English, Weber State University, Ogden, Utah*

“I was not a man of war, but one of peace” (259). This epiphany came to Stephen G. Biddulph, an LDS combat Marine in Vietnam, as he described a sobering attack he had participated in behind enemy lines. Near a burned-out village among the rubble and chaos and stench of war lay a dead enemy soldier, a diary in his pocket. Biddulph took the diary and later obtained a rough English translation, reading it one night by flashlight. As he read, he realized that the dreaded enemy had been a warm human being who loved his family and homeland; he had hated war but was there to repel the American invaders; he was a brother, despite cultural and political differences.

In the earlier Korean War, Richard D. Wilson, a seventeen-year-old Marine full of youthful exuberance, began his personal account with this stirring epigraph: “Fighting a war without having your scriptures is like being baptized without going in the water” (184). But his youthful enthusiasm is tempered when he meets a good family man, a Bi-

ble-reading Marine, a likeable person who loved God. Wilson saw him one day carrying his Bible in an open area when a mortar exploded a few feet from him, killing him instantly. And then the hard questions came to Wilson, the questions that every sensitive, thinking person struggles to answer. That day a naive combat Marine became subdued as he spoke this profound truth: “It took me a long time to deal with that event—if I ever have!” (184).

These are just two excerpts from hundreds of personal accounts of Latter-day Saints either in combat or in support roles during the Korean and Vietnam wars. The book itself is a sequel to *Saints at War: Experiences of Latter-day Saints in World War II* (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 2001), a “triple combination” now, as Freeman and Wright take us once more into the breach with this new “mini-archive,” a compilation of historical materials (both secular and religious), photographs, maps, time lines, feature stories, newspaper clippings, and other memorabilia both preceding and interspersed among individual veterans’ accounts arranged alphabetically by surname. A few LDS General Authorities tell their stories of war: Joe J. Christensen, Russell M. Nelson, Hartman Rector Jr., and Lance B. Wickman. Included also are accounts

by revered warriors Bernie Fisher, Arden Allen Rowley, and Larry Chesley.

But the most rewarding experience is sifting through the accounts of hundreds of virtually unknown veterans to find the often-buried gems—those ideas, issues, images, single sentences, selected passages and, occasionally, full accounts of most value to each reader. I remember Douglas P. Bush's account of his patriarchal blessing—not for its actual words, but for what the patriarch years later told him he had seen in vision while giving the blessing but did not tell him or his mother at that time. I also remember Ronald Billings, seeing the explosion and hearing the screams of a young Marine, "Mommy, Mommy!" And "Tad" Derrick and his Mormon Meteor jet aircraft. Yes, and Stanley Shultz and his jeep named Mahonri Moriancumer. But the spiritual accounts of Judy and Michael Kigin, Virgil N. Kovalenko, and Kent Hansen impressed me the most.

The book's target audience is primarily women (70 percent of the shoppers in LDS bookstores), buying it as a gift for men in their sixties and seventies who are interested in discovering what faithful Latter-day Saints can accomplish, even amid the trials, heartache, and brutality of war. The release date for the book and the *Saints at War: Korea Documentary* (DVD and VHS) was Veterans' Day, November 11, 2003. The documentary features LDS members of the 213th Armored Artillery Battalion, an activated National Guard Unit from

southern Utah, one of the most celebrated units in "The Forgotten War." Keith Pendleton called the members of this battalion "Second Helaman's Army" (136) because they were led by a faithful LDS colonel, Frank Dalley, and all of the 600 men returned home safely.

Both the book and documentary have been extracted from the much larger Saints at War Archive, the only living archive of LDS veterans' wartime experiences. More than a thousand veterans who have never spoken publicly about their experiences are choosing to speak now. Some of the accounts in this book focus almost uniquely on combat experience; these veterans seem to reflect the mindset of the fictional character Frederic Henry who feels that the only things that have meaning in war are "the concrete names of villages, the numbers of roads, the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates."<sup>1</sup> But I found the accounts of the latter-day spiritual warriors much more satisfying. All of these accounts (both oral and written), along with journals, diaries, newspaper clippings, and other memorabilia, are housed in the L. Tom Perry Special Collections Department at BYU's Harold B. Lee Library.

On November 8, 2003, three days before the release of the book and documentary, a special conference for LDS servicemen and women was held at BYU as a tribute to all veterans of twentieth-century military conflicts, with

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1. Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (New York: Scribner's, 1969), 185.

special recognition being given to veterans from the Korean and Vietnam wars. The keynote speaker was Hartman Rector Jr., a Seventy emeritus. He expresses a hint of his almost “Catch-22” conversion story during the Korean War in these words: “They’re trying to kill me out there. And if they do, I’ll bear testi-

mony against you at the last day that you kept me out of the Church!” (142) Then he records a vision he had as a pilot bombing North Korean railroads. But I’ll let you read that story.

## Opening the Fiery Portals: World War II and the Saints

Donald Q. Cannon and Brent L. Top, eds., *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saints Church History. Vol. 4: Europe* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, Department of Church History and Doctrine, 2003), 207 pp., index, \$19.95.

*Reviewed by John Sillito, professor of libraries, Weber State University, Ogden, Utah*

Not long after learning of the cancer that would ultimately take his life, my father faced a difficult course of experimental radiation and chemotherapy. As I drove him to the hospital to take his first treatment, I asked him if he was frightened. “Yes,” he admitted, “and I have only been this scared once before in my life—June 6, 1944.” D-Day in Europe.

If I hadn’t known it before, our conversation confirmed that, like the Vietnam War for my generation or the Great Depression for my grandparents, World War II was the defining moment for my parents’ generation. Over the years we have called it the “Good War” and characterized those who fought it and defeated Fascism as the “Greatest Generation.” Without the efforts of

that generation, no doubt the world would be a far different and much worse place. Yet despite our hopes that the world would emerge from that terrible war free of conflict, we still know all too well the suffering and costs in human life, resources, and psychic trauma that war brings.

For Latter-day Saints, World War II presented a unique set of challenges. After a century of missionary efforts in Europe, it was inevitable that Mormons would be involved on both sides of that conflict as civilians and combatants, and would feel, especially in Germany, but elsewhere as well, the horror of war personally.

The four essays dealing with World War II in this volume of *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saints Church History*, edited by Donald Q. Cannon and Brent L. Top, help us better understand those realities and the impact they had on the people involved. The topic makes this volume especially appropriate for review in this issue of *Dialogue*. In addition, Cannon and Top have included in this eclectic volume excellent studies of the Mor-