

Dulles, VA: Potomac Books Inc., 2010

226 pages

\$24.95

Wanting War: Why the Bush Administration Invaded Iraq

by Jeffrey Record

Reviewed by Robert Killebrew, COL (USA Retired), who served in Special Forces and held a variety of planning and operational assignments during his 30-year Army career

Jeff Record has had a long and distinguished career as a military and political critic. In the 1980s, for example, he was a leading light in the “military reform” movement that advocated for, among other things, smaller, cheaper airplanes like the F-16 instead of the F-15, a fact that is suggestively ironic considering the F-15’s impressive history as a fighter and Record’s present professorship at the US Air Force’s Air War College. Those who follow his scholarship are familiar with his incisive, and sometimes razor-sharp, style.

In *Wanting War*, Record goes after the now-public mass of mischaracterization and deceit that accompanied the push, under former President George Bush, to go to war in Iraq. It is not a pretty picture. It is also, by now, fairly well known. For example, we now know—have known—there was no solid evidence of a link between Saddam and al Qaeda, although the Administration went to considerable lengths to publicize one. Likewise, it is now common knowledge that there was no plan for post-invasion Iraq—indeed, that was known well before the invasion, to the consternation and perplexity of anyone familiar with sound military planning procedures and even a faint sense of reality. Looking back, one has to scratch one’s head that so many responsible, dutiful, and highly educated military and political leaders walked so willingly off this cliff.

The facts are so well known that Record’s book will contain no surprises to anyone familiar with the subject. A marginal note composed during this review says “another pile-on book,” and so it can be taken. He seems to have a particular burr about “the neoconservatives,” a type of political ideologue inside the Beltway given to wearing bow ties and horn-rimmed glasses and who believed—perhaps they still do—that American power can be used to advance good in the world. In fact, “neoconservative” is invoked so often in the book that one might think Record believes that they constituted a dark cabal out to destroy America, instead of people with whose political philosophy Record disagrees. The author’s politics have occasionally leant to the left, so the neocons would be ideological foes as well as lousy war planners. Vice President Dick Cheney also comes in for a good pasting, and deservedly so—the emergence of a co-president and the office of the vice president as another pole of executive power is one of the more troubling trends of recent government. Record has special scorn for Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, and notes

that Rumsfeld's careless, almost breezy approach to war negated sound US strategic planning.

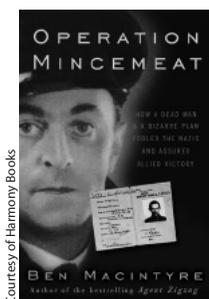
By going in fast, relatively light and blind to possible post-invasion military requirements, Rumsfeld created a fundamental contradiction between the war plan and the critical objectives of quickly securing Iraq's WMD sites and the provision of security necessary for Iraq's political reconstruction. Rumsfeld either did not understand the disconnect between his invasion plan and the war's political objective, or he did understand it and simply chose to ignore it because he had no intention of prolonging the US military's stay in Iraq beyond the destruction of Saddam Hussein's regime. In any case, he subverted President Bush's purpose in Iraq.

Books of this genre are fast appearing, and will doubtless continue to come; in retrospect, the early Bush Administration now looks hopelessly incompetent, and critiquing the war is the academic equivalent of shooting fish in a barrel. But a decent respect for very recent history requires readers to remember—for all that the runup to the war now looks like a sad Laurel & Hardy rerun—that Iraq and Saddam Hussein were the principal foreign-policy problem bequeathed by the Clinton Administration to Bush, and in the short period between Bush's inauguration and 9/11, Hussein's regime looked very menacing indeed. The UN sanctions were failing, US aircraft patrolling the no-fly zones were frequently attacking Iraqi air defense sites, and Saddam was subsidizing the families of suicide bombers, having decided to make himself a devout anti-Western Muslim after decades of relentless and cruel secularism. This is no excuse for bungled policy and war-planning, but the more serious question of whether the United States could have put Iraq on a back burner after 9/11, or why America chose to fight a two-front war—the first being the unfinished fight in Afghanistan—must wait another historian; for Dr. Record, the answer is simple—“The war was, in short, about the arrogance of power, an interpretation perfectly consistent with the realist theory of international politics which holds, among other things, that power unbalanced is power inevitably asserted.” The reader can be forgiven for wanting a better explanation of “inevitably.” In another chapter, the author calls for an “autopsy” of the decision to invade Iraq, giving as precedent the bipartisan 9/11 investigation because, he says, “disastrous foreign policy mistakes, like fatal accidents, mandate investigations.”

Record's concluding chapter offers a series of insights on the use of force. Many of his comments are no surprise: he critiques both the “Weinberger-Powell Doctrine” of overwhelming force as well as the US capability to fight limited wars, and doubts that even the application of massive and rapid force can guarantee strategic victory for the United States. He acknowledges that war is uncertain, and correctly comments that “Only rarely do prewar exit strategies get implemented,” and that “the American body politic has limited tolerance for prolonged, costly, indecisive wars.” The author doubts the US military's commitment to counterinsurgency, on which he has previously written, and suggests that in future, American leadership should think “more than twice”

about entering prolonged conflict. It is a curiously deflating ending to a book propelled by indignation and a sense of certitude about US affairs. Perhaps like many of us, Dr. Record is confessing that he doesn't have all the answers.

One attractive feature of *Wanting War* is the author's insight into warfare in general. A long and perceptive observer of strategic affairs, Record's asides and general observations on war sprinkle the book with thoughtful points, as when he mentions that "strategy must deal first and foremost with the realities of power (including, for the United States, the limits of its own power) . . ." or in another chapter, ". . . elections, written constitutions and other democratic institutions can and have been exploited by antidemocratic parties to achieve power . . . Democracy may not turn out to be the cure for the political ills of the Middle East but rather the vehicle on which political extremism rides to power." Record's eloquence and experience, his long study of war, and his insight into current events enliven a book that suffers from his evident rage at duplicitous policy and botched planning.



New York: Harmony Books, 2010

400 pages

\$25.99

Operation Mincemeat: How a Dead Man and a Bizarre Plan Fooled the Nazis and Assured an Allied Victory

by Ben Macintyre

Reviewed by James R. Oman, COL (USA Retired),
Director, Senior Service College Fellowship Program,
Defense Acquisition University, Aberdeen Proving
Ground, Maryland

“Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori,” originally written in the ancient Roman poet Horace's *Odes*, cited by the author in *Operation Mincemeat: How a Dead Man and a Bizarre Plan Fooled the Nazis and Assured an Allied Victory*, and inscribed as the epitaph on Glyndwr Michael's headstone this Latin phrase translates into “It is sweet and fitting to die for your country.” It is ironic that Michael, while not dying for his country, as the author points out, nonetheless, “. . . had indeed given his life for his country, even if he had been given no choice about it.”

This reviewer suspects that most readers have never heard of Glyndwr Michael. Michael played an instrumental role in concealing the Allies true strategic intentions during the decisive middle years of the Second World War. Actually, Michael's mortal remains, combined with the contents of his briefcase chained to his body, and the many items placed in his wallet and on his person, were all part of a grand strategic deception plan. A plan aimed at misleading Hitler and other senior, influential German military leaders.

Author Ben Macintyre describes Michael's role and much more as he tells the “rest of the story” in *Operation Mincemeat*. This latest work is extremely interesting, well written, and exhaustively researched. Macintyre is