

to create a nuke, the author notes.

If the bombers who, in 1994, blew up the World Trade Center in New York had substituted nuclear material for ammonium nitrate, the blast probably would have destroyed lower Manhattan, according to Laqueur.

So where will the terrorists find the enriched fissionable stuff? Some of it has been smuggled out of Russia and apparently is available on the black market. In addition, it seems that Russian scientists built a number of "luggage nukes" for the KGB that are small enough to be carried by one person, and some of these suitcases are missing. For how long?

Some of the terrorist cults, like Aum, have actually tried to find a "doomsday" weapon, such as a death ray or earthquake machine. Crazy? Nikola Tesla, the ingenious rival of Thomas A. Edison in applications of electricity, insisted that he had produced both. Aum devotees have been searching for the Croatian's "lost" papers.

If the present trends continue, "there is every reason for grim forebodings," Laqueur warns. "Megaterrorism could well become ... the incendiary torch and the devastating storm of the ... century."

Laqueur makes a compelling case for his dire prophecy, but he does not offer any way or means of preventing a calamitous onslaught.

Maybe there is no way.

Samuel E. Stavisky

*Editor's note: Mr. Stavisky was a reporter for The Washington Post in 1942 when he heard the Marine Corps was recruiting writers to serve as Marine combat correspondents. He joined the Corps and has been an active supporter since. His recent book, "Marine Combat Correspondent: World War II in the Pacific," is available through the MCA Bookservice.*

**THE CO-VANS: U.S. Marine Advisors in Vietnam. By John Grider Miller. Published by Naval Institute Press. 195 pages with photographs. Stock #1557505497. \$22.45 MCA Members. \$24.95 Non-members.**

*"Oh East is East, and West is West,  
and never the twain shall meet,  
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at  
God's great Judgment Seat;  
But there is neither East nor West,  
Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,  
When two strong men stand face to  
face, though they come from  
The ends of the earth!"*

—Rudyard Kipling

Nowadays there are lots of books about the Vietnam War. A good number are of little value to active-duty Marines who want to learn about that era and hope to glean some wisdom that will stay with them, thereby increasing their professionalism and their chances of survival in the nasty business of war.

Retired Marine Colonel John Grider Miller, who 12 years ago wrote the stirring account of Marine advisor to the South Vietnamese, Captain John W. Ripley in the book "The Bridge at Dong Ha," once again returns to the subject of Marine advisors; in Vietnamese they were called "co-vans," or "trusted friends." In his concise style, Miller, a disciple of brevity, gives the reader another insight into a unique combat assignment and provides lessons in leadership, tact, courage and humility.

"The Co-Vans" is autobiographical, and Miller has never been known as a Marine who liked to blow his own horn. Consequently, the reader faces a certain amount of self-deprecation which one suspects Miller may have learned as a co-van with the Vietnamese Marines from 1971 to 1972. Nonetheless, the book is refreshing and allows Miller to write of his experience without self-aggrandizement.

Co-vans were unique in their time and place in history. Time had run out on the American involvement in Southeast Asia. A handful of Marines were among the dwindling Americans desperately trying to help a failing government and its armed forces in their attempts at "Vietnamization" of the war. They faced well-equipped and trained communist forces buoyed in the belief that victory was not only certain, but well within reach; a corrupt South Vietnamese government and military hierarchy; the loss of confidence and aggressiveness by departing American forces; and a lack of situational understanding by senior American officers in Saigon.

Thus, career Marines such as Miller were handed an impossible assignment: work with the Vietnamese; provide liaison for artillery, air and naval gunfire (which was often granted reluctantly); and buy time for the South Vietnamese to somehow turn the tide and survive as a nation. Miller and other leatherneck co-vans had only a few things going for them: they were professional Marines with multiple tours "in country"; they understood and spoke basic Vietnamese; and the tough, little men who fought alongside them were Vietnamese Marines who had been imbued with that spirit Marines

universally share called esprit de corps.

For the student of war, lessons in small-unit tactics, the ability to operate independently and the use of tact and honesty when dealing with foreign unit commanders (who need assistance rather than advice from Americans) are throughout the book like tracks on a jungle trail waiting for a discerning point man to read them.

It was also lonely business. Assigned separately, one to a battalion, co-vans, although living amid hundreds of Vietnamese, were isolated, far from their own people and things familiar to them. At the same time a co-van's every move was scrutinized by everyone from his radio operator and riflemen to the battalion commander. How Miller and others handled these situations is not only excellent reading but contains subtle and not so subtle lessons.

The book notes that many of the Corps' top leaders during the Gulf War some 20 years later had been co-vans in Vietnam: now retired Generals Richard "Butch" Neal, Walt Boomer and Jack Sheehan; Lieutenant Generals Bill Keys and Jim Brabham; and Major Generals Mike Myatt and John Hopkins. Did their time as co-vans help them? One can conclude that it didn't hurt.

While no Marine advisor was killed because he stood by his fellow Marines (who happened to be Vietnamese) to the end, it is more important to understand that, according to Miller, "Unlike the Army's self-defense approach [which stopped short of total commitment to the units they advised, thus making it easier for Army advisors to separate from the Vietnamese units in *extremis*] the Marine advisors believed, rather pragmatically, that no enemy attacking force powerful enough to fight its way through a battalion of Vietnamese Marines would be slowed down for very long by a handful of Americans."

Yet, for it all, Miller believes "that in the final analysis the Vietnam War was an Asian war—a continuation of conflicts fought for centuries."

Retired Brigadier General Edwin Simmons, Director Emeritus, Marine Corps History and Museums, writes in the book's foreword: "[Miller's] unmistakable conclusion is that, in retrospect, the East remains inscrutably East and West is irrevocably West—so perhaps Rudyard Kipling had it right."

R. R. Keene

