

ment would fall by a little under one-half of one percent.” Rather than squeezing blood from this administrative turnip, Donahue argues that the real way to cut the federal government is to reduce entitlements, an idea that is far less popular among politicians than devolution. Donahue also suggests privatizing and “voucherizing” certain federal undertakings, such as job-training programs, rather than devolving them to already-groaning state bureaucracies.

What is most notable about *Disunited States* is its painstaking fairness. When Donahue summarizes his arguments at the end of the book, the depth of his skepticism toward devolution comes as a surprise, given the scrupulous balance of his earlier chapters. This reasoned, constructive assessment of unpopular economic realities is a rare achievement: a book that boasts both a stunningly original concept *and* a near-flawless execution.

—Louis Jacobson

### MAKING THE CORPS.

By Thomas E. Ricks. Scribner.  
324 pp. \$24

For a great democracy that is also a global superpower—and whose continued dominance demands a superior military force—the relationship between soldiers and society is a matter of singular importance. Although recent developments have suggested that the American civil-military relationship is far from healthy, most Americans continue to take it for granted. This readable and provocative book should change that.

Despite his job title—Pentagon correspondent of the *Wall Street Journal*—Ricks understands that the real story of today’s military is not the generals in Washington but the sergeants and captains in the field. Parris Island, the Marine Corps base in South Carolina that provides the principal setting for Ricks’s tale, is about as remote from the corridors of power as you can get. *Making the Corps* tells the story of Platoon 3086: a group of 63 young men delivered by bus to Parris Island in early-morning darkness, each to discover if he has what it takes to become a United States Marine. Step by painful step, Ricks follows the progress of these recruits through boot camp, an arduous, disorienting, sometimes brutal 11-week rite of passage that some will fail to navigate. He tracks those who make it into

the Fleet, where they struggle to adapt the standards of boot camp to those prevailing in the “real” Marine Corps. Finally, Ricks evaluates the efforts of these rookie marines to come to terms with the world outside the Corps, a world that Parris Island taught them to disdain.

In telling his story, Ricks introduces the reader to a fascinating cast of characters: the hierarchy of senior leaders who design boot camp with the explicit intention of stripping each new recruit of his civilian identity; the drill instructors who, as gods, tyrants, mentors, role models, and father figures, preside over the daily process of transforming recruits into marines; and, above all, the recruits themselves, whom Ricks portrays with empathy and respect. Today’s marine volunteers come, for the most part, from among the have-nots of society. They enlist not for love of country but out of something like desperation, reacting to boredom, failure, minor scrapes with the law, and love affairs gone awry. Yet each yearns to be somebody. To enter the exclusive brotherhood of the marines is to be somebody very special indeed.

Boot camp is the price of admission. Recruits pay the price less by attaining the technical skills of the professional soldier than by embracing without reservation the ethos of the Corps. Central to that ethos are values such as honor, courage, and selfless-



ness that, according to senior marines, have all but vanished from American society. The essence of boot camp, in other words, is cultural indoctrination.

Here lies the author’s true achievement. *Making the Corps* exposes the gaping cultural divide that separates soldiers, marines in particular, from the rest of today’s soci-

ety. Others have noted that, in the aftermath of Vietnam, American elites turned their backs on the military, a process ratified by the end of the draft. A generation later, the armed services, still nursing Vietnam-induced resentments of their own, return that contempt with interest. Professing to be repelled by a society they view as undisciplined, corrupt, and selfish, soldiers today cultivate a self-image of moral superiority over those they serve.

Ricks does not note, although his reporting clearly suggests, the extent to which this self-image is false. Certainly it is not sustained by the experience of Platoon 3086. "Parris Island," Ricks observes, "was theory—a showplace of what the Corps would like to be." Reality turns out to be altogether different. Several of those who survive boot camp become chronic disciplinary problems, washing out of the service before completing their first year. (Ricks notes that one-third of all marines fail to make it through their initial enlistment.) For many, the Fleet turns out to be a disappointment: members of Platoon 3086 encounter fat, incompetent sergeants and fellow marines more interested in smoking dope and getting drunk than in adhering to the standards of Parris Island. Indeed, the platoon's experience suggests that the putative transformational impact of boot camp may be largely mythic. Proclaiming themselves ever afterward to be members of an elite set apart from society, they remain all too human.

Ricks recognizes that this cultural antagonism between soldiers and society is fraught with danger. His own proposal for healing the breach is to bring the middle class back into uniform, by reviving conscription if need be. Some readers may question the political feasibility of doing so. Others may suggest a more direct approach: pointing out to soldiers—even marines—that they may not differ from the rest of us as much as they imagine. Understanding the myth and reality of Parris Island offers a useful first step in that direction.

—A. J. Bacevich

### *NEWS OF A KIDNAPPING.*

By Gabriel García Márquez. Edith Grossman, trans. Knopf. 304 pp. \$25

On a secluded ranch dotted with African wildlife, a Colombian drug lord orchestrates the abduction of 10 leading journalists and

political figures. The drug lord, Pablo Escobar, declares that he will release these hostages only if he is tried for narcotics crimes in his native land and not extradited to the United States for trial. "Better a grave in Colombia," he avows, "than a jail in the United States." The Colombian government at first refuses to bend. After two of the prisoners are murdered, though, the government bars Escobar's extradition, and the remaining hostages are released.

In recounting these events of 1990, Nobel laureate García Márquez returns to journalism, a profession he left to take up fiction some 35 years ago. While stripping his prose of the exotic flourishes that mark such novels as *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1967), he nonetheless provides a striking portrait, grim but hopeful, of a nation in crisis. His book reminds us that democracy can be fragile but never futile.

*News of a Kidnapping* is a deeply personal account that pays tribute to the author's friends Maruja Pachón, one of the people kidnapped by Escobar's men, and her husband, Alberto Villamizar, an influential politician who personally lobbied both President César Gaviria and Escobar for release of the hostages (including his sister and his wife). Villamizar and Pachón persuaded García Márquez to write the book, and the two of them appear as central characters. "Their pain, their patience, and their rage," the author notes, "gave me the courage to persist in this autumnal task, the saddest and most difficult of my life."

To García Márquez, the government's extradition policy was a mistake from the outset. "No mother would send her children to be punished at the neighbor's house," he told an interviewer last year. In *News of a Kidnapping*, he suggests that the tragedy could have been avoided if the government had abandoned the policy more readily. His argument is convincing to a degree, but only because he neglects to take note of the cycle of violence and death that has terrorized Colombia for much of this century. This shortcoming is an act of omission, not one of ignorance, for García Márquez is acutely aware of the perilous state of affairs in his native land. Still, he remains optimistic. "News of a kidnapping, no matter how painful," he observes, "is not as irremediable as news of a murder."

—David Brindley