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