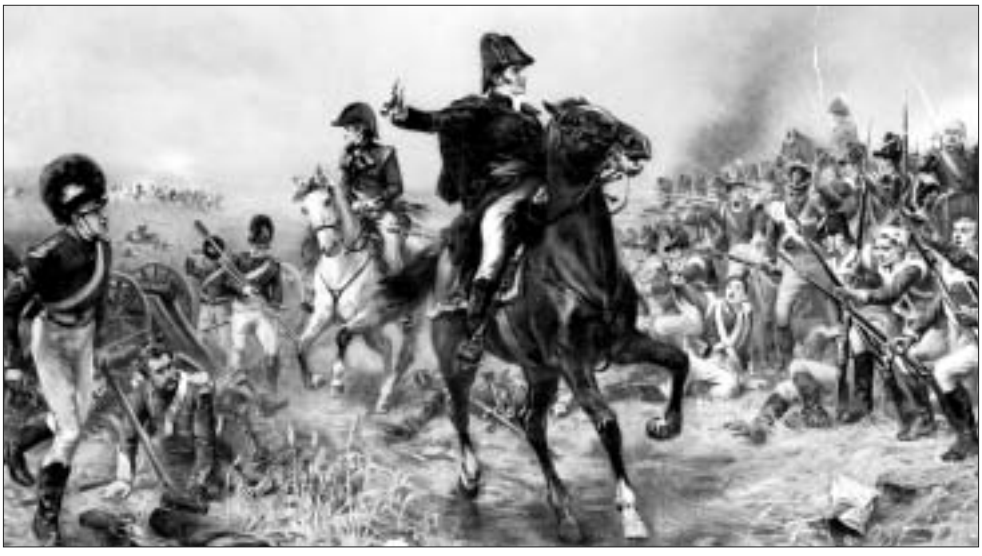

At Waterloo, the Duke of Wellington's victory owed much to his well-armed British riflemen.

ence was that the *voltigeurs* used smooth-bore muskets, barely accurate even at 30 yards, whereas the British sharpshooters had sturdy Baker rifles. Although their rate of fire was much slower, British riflemen were usually sure of a kill at 200 yards. Wellington won battle after battle by using his riflemen to repel the *voltigeurs*, posting his ranks of infantry behind the brow of a hill to protect them from French artillery, then deploying the infantry in double lines so that each man could shoot (only the front ranks in the French columns could fire).

This is the context for the highly readable and entertaining book by Mark Urban, a former British officer turned journalist. He uses memoirs, hitherto-unpublished diaries, and French archives to give a detailed account, focusing on six soldiers of the celebrated 95th Regiment. He describes their campaigns in Portugal in 1809, through Spain and into southern France in 1814, and finally at Waterloo in 1815.

Urban reproduces a British recruiting poster of the day: "You will carry a Rifle no heavier than a Fowling-Piece. You will knock down your enemy at Five Hundred Yards, instead of missing him at Fifty. Your clothing is GREEN, and needs no cleaning but a BRUSH." In fact, with extra rounds, spare shoes and socks, mess tin, water, and other supplies, each rifleman had to carry more than 70 pounds. Once, to reach the battlefield of Talavera, in Spain, the sharpshooters marched 30 miles uphill in 24 hours. And, marching at the quickstep, they moved markedly faster than the standard infantry.

Much of this is familiar territory for Urban, whose last book was *The Man Who Broke Napoleon's Codes*, a fascinating account of the Peninsular War through the exploits of the staff officer who learned to read Napoleon's "Great Paris Cipher." But the riflemen make for a better story, offering at once a broader yet more focused canvas that illuminates the way all armies at the end of the 18th century sought tactics to cope with the massive killing power of the new artillery and the massed musketry fire of well-trained troops. Wellington consistently beat the French because the riflemen gave him the means to do so, just as the American sharpshooters had frustrated and beaten the redcoats.

—MARTIN WALKER

LIBERIA:
Portrait of a Failed State.
By John-Peter Pham. Reed Press.
252 pp. $24.95

Liberia aspired at its birth to be a beacon of light and progress for all of Africa, but ended up sliding into absolute anarchy a century and a half later. A civil war starting in 1989 lasted more than a decade, killed five percent of the population and displaced two-thirds, destroyed the fragile infrastructure of the state, and made criminality the

only means of economic survival. Liberia is now a byword for bizarre atrocities, committed by soldiers high on drugs and dressed in all manner of strange gear, including blond wigs and women's clothes.

John-Peter Pham was a diplomat in East Africa during the latter phases of the civil war, which ultimately engulfed the whole region. Both personal experience and wide reading qualify him admirably to explain Liberia's descent from high aspiration to nightmare. He is concise as well as fair-minded: The sound of grinding axes cannot be heard in these pages.

Pham traces the origin of Liberia's catastrophe to the very founding of the state in the 1820s by a small group of expatriated black Americans, an act that was inherently contradictory insofar as the Americo-Liberians achieved liberty at the cost of subordinating the indigenous inhabitants. The Americo-Liberians became, in effect, a colonial elite, and were at least as convinced of their civilizing mission as any European colonial official. Small in number—never more than three percent of the population of the territory to which they laid claim—they had great difficulty imposing their rule and resorted to unscrupulous and sometimes brutal methods. They craved the respect of the outside world, and looked to America for inspiration and protection: a regard that was never reciprocated.

The old order was formally overthrown in 1980, but it had been modified over previous decades to incorporate an increasing number of indigenous people into the fast-expanding economy. (Astonishing though it may seem now, for several years in the 1950s Liberia had the world's highest rate of economic growth.) But authoritarian systems are most vulnerable when, having lost confidence in their own divine right, they reform themselves, a truth borne out by the Liberian case.

Hatred of an old regime is not necessarily sufficient to unite the population in an alternative project, and Liberia soon became a playground of personal and ethnic ambition. In 1980, the master-sergeant-turned-five-star-general, Samuel Doe, replaced the Americo-Liberians as the elite with his own ethnic group, the Krahn, who made up approximately the same small proportion of the population. As they used to say in Portuguese

Africa, the struggle continues.

Pham does not draw sufficient attention to a factor I believe to have been crucial in the debacle not only of Liberia but of all post-colonial Africa: the disjunction in the educated classes between abstract, rhetorical universal principles and innermost desires for personal advancement. Thus, old regimes such as the Americo-Liberian are criticized from the standpoint of an ideal by people with limited, or deliberately concealed, self-knowledge—they speak of social justice but dream of Mercedes cars. Nevertheless, Pham's book is the best short guide to the Liberian imbroglio, and serves as a timely warning to those who think weak and disintegrating states can be led by outside intervention to the paths of peace and wisdom.

—Theodore Dalrymple

THE NUREMBERG INTERVIEWS: An American Psychiatrist's Conversations with the Defendants and Witnesses.
By Leon Goldensohn. Edited by Robert Gellately. Knopf. 474 pp. $35

As every publisher knows—and as we were reminded during Holocaust denier David Irving's audacious but ill-fated libel suit against his fellow historian Deborah Lipstadt—there can probably be no such thing as a surfeit of information about the Third Reich. Like Richard Overy's *Interrogations* (2001), which synthesized the transcripts of interviews of captured German leaders, Leon Goldensohn's fastidious record of his encounters with fallen potentates and functionaries offers a backstage glimpse of the Nuremberg trials.

A psychiatrist who rose to the rank of major in the U.S. Army, Goldensohn (1911-61) spent seven months of 1946 interviewing Nazi officials held as both defendants and witnesses at the Nuremberg trials, for purposes of monitoring their mental health. Although he never fulfilled his plan to write a book about the assignment, his notes and transcripts were collated after his death and subsequently came to the attention of Florida State University professor Robert Gellately, author of *Backing Hitler: Consent and Coercion in Nazi Germany* (2001).

The result is, essentially, a work in progress, which inevitably lacks the narrative flow and occasional melodramatic flourish of psychologist G. M. Gilbert's *Nuremberg Diary* (1947). But Goldensohn remains an intriguing witness to history nonetheless. There may be a chilling doggedness to some of his techniques: Asking Rudolf Hoess, the former commandant of Auschwitz, if his wife was "a good cook" elicits no useful information. And like many an interlocutor at Nuremberg, Goldensohn is invariably confronted with long-winded evasions and self-justifications, particularly when he attempts to probe the inner workings of the Final Solution.

But his patience and persistence yield valuable insights, especially from the lowlier figures in the Nazi hierarchy. Indeed, the third of the book devoted to the men called as witnesses is the most intriguing. The loftily self-absorbed SS general Erich von dem Bach-Zelewski attempts to depict himself as an "incorruptible," good Nazi. The fanatical *Einsatzgruppe* leader Otto Ohlendorf is so successful at convincing himself that he was a mere pawn that he resembles, in Goldensohn's words, "a burned-out ghoul."

In a curious way, there is an even more repellent quality to the portrait of Walter Schellenberg, the urbane intelligence official who seems capable of infinite adjustments to the moral calculus. If the VIPs in the other cells often seem less than human, Schellenberg is all too recognizable as the ambitious, quick-witted young man who always knows which way the wind is blowing. Though the monsters were hanged, Schellenberg's spiritual descendants will always be with us.

—Clive Davis

ATHENS: A History, from Ancient Ideal to Modern City.
By Robin Waterfield. Basic. 362 pp. $27.50

Classicist Robin Waterfield takes on a daunting task. He aims to provide a concise but detailed history of Athens from the Mycenaean settlements of the 13th century B.C.E. to the preparations for the 2004 Olympics. Waterfield's love for the land and its history permeates the book. He provides vivid portraits of the major players—Pericles,