

One More Bridge to Cross: Lowering the Cost of War

By John Poole

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Erine Pyle, the beloved World War II correspondent wrote, *“I love the infantry because they are the underdogs. They are the mud-rain-frost-and-wind boys. They have no comforts and in the end they are the guys that wars can’t be won without.”* It is in that same spirit of admiration and heart-felt compassion for warriors that John Poole writes his book, *One More Bridge to Cross*. If our country is going to send its young men into combat then, Mr. Poole contends, they must be provided the requisite training to acquire the technical skills and professional competence to carry out the nations bidding with the least amount of destruction, death, and injury. To do so is a moral imperative. To present his case, Mr. Poole sites historical accounts of military battles that substantiate what he considers to be fundamental principles in the conducting of war and combat. Unfortunately, these principles – many of which are rooted in ancient warfare – have been relegated to a position of inferiority in favor of, and absolute trust in, superiority of technology. He is not against technology – only the absolute trust in its capabilities and all too often the wanton destruction left behind that has been disastrous to the warrior, the enemy, or civilian population.

As with all readers, I read with an eye to specific emphases of an author. Though I am not a warfighter, his techniques and admonition to develop and permit NCOs to make decisions based on their assessment of the situation needs a serious response by military leaders. Furthermore, he argues passionately for maneuver warfare and its realistic training, which he notes has several benefits: improves unit morale and cohesion, reduces disciplinary problems, lightens the logistical burden, teaches the leader when and where to fight, and most importantly – reduces casualties across the battlefield. If this type of training and subsequent implementation cannot be done the reason must be based on more than an appeal to tradition, leadership fears and concerns, or higher authority.

Throughout the book, Mr. Poole’s weaves a theme about the dynamic of the human element in battle. This is especially apropos since our current civilian and military leaders extol the virtues and value of the each member of the armed forces. This leads to the question: *“If that is true then what is being done with their elected and appointed authority to ensure the warrior’s capability and well-being on the battlefield?”* The reader must determine the answer to that question

after reading Mr. Poole's book. This emphasis, however, echoes convictions held by other warfighters. A man held in esteem by colleagues and described as honorable, General Harold K. Johnson, USA, Chief of Staff 1964-1968 said, "It is the soldier who fights; it is the soldier who bleeds and dies if he must; it is the soldier who brings the victory home . . . The single most precious element of combat power is the life and the energy of the individual soldier."

There are readers who will take exception to his reference of biblical injunctions or faith based convictions – even though they are few. Others will fault him for a lack of eloquence in prose. Still others will consider his conclusion too broad since they are based on apparent generalities. Notwithstanding these issues, one must see beyond their own literary critique to examine the substantive principles. Whatever one's criticism of the book, it should not become a basis for rejecting or minimizing his fundamental principles of warfare, the care of the warrior, and belief in warriors' capability. In the early stages of the twenty-first century with terrorism as warfare being thrust on America – warriors, along with elected and appointed officials, would do well to consider his message – and then act on it.