

Book Review

THE DARKEST JUNGLE THE TRUE STORY OF THE DARIÉN EXPEDITION AND AMERICA'S ILL-FATED RACE TO CONNECT THE SEAS¹

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In *The Darkest Jungle*, Todd Balf once again proves himself to be a masterful writer.³ By telling the simple tragic story of an American expedition gone terribly wrong,⁴ Mr. Balf clearly succeeds in bringing the tale of the Darién Expedition to life for the modern reader. Mr. Balf details the long-forgotten, true adventure story of thirty-two-year-old Navy Lieutenant (LT) Isaac Strain,⁵ as he trekked across the Darién Gap (the Isthmus of Panama) in 1854 in pursuit of a future shipping canal that would connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.⁶ *The Darkest Jungle*, however, is not merely a titillating historical narrative adventure. Mr. Balf also ventures into leadership issues. Given these observations, *The Darkest Jungle* is definitely worth reading as a historical, adventure narrative offering insights into leadership.

As a historical adventure, Mr. Balf strategically begins his story with the end—jolting the reader into the dire circumstances of LT Strain and a member of his exploration team. Immersed in the jungle for nearly two months,⁷ an English rescue party finally spotted the men⁸ as “two skeletal, corpse-white figures” in the “ragged remains of a uniform”⁹ aboard a flimsy, makeshift raft¹⁰ floating down the Chucunaque River.¹¹ Lieutenant Strain’s skin displayed “a hieroglyph of rashes, boils, and insect bites.”¹² He had been lost for forty-nine days¹³ and weighed about seventy-five pounds,¹⁴ approximately half his normal body weight.¹⁵ Such a vivid introduction propels the reader forward and causes one to question how the official, Navy-sponsored U.S. Darién Exploring Expedition¹⁶ deteriorated to such a desperate state. Mr. Balf successfully feeds the reader’s hunger for an explanation in the pages that follow.

Mr. Balf first places the Darién Expedition in its wider context, explaining the long international competition behind the quest for a path across the Darién Gap, dating back to 1503 and Christopher Columbus.¹⁷ He then neatly ties in the American concept of Manifest Destiny.¹⁸ After providing the reader with contextual background, Mr. Balf tells the horrible story of this “ill-fated” mission in graphic, gut-wrenching detail. For example, after just one week in the jungle, the following

¹ TODD BALF, *THE DARKEST JUNGLE, THE TRUE STORY OF THE DARIÉN EXPEDITION AND AMERICA'S ILL-FATED RACE TO CONNECT THE SEAS* (2003).

² U.S. Army. Written while assigned as a student, 53d Judge Advocate Officer Graduate Course, The Judge Advocate General’s Legal Center and School, U.S. Army, Charlottesville, Virginia.

³ Todd Balf’s first book, *The Last River*, was named one of the top ten nonfiction books of 2000. Book Reviews, at <http://www.booknoise.net/darkestjungle> (last visited May 11, 2005) [hereinafter Booknoise Reviews].

⁴ In an interview, Mr. Balf says he wanted to tell LT Strain’s story because LT Strain was “incredibly ambitious” and yet a “[b]eautiful loser[.]” Interview by Robert Birnbaum with Todd Balf (May 5, 2004), at <http://identitytheory.com/interviews/birnbaum145.php> (last visited May 11, 2005) [hereinafter Balf Interview]. In taking an “anecdotal approach to history,” Mr. Balf desires to recapture some of America’s “risk-taking personality.” *Id.*

⁵ See BALF, *supra* note 1, at 5, 25.

⁶ See *id.* at 23.

⁷ Lieutenant Strain left the anchored *Cyane* on 13 January 1854 to begin his expedition into the jungle and was rescued on 9 March 1854. See *id.* at 1, 64.

⁸ See *id.* at 200-01, 310.

⁹ *Id.* at 1.

¹⁰ See *id.* at 1, 196-97.

¹¹ See *id.* at 199-200.

¹² *Id.* at 1.

¹³ *Id.* at 2.

¹⁴ *Id.* at 2, 201.

¹⁵ See *id.* at 201.

¹⁶ See *id.* at 7.

¹⁷ See *id.* at 9-10. Competition between America and England grew especially heated at the time of LT Strain’s expedition. See *id.* at 63-64, 71.

¹⁸ See *id.* at 64 (“The Americans were crossing independently and they, and they alone, had known it from the start.”); see also *id.* at 26-28, 42, 111.

nightmarish discovery unfolded: “a vampire bat, excised such a tiny piece of flesh [from the sleeping men and] . . . [a]n anticoagulant in the bat’s saliva produced a steady trickle of blood that flowed freely all night long.”¹⁹ Later in the expedition, the explorers suffer from another bizarre predator—the botfly.²⁰ With the benefit of modern science, Mr. Balf describes, almost with relish, the havoc wreaked by this larval parasite:

Getting under their skin, either through a fresh bite or existing sores, the larvae is initially unnoticeable but becomes larger and extremely painful as it fattens on human tissue. River bathing produced the most excruciating episodes because the maggot, which employs a snorkel-like apparatus to breathe, feels its air supply shut off and begins to writhe, using its sharp anal hooks to mobilize. . . . Crude attempts at removal . . . did [the men] more harm than good. The portions of the maggot they couldn’t excise with either their fingernails or knife blades rotted beneath their skin, leading to still further infection.²¹

Throughout the expedition, the effects of diminishing food consumption by the men steadily became more pronounced, until the crew was faced with the specter of starvation and its consequences, both physical and mental.²² The exploration party was forced to abandon the weak and dying in the interest of saving the remaining men.²³ Mr. Balf explores how the despair of some turned to grim desperation, that is, thoughts of cannibalism.²⁴ Based on the recollection of Seaman Parks,²⁵ Mr. Balf describes the gruesome plans: “When the party left, [Lombard and Parks] would sneak back and dig up the corpse [of their shipmate], using his flesh to nourish them for the long trip back.”²⁶ How could any adventure or exploration reader not be hopelessly captivated by Mr. Balf’s true story of excruciating human endurance?

In addition to being an adventure story, *The Darkest Jungle* also offers insight into lessons on leadership. Relying upon various historical sources listed in his chapter notes,²⁷ Mr. Balf relays that LT Strain was born into a family of “God-fearing Scotch-Irish Presbyterians”²⁸ in 1821 in a small Appalachian town²⁹ where he attended an exacting school “instilling him with generous doses of Latin and literature, [and] also a sense of [his], and [his] country’s, keen future.”³⁰ By the age of sixteen, LT Strain had begun his career, reporting for military duty at the Boston Navy Yard.³¹ In the end, however, Mr. Balf admits, in all fairness, that the “makeup of an explorer is impossible to divine.”³²

Mr. Balf’s admission notwithstanding, the reader cannot deny the probable significance that a mentor from the world of science had on young LT Strain.³³ It should be no surprise that LT Strain later engaged on a career path that ultimately put him at the keel of the Darién Expedition, which was both an expeditionary *and* scientific mission.³⁴ The connection between LT Strain’s mentor and his career of choice demonstrates the significance mentors can have in the lives of others. Also

¹⁹ *Id.* at 138.

²⁰ *See id.* at 169.

²¹ *Id.*

²² *See id.* at 194, 197-98.

²³ *See id.* at 177. Mr. Balf describes one such parting, as follows: “[Polanco] attempted to follow, the journal duly noted, but collapsed shrieking as the party trailed off into the forest.” *Id.*

²⁴ *See id.* at 169-73.

²⁵ *Id.* at 172.

²⁶ *Id.* at 170; *see also id.* at 220, 245-46, 311 (discussing accusation of cannibalism after rescue, but commenting that no one on the expedition “resorted to a ‘disgraceful expedient’ in order to sustain themselves”).

²⁷ *See id.* at 298-301 (citing three successive editions of the 1855 *Harper’s New Monthly*, original church records, genealogical researchers, and a book, *Heartland*, by the Clark County Historical Society in Pennsylvania).

²⁸ *Id.* at 26.

²⁹ *See id.* at 25.

³⁰ *Id.* at 26.

³¹ *See id.* at 31.

³² *Id.* at 29. *But see id.* at 56 (offering that “[g]reat leaders [are] undeterred, resourceful, and uncompromising in the face of even overwhelming odds”); *id.* at 154 (observing that “successful survival leadership” requires “firm but nimble thinking, sensible planning, and strong group dynamics”).

³³ *See id.* at 33. By way of comparison, Mr. Balf, too, had a mentor that he acknowledges may have been influential in his professional life. In an interview, Mr. Balf remarks, “I actually had a very good history teacher who loved to delve into the obscurity.” Balf Interview, *supra* note 4.

³⁴ *See* BALF, *supra* note 1, at 109-10 (discussing the numerous scientific instruments that had to be abandoned); *see also, e.g., id.* at 276.

relevant in a discussion on leadership is the leader's personal experiences; LT Strain had wide and various experiences during those intervening sixteen years before leading the Darién Expedition.³⁵ Mr. Balf suggests that LT Strain's miserable failure in a prior expedition of the South American jungle was, in all likelihood, pivotal in defining his driving ambition on the Darién Expedition.³⁶ On another occasion, however, Mr. Balf suggests that leadership stems from one's innate personality: "Others had faltered, stumbling in the heat and fever and the wilderness of the unknown. But [LT Strain] saw himself as adapted, perhaps even deserving [of success as an explorer]."³⁷ Is the author suggesting that LT Strain was a born leader or that innate personality is merely one factor in the calculation?

Regardless of how this question is answered, LT Strain exercised leadership by making careful choices during the early planning stages of the expedition. For example, LT Strain selected men with demonstrated ability through past experience for his crossing team.³⁸ He also established his command structure early on, before setting one foot in the jungle.³⁹ These decisions ultimately helped save the expedition from abject failure. Lieutenant Strain demonstrated flexibility, as well. Due to the life and death circumstances, he sometimes made untried decisions that proved highly effective for survival, despite wisdom to the contrary. For example,

Military custom dictated that the officers and men split into their two messes, or dining groups. Each camp . . . had its own fire and guard. There the differences were supposed to end. When it came to the basics of military life—how much one ate and how hard one was asked to work—Strain felt there should be no difference between the men and those who led them.⁴⁰

While blending the ranks with respect to the "basics of military life" might be frowned upon in various organizations today, and especially in the military, such flexibility might have a place in the new realities of today's unpredictable world as the United States engages in military activities aimed at eradicating terrorism worldwide.

Nonetheless, *The Darkest Jungle* is lacking as a guide on leadership because any presumed leadership lessons are based on a flawed premise, that is, that LT Strain was a great leader. His actions demonstrate that he was not.⁴¹ Admittedly, the mission was ultimately saved by LT Strain's leadership—his men followed him devotedly.⁴² What is troubling, however, is why the mission ever disintegrated so completely, resulting in unacceptable human costs? That answer, in all likelihood, lies in LT Strain's driving ambition. This ambition is revealed early on, before any of the men ever entered the jungle.

Prior to disembarking the *Cyane* and heading for shore, LT Strain had meticulously prepared for the expedition, he read books about the region,⁴³ personally oversaw supplies,⁴⁴ hand-picked his men,⁴⁵ gathered information from the local Cartagena population,⁴⁶ and negotiated permission to cross Darién with the local Indian chiefs.⁴⁷ In his impatience at the

³⁵ See *id.* at 31-42, 277.

³⁶ See *id.* at 34-35, 43.

³⁷ *Id.* at 42; see also, *e.g.*, *id.* at 28 (observing that as a boy, LT Strain "could not have felt anything other than blessed by his birthright"); *id.* at 34 (describing LT Strain as "incredibly self-assured and a bit hungry for notoriety").

³⁸ See *id.* at 102-04.

³⁹ See *id.* at 24.

⁴⁰ *Id.* at 120.

⁴¹ Moreover, while the gripping nature of Mr. Balf's adventure story is compelling nonfiction, the storyline distracts from any attempt to discern meaningful lessons on leadership. Students of leadership are better advised to seek out books devoted exclusively to leadership. See, *e.g.*, AL KALTMAN, CIGARS, WHISKEY & WINNING LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM GENERAL ULYSSES S. GRANT (1998) (providing 250 leadership lessons of general applicability based on historical facts); JEFFREY A. KRAMES, THE RUMSFELD WAY (2002) (discussing the leadership style of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld).

⁴² See Balf, *supra* note 1, at 103. For example, LT Strain left First Officer (FO) Truxton behind and in charge of seventeen other members of the expedition who were too sick to move along at a steady pace. See *id.* at 24, 159-60, 218. Lieutenant Strain planned to move ahead at a quick pace toward the Pacific with three of the strongest men, in search of canoes and provisions. See *id.* at 159-60. First Officer Truxton's team was supposed to recover and then move forward after them. See *id.* at 160, 168. However, the first death of those left behind, LT Strain's prolonged absence, and plummeting morale, coupled to cause First Officer Truxton to decide to return to the ship. See *id.* at 173-74. After thirty-eight days and five eventual deaths in Truxton's party, LT Strain finally returned. See *id.* at 218. Even after all his hardship, FO Truxton still sought approval, asking LT Strain, "Did I do right to turn back?" *Id.* at 219.

⁴³ See *id.* at 11-12.

⁴⁴ See *id.* at 11, 54-55, 110-11.

⁴⁵ See *id.* at 102-04.

⁴⁶ See *id.* at 56-57. Lieutenant Strain also examined the shore prior to disembarking the *Cyane*. See *id.* at 98.

very end,⁴⁸ however, LT Strain miscalculated. The surf—the pounding waves toppled his boats, washing all the supplies and equipment into the ocean.⁴⁹ Lieutenant Strain’s men spent a miserable first night on the beach, tired and wet⁵⁰—hardly the mark of an expedition by a “great” leader and undoubtedly an indication of LT Strain’s ambition to be the first to cross the Darién Gap.⁵¹

Lieutenant Strain’s most significant failure in leadership, however, was at his war council where he decided to continue the exploration despite mounting adversity.⁵² Mr. Balf writes that the war council was conducted “in an atmosphere approaching true democracy.”⁵³ Lieutenant Strain wrote, “No proposition to return to the ship was made, and I believe that every one felt that nothing but a transit from sea to sea would . . . make our work complete.”⁵⁴ But the end of the first week, the Sucubti and Chucunas Indian guides had abandoned the expedition,⁵⁵ food provisions were quickly dwindling,⁵⁶ and physical exhaustion and trauma were taking its toll.⁵⁷ At this point LT Strain should have recognized the critical situation and exercised leadership by retracing his steps back to the *Cyane*, in spite of the group opinion.⁵⁸ In doing so, he could have saved his men from despair, starvation, and death. He was fighting no war, he was not in search of a lost platoon, there was no need for the ultimate sacrifice paid by many of his men.⁵⁹ There was nothing but national pride and personal glory driving LT Strain forward.⁶⁰ A “great” leader would not have put the lives of his men at peril for mere pride and glory.⁶¹

Regardless of one’s motivation for reading *The Darkest Jungle*, whether for pleasure or for leadership instruction, there are four flaws that detract from the book. First, the author provides substantial information about several competing contemporary expeditions.⁶² Too detailed, this information often confused the main storyline. Not until the end of the book, did the relevance of these other expeditions become apparent.⁶³

⁴⁷ See *id.* at 98-101.

⁴⁸ Lieutenant Strain was impatient to launch from the *Cyane* to shore. He “lost the entire morning awaiting the return” of two men from shore and had been waiting days for an expert promised by the governor of New Granada (present-day Columbia). See *id.* at 25, 54, 62-63, 66, 105. Members of the crew were falling sick daily. See *id.* at 62. Moreover, the lieutenant was keenly aware of the international race for discovery of the Darién Strait, as revealed in his correspondence to the Secretary of the Navy mentioning the “many rumors of English and French expeditions now on their way to the Isthmus.” *Id.* at 63. In fact, LT Strain’s American expedition purposefully began the trek into the jungle just days before the arrival of the British, in clear contravention of previous arrangements for a “joint effort” and a recent treaty between the two nations “pledging neutrality on the isthmus.” *Id.* at 64.

⁴⁹ See *id.* at 105.

⁵⁰ See *id.* at 105-06. In retrospect, this landing fiasco could be seen as an ominous prelude to LT Strain’s later decision to “drive on.” See *infra* text accompanying notes 52-61.

⁵¹ See, e.g., BALF, *supra* note 1, at 111, 141; see also *supra* text accompanying note 36.

⁵² See KALTMAN, *supra* note 41, at 211 (“Guard against unrealistic expectations by . . . yourself, and your subordinates.”).

⁵³ BALF, *supra* note 1, at 140.

⁵⁴ *Id.* at 141.

⁵⁵ See *id.* at 139-40.

⁵⁶ See *id.* at 138-39.

⁵⁷ See *id.* at 137-38.

⁵⁸ See KALTMAN, *supra* note 41, 136 (“[Y]ou abdicate your . . . responsibilities by putting decisions to a vote.”).

⁵⁹ See BALF, *supra* note 1, at 211, 218, 224; Balf Interview, *supra* note 4 (noting that seven men from the expedition starved to death).

⁶⁰ Mr. Balf acknowledges as much in his chapter notes where he keenly observes that the “anxious political climate” contributed to LT Strain’s unwillingness to return to the *Cyane*. BALF, *supra* note 1, at 306-07.

⁶¹ See KALTMAN, *supra* note 41, at 284 (“[A] desire for personal acclaim is certain to fail.”). In contrast, LT Strain’s contemporary, Commander Thomas O. Selfridge, widely-lauded even today for what was then a new approach to jungle exploration, turned his men around after three weeks on the Darién Gap to seek additional help, thus avoiding the catastrophe that befell LT Strain. See BALF, *supra* note 1, at 279-80, 306-07. In contrast to LT Strain’s expedition, Commander Selfridge’s new approach to jungle exploration was characterized by “extraordinary preparations,” such that “[t]here were six hundred pairs of shoes for one hundred men.” *Id.* at 279-80.

⁶² See, e.g., *id.* at 59-61, 71-91 (discussing the exploits of William Paterson (a Scotsman) in 1698, Alexander von Humboldt (a Prussian naturalist) in 1803, Edward Cullen (an Irish physician) in 1850 and 1851, Lionel Gisborne (a British engineer) in 1852, and James C. Prevost (on orders from the British navy) in 1852). Comments by Dr. Cullen started the international race for discovery of the Darién Strait. See *id.* at 75-76. In 1850, Dr. Cullen wrote: “From a tree on the top of a mountain . . . I enjoyed a view of both Atlantic and Pacific, so narrow is the isthmus here.” *Id.* at 75.

⁶³ Lieutenant Strain’s reliance on faulty and incomplete information from previous explorers proved fatal to the success of his expedition. See, e.g., *id.* at 118-19 (noting LT Strain’s difficulty in finding the lowest point on the isthmus as a result of reliance upon the inaccuracies in Mr. Gisborne’s reports); *id.* at 138 (noting LT Strain’s miscalculation resulting from reliance upon Mr. Gisborne’s inaccurate maps); see also *id.* at 24, 72, 110 (discussing LT Strain’s reliance on the maps, information, and testimony of previous explorers); *id.* at 76-83 (discussing Dr. Cullen’s falsehoods and inaccurate maps of Darién); *id.* at 61-62 (discussing the exaggerations in von Humboldt’s scientific writings); *id.* at 129-32 (discussing Mr. Gisborne’s grossly inaccurate survey of Darién).

Second, Mr. Balf's footnote style invites criticism for lack of credibility. Admittedly, summarized footnotes at the end of the book allows for fluid reading.⁶⁴ But this writing style causes confusion about the precise source of textual facts. Mr. Balf ably deflects some of this critique by attributing information to its source directly in the text. For example, he writes, "'I shall never forget the 1st night,' wrote Winthrop. 'My watch was from 12 to 2 the moon had just risen . . .'"⁶⁵ There is no question in this passage about the source of the historical information—clearly Mr. Winthrop made the observation. Not all information, however, is annotated in this manner and the reader is frequently left wondering if facts in the text are from original documents, secondary sources, or the writer's own observations or opinions. Overall, this footnote writing style tends to weaken the reliability of *The Darkest Jungle* as a historical narrative.⁶⁶

The third flaw with the book is Mr. Balf's lack of objectivity. Mr. Balf occasionally provides unwarranted support for LT Strain's actions. For example, in his chapter notes, Mr. Balf defends LT Strain against criticism that LT Strain was unprepared, impatient, and amateurish.⁶⁷ Admittedly, LT Strain should be judged against the backdrop of his time period, the "bully age of Manifest Destiny,"⁶⁸ but Mr. Balf should give more leeway to the reader to draw conclusions from the facts. On other occasions, Mr. Balf inflates LT Strain's accomplishments and importance in history.⁶⁹ As a result, the reader must be discerning to distinguish between fact and opinion.

Fourth, the lack of pictures and modern maps was disappointing. Mr. Balf writes that there are "No surviving photographs of the *Cyane's* crew,"⁷⁰ and he includes no pictures or drawings of the expedition in his book. Mr. Balf's statement is admittedly true, but drawings from the time period, as well as modern photographs of the region would have been welcomed to give the reader a visual peek into this inhospitable world. The internet has a literary web site discussing Mr. Balf's book; the site includes drawings of the expedition from *Harper's New Monthly* and colorful modern wildlife photographs taken by Mr. Balf, himself.⁷¹ Mr. Balf's readers would have been better served had the author included these kinds of drawings and pictures directly within the pages of the text instead of leaving readers to search the internet for this visual information. Moreover, although Mr. Balf includes a map from the time period, detailing various expeditions and routes,⁷² it would have been interesting to see those same expeditions and routes over a modern map.

Overall, these critiques are minor.⁷³ The readability of *The Darkest Jungle* cannot be challenged. The story flows logically and chronologically. Contextual information and LT Strain's family history are well-placed to maximize understanding of the motivations of the period and "the big picture." Any shortcomings are overcome as a result of Mr. Balf's thorough research and sound insight. This insight is firmly supported by Mr. Balf's personal experience in the jungle. He first visited Darién in the early 1990's as a magazine correspondent,⁷⁴ and then later in 2001 in a concerted effort to

⁶⁴ See *id.* at 297-313.

⁶⁵ *Id.* at 111 (emphasis added).

⁶⁶ Mr. Balf also admits to being unable to use the official Darién Expedition journal. See *id.* at 297-98. Lieutenant Strain's voluminous journal entries were filed with the Navy depository, Mr. Balf writes, but they are not there today; nor are the journals located in the National Archives or at the Library of Congress. See *id.* at 297. Mr. Balf remarks that the Navy library staff has searched unsuccessfully for the Darién journals and notebooks on several occasions over the last century. *Id.* Mr. Balf engaged in a two-year search for the journals and notebooks, also to no avail. *Id.* As a result, for many of the details Mr. Balf relied on three successive issues of the 1855 *Harper's New Monthly*, a contemporary magazine that "retold" LT Strain's amazing story. See *id.* at 244-45, 298-99. The 1855 *Harper's New Monthly* contains verbatim journal entries from members of the Darién Expedition, as written by historian Joel Headley. See *id.* at 298.

⁶⁷ See *id.* at 302, 304, 306-07.

⁶⁸ *Id.* at 64.

⁶⁹ For example, Mr. Balf states, "[LT Strain] was, it seemed, the realization of a strange and perfectly new kind of species." *Id.* at 42; see also *id.* at 33-34 (remarking on LT Strain's "extraordinary future path").

⁷⁰ *Id.* at 8.

⁷¹ See Booknoise Reviews, *supra* note 3 (citing *Harper's New Monthly* (1855 and 1873)).

⁷² BALF, *supra* note 1, title page, at 78-9.

⁷³ One final observation with respect to flaws in *The Darkest Jungle* is Mr. Balf's choice of quotation on one occasion. In describing life in the jungle, Mr. Balf quotes an entry from Mr. Winthrop's journal in which Mr. Winthrop describes a bullet ant "as spiteful and venomous as emancipated niggers." *Id.* at 151-52. This gratuitous description of ants is unnecessarily inflammatory, irrelevant to the story of the Darién Expedition, and certainly a poor choice for a direct quotation given the purpose of the book. Mr. Balf mentions race relations only minimally, primarily in the context of the subsequent Civil War service of some of the Darién Expedition survivors. See, e.g., *id.* at 252-54, 256-61.

⁷⁴ Balf Interview, *supra* note 4.

retrace LT Strain's expedition.⁷⁵ When the compelling and historic details of LT Strain's arduous and death-defying march across the Darién Gap are added to the mix, the end-result is a first-rate adventure story. Accordingly, *The Darkest Jungle* is recommended as a page-turning, must-read adventure book.⁷⁶ It also offers insight into leadership issues. Finally, *The Darkest Jungle* should be especially enjoyable to military members, given that the Darién Exploring Expedition was a military venture.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ See NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC ADVENTURE (Feb. 2004) (cited by Booknoise Reviews, *supra* note 3). Thus, for example, in describing the slow progress of the expedition, Mr. Balf at one point states, "The combination of wading in swift water and cutting along the densely forested banks made the going deadly slow." BALF, *supra* note 1, at 111. This description of the natural conditions, even if gleaned from historical resource material, was certainly enhanced by Mr. Balf's own jungle experience.

⁷⁶ Accolades from book reviewers abound. See, e.g., Booknoise Reviews, *supra* note 3 ("[c]rack contemporary place writing, related in wrenching, enchanting detail" (quoting *Kirkus Reviews*)); Powell's City of Books, Book Review, at <http://www.powells.com/cgi-bin/biblio?inkey=62-0609609890-0> (last visited May 11, 2005) ("a compelling, tragic story" (quoting *Publishers Weekly*)).

⁷⁷ Mr. Balf deftly describes Navy protocol, practices, pride, and discipline. See, e.g., BALF, *supra* note 1, at 24, 105, 201, 220. Thus, in describing the debacle of the beach landing, he remarks: "Military bearing was no small thing, and the way in which an American outfit carried itself and performed a deck drill, much less how it made a foreign arrival, was viewed with exaggerated importance." *Id.* at 105.