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Bryan Bender, *You Are Not Forgotten: The Story of a Lost WWII Pilot and a Twenty-First-Century Soldier's Mission to Bring Him Home*. New York: Doubleday, 2013. Pp. 317. ISBN 978-0-385-53517-5.

Review by Michael R. Dolski, JPAC Central Identification Laboratory (michael.r.dolski.civ@mail.mil).

In this engaging book, journalist Bryan Bender¹ exposes readers to the journeys of two men whose lives became connected through the vicissitudes of war and, most particularly, of its aftermath. It juxtaposes two main stories. The first concerns the life and death of Capt. Marion Ryan “Pop” McCown Jr., a World War II Marine fighter pilot who perished in January 1944, when his plane went down on New Britain Island in the Southwest Pacific barely two weeks after his unit arrived in this contested sector of the war against Japan. Neither McCown nor his aircraft was recovered during the war. The second story concerns Maj. George S. Eyster IV, a veteran of America’s recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The two tales converged when Eyster was posted to the Joint POW/MIA Accounting Command (JPAC), the organization tasked with investigating, recovering, and identifying the remains of America’s deceased service personnel. Eyster played a role in one mission that ultimately recovered some of McCown’s remains. After formal identification, McCown returned home to his native South Carolina almost seventy years after his death. The story of these two individuals reveals the profound costs of war—personal, familial, communal—and the selfless collective efforts to account for America’s fallen.

Bender is well acquainted with the nature of modern warfare. His book blends a journalist’s knack for fluent narrative with the lessons learned in an immersive experience with JPAC recovery missions. He never loses sight of the people who make up large institutions like the Marine Corps or civil and military bureaucracies. This adds a human dimension to the costs and consequences of modern war, whether they be “good” ones or more ambiguous in their justifications and outcomes.

The book presents the experiences, fears, and hopes of McCown and the lasting pain caused by his loss—the heartache of relationships torn apart and lives forever diminished by war. In a rather affecting section, Bender describes in detail the ordeal that McCown’s family faced in their dealings with officialdom because their loved one’s body was not retrieved for so long. The psychological toll was grievous: McCown’s mother never fully accepted her loss. In her words, she “wasn’t all right”; her “heartache” and “anguish” were “overwhelming” and never dulled with the passage of time (233). Unfortunately, too many families, even in the relatively fortunate United States, continue to face similar trials. While McCown’s remains were eventually recovered through a series of missions spanning from 1991 to 2008, many more families wait in vain for information about their lost friends and relatives—“Ryan McCown was just one of the countless names of those who were missing in action from the war” (4-5).

From this tale of World War II loss, Bender turns to the more recent past and his second subject. George Eyster IV, hailing from a family with a long and commendable martial tradition, felt the weight of earlier generations in the course of his own life. His journey led through his rather reluctant acceptance of the military life to a crisis of conscience after he lost a close friend in Iraq and a sense of redemption in embracing JPAC’s noble mission. He felt the call of duty after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, to be sure, but “What George didn’t say, however, was that unlike the fictional character [Lieutenant Dan in *Forrest Gump*], who was obsessed with dying in battle as his forefathers did, he had been decidedly wary of the family business from the start. Now he was surrounded by that history” (69).

Bender not only addresses personal and collective responses to America’s wars in the past seven decades, but also sheds light on the vagaries of the country’s mission to account for those lost in those con-

1. He is national security reporter for the *Boston Globe*.

flicts. Other works² provide a more thorough case-study treatment of the people, activities, and institutions involved in the search for missing service personnel, but Bender has uncovered the compelling stories of specific individuals struggling with war's disruptive impact on their lives. Yet this strength of his work comes at the expense of obscuring the collective aspect of JPAC's mission. In discussing Eyster's mission to bring McCown's body home, Bender does sometimes indicate that others were involved in the work, for instance, in a digression on the role of historians in the command and anecdotes about the difficulties of digging for remains in the field. But he does not adequately convey the indispensable team work that characterized the accounting mission, which required a multidisciplinary effort by soldiers and civilians alike. It is too simplistic to fixate upon a single investigative or command and control cell leader, when, as Bender himself acknowledges, other investigative teams found the key sites and did the hard work that yielded a favorable outcome. At times, Bender's preoccupation with Eyster makes him appear uniquely qualified to tackle POW/MIA accounting work that countless others have engaged in before or since (see, e.g., 246).

You Are Not Forgotten is not a history of JPAC per se, nor does it present any particular argument. Rather, Bender simply tells some interesting stories without drawing any overarching conclusions. He makes no mention of the culture wars of the past two decades or fiscal and military debates in general as they relate to the accounting activities he describes. This decontextualization conceals the larger social significance of his subjects' stories. Nor does the author seem to have thought through the implications of enshrining tales of valiant military sacrifice while ignoring the forces that over and over create the situations that demand such sacrifices. Further, to say that no expense is too great to sustain POW/MIA accounting efforts is tone deaf in a time of intense debates about government largess, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and the military's inability to provide answers to so many families of the missing.

Bender sometimes lapses into a prose style more suitable in a novel than a work of well researched journalism. He describes his "characters" as "chiseled" (172), "sinewy" (176), "mischievous" (184) or the like, and imagines one of them contemplating the "sun-kissed breasts" (98) of native Samoan girls. Less excusable are several instances of chronological confusion, one of which makes it hard even to grasp the author's point as he attempts to convey the decades-long grief McCown's siblings struggled with due to their loss (297-98).

Despite these defects, *You Are Not Forgotten* gives its readers access to the realities of the Second World War, and of wars fought since then, from a distinctively personal vantage point. Bryan Bender has made a valuable addition to the growing body of work on the tragically prolonged human aftershocks of warfare over the past seventy years.

2. E.g., Bill Warnock, *The Dead of Winter: How Battlefield Investigators, WWII Veterans, and Forensic Scientists Solved the Mystery of the Bulge's Lost Soldiers* (NY: Chamberlain Bros, 2005).