Book reviews


Roll Me Over, An Infantryman’s World War II by Raymond Gantter is a “tribute to all former infantrymen, a personal narrative for Gantter’s family, and a rough notebook of sorts for the young men who will be the foot soldiers of the next war”. This book was written from letters Gantter wrote to his wife as well as scrap notes he wrote through his journey as an infantryman from Normandy to Czechoslovakia. It describes in great detail the day-to-day encounters of a foot soldier deployed for war.

The author describes his emotions while waiting for each assignment that could potentially, and will undoubtedly, change the rest of his life. He faces the unknown forefront of war and contemplates the rumors that trickle down from the men that were there before him. This book actively peaks the interest of the reader with an actual uncensored re-creation of this man’s experiences during war.

It is difficult to compare this book to others like it because it is the first book I have read reflecting personal memories of a soldier in war. I found it to be quite interesting and have become interested in reading more books like it. Gantter expressed his thoughts, feelings and actions regarding the war and the people he encountered in it in a factual and candid manner. The book was written in a logical manner and followed each sequence of events chronologically. Footnotes were included when appropriate to make certain the reader was aware of “the rest of the story” for any situation that was not resolved until later.

From the point of view of an occupational therapist, I keyed in on the impact each major role change had on the author. He described his difficulties at the beginning of his journey as he adjusted to the distance and undetermined time away from his wife and two children. At the same time he was dealing with his new roles and responsibilities that he did not want or chose, as a foot soldier. He described the resentment, anger, hopelessness and helplessness he felt with these new roles. He questioned his abilities to be a good soldier and carry out the expectations the Army had put upon him. He felt he was leaving his family behind without the comfort of knowing he would return.

Though many of Gantter’s grievances were unchanged regardless of the stage of war or geographical location, he managed to describe each so the reader could visualize his life and feel his discomfort. He wrote about the many meals he was served while living in the field. They were cold by the time he got to eat them, and there was not enough food to fill him. He described how he had to eat tactically, so he would not be seen by the enemy while his defense was down. Eating was to sustain life, not one of life’s pleasures as before.

Another daily complaint was how cold he felt. He was cold all the time. He was not allowed to modify his uniform with a scarf, so he waited cold and hungry for the next command. When he saw a couple of officers go by him snuggled in warm scarves, he felt a great deal of resentment and this resentment stayed with him. The event and the emotions continued to be on his mind even after he was commissioned in the field as an officer.

Gantter described the sleeping conditions he endured during the different troop movements. Many times he would sleep in a cold, wet foxhole that he and his battle partner would dig. He described them as uncomfortable, small and many times incomplete due to bad weather, lack of time and poor digging equipment. He would have many sleepless nights due to these conditions. He described his adaptation so hearing artillery and other sounds of war throughout the nights actually became a comfort, rather than a threat. If you could hear it in the distance, you knew what and where it was. Silence meant the situation was unknown, which was certainly more frightening.

As time passed, Gantter adjusted to his new roles as a soldier and to his temporary distance from the prior roles he enjoyed as a teacher, husband and father. His adjustment occurred without his active realization of his own ability to cope with such change. It was not until he arrived back home that he recognized how
much he had made his wartime environment part of his
culture, belief and language. Others had surrounded
him for so long with similar feelings, thoughts and
experiences that he had lost touch with his previous
interests, relationships, and emotions.

This book is an excellent source of knowledge for any
healthcare provider in the armed services. It provides
a strong understanding of the day-to-day physical and
mental stresses and expectations demanded of a soldier
in war, as well as during training. I recommend this
book to any service member dealing with the well being
of soldiers, as it will help them understand the demands
of their fellow soldiers and potential patients.

As an occupational therapist I recommend this book
to provide a comprehensive understanding of a soldier’s
life dynamics. It described aspects of all domains of
concern in occupational therapy including ADL, rest,
leisure and work. It explores the emotions and conflicts
that arise when facing role changes, even when the
changes are positive, such as returning home. This life-
sharing can only enhance therapists’ understanding of
others and will certainly lead them to wonder how they
would respond under similar circumstances.

1LT Michelle Barss Selcke
Occupational Therapy Department
Eisenhower Army Medical Center
Ft Gordon, GA 30905, USA

Black Hawk Down (First ed.), by Mark Bowden, At-
lantic Monthly Press, New York, 1999, 386 pp, $24.00,

Black Hawk Down provides a realistic account about
the war in Mogadishu, Somalia on October 3, 1993.
This victorious, yet tragic, situation primarily involved
the special force’s group Delta Force (also known as
D-boys or Operators), the Task Force Rangers, and the
population of Mogadishu, Somalia.

Mark Bowden takes the reader into the realities of
war. Not just war, but the actual terror and exhilara-
tion of urban infantry combat fighting. Classifying this
book as nonfiction is difficult. Bowden composes the
individual accounts and dialogues together in a profi-
cient and commanding manner. He builds up the sus-
 pense so that it reads like a best seller authored by John
Grisham. His intent: “… To capture in words the ex-
 perience of combat through the eyes and emotions of
the soldiers involved, blending their urgent, human per-
spective with military and political overviews of their
predicament.” (Bowden, p. 331).

Black Hawk Down is not a book required or rec-
ommended for every occupational therapy practitioner
(therapist, assistant, or student) to have as a reference
or a guide. It is not a book of insight, theories, or treat-
ment techniques concerning the field of occupational
therapy. However, it is relevant for occupational ther-
apists in both military and civilian environments, for
reasons I’ll explain below.

At some point in the career of many occupational
therapy health care providers (therapist, assistant, or
student), it is likely they will be involved in the treat-
ment of a client (civilian or military) who has injuries
related to a combat situation, either mental or physical.
Reading Black Hawk Down will provide the caregiver
some knowledge of the realities that the client has
experienced. This opens avenues for two-way commu-
nication and possibly guidance toward treatment tech-
niques.

An additional item of interest for health care
providers is the type of injuries that occur during train-
ing and combat. Many soldiers’ injuries (such as shoul-
der or elbow injuries) occur as a result of physical fit-
ness training, sports, or horseplay during down times
between missions. At the other extreme, a soldier may
have severe damage to muscles, tendons, and bones
caused by 5.56 m rounds, shrapnel from a grenade, en-
emy or civilian mobs. If a soldier has a shattered elbow,
it is important to know if it occurred during a training
exercise or by the complexities of combat.

This book provides insight on the realities soldiers
go through during training and in actual combat. Most
people are not aware of the occupational demands re-
quired in combat. As the reviewer, I found I did not un-
derstand the constant terror, exhilaration, moral/ethical
dilemmas, the losses, the triumphs, the hopelessness,
and the brotherhood of war.

Mark Bowden does an excellent job of reporting the
events that took place in Mogadishu, Somalia. His ex-
tensive research interviews and reviews of radio trans-
mission tapes attest to the accuracy and realism of the
text.

Black Hawk Down is worth reading: For those in
the field of occupational therapy and all civilian and
military health care providers. It is remarkable and
provokes the readers to comprehend the realities these
highly trained soldiers go through during actual com-
batt. Bowden re-created for the reader the experience
of combat through the eyes of the soldiers involved. (Read it. You’ll be glad you did.)

Michael S. Kim, 2LT
US Army, OT Student
Fort Sam Houston, TX, USA