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Pittsburgh Tribune Review

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Review: Our hero

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The latest book from the author of "Into the Wild," "Into Thin Air" and "Under the Banner of Heaven" will leave readers who respect the sacrifices made by U.S. troops and their families appalled, angry and more worried about our nation's continuing military presence in Afghanistan.

In "Where Men Win Glory: The Odyssey of Pat Tillman" (Doubleday), Jon Krakauer traces how bad policy decisions dating back decades and bureaucratic failings as old as war itself led to Tillman's killing by friendly fire in Afghanistan -- and how government and military officials tried to suppress the truth about the manner of his death.

Krakauer does convey his own anti-Bush-administration viewpoint, sometimes less than subtly. But he also criticizes both ends of the political spectrum for making what they wanted to of Tillman in death despite Tillman's own public reticence about himself in life.

Krakauer's Pat Tillman is a voracious, intellectually curious reader, conversationalist and keeper of personal journals, a long-haired atheist who supported gay rights and disdained the Army's prizing of rank and time in uniform above merit and skill. In other words, he didn't fit the heroic military stereotype.

Punctuating his narrative of Tillman's life with the all-too-familiar timeline of Islamist terrorism, Krakauer weaves together this soldier's tale with Afghanistan's long role as a graveyard for empires and how U.S. and Soviet involvement there decades ago set the stage for the Taliban, al-Qaida, 9/11 and its repercussions.

Just before his first Arizona State University football training camp in the summer of 1994, Tillman's life was changed for the better by the 30-day juvenile sentence he served and the 250 hours of community service he performed for his role in a high school brawl outside a pizza parlor. He would excel athletically and academically at ASU and rise to stardom with the Arizona Cardinals.

After his third season, Tillman was offered multiyear, multimillion-dollar deals. Yet he chose to stay with the Cards on another one-year contract paying him the fourth-year league minimum of \$512,000.

And then came 9/11.

By April 2002, Tillman had decided to join the military to fight al-Qaida in Afghanistan. He married Marie, his sweetheart since high school, before enlisting in June with his brother, Kevin, with whom he was especially close and would go through Ranger School and serve until his death. When the time came to ship out, Pat was disturbed about being sent not to Afghanistan but to Iraq, where he would be on the periphery of the rescue of Jessica Lynch, the captured private.

Blasting media outlets for unquestioningly retailing the bogus official account to their audiences, Krakauer shows how Lynch's story -- how she was injured, how she was treated by her Iraqi captors and doctors -- was distorted, as was the truth about the battle in Nasiriyah that followed Lynch's capture.

That battle left 29 Americans dead but the military admitted only eight had been victims of friendly fire. Krakauer makes a strong case that the true number was much higher -- and that "brazenness," "dishonesty" and "mendacity" are shockingly common in such military inquiries.

Krakauer's detailing of the Lynch and Nasiriyah tales slows his narrative but his specificity here pays dividends later because the same sort of official untruthfulness and butt-covering were at work in regard to Tillman's death.

The effort to suppress the true manner of Tillman's killing began just as the world was learning about U.S. soldiers abusing Iraqi inmates at Abu Ghraib -- and would go to breathtaking lengths and continue through multiple investigations.

Contravening policy designed to aid forensic investigation, the military burned Tillman's bloody uniform and body armor. Contravening Tillman's own wishes, it held a memorial service for him that included a chaplain. And it falsified documentation to award Tillman's posthumous Silver Star.

Many of Tillman's comrades in arms knew he'd been killed by friendly fire but the brass ordered them not to tell Kevin the truth, though they continued to serve together; dealt only wrist slaps to the culpable soldiers; and kept the rest of the Tillman family in the dark, too.

Krakauer even quotes an e-mail sent by the officer in charge of the Joint Special Operations Command to ensure that President George W. Bush wouldn't spill the beans in a speech to the White House Correspondents' Association.

That officer? Gen. Stanley McChrystal, installed earlier this year as the top U.S. and NATO commander in Afghanistan. That fact didn't make it into Krakauer's book, but for readers who recognize the connection, it's chilling.

By calling to account those culpable for Tillman's death and the cover-up of its manner, "Where Men Win Glory" is ultimately a fine example of eyes-wide-open patriotism -- as opposed to patriotism that's blind to all but what reflects well on the U.S. and its military.

SHELF LIFE: G-20 takeaways: Pittsburgh books

Whew! The G-20 summit is over. But what are the summiteers taking home with them that has to do with Pittsburgh?

The G-20's official schedule of meetings at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center and related events at a few other local sites gave participants only relatively narrow glimpses of our city and region.

Even if a few expensive silk "power ties" stained by Primanti Bros. lunches do lurk deep within the luggage of homeward-bound world leaders, that won't tell them much about our town. Neither will most of the souvenirs typically sold to Pittsburgh visitors.

What's needed for Pittsburgh to make a lasting impact on the G-20 luminaries is something with some intellectual heft and historical perspective. So manager Karen Rossi and her staff at Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh's Downtown & Business branch put together the following list of books about Pittsburgh that they hope the world leaders who just gathered here are taking home with them.

And the Wolf Finally Came: The Decline of the American Steel Industry

by John P. Hoerr

(University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988)

Devastation and Renewal: An Environmental History of Pittsburgh and Its Region

edited by Joel A. Tarr

(University of Pittsburgh Press, 2003)

Don't Call Me Boss: David L. Lawrence, Pittsburgh's Renaissance Mayor

by Michael P. Weber

(University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988)

Downtown Pittsburgh

by Stuart P. Boehmig

(Arcadia Publishing, 2007)

Meet You In Hell: Andrew Carnegie, Henry Clay Frick, and the Bitter Partnership that Transformed America

by Les Standiford

(Three Rivers Press, 2006)

The Mill

edited by Rade B. Vukmir

(University Press of America, 1999)

Out of this Furnace

by Thomas Bell

(University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991)

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: A Photographic Portrait

by Mark Bolster

(Twin Lights Publishers, 2007)

Pittsburgh: The Story of an American City

by Stefan Lorant

(Esselmont Books, 1999)

Pittsburgh's Landmark Architecture: The Historic Buildings of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County

by Walter C. Kidney

(Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation, 1997)

The River Ran Red: Homestead 1892

by David P. Demarest Jr.

(University of Pittsburgh Press, 1992)

The August Wilson Century Cycle

by August Wilson

(Theatre Communications Group, 2007)

REVIEW: By Donald Collins

"Saving Capitalism: Keeping America Strong"

by Pat Choate

(Vintage)

Pat Choate -- policy analyst, veteran political economist and Ross Perot's 1996 Reform Party running mate -- truly understands how to better manage our broken capitalist system. His latest book, a paperback, captures the essence of our dangerous situation.

With America in a recession -- Choate sees it as a depression -- he has produced a powerful economic roadmap in "Saving Capitalism: Keeping America Strong." For anyone who thinks the recent upturn in the U.S. stock market means an end to the financial shocks, he suggests: "The U.S. is in the midst of a basic structural shift in the global economy that reaches to the very core of its economic institutions. Where American leaders once believed globalization would lead to the widespread adoption of market capitalism, this depression has brought into focus a different reality -- the rise of state capitalism." Examples abound: China, Japan, South Korea, even Germany.

Choate cites the "de-industrialization of the United States" and proves with numerous examples that the U.S. cannot survive without a strong manufacturing base. He writes: "People without assets, jobs and credit cannot buy the goods and services made and sold by others. They become poorer and their lives more difficult."

He reports: "Between 1981 and 2009, manufacturing employment fell from 18.7 million jobs to barely 12 million, a 40 percent loss, while finance grew from 5.1 million jobs to 8.1 million, a 60 percent increase. America lost almost three jobs for every one it gained in that exchange."

The governing ethos during recent decades, Choate writes, has been "government is the problem, not the solution." But now, after chicanery, many nations and half the U.S. public see capitalism as unworthy of emulation, which is a tragedy because, as Choate puts it, "capitalism, properly regulated, is the most efficient means in the world to allocate scarce resources and stimulate economic innovation and growth."

So what does Choate see as the way out? He offers six "game-changing" proposals of obvious urgency and validity, restated here for brevity:

1. Impose strict federal supervision of all financial institutions, leading to a sound currency.
2. Replace federal income and corporate taxes with value-added or flat taxes, balance the budget and start paying down the federal debt.
3. Balance our trade deficit through pragmatic non-protectionist deals with state capitalism.
4. Strengthen America's social safety net, stressing education, training, health care and jobs and ensuring a minimal income and pensions adequate for dignified retirements.
5. Initiate a massive capital budget for public works to improve our aging infrastructure, creating millions of new jobs.
6. Create a national innovation strategy to facilitate more creativity, enhancing job creation.

Ambitious? You bet. But Choate shows exactly how to accomplish these steps, many of which are the same ideas that FDR used to stabilize a dire situation. At the start of FDR's first term, many of his key advisers -- including Walter Lippman, then the nation's most influential editorial voice -- called for FDR to become a dictator, which he declined to do, trusting no one, not even himself, with such power.

Real unemployment -- now at 16 percent, per the head of the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta -- and rising deficits projected at \$9.2 trillion over the next decade suggest the point Choate makes when he writes that "the rest of the world is unlikely to loan that much money to a nation whose people cannot control their government's spending." Something that Choate also knows must happen is stopping the flood of unneeded illegal immigrant labor -- now.

"Saving Capitalism" is a brisk, engaging read. Don't miss it.

Donald Collins, a co-chair of the National Advisory Board of the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR), is a freelance writer living in Washington, D.C.

NEW PAGES TO TURN

Arguing with Idiots: How to Stop Small Minds and Big Government

by Glenn Beck

(Threshold Editions)

OK, so there's probably as much point in trying to figure out why the cover photo of Glenn Beck's new book portrays him wearing attire reminiscent of Col. Klink from "Hogan's Heroes" as there is in trying to figure out which came first, the rise in the decibel level of political debate or the rise of Beck to talk-radio star, host of his own show on Fox News Channel and author of three previous New York Times No. 1 best-sellers. After all, he's pictured merely sticking out his tongue on the cover of the Sept. 28 edition of Time -- but his mug landing there is another indication that those looking to take the pulse of American popular political sentiment can't afford to ignore Beck. In "Arguing with Idiots," he offers what the publisher calls "the secret formula to winning arguments against people with big mouths but small minds: knowing the facts." Beck provides user-friendly verbal ammunition to fire against those who believe -- among other things -- that gun control prevents gun violence, that the U.S. should emulate the British national health care system and that without illegal immigrant labor, vegetable prices would skyrocket. If nothing else, "Arguing with Idiots" should keep Beck's fans satisfied until a picture-book adaptation of his Times No. 1 seller "The Christmas Sweater," aimed at children, hits bookstore shelves.

True Compass: A Memoir

by Edward M. Kennedy

(Twelve)

Originally scheduled for release next year, then in October, "True Compass" was made available Sept. 14, following its author's Aug. 22 loss of his battle with brain cancer. Written in collaboration with Ron Powers, author of biographies including "Flags of Our Fathers," "True Compass" -- its title reflective of the late Massachusetts senator's love of sailing -- reportedly earned the liberal Democrat icon an \$8 million advance. In a July e-mail interview posted online by the publisher, Kennedy said he wanted to tell the story of his life and describe some of the history he had witnessed and been a part of. He maintained that he'd never before discussed Vietnam, Lyndon Johnson and his brothers Jack and Bobby in such depth. He also said he "didn't waste words in the book refuting myths" and "didn't write about things I didn't know about personally." No doubt many will read "True Compass" to see whether it confirms or refutes their existing opinions about Ted Kennedy. It's hard to predict how many who do read this book will change their minds about him. But given Kennedy's impact on legislation and policy during his notably long Senate tenure, historians and scholars should be glad to have "True Compass" as a primary source they can dig into for decades to come, no matter what thesis about its author they're aiming to support.

Financial Fiasco: How America's Infatuation with Homeownership and Easy Money Created the Economic Crisis

by Johan Norberg

(Cato Institute)

"Financial Fiasco" examines the economic meltdown from which America and the world still are struggling to recover. "The story of this storm in the global markets is the story of how government intervention to solve previous crises laid the foundation for a new one," writes Johan Norberg -- Cato Institute senior fellow, author of "In Defense of Global Capitalism," writer and host of the documentary "Globalisation is Good" that aired on Britain's Channel Four, and resident of Stockholm, Sweden. He covers how the combination of monetary policy, housing policy and financial innovations produced financial catastrophe and warns about repeating the same mistakes and pursuing the wrong solutions. The book, according to the publisher, is "the perfect antidote" to what the author calls a dramatic shift in "the climate of ideas ... in the direction of a bigger and more active government." Amity Shlaes praises Norberg for offering a perspective other than that of an American insider. Walter E. Williams lauds Norberg for describing "lax monetary policy by the Federal Reserve System, overpromotion of homeownership by the government and government agencies, and transformation of the mortgage loan industry into an issuer of securities backed by a pool of mortgages of varying quality." Norberg's analysis may or may not ultimately prevail as consensus opinion, but his is another strong voice in the chorus that assigns much blame to

governmental errors.

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