**Brummett Echohawk with Mark R. Ellenbarger. *Drawing Fire: A Pawnee, Artist, and Thunderbird in World War II*. Edited by Trent Riley, foreword by Lt. Col. Ernest Childers. University Press of Kansas, 2018. 248 pp. ISBN: 0700627030.**
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*Drawing Fire* immerses readers in a meticulously detailed sketch of war, specifically, of the U.S. invasion of Sicily and Italy from 1943 to 1944, through the eyes of decorated Pawnee veteran Brummett Echohawk, of the 178th Regimental Combat Team, 45th Infantry Division: the "Thunderbirds." Like many memoirs of famous Native Americans, Echohawk's experiences, while written by himself, have been edited and presented by another, in this case Mark R. Ellenbarger, along with historical guidance from Trent Riley. Ellenbarger pitches *Drawing Fire* this way: "this work serves the purpose of revealing for the first time what it was like for these young Native Americans serving among other American Indians in the European theater" (xvi). In terms of structure and content, Ellenbarger explains that Echohawk completed "chapters" of the manuscript that would become this book and gave a typed copy of this manuscript, along with "an old intelligence case," to Ellenbarger after Echohawk's stroke in 2005. Taking this manuscript, Ellenbarger relied on "oral history interviews and personal notes" to embellish the contents of Echohawk's own contributions (xv). In an epigraph to the first chapter, Ellenbarger states "*This was his [Echohawk's] legacy, and the thought of embellishment could not and did not enter his mind*" (1, italics his). Presumably, Ellenbarger means to convey that the content of the chapters themselves derive from Echohawk's own manuscript. Like many such curated and edited memoirs, however, the extent to which the reader encounters the unvarnished "authentic" voice of the author remains somewhat ambiguous. Yet—as I will discuss later—*Drawing Fire* conveys a sense of immediacy and authenticity.

In terms of content, the book focuses on Echohawk's experiences of combat, with only brief references to his life before, even to military life prior to the transport ship headed to Sicily. The first seven chapters cover the invasion of Sicily, (July 9/10–August 17, 1943); the eighth chapter covers the invasion of Italy (Sept 9, 1943); and the final chapter covers the Battle of Anzio (January 22–June 5, 1944, ending in the capture of Rome). I want to make the point here that my review approaches this book from the perspective of a literary scholar rather than an historian. The historicity of the book will be a project for others. Ellenbarger, and presumably public historian Riley, do offer a gloss of helpful tidbits which contextualize names, dates, references, and context; this gloss adds particular points of interest that would connect well with other course material in an Indigenous Studies history or literature class. The book also contains a

helpful glossary and timeline along with a *dramatis personae* at the end of the volume, making it easily searchable and useable. As an example of what I mean when I suggest this book's potential interest for a class, Echohawk mentions the Thunderbirds' own version of the common military expression FUBAR: for Native American troops, he says, some situations were "Fouled up like the Bureau of Indian Affairs" (29). Without lengthy explanation of the BIA's complicated relationship with Indian Country, Ellenbarger adds a note that offers readers this insight: one issue of the BIA's vocational journal contains an enthusiastically admiring and yet uncomfortably racist depiction of Echohawk. They note that he, like other Native American service members, was a great soldier because of an "'enthusiasm for fighting'" (footnote, 14). One imagines that this memoir, read alongside other primary and secondary sources, would come alive for students in such subtle moments as these.

As a literary text, *Drawing Fire* has its limitations. Not only is the narrative weighted with minutiae, but there are some syntactically awkward moments as well. As they begin the ground offensive in Sicily, for example, Echohawk notes: "Ahead I don't see Last Arrow's squad," and two phrases later, "Ahead I spot green shrubbery" (33). Indications like this of a light editorial hand on Ellenbarger's part conveys a sort of authenticity, a lack of polish that creates a disarmingly "real" voice. The reader senses that they are in the hands of an artist and a soldier, not a wordsmith. Syntactic uniformity, a didactic tone that exposes Pawnee and other Native American words, religious practices, cultural reference points, and verbal repetitions bog down an otherwise high-octane and rewarding first-person narrative about the ground invasion in Europe.

That being noted, the narrative is rendered almost entirely in the first-person and the present tense, so that it reads like a combat diary. It's a narrative characterized by a deluge of specifics meant to convey accuracy and attention to historical and contextual detail. Echohawk's interspersed comments give little sense of personality, but are nonetheless vulnerable and profoundly human. For instance, as the landing craft approaches their target destination, the beaches of Scoglitti, Echohawk muses, "I am not a brave man… got to control my fear… got to control my fear" (16). In addition to these brief glimpses of profoundly human emotion, the narrative offers insight into Echohawk's personality and values—moments that are, again, brief yet luminous. When they're advancing toward Scoglitti, worried that they've overshot their LZ (landing zone), Messerschmitts start streaking by overhead. Echohawk remarks that he knows his men have practiced squad tactics, but he is reluctant to simply shout orders, even in

this fear-drenched moment. "I'm not a hard-bitten sergeant," he says. "I explain, then lead" (22).

Of most interest are the glimpses of the man's internal tension, the tension between warrior and artist. Toward the beginning of the ground invasion of Sicily, Echohawk and his squad have taken a structure they call the Pillbox. Echohawk goes into the building, which had been used as a bunker, and hears the drone of insects. He looks down and realizes that he's standing "in a pool of blood specked with the flies" (40). He dashes out of the building, wipes off his boots, and struggles to regain his composure. "I want to be a brave warrior," he reminds himself, and to do so, he must "[n]ever look back… Yet there is an urge to draw this" (41). But he and his men move on. Later, they find a recently abandoned command post, and Echohawk finds a drafting table. He stuffs several sheets of drawing paper and pencils into his shirt as they move through (69). The urge to record, the urge to capture the aesthetic and emotional viscera of this terrible and alien experience, and the urge to kill—to be a warrior—drive this narrative forward.

For the reader, however, it is Echohawk's artistic vision that renders his experiences uniquely disturbing, uniquely gripping. At one point, Echohawk shoots an enemy machine gunner (it's not specified whether the man fights for the Italian or German army). Turning to confront the enemy's assistant gunner, Echohawk notes this new man has a gruesome flap of his ear hanging in his face; he also notices that the assistant gunner "has a fresh haircut with sideburns shaved" (95). The intimacy of such a remark—and the vulnerability of that image, the raw pink skin of a new shave under the blood and grime of a severed ear—is haunting. In addition to artistic language, *Drawing Fire* contains reproductions of many of Echohawk's drawings; the book is worth the purchase for these astonishing works alone.

Even more than offering an artist's perspective of a particularly brutal ground invasion, *Drawing Fire* explores the war through the eyes of Indigenous Americans. Echohawk points out that their original division insignia was the swastika; it was changed to the Thunderbird because of Nazi German appropriation of the swastika (10). The degradation of such an ancient and meaningful symbol is not just a point of interest but a poignant reminder of how little time elapsed between the genocidal push against Plains nations and the service of Plains nations citizens in the U.S. Armed Forces. At one point, Echohawk talks about a Pawnee tradition in which the leader of a war party recites a poem of inspiration, as his father had told him before he left. He recalls that his grandfather had given those same words to his father before he served in World

War I; as a young warrior, Echohawk's grandfather had heard the same recitation "on the Great Plains" (46). In the same way that beauty and horror collide in the image of the swastika, so much history is packed into these brief glimpses of Echohawk's relationships to the Pawnee nation and to the United States.

There are moments of raw honesty, but a careful reader will also note where Echohawk, patriot and warrior, chooses silence. He mentions, but does not explain, the Oklahoma allotment system (43), just as he brushes over the complicated history between the Pawnee on the one hand and the Cheyenne and Arapahoe on the other. At one point, missing the Pawnee Powwow, Echohawk and his fellow Native American soldiers recite stories they have heard from different elders about their elders' war stories. Echohawk recalls a Pawnee man who was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor during the conflict on the Plains (138). The Pawnee Scouts worked with the U.S. federal forces, while others' elders would have been fighting against them. Yet these differences are erased, subsumed by the later shared history that forced their people to Oklahoma. He demonstrates common cause, affinity, and deep friendship with his Cheyenne and Arapahoe fellow service members and elides their complicated history between enmity and an alliance of loss. A patriot who relays his patrilineal heritage of war—fighting for the U.S. *and* against—he declines to talk about the invisible time period between the latter and the former.

Another intriguingly light touch appears in Echohawk's characterization of the 45th Infantry Division. At one point, Echohawk calls the 45th a group of "cowboys, oilfield roughnecks, sunup-to-sundown farmers, and top-notch boxers" mustered to federal service, hardy and "good ol' boys at heart" (143). As evidence, he recalls a night when they were stationed in Boston, in 1942 (before deploying to Sicily). Echohawk describes how "we" got passes into town for a night out, although in the rest of the narrative he carefully avoids the personal pronoun so that the reader is uncertain what, if any, role Echohawk himself played in the events. In a bar called the Silver Dollar, a group of tall men from the company—Echohawk describes exemplars as "a 6'4" Sioux Indian, another a 6'6" Pawnee"—walk into the bar. A woman customer screams that there are "'Indi-yans!'" and a fight breaks out between cops, MPs, civilians, and the service members. He describes the "lively" fight, but also mentions that a nightclub "caught fire" and several people died that night. He is here referring to the Coconut Grove fire, in which nearly five hundred people perished. Concluding that abruptly violent story, he says that the 45th was indeed a "rough bunch" (143). From the narrative framing of the story, Echohawk seems to indicate that the rowdy bar fight he and his companions engaged in was somehow linked to the deadly Grove fire, although this does not

historically seem to be the case. It is unclear what his purpose is in this moment, unless it is to cement in his readers' minds the relatively less violent, racially-motivated conflict in which he was embroiled with the far more violent accidental fire, to suggest the complexity of Indigenous experience in wartime.

There is evidence throughout his narrative that Echohawk is crafting a particular image of himself as a warrior. He is careful to flavor scenes of combat with references to fear, to a desire to be brave—to the human attributes of war. Yet depictions of his own and other American troops' actions in battle are never depicted with brutality and savagery. He even, for the most part, avoids using slurs military personnel were encouraged to use for enemy combatants. One of the few times in which the narrator refers to German soldiers as "Krauts" comes after Echohawk finds the remains of a second lieutenant he knew (150). Shortly after this scene, Echohawk finds one of the most heartbreaking scenes in the memoir—a soldier from C Company and a part-Choctaw medic still in the process of unwinding bandages to treat him, both dead and slumped where they sit. German soldiers had shot down at them from a half-track with machine pistols. "A rage churns" in Echohawk as he witnesses this scene (156); his sketch of the scene is fantastically rendered, simple and devastating (155). Then, after he is wounded near Anzio, he survives the night while German soldiers ransack the belongings of his fallen companions; the next morning, crawling out to the road, he thinks "*Damn Kraut-head bastards*" (204). This is an understandable rage. Almost no other indications of rage, fury, anger, or any other form of violent emotion color his depictions of combat.

Instead, Echohawk's primary mode of communicating interpersonal interaction is humor. Even in cases where the reader might detect a hint of anger, Echohawk meticulously conveys it with a generous coating of sly fun or witty repartee. In response to an annoying (white) grunt who marvels to Echohawk that "Indians" are a "'kinda warrior-soldier,'" Echohawk replies dryly that he just "'shake[s] with patriotism'" (43). Later, the battalion medic, Medicine Man, commends their battalion for a successful night raid, but does so mocking U.S. cinematic depictions of American Indians. He describes how, in the movies, they never fight at night, but "'you 'skins did all right!'"—particularly considering they weren't in need of a shave, "'wearing a Sioux war bonnet, Kiowa war shirt, Cheyenne leggings, Cherokee moccasins, and Navajo jewelry'" as Hollywood stereotypes, usually performed by white actors, suggest (86). In this scene, the men guffaw, a release from the tension of the day at the expense of white American stereotypes. In another scene, Last Arrow (Potawatomi) and San Antone (Comanche) fake an attempted scalping to scare a German prisoner, both exposing

pervasive racist stereotypes and providing a moment of levity at the expense of a German captive, but furthering U.S. military aims (166-7).

As combat intensifies, Echohawk's narrative moves more swiftly through time. In late 1943, he is wounded and sent to the 33rd General Hospital in North Africa. He goes AWOL in order to return to combat in Italy (185). Shortly afterwards, he returns to active duty—just in time for the assault on Anzio, an important target on the way to Rome. Anzio, Echohawk says, is "an inferno" (187). During an all-out attack on "The Factory" outside Anzio, Echohawk and eleven others are gunned down. "[W]e have been slaughtered," he says, with characteristic brevity and pathos (199). Last Arrow is killed in this onslaught, and the death of his close friend haunts the remainder of the narrative. From Anzio, Echohawk spends most of the rest of the campaign in a military hospital, so he offers little more than a historical overview of the offensive from the time between February 16th and May 23rd, 1944. He concludes his memoir with a brief homecoming scene. Furloughed in 1944, Echohawk is greeted in Oklahoma with a ceremony in which he and two other Pawnee Thunderbirds are given a warrior's song. This scene, like the summarized narrative about the end of the campaign, is in the past tense. He concludes his memoir with the image of the Thunderbirds saluting an American flag, a flashback to bayonet charges in Sicily and Italy, and the "sweet call of a bobwhite" (215). The emotional vibrancy of this last scene characterizes the book as a whole. It is short, meticulously detailed about combat experience, but brief and suggestive in its treatment of its characters. This memoir would be enhanced by being read alongside other materials that offer historical context and draw out its evocative hints and references. On its own, *Drawing Fire* entertains and inspires. And readers may learn a little along the way. At the very least, it is a gift to know that this book, recounting the memoirs of a Thunderbird and offering several of Echohawk's stunning drawings, has made its way to our hands.

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