June 1995

From the Reference Desk: Reference Book Reviews

Tom Gilson

College of Charleston, gilsont@cofc.edu

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Recommended Citation

Gilson, Tom (1995) "From the Reference Desk: Reference Book Reviews," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 7: Iss. 3, Article 19.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.1760>

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From the Reference Desk

Reference Book Reviews

Column Editor: **Tom Gilson** (College of Charleston) (gilson@cofc.edu)

Evinger, William R, ed. *Directory of U.S. Military Bases Worldwide*. 2nd ed. Phoenix: Oryx, 1994.

Reviewed by **Tom Gilson**

Oryx Press has expanded and retitled its well received *Directory of Military*

Bases in the U.S. This new "2nd edition" is called the *Directory of U.S. Military Bases Worldwide*, and has increased the number of listings to include active over-

seas bases, as well as, those located in the United States.

Arranged alphabetically, first by state, and then in a separate section, by country, the directory lists over 1100 U.S. military bases throughout the world. Each entry contains the standard directory type information; address, telephone number, fax number, etc. But editor, **William R. Evinger** also, provides full profiles of each base. In these profiles, he includes information like: size and location, key contacts, a brief base history, branch of service, major units, personnel and expenditures, available services, visitor attractions and future closure/realignment possibilities. The result is a comprehensive but succinct description of each base. The indexing is strong, providing an alphabetical listing of bases, a branch of service index, a State/Country and branch of service index and a listing by military unit. All references are to entry numbers, not pages.

Equally important are the appendixes. Given the tremendous change experienced in recent years due to closures and realignments, Evinger has wisely provided an appendix which summarizes the 130 base closures and 45 base realignments. In addition, he has provided a second appendix which includes the implementation schedule for the actual closures and realignments. The *Directory of U.S. Military Bases Worldwide* is a well-organized and well-written directory which provides essential and useful information. However, in the light of the continuing base closures/realignments, the directory might be updated more often. Aside from this minor concern, this directory is a worthy addition to collections where there is a perceived need.

Librarian's Guide to Public Records. Tempe, AZ:BRB Publications. ISBN: 1-879792-23-0. 1995. \$39.95.

Reviewed by **C. Michael Phillips**
(College of Charleston)
(phillips@cofc.edu)

The **Librarian's Guide to Public Records** is a comprehensive directory of
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Kister Interview
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terested consumers in North America. The main difficulty is that there are no substantial review sources covering encyclopedias and other reference works in languages other than English. *LJ* [Library Journal], *RBB* [Reference Books Bulletin], *Choice*, *Wilson* [Wilson Library Bulletin], *RQ*, *ARBA* [American Reference Books Annual] — none of these standard review publications cover foreign-language reference sources, including encyclopedias. The logical candidate to do this, it seems to me, is *Choice*. All I can suggest at this point concerning foreign-language encyclopedias is to heed the advice given by Emanuel Molho in my book [see *Kister's Best Encyclopedias*, p. 444]. An experienced specialist in the foreign book trade, Molho offers a realistic overview concerning the pitfalls of selecting and acquiring encyclopedias and related materials published in languages other than English. But what's really needed is a journal in English devoted exclusively to reviewing foreign-language reference publications, which seems like a reasonable proposition in these days of the global village and global economy.

TG: Your comments suggest that the library community has a mixed record on encyclopedia reviewing. Is that a fair summation of your views? And if so, what suggestions do you have for improvement?

*KK: I suppose it's inevitable that librarians would have a mixed record when it comes to reference and encyclopedia reviewing. It could hardly be any other way, could it, given the large number of reviews by librarians published in such journals as *LJ*, *Wilson*, *RQ*, *ARBA*, *RBB*, and *Choice*. In fact, practically all the reference reviews in these journals are by librarians. This is certainly true of *RBB* and *Choice*. Some reviews are naturally going to be better than others, depending on the skills*

and experience of particular reviewers.

TG: You've mentioned Reference Books Bulletin and Choice several times. How do these two well-known review journals measure up as far as encyclopedias are concerned?

*KK: Based on my experience — and I've reviewed for both at one time or another — both *RBB* and *Choice* normally provide quite useful reviews of reference materials, including encyclopedias. Of course, *Choice* usually only reviews subject encyclopedias, whereas *RBB* covers both general and subject works.*

Reviews are obviously very important. For example, recently a review skewered — quite unjustly — a new multivolume biographical encyclopedia published by a major reference publisher. The reviewer stated that most of the information in the biographical set could be found in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which is just plain wrong. My point is that such a statement should have been challenged by an alert editor.

TG: In the broadest sense, how can libraries and the library community best impact on reference publishing?

KK: Well, one important way, as we've been discussing, is through reviews by librarians — reviews that apply the standards developed by the library community. Such reviews carry enormous weight with reputable reference publishers. In fact, a negative review by a librarian can be the kiss of death for a new reference work. Librarians also influence reference publishing through their collection development policies. If a publisher knows or believes, for instance, that a certain subject is out of favor with librarians, this will impact on the decision to publish reference materials on that subject. One example: not long ago a publisher's rep told me that he thought his company's new military

encyclopedia was not doing well because, and I am quoting loosely here, "of a general negativism regarding the military among librarians — who tend to be a liberal and peace-minded group." I also think individual librarians can have a real impact on reference publishing by letting publishers know what's needed, what they don't appreciate, and so forth. Most publishers welcome such suggestions.

TG: Finally, Ken, what "words of wisdom" do you have for a harried Head of Reference and his or her staff, in selecting encyclopedias for today's library?

*KK: I would say, be skeptical. Or as Bill Katz once put it in his excellent *Introduction to Reference Work*, "Trust no one" when it comes to reference — not patrons, not your colleagues, not publishers, not reviewers, not even yourself. I think back, for instance, to a letter published some years ago in *RQ* from a young librarian decrying the lack of annual revision in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* at the time. Trusting the *Britannica* name, she had automatically purchased a replacement set for her community college library and had been burned. She wrote to warn other librarians not to make the same mistake, to be wary. *Britannica* today has a much more vigorous policy of continuous revision, but the general point remains valid. When librarians acquire either a new encyclopedia or a new edition of a standard encyclopedia, they would be wise to immediately check 10 or 12 or 25 diverse topics, to see how well the set measures up in terms of up-to-dateness, readability, accessibility, illustrations, and so on. If the encyclopedia is found wanting, it should be returned posthaste. That's my advice — question everything and everyone, including the reviewers.*

TG: Even Kister?

Kister: Yes, especially Kister.

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county courts, real estate offices, state agencies and federal courts where public records are located. The directory is split into three sections: county, state and federal records. For ease of use, sections are color-coded

white, yellow and blue respectively and each section is preceded by helpful scope notes. This title is unique not only because it includes phone numbers, hours of operation, time zones and addresses of nearly

11,500 locations, but the type of public records to be found at each location as well. Advertised at the price of \$39.95, this ready reference tool is a bargain.