

OFF duty

'Defense' a respectful update

By J. Ford Huffman

Protagonist ("hero" is a stretch) Phil Connors is aboard a charter flight to Iraq and can't pay attention to the in-flight film — "some old war movie about the French in Africa."

The veiled nod to the critically acclaimed "The Battle of Algiers" (1966) foreshadows the second lieutenant's misadventures and notes his accrued ignorance and arrogant indifference to cultures outside his own. And the movie reference hints at the sly wit of



The Defense of Jisr al-Doreaa

by Michael L. Burgoyne and Albert J. Marckwardt, University of Chicago Press, \$14, 156 pages

John A. Nagl's preface calls a small classic account of the Boer War, a "Groundhog Day" in which Back-sight Forethought learns the lessons of one battle in six different dreams.

Lt. Forethought? That's subtlety — British style.

American-style "Defense" appears first in this volume, which includes "Defence" at the back of the book. Please do the authors and yourself a favor by first reading the century-old "Defence." This is not cheating and will not ruin the ending(s).

Their contemporary tale could enlighten anyone who thinks the Boer is a bore. While Swinton seems quaint, the officers are current and quick. One "Defense" sentence uses the acronyms ROE, FOB and EOF, leaving a baffled casual reader to wonder WTF — and sympathize with Iraqis who don't know English or "Army." □



You might be emulating Shaq or Angelina with that new tattoo, but likely none of you would be inked at all if not for sailors.

That's the premise behind a new exhibit in Philadelphia tracing the history of tattoos in American culture: The prevalence of tattooing today stems directly from the ongoing custom started by merchant and naval seamen in the 18th century.

"It's an unbroken tradition, which is something that's not widely recognized," said Craig Bruns, curator of the exhibit "Skin & Bones: Tattoos in the Life of the American Sailor," which has been on display at the Independence Seaport Museum.

"If you have a tattoo, you really have a sailor to thank," he said.

The exhibit does note that body art is an ancient custom practiced — as Charles Darwin first noted — by cultures worldwide. However, tattooing became a part of American life because of the seafarers who brought home the practice after learning it from their British counterparts, Bruns said.

Early American seamen typically were tattooed aboard ships with needles used for sail sewing — and the "ink" of gunpowder mixed with urine. "Sailors of that period, knowing there was a real

Q I see people in the gym. Should I buy one?

A For the vast majority, recreational lifting belts are useless. Powerlifters and lifters usually wear