

THE WARRIOR'S WORDS:
SEEKING THE AMERICAN SOLDIER IN NON-FICTIONAL MILITARY LITERATURE.

by

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ABSTRACT

The genre of non-fictional military literature is which has been long overlooked, underappreciated and undervalued in concern to literary research, and otherwise. While other forms of military representation, specifically fictional writing and movies, have long served a classroom function of elucidation, non-fiction has taken a back seat. What's more, in society at large, the population is predisposed to accept mass media accounts of the military, the soldier and warfare rather than turning to the words of the soldier. However, this source has great potential, even beyond the literary sense. This brand of writing could very well be the missing piece of the puzzle to help readers understand a litany of complex issues on a more personal, human level.

Conduct a survey investigation via a series of personal accounts, memoirs, historical narratives, biographies, etc., of the possibilities non-fiction military literature offer in regards to the illumination of individual and national sociological, historical and political knowledge. This study approaches literature by way of sociology theories and literary concepts, as well as major historical political events. The guiding premise is to develop and thoroughly explore the overlap between the three subjects by way of the literature.

The result is that the reader expands his/her foundational understanding of: a) the sociology of literature, b) military sociology, c) historical and political interrelatedness, d) the military's role in developing the US's national identity, and e) the multifarious uses of literature as a toll to gain insight into heretofore unknown topics. Likewise, because such writing allows for personalized interpretation of historical and/or political events, the reader learns to appreciate their own society holistically.

Because of the type of investigation and the fact that it is the first of its kind, the results are slightly generalized, but offer promise for future exploration. Most notable is how this investigation shed light upon the creation and perpetuation of widely held public misperceptions, troubles with mass media legitimacy and military relationship, and revealing to the average reader the nature and face of American soldiers as they shape society, history and politics.

INTRODUCTION

Warfare is a great matter to a nation;
it is the ground of death and of life;
it is the way of survival and of destruction,
and must be examined.

--Sun Tzu: The Principles of Warfare "The Art of War"

This paper presents an essential critical argument: non-fictional military literature offers readers an otherwise unknown truth regarding the soldier's individual and social human condition through unique, firsthand insight.¹ I state "otherwise unknown" because ultimately, compared with fictional works, this genre provides a more convincing social, cultural, historical and political message because of its authenticity and legitimacy grounded in its foundational factuality.² However, and this point is absolutely vital, such a position *is not* an argument of literary valuation. What I offer the reader is not a list of reasons *why* this genre is "better than" fictional accounts, nor is it intended to provide a reason to dismiss the study of fictional works. Rather, I want to present the reader with an introductory discussion concerning the most basic functions and purposes of this genre, which I will address shortly.

Readers should be especially clear in their understanding that this study is not an attempt to romanticize, sensationalize, or even nationalize warfare, nor an attempt to champion or cheerlead for the American soldier.³ Instead, warfare is (among many

¹ The word "truth" is a subjective term with an elusive definition. As used herein, it is meant to suggest a unique perspective, or previously ignored or unaccounted for point of view. I urge readers to avoid becoming embroiled in etymological debates concerning language as there is no authorial intent to deceive.

² An acknowledgement and discussion concerning non-fictional works being tainted by memory, time, exaggeration, hyperbole, vainglory. etc., is earnestly addressed in several chapters.

³ There is no motive, as one reader suggested, to vindicate my own identity as a soldier, nor that of all soldiers. Such a motive would contradict my introductory assertions, as well as those in Chapter One.

other things, obviously) social, historical and political, and because each of these influential constructs, it is recorded by mankind in the socio-historic record of his literature; therefore, I want to concentrate on these as they relate to the most rudimentary implement of war, man himself via representative literary works.

This investigation is necessary for several reasons; first of all is that, because it directly confronts and grapples with uniquely American socio-cultural, historical and political events, non-fictional military literature provides a unique method for understanding our nation, its history, and our national identity. As author Stewart O’Nan found, this genre’s introspection is unique in that Vietnam War literature, for instance, is incredibly restrictive, “focus[ing] almost solely on the war’s effect on the American soldier and American culture at large. In work after work, Vietnam and the Vietnamese are merely a backdrop for the drama of America confronting itself” (O’Nan 3). Therefore, the material can be conceived as avenue by which one can explore the larger concepts of American society, history, politics, and war as they relate to the American soldier.

Secondly, I am conducting this investigation regarding the uses and function of non-fictional military literature because it fills a specific void in literary, historical and political research. It is critical that the reader understand that, to date, no one has considered this brand of writing in such a manner, nor have they conducted an investigation of its potential. As such, the study is broad and presents, both directly and indirectly, possibilities for more specific future investigations. Given the volatility and associated emotional charge of the topic, there is bound to be strong reaction to such a study. There will, undoubtedly, also be attempts to focus on theoretical and intellectual concepts (such as authorial subjectivity and ambiguity of language), rather than the material itself. While I contend that countless issues herein should be more critically

researched, that is not the role or intent of *this* investigation whatsoever. Instead, I want to offer an initial investigation of the genre's potential. The reader is welcome to complicate this study, but to also bear in mind that as the first of its kind it simply cannot account for and investigate every issue.

This investigation is also driven by the premise that such socio-literary study is relevant to our national history and identity, which suffer due to this material's classroom absence. While I do not believe in a vast left-wing conspiracy, be it in the classroom, the publishing house, the soundstage, or the newsroom, etc., those who corrupt knowledge do so without considering the larger and more dramatic social impact such actions produce. By way of whatever power, under the guise of whatever rationale, our national identity is in danger of being altered to a point wherein the most rudimentary facts may never be known. Paul Edwards, author, professor of history, and director of the Center for the Study of the Korean War, remarks in a recent writing that the faulty methodology by which Americans are miseducated contributes greatly to this dilemma. Edwards believes "the substitution of social studies for history in schools" is to blame for a largely "uniformed American public" which fails to recognize the vital link between military/national history and national identity (Edwards 7).⁴

This misconception is responsible for the absence of military history in general, and Korean War history in particular. This lack is primarily responsible for the fact that most Americans do not understand the policies of their nation, nor the century in which they live. It is worth understanding that one reason Americans go to war with such ignorance is they do not understand either their causes or the costs, of war. From elementary school through graduate programs, this unpleasant but significant event [the Korean War] never seems to have happened. (7-8)

⁴ Simply stated, social studies are the holistic study of a specific society as it changes over the course of time. It explores via 5W+H, and investigates topics three-dimensionally emphasizing interrelatedness and interconnectivity. Conversely, history is the linear study of isolated historical events without capitalizing upon the notion of relativity and/or connectivity to the degree of social studies. To address the charge that "history does not sympathetically study the causes of war", that is precisely what Edwards is stating. This is a classic example of how history is incapable, or perhaps unwilling, of performing the social studies role.

This serves as a small example of how gatekeepers of knowledge have shaped our education by way of our national history; but how does this impact our national identity? Edwards asserts, and I vigorously agree, that “to ignore war is like trying to recapture your own personal narrative but leaving out all the conflicts involved. When a nation, like an individual tries to rewrite its past by ignoring its impact on the present, they become sick and their affirmations become obsessions” (Edwards 8). Such an assertion further delineates the depth of the compelling argument as to why such an investigation is necessary. In order to do so, I will present several discussions concerning the potential of this genre.

While each of the discussions represents an individual guiding concept, premise or theme under which these literary discussions can occur, there is also a great allowance for the overlap of such studies. Despite the fact that some readers may believe that an exhaustive study a singular point is more appropriate, this is my preference. Furthermore, understanding those basic tenets of media, sociology, history and politics is important, but recognizing their interrelatedness and how they complicate both the macro and micro view of this subject is critical. All of this leads to my final hope: that this writing will cause and foster further discussion and research concerning these issues, especially as they pertain to the role our nation’s system of education plays in developing national identity.

First I will discuss how the popular media has misrepresented the American soldier through inaccurate reporting, sensationalized misportrayals, and overt carelessness.⁵ I will explore how and why these accounts warp not only the image of the American soldier, but also the ideas of warfare, society, history and politics. This will

also serve as a justification for the study of non-fictional works, works which in themselves will fully demonstrate the veracity of my accusations. What is important to recognize is that key points presented in this chapter carry over throughout the text's entirety. One such point, for instance, is that the media is not limited to non-military media; in several examples I incriminate veterans for creating works which serve to erode the military's image of legitimacy. Also, I point out several accounts which are intended to demonize and castigate the military, as well as accounts that glorify and romanticize the military. The media does both of these things, but neither accurately portrays soldiers or warfare.

Additionally, there are single authors with whom I both agree and disagree. One such author is Stewart O'Nan, who writes with authority on the influential part films play in shaping public perceptions of the military, but who (like *many, many* others) misidentifies classic images from the Vietnam War. Another is Chris Hedges, who speaks with expertise on the experience of war and the nature of soldiers, in that sense he is a fine reporter. Yet, Hedges' is a social idealist, whose philosophic advocacy smacks of moral superiority and elitism, thus tainting his reporting at times. I have, however, included these authors, and I believe that demonstrates my attempts to approach all works, including my own, with genuine impartiality. Some readers may interpret the use of such a reference as a dichotomy or poor research; I, however, perceive it as critical reading and evaluation of a work. Certainly there are points herein with which the reader will find him or herself at odds, as well as particular points the reader will fully support. In short, each piece I have selected and made use of herein has a role to play and/or a lesson to teach.

⁵ In the larger sense of the term, not indicative or synonymous solely with the *news* media.

Second will be a demonstration of the unique opportunity this writing affords scholars as an avenue by which important social and cultural ideas may be investigated. My guiding premise is that, like literature, anthropology and sociology are governed by philosophical ideas regarding the subject(s) being studied. And because literature is ultimately a reflection of both society and pressing social issues, the coupling of these disciplines with literature is quite natural. What ultimately emerges from such a union is a defining of American socio-cultural values by way of this literature. What is different about this genre's approach, when compared to fictional works, is that we are discussing real living, breathing people, our nation's actual history, and our very own society. One should approach this reading with the understanding that the military is a cross-section of the larger American society. Therefore, it is important to remember that, much to my own chagrin, some generalization and simplification is required, and that all opinions, whether present or absent herein, simply cannot be represented equally. Likewise, those expressed or silent opinions cannot be interpreted as being indicative of the military in its entirety.

As stated earlier, this initial study is intended to foster questions and further research, as such, limitations have to be made. However, what does come from this investigation is a rather broad range of lessons, which due to its non-fiction characteristic, becomes tangible, recognizable, and thus, more valuable herein. Third, I will illustrate how this genre of writing exposes the often-overlooked human reality of both history and politics. I intend to make this evident by highlighting the graphic, firsthand accounts, memoirs, narratives, and stories of men who have, through their actions, shaped our nation's history. The use of non-fiction here, rather than fiction, is again significant and offers some *thing* different than recorded history or reportage. In fact, this genre is absolutely vital to such a study as the overarching ideas in this section

will be governed not by abstract concepts and scientific theories, but instead by practical experience and human reality. Through these non-fiction examples, I will illustrate how the reader's understanding of historical, political, and social knowledge is heightened. Furthermore, in doing so, I will demonstrate precisely how and why this genre profoundly shapes our national identity.

Given the aforementioned breadth and scope of my investigation, such an undertaking requires sensible limitations to maintain its overall feasibility. Unfortunately, critics often interpret limitations as disregard for a given issue. Considering my personal distaste for oversimplification and obfuscation I can readily assure the reader that this is not the case. At any rate, the first limitation is historical period. For the purpose of this writing, the time period will consist of Korean War to the present, a span of fifty-plus years. While I recognize that, in the realm of literary study, sixty years simply does not register as "significant", for the purpose of tracking socio-cultural change, as well as historical and political developments, this is an ideal frame of time. Also, given the context within which I am working, we will have our plates full enough.

Another limitation comes from concentrating solely upon non-fictional literature. This includes autobiography, biographies, diaries, historical narratives, memoirs, and so on. In addition, that focus will be further narrowed to singular attention to literature written by American authors and concerning social, cultural, historical, and political issues as they relate to Americans. I recognize that such plans require me to disregard other works of literary acclaim and/or significance, like Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago*, and Keller's *Catch-22*. These decisions, however, are designed for the sole purpose of highlighting this particular genre, as well American authors and the society, culture, history and politics their literature represents.

From the outset let me clarify what is meant by the term *soldier*. Technically this term only pertains to, or describes those serving in the United States Army; with Marine, Sailor, Airman, and Coast Guardsman identifying others by their respective branch of service. Marines become infamously enraged when referred to as “soldier”, a term they find highly derisive due to its Army denotation. While to the outsider such a term seems trivial, these distinctions are based upon more than interservice rivalries. Much of it has to do with each branches’ understanding of its own history and mission, each of which aids in determining its identity. Also involved are important factors that I will define a little later, namely: the acts and methods of socialization, the importance and function of various social groups, and the production and maintenance of institutional structures. In the end, however, only for the sake of simplicity every branch and service member will be generically referred to as soldier.

Herein I will be using the masculine terms *mankind* and *he*, for ease and simplicity, not to designate gender and certainly not to marginalize women. While the overwhelming majority of literature discussed in this paper will concern the masculine gender, the contributions of females in this realm of discussion are significant and plentiful. By no means whatsoever, is any disrespect or belittlement of their service to this nation intended.

If such writing requires justification and disclosure then allow me to be quite honest; I believe in this genre’s purpose and function and it does reflect a vital piece of who I am as a person. My familial and personal association with the military is an obvious factor in addressing this issue; however, my motivation is to concentrate on a brand of literature and form of study wherein very little time and energy has previously been devoted. In addition, my experience with this subject matter provides me with a unique perspective, one which I wish to share with the readers.

POPULAR MEDIA AND THE AMERICAN MILITARY

The corporate media increasingly trivialize war, spreading ignorance and pandering to our instincts of self-indulgence, arrogance and hypocrisy. The writers represented in this collection offer up to us the stench of war as soldiers and civilians must endure it—today, and tomorrow and the day after that. These writers at their best serve the truth—and ideal sharply at odds with much recent war coverage and, ultimately, with war itself. – Clint Willis, Writing War.

The Media's Troubling Addiction to Fiction.

In the spring of 1951, from the jagged mountain peaks that defined the front lines of the Korean War, marine Lt. Douglass Bradley penned a letter to his family in Boston. The twenty-three year old, who had played football at and graduated from Harvard, had volunteered for combat duty against the wishes of family and other marines. Bradley had been in Korea for a short time when, in a Chinese attack, he had come close to death and perhaps as a result, amidst the insanity of war, he came to realize his life's calling. Not too long after this letter was written, Bradley was killed.

I have felt during the last seven years or more that I might have been cut out for things away from the beach and country club ... this might be a good foundation. I look upon the principles of a Christian life, not stopping at a "gentlemanly" Christian life but working toward a saintly one. I hope one day to find and work toward God. (Brady iii)

Fifty-two years later, Gregory MacDonald, who held a master's in philosophy and dreamed of working as a Middle-East policy maker, marched on the capitol in the Pledge of Resistance anti-war demonstration; volunteered at Peace Action's Washington DC office. He was also a Marine Corps reservist who, when called upon, went to Iraq. In June 2003, as he rushed to the aid of ambushed fellow marines, his vehicle flipped and he was killed. This is an excerpt of his final letter:

I have struggled for more than half of my life to live FREE, to know freedom. I can say it is a goal I achieved and it is a goal that I ever sought to embrace. Freedom isn't a moment in life, it is life, it is something to be attained everyday, it is something I pray you all seek to find. [...] That I have died means that I have failed to achieve the one thing in life I truly longed to give the world, PEACE. The plight of human suffering consumed me and I dedicated much to trying to find the ideas that might lead human kind toward alleviating it for all. It was a quest which was inextricably intertwined with my quest for freedom. If you know anything about me, you know that. Understand it and come to understand how the suffering of others tormented my soul. Then, seek to honor my memory by trying to achieve what I could not.⁶ (Thys)

Both Bradlee and MacDonald write with an authentic, humble sincerity. And because their fates are known, and because we can look back upon history, their words are filled with a kind of stoic, yet peaceful, loneliness. That is, each man's character is evident in his commitment to high ideals and noble actions; each man died fighting a war to liberate the oppressed. And though they held views which seem diametrically opposed, both men were examples of their generation's logic and rationale concerning service. Despite that they never knew one another, each marine lived and died as men of action, seeking something grander than themselves. Unfortunately, the righteous legacy of such soldiers is often maligned by those who, by one means or another, warp our understanding of warfare by introducing romantic elements. "War," wrote Philip Caputo, "is always attractive to young men who know nothing about it" (xiv). Caputo was referring to the falsely romantic literary ideals of men like James Jones, who penned the novel, The Thin Red Line.

This book is cheerfully dedicated to those greatest and most heroic of all human endeavors, WAR and WARFARE; may they never cease to give us the pleasure, excitement and adrenal stimulation that we need, or provide us with the heroes, the presidents and leaders, the monuments and museums which we erect to them in the name of PEACE. (Jones)

⁶ Clark, Gordon.; Eirene, Vincent, S., St. George, Donna; and Strohm, Chris and Ingrid Drake.

Jones, himself a veteran of WWII, callously dedicated his novel to the horrific realities of war. I would like to suggest that, given the novel's rather shockingly unromantic presentation of war, Jones' dedication was sardonic or satiric, but I simply cannot. And while I cannot answer what inspired Jones' dedication, I can testify that such aggrandizing and glorification of warfare contributes greatly to the larger social misperception that military literature is consumed by, openly espouses, and perpetuates an unhealthy craving for warfare.⁷ Conversely, the actions, words, motivations, lives and deaths of soldiers like Bradlee and MacDonald are elements of reality which simply cannot be replicated through fictional accounts. Yet there is a regrettable dilemma concerning these representations, they cannot be wholly discounted because they do possess merit.

Further complicating the perception of this genre are authors such as Stephen Crane, who penned *The Red Badge of Courage*, despite having no personal military or war experience.⁸ And one cannot discount Ernest Hemingway's writing, which confuses decidedly romantic notions of combat, the intangible mystique of war, the beauty of inner turmoil, and the author's legendary, yet chemically imbalanced, personal life. Crane, Hemingway, Jones and far too many others like them have produced fictional military works that arguably constitute foundational pieces of the academic and popular literary canons. These "great authors" have given unfortunate credence to modern day best-selling writers of military fiction, such as Tom Clancy, Stephen Coontz, and Harold Coyle who each cause their pen to glorify and romanticize the act of warfare. But just as their predecessors, they too miss the mark by writing of military technology and the mechanical juggernaut, rather than the soldier. And what little attention is paid to the

⁷ For further reading on the topic, see Chris Hedges' War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning, specifically Chapters One, Two and Four.

soldier is itself the greatest fiction; for example, Clancy's two-dimensional depiction of the military and its soldiers in The Hunt for the Red October, and Clear and Present Danger.⁹ As their sustained presence on bestseller lists prove, these are talented authors producing great tales, but purely fiction, every word of it. What is most troubling, perhaps, is that each of these men served the United States military at some point in time, yet their works contribute to the eroding of that same military's legitimacy. Compared with the words of Bradlee and MacDonald, the difference should be rather obvious; the true soldier's words are sincere, contemplative, introspective, concerned with larger, more complex issues, typically reflecting upon some *thing* entirely different.

As a result, these alternate, often fictionalized accounts of warfare serve only to infect and warp social perceptions. For instance, while reading Embedded The Media at War in Iraq: An Oral History, I was dumbfounded by the number of reporters who relied upon references to Hollywood portrayals of both the military and of warfare. Remember, these are the gatekeepers of knowledge and information, responsible for delivering accounts from the front lines of the war to the American people. Eventually their words will serve as the basis for recorded history, even the text has the term "Oral History" in its title; however, many of these reporters could find no better way to describe soldiers beyond fictional references such as: The Red Badge of Courage, Saving Private Ryan, M*A*S*H, Apocalypse Now, Rambo, Top Gun and The Three Kings.¹⁰

⁸ For verification and a biography on Crane, visit: <http://www.bedfordstmartins.com/litlinks/fiction/crane.htm>

⁹ Consider also that Clancy has made millions with his military themed video games that capitalize upon and perpetuate the myths associated with the military, the soldier, and warfare in general.

¹⁰ I make and stand steadfastly behind the assertion that such reportage warps social perceptions because the news media **are** the gatekeepers of knowledge and they **do** contribute to determining historical evidence. Consider, for example, the reporting of the Maine's sinking, Brady's counterfeit Civil War images, CNN's payments to Iraq for exclusive broadcast rights, NY Times reporter, Jason Blair's fictitious reportage, and so on. Each of these examples contributed greatly to the teaching of history and perception of reality. Yet, only recently have these former "truths" been exposed as erroneous. What once was believed as "the truth," according to the average media subscriber, has been determined as false.

For instance, while *Fox News*' Rick Levanthal described the aftermath of a gruesome battle as "[...] a scene straight out of a movie" (Katovsky and Carlson 190), *Wired* reporter, Josh Davis, depicted Central Command's headquarters as "Hollywood-like" (223). *USA Today* reporter, Steve Komarow explained that watching the war unfold from a general's command vehicle was like watching "a Tom Clancy movie" (81).

Most indicative of this fictional parallelism dilemma, however, are the time-after-time descriptions of the war as being like *Apocalypse Now*. For example, *Boston Globe* reporter, Scott Bernard Nelson, described an intense combat operation as "something straight out of *Apocalypse Now* [...] it felt a movie to me [...]" (198). But most notable was forty-year old *CBS Evening News* correspondent, Jim Axelrod's, representation of crossing the Euphrates River with the Third Infantry's, 3-69 Armor.

It was the fiercest fighting we had seen. There's lots of Iraqi mortar and artillery and *it looks like something out of Apocalypse Now*. Apache attack helicopters are coming through these palm trees. The area here looks so much different than the desert; *it even looked like Vietnam*.¹¹ (26)

It may seem obvious but I would like to point out that Axelrod was born in 1963. By the time he was twelve, the Vietnam War had been effectively over for two years. By the time Axelrod was old enough to serve in the military, eighteen, the most recent U.S. military event had been Operation Eagle Claw, the failed attempt to rescue hostages from Iran. The last U.S. troops had left Vietnam almost twenty years earlier, in 1973. What's more, the only comparison between Operation Iraqi Freedom and the war in Vietnam was that they were both wars in which America was involved. Simply put, a two-hour movie cannot encapsulate the experience of war; instead it simplifies and trivializes the experience of all involved, including the soldier. Moreover, when abused in such a manner, it delivers a hollow and dishonest report to those people the media is

¹¹ Italics added for emphasis.

accountable for serving. As a result, Axelrod's comparison and depiction is nothing short of ignorant and spurious, detracting from not only his own journalistic integrity, but severely hampering the historical record as well.

Yet, that tone was established early on by The Media at War in Iraq editors, Bill Katovsky and Timothy Carlson, who titled their book in such a fashion so as to dramatize the role of the media. While some may balk at this accusation, I offer the book's first written words as proof: "Let's start with one simple fact about the war in Iraq: Statistically, journalists were ten times more likely to die than the 250,000 in American or British soldiers" (xi). In another example, the editors attribute a passage from Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage* to *Newsweek* reporter, Scott Johnson's retelling of his nearly fatal run-in with the Iraqi army. These same editors deemed one man who had served in the Portuguese Special Forces, "Rambo," an insult and tragic misnomer for anyone with even an inkling of military knowledge. However, the most over- and mis-used parallel was that of Black Hawk Down.¹² Reporters time and again seized upon this Hollywood movie, (based on an actual military event) and redirected it so as to misrepresent a completely different circumstance, military, and war.¹³ Everything; scenarios, footage, situations, views, sounds, fighting, soldiers, equipment, war and so on ..., all of it was described again and again to be "Black Hawk Down-like".

It is very much worth noting that the exception to these counterfeit characterizations is made by the scant few reporters who are military veterans. Among these were *ABC News* and *Nightline* correspondent, Mike Cerre; *CBS News* cameraman, Mario DeCarvalho; *San Francisco Chronicle* reporters, John Koopman and

¹² Contrary to one reviewer's misguided belief, Black Hawk Down is *not* an anti-war film whatsoever.

¹³ Operation(s): Restore Hope, Provide Hope, Provide Promise, Provide Relief, and Gothic Serpent.

Carl Nolte; Clarksville, Tennessee's *Leaf-Chronicle* reporter, Chantal Escoto; and *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* reporter, Ron Martz.

That is not to suggest that veterans and soldiers do not recognize the relationship between fictional films and literature, like those mentioned earlier, and their own military service. In fact, the two are often very much related. Such films and folklore influenced many to enlist. One such soldier is Colonel David Hackworth (ret.). After WWII combat had ended, but still several years before legally allowed, Hackworth enlisted into the army. He was fifteen-years-old and romanced by images of sharp paratrooper's uniforms, beautiful blond fräuleins, and the movies. He envisioned the relatively easy and hedonistic life of an occupying soldier in post-war Berlin. After training, however, he found that those fantasies would have to suffice, as his reality would be quite different.

For Hackworth, instead of Berlin he was stationed in Italy, and instead of an easy life seducing blond fräuleins he found the horrors of war.¹⁴ The veterans he worked alongside did not share fanciful stories of combat. He recalls, "The old soldiers went silent on the horrors of war. It was as though they belonged to a secret fraternity, and we, the pink-cheeked unenlightened, were –in a word-- outsiders" (34). He also found that it was a shocking reality check, one which exposed the lies of Hollywood movies which romanticized combat:

Italy after World War II was dark and desperate, and unlike anything I could have ever imagined. It was like a cloudy day every day, and all the people were hurting. Even the landscape seemed to be hurting; the houses were all blown down, the bridges blown up, the fields ripped apart, and nothing was growing. There was no money and no food. Old ladies in black dresses and black scarves stood at the end of the chow line, picking through the garbage cans for enough scraps to feed their families. Young boys walked the train tracks in the hopes of scrounging the odd piece of coal to eke some warmth out of the family heart. [...] This

¹⁴ This relies entirely upon the author's own words and characterization.

grim aftermath of war would be forever etched in my fifteen-year-old mind, but, equally, I would always remember the people's will, their sheer determination to survive and start again. (34)

Anthony Herbert, who, by the end of the Korean War was the most decorated soldier in the US Army, began his military career much like Hackworth. In his memoir of the Korean War, Herbert: The Making of a Soldier, he writes that he could “hardly remember a time when I didn't want to be in the service” (2). He attests to the power of Hollywood for shaping his decision to join, claiming “Artillery barrages, hand-to-hand combat, paratroopers, the jungles, Errol Flynn in Burma--that was war. I was born to be an infantryman” (2). Herbert, just like Hackworth, had tried to enlist for WWII at fourteen but was foiled by his high school principal. He remembers thinking, “there would be another war, and I would be in it. So when I reached the age of seventeen, I enlisted [...]” (2). His determination to serve and live out the life depicted in movies caused him to cut short his visit home and speed himself off to war. “There was no reason to stay longer. I had to get to Korea. My mind was full of the movies and tales of war I had grown up on. Combat, courage, comradeship; the triumph of truth and justice-I had learned the lesson well. I was tough, determined, and ignorant” (7).

Admittedly, those stereotypes have merit as is demonstrated in Bowden's Black Hawk Down, where readers find the Rangers reading, absorbing, and hoping to emulate such literature.

They yearned for battle. They passed around dog-eared paperback memoirs of soldiers from past conflicts, many written by former Rangers, and savored the affectionate, comradely tone of the stories, feeling bad for the poor suckers who bought it or got crippled or maimed but identifying with the righteous men who survived the experience whole. They studied the old photos, which were the same from every war, young men looking dirty and tired, half dressed in army combat fatigues, dogtags hanging around their necks, posing with arms draped over each other's shoulders in exotic lands. They could see themselves in those snapshots, surrounded by *their* buddies, fighting *their* war. It was THE test, the only one that counted. (10)

In his memoir, Jarhead: A Marine's Chronicle of the Gulf War and Other Battles, Anthony Swofford admits to and highlights a very similar way of thinking in his writing. Almost immediately after learning that his unit will be deployed to the Persian Gulf the barracks are filled with young marines getting drunk, head butting each other, screaming *Semper Fi* and perhaps most importantly, watching Vietnam War films.

We concentrate on the Vietnam films because it's the most recent war, and the successes and failures of that war helped write our training manuals. We rewind and review famous scenes, such as Robert Duvall and his helicopter gunships during Apocalypse Now, [...]; we watch Willem Dafoe get shot by a friendly and left on the battlefield in Platoon; and we listen closely as Matthew Modine talks trash to a streetwalker in Full Metal Jacket. [...] The American boys, brutal, young farm boys or tough city boys, sweetly fuck the whores. Yes, somehow the films convince us that these boys are sweet, even though we know we are much like these boys and we are no longer sweet. (6)

Joel Turnipseed in his memoir, Baghdad Express, tells of the Marine Corps method for subtly reinforcing their values. While the men in the rear are waiting for another convoy run to the front lines they watch films. Oddly, such films are also their distraction from the war itself – something you don't see in popular representations of war such as M*A*S*H.¹⁵

At Camp Shepard, the war was more like an interruption of the movie: when the sirens sounded during Heartbreak Ridge, the projectionist would stop the film and dive for a bunker, sure: but he was the first guy out of the bunker at the all-clear, and the film was rolling before you could snatch your ass back to the bleachers.(78)

There is much well-known speculation, of which soldiers are readily aware, that many of these war films and narratives are actually meant to serve an anti-war role. That their function and purpose is not to excite audiences and enthuse young men into enlistment, but rather to paint a horrific image that is so incredibly unappealing and dismal that no man in his right mind would choose such an option. Stewart O'Nan

¹⁵ It is widely accepted that M*A*S*H intended as an anti-war response to the war in Vietnam.

addresses this in his Vietnam War anthology, The Vietnam Reader. According to O’Nan, one of the problems with how films are received is not “what it says but how it says it” (277).

This is one of the greatest paradoxes or challenges every artist faces when taking on Vietnam, but especially filmmakers: The audience’s addiction to the raw sensation of aestheticized violence, combined with the difficulty of (and political and cultural opposition to) relating the experience, can easily lead to a falsification of presentation--an emphasis on the spectacle of war or simplistic judgments upon it rather than its political intricacies and the emotional truths of those involved. (277)

O’Nan’s assertions are accurate, especially when considering the mindset and perception of such an argument as held by Swofford and his fellow marines. They perceive such films to be much less complex.¹⁶

There is talk that many Vietnam films are antiwar, that the message is war is inhumane and look at what happens when you train young American men to fight and kill, they turn their fighting and killing everywhere, they ignore their targets and desecrate the entire country, shooting fully automatic, forgetting they were trained to aim. But actually, Vietnam war films are all pro-war, no matter what the supposed message, what Kubrick or Coppola or Stone intended. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson in Omaha or San Francisco or Manhattan will watch the films and weep and decide once and for all that war is inhumane and terrible, and they will tell their friends at church and their family this, but Corporal Johnson at Camp Pendleton and Sergeant Johnson at Travis Air Force Base and Seaman Johnson at Coronado Naval Station and Spec 4 Johnson at Fort Bragg and Lance Corporal Swofford at Twentynine Palms Marine Corps Base watch the same films and are excited by them, because the magic brutality of the films celebrates the terrible and despicable beauty of their fighting skills. Fight, rape, war, pillage, burn. Filmic images of death and carnage are pornography for the military man; with film you are stroking his cock, tickling his balls with the fine pink feather of history, getting him ready for his real First Fuck. It doesn’t matter how many Mr. and Mrs. Johnsons are antiwar—the actual killers who know how to use the weapons are not. [...]
I take my seat and return to the raging battle. The supposedly antiwar films have failed. Now is my time to step into the newest combat zone.

¹⁶ This should not to be misconstrued as being indicative of all soldiers’ interpretation of such films. Also, the understanding that such fictional military narratives are “the soldier’s pornography” is a highly dubious misreading which places the reader’s motives in suspicion. It is worth noting that Swofford informs the reader that the films they watched were all fictional representations, *Apocalypse Now*, *Platoon* and *Full Metal Jacket*.

And as a young man raised on the films of the Vietnam War, I want ammunition and alcohol and dope, I want to screw some whores and kill some Iraqi motherfuckers. (7)

O’Nan reports that later war films like Disney’s Operation Dumbo Drop, or The Walking Dead, or television’s China Beach have each taken Vietnam and used it not as a way to explain or investigate “why America was there, what it was doing, and who paid the price,” but as a simplistic backdrop by which issues of, respectively, childish humor, the African-American experience, and women’s rights can be explored (456). Only now, with the soldier willfully misrepresenting the film’s official meaning, the debate grows much more contentious. While the soldier’s initial indoctrination occurs by way of film or literature, it is training that instills the military’s ethics and morals in the soldier, a topic to be discussed in the next chapter.

However, these jingoistic fictional (or at least sensationalized or romanticized) traditions have an origin in the 1940s with John Wayne films and Ernie Pyle reporting. Today’s social perceptions of the military are created by the media, specifically Hollywood and news organizations. The media’s decidedly negative effect upon the perceived legitimacy of the military as an entity is profound, with opinions of our nation’s military turning from the military being a service of honor, to, more recently, a sentence of shame. Karl Zinsmeister, who was an embedded reporter with the 82nd Airborne during Operation Iraqi Freedom, shared that when friend and author, Frank Shaeffer’s son decided to join the marines, Shaeffer’s neighbors reacted with disgust and contempt, lamenting “He’s so bright and talented and could do anything. What a waste!” (qtd. in Zinsmeister 186). His account offers support of this social prejudice assertion, stating “too many American professionals exhibit an ugly sense of superiority toward the military” (185). The reality is that our nation’s military, as a whole, has always been staffed by a wide cross-section of American society. In a phrase, the military is America.

These types of soldiers, the cross-section, appear again and again in the non-fictional works concerning modern warfare; texts such as Baghdad Express, Jarhead, The Eyes of Orion, Boots on the Ground, Embedded, Black Hawk Down, In The Company of Heroes, Somalia on \$5 a Day, and many others. Today's military is an entirely volunteer force, however, a stark contrast to the Vietnam Era when a third of the military's ranks were draftees. According to retired Gen. William Westmoreland, however, a recent study indicates 91-percent of Vietnam Veterans say they are glad they served and 74-percent said they would serve again even knowing the outcome (Westmoreland and VHFCN.org). You would never know that however, because these statistics fly in the face of how soldiers in general --and Vietnam veterans specifically-- are portrayed in fictional literature, Hollywood films, and by the news media. This is to say nothing about the malevolent taint haunting the military in the form of the word "Vietnam" when used, typically with purposefully derisive intent, and largely erroneously, by reporters who practice a form of what Zinsmeister dubs "Gotcha!" journalism. This point is effortlessly verified by the media's ceaseless attempts to link every post-Vietnam conflict back to Vietnam, especially when associated with the idea of failure or loss of life. Take for example the media/government debate over using the word, *quagmire*, or how CNN reports Operation Iraqi Freedom casualties in comparison with Vietnam's. The end result is a methodology of negative socialization driven solely by the left-leaning media's overt ideological/political agenda.

Are We Choosing Miseducation?

In the U.S. today we have more than our share of nattering nabobs of negativism. They've formed their own 4-H club – the hopeless, hysterical, hypochondriacs of history. – Spiro Agnew

To illustrate how effectively these media organizations have improperly socialized Americans by way of disinformation, consider what you “know” about the adjacent image.¹⁷



Figure 1: Napalm Strike on Kim Phuc's Village. Credit: AP/Nick Ut.

Most often this horrific image is described to be that of nine-year old, South Vietnamese citizen, Kim Phuc, running from an American napalm strike near her village of Trang Bang. The truth, while still tragic, is quite different. No Americans *whatsoever* were involved in this attack. The airplanes that dropped the napalm were flown and controlled entirely by the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). The ARVN pilot, who now lives in the United States, and the photographer were both South Vietnamese, and both attest to these truths. It is also widely taught and reported that Phuc's brothers were killed in this attack. While the deaths are no less tragic, the two men killed were actually her cousins (VHFCN.org and Timberlake).

Next, consider this next famous image from the Vietnam War.¹⁸ It is often *falsely* reported to be a military helicopter evacuating U.S. embassy personnel during the fall of Saigon.



Figure 2: Evacuation of Pittman Apartment Building. Credit: Corbus-Bettman Archives, UPI Hugh Van Ess.

The reality is that the helicopter and its crew were actually civilian, specifically Air America. The location is wrong as well. The building is the Pittman Apartment building, not the U.S. Embassy. Finally, the people being evacuated are Vietnamese civilians, not American military or embassy personnel (VHFCN.org).

Shockingly indicative of the media's poor research is that both of these images are incorrectly captioned within Stewart O'Nan's anthology, The Vietnam Reader. O'Nan's text has been self-dubbed, "The Definitive Collection of American Fiction and Nonfiction on the War," yet as I have illustrated, it includes information that is entirely false. Such slipshod research, poor reporting, and fictionalized accounts only serve to generate and further engrain social misperceptions concerning how our society perceives the Vietnam veteran.

¹⁷ Photograph credit: AP photographer, Nick Ut

Among these media perpetuated false perceptions are the beliefs that Vietnam veterans left the service in a less-than-honorable fashion, failed to assimilate into society, are consistently in trouble with the law, are impoverished, homeless, and/or unemployed at significantly higher rates than the rest of American society. Such fallacies are enabled, again, by movies such as The Deer Hunter, Coming Home, and Rambo; as well as literature like Going After Cacciato and Meditations in Green. As retired Lt. Gen. Barry R. McCaffrey reports, however, the truth is quite different:

Ninety-seven percent [of all Vietnam veterans] were discharged under honorable conditions; the same percentage of honorable discharges as ten years prior to Vietnam. Vietnam Veterans are less likely to be in prison - only 1/2 of one percent of Vietnam Veterans have been jailed for crimes. Vietnam veterans have a lower unemployment rate than our non-vet age group. Vietnam veterans' personal income exceeds that of our non-veteran age group by more than 18 percent. [And] 85% of Vietnam Veterans made a successful transition to civilian life. (VHFCN.org)

The point is that numerous details concerning what many consider to be factual history or an accurate portrayal of our nation's Vietnam veterans are actually entirely false! Due to strong anti-war activism, poor reportage, manipulation by the media, and Hollywood's impressionistic painting of the Vietnam War and its veterans, many Americans have a troubled view and/or opinion of the military and its veterans. Both miseducation and misinformation, however, are unfortunate agents and realities of socialization; ones which, over time, adversely affect the public's notion of its military's legitimacy. In order to understand how this socialization influences the public perception of soldiers, the military, national history & identity, and warfare, compare and contrast the function and purpose of fictional military literature with that of non-fictional literature. What you will discover is that romantic authors of fiction rarely portray the realities of service and conflict because the truth detracts from their falsely romantic vision of war.

¹⁸ Photograph credit: Corbus-Bettman Archives, UPI Hugh Van Ess

As I have demonstrated, that all-too-often romanticized portrayal of war has a profound effect upon how wars are interpreted and conveyed, not to mention the perception of the soldier. In fictional works, those nastier realities are quite often drastically altered so as to achieve a more attractive, yet false, social ideal.¹⁹ Such ideals are created and perpetuated by the media; Hollywood, for instance, often portrays marines in a very simplistic manner: dumb and physically brutish. “It was funny how few marines had really good builds,” James Brady commented in his personal narrative, The Coldest War: A Memoir of Korea. He weighed Hollywood’s version of the marines against his own experience. “There were thin ones and fat ones, swaybacks, bowlegs, rounded shoulders, bony rib cages, big, scabby buttocks. I didn’t feel so bad about being skinny [...] Hollywood wouldn’t have cast many of us in a [John] Wayne war movie” (132). Yet, manipulation of physical appearance is not the only attribute altered by Hollywood and literature.

For instance, the Korean War maintains its shameful and thankless moniker: “The Forgotten War,” because literature concerning the three-year conflict was slow in coming, the majority of books on the subject appearing only in the last ten-to-fifteen-years. That is rooted in America’s disinterest and consequent willful ignorance of the Korean War, which has *its* roots in how the war was largely ignored by the media. But it is also linked with the war’s outcome: a stalemate that persists even today. As a Korean War veteran recently explained to me, the lack of the war’s decisive finality *preempted* the writing of novels and memoirs. That is interesting in that it means social

¹⁹ A critical reader would say, “But didn’t you just say these same accounts demonize war?” To which I reply, “No.” What I stated was that certain false perceptions regarding war and soldiers are perpetuated by fictional accounts. Obviously, all accounts are going to lean or slant the direction of the creator’s personal and/or political ideology. It would be not only dangerous but deceptive to attempt to lump all fictionalized

circumstances dictate what types of literature can or will be published, further implicating the media. This coincides with Paul Edwards' explanation that the notion of an ideal war, an ideal soldier, of ideal American values dictated that there would be no John Wayne movie about the Korean War. Edwards reports the Korean War "was never popular because it was not reducible to the simple affirmations that Americans love, and about which traditional movies are made" (Edwards 5). Again, social perceptions concerning *what* the military was, and in this case, *how* it was to be portrayed, prevented a movie from being made. In this case social perceptions and beliefs were shaped by the film's absence, its omission from the library of cultural lore.

[John Wayne] did not make a movie about the Korean War because he did not want to exemplify what was happening in Korea. He did not want to play the gunnery sergeant of a retreating Marine company; he did not want to immortalize a colonel who has lost a battle, not to a superior enemy, but to some negotiating team hundreds of miles away, or a long suffering Vice Admiral serving as a negotiator at Panmunjon whose fighting was limited to an argument over the shape of the table. What Wayne wanted was a film that said **real** Americans do not surrender; they do not become prisoners; they fight to the last man or woman because of the rightness of their cause. He wanted to say that Americans are not soft and do not crumble under the hardships imposed on them. He wanted to say Americans are brave and do **not** run from the enemy no matter the conditions, and that they are loyal even to lost causes. He wanted to show us that real Americans do **not** negotiate with the enemy. He wanted to preserve the traditional ideals of the American nation, that is, to further memorialize the myth of American victory. John Wayne did not make a movie about the Korean War because the war reflected an America he could not accept. (Edwards 10)

This form of social misrepresentation closely follows the pattern I have highlighted throughout this chapter. What I have presented the reader with are three different wars, three different generations; yet, only one way by which the media orchestrates how American society and its various cultures and subcultures perceive and understand the

military, the soldier, and warfare; one way by which the soldier is delineated. It also serves to illustrate --if readers seek to understand or answer "Who is the American soldier?"-- *why* readers should focus their attention on non-fictional military literature, rather than fictional accounts. However, such a social and philosophical expedition into literature requires a methodology by which to discover such an answer. And that is the focus herein, a study of culture and society on a more micro level, understanding the Structural-Functional Paradigm, a "framework for building social theory based on the assumption that society is a complex system whose parts work together to promote stability," and how it applies to the way readers interpret literature (Macionis 10).

The first step in such an interpretation is making the choice to read non-fictional military literature. It also requires moving beyond broad generalizations and simplifications that leave in their wake ignorance rather than substance and knowledge. Despite what many have been led to believe, there is much more to the genre of military non-fictional literature than vainglorious personal accounts of war. So just why have works of fiction become readily accepted in the academic canon and on the bestseller list as being indicative of the soldier's story, while the words of *actual* soldiers engaged in warfare are in a struggle for even minimal recognition?²⁰

The critics of non-fiction argue that such writing cannot compete, aesthetically, with fictional works. Other critics contend the answer is that non-fictional military literature is simply not literary, but instead serves as reportage and is thus limited to the role of historical text.²¹ Another assertion, the one I have heard most often, is that the

Chapter Three, under the idea of soldier's disclosing the fallibility of their own memoirs.

²⁰ Admittedly the question and/or idea of "recognition" is quite tricky, but the context in which I use it herein is of a wider social acceptance, something with a more dignified and purposeful usage. However, the basis for this assertion is the reality that fictional works representing war, such as those I mention by name and author in the introduction, are quite prevalent in literary studies.

²¹ For further information concerning the non-fiction vs. fiction debate, read: Carolyn Hughes, "Term Limits: The Creative Nonfiction Debate." Poets and Writers. May/June 2003: 61-64; Nancy Miller's, "But enough

liberally controlled academic canon vigorously prevents the inclusion of what is often perceived as imperialistic literature. Regardless, the suppositions as to why military non-fiction remains in seeming literary obscurity are innumerable, while, conversely, there exist scant few rational answers.

Therefore, allow me to address that issue specifically. Perhaps the proper way to begin here is by establishing *why* non-fiction is necessary in such a study. If there is a single word to define this underlying principle it is: legitimacy. That is because my main point of contention with non-fictional works is they are determined to simplify complex issues by attributing social conditions or ideas, such as a particular way of thinking regarding a certain subject, to a single person or entity. As a result, this one body is designed so as to represent the whole of an entire segment of society. The obvious problem is nothing can be made that simple; that is, nothing except fiction. As a result of such implausibility, larger, more complex truths are rearranged into tidy, easily digestible portions and instantly legitimacy is sacrificed, forfeited.

But how does one avoid such concerns? And what if there was some way by which one could create a sense of balance? The answer to both comes in my premise; we must investigate this subculture of American society by focusing our attention first on the soldier's literature, and then later, explore how such works are capable of assisting readers to understand the larger American society. Rather than allow the aforesaid materials to dictate a false reality, we must seek out the truth ourselves.

In the next chapter, author Samuel Hynes will provide to test the soldier's literature, planning our initial steps by establishing a textual criterion. It is a methodology

that will assist in the exploration of the soldiers' words, so as to better understand the military's unique socio-cultural values.

SOCIOLOGY AND MILITARY LITERATURE.

It is conventional wisdom that sociologists have tended to neglect military concerns. In fact this is a somewhat misleading claim, since not only have numerous studies taken the military as a substantive area of interest, *but (more importantly) it is hard to see what, if anything, is specifically sociological about militarism and war.*²² (Gordon 417)

The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology

Applying Sociology to Military Literature

Among the most basic functions of literature is to represent society in order to provide readers with insight on cultural values, moral lessons, and social knowledge. This belief is confirmed by sociologists who contend, “Literature is social evidence and testimony [...] a continuous commentary on manners and morals” (Cosser xv). Ultimately, this pairing of disciplines is quite natural, and as a result non-fictional, military literature finds its way into this argument due to its elevated potential for the edification of cultural insight and sociological knowledge. Such a rationale is reinforced by the words of author Samuel Hynes, who asserts in The Soldiers’ Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War, that the constant condition of war makes people “curious about war and, more than curious, [...] engaged and compelled by it” (Hynes xii). Typically, that curiosity leads one into an unfortunately narrow definition and idea of war. Instead of pursuing that curiosity towards an understanding of “what war is like, and how it *feels*,” one becomes bogged down with statistics, myths, numbers, judgments, and drastic oversimplifications (xii). Too often the curious reader quickly loses touch with the human factor of warfare; not the dead and wounded, but detached from those who survive and have important stories

²² Italics added to emphasize the lack of imagination, foresight, and social awareness of this absolutely idiotic statement by the reputed “World’s most trusted reference books.”

to share.²³ For this reason, Hynes asserts that readers must “seek the reality in the personal witness of the men who were there” (xii). Only then will such a curiosity begin to satiate the quest for deeper social, historical, and political knowledge.

Hynes’ exploration of the social necessity for this genre introduces the need for a definition of what constitutes military literature. And though Hynes’ work is focused on the veteran’s fictional representations of warfare, his definition of this genre is quite helpful. He recommends that readers put literature to a test, not based upon “how literary a book is [...] or how prominent the author became, but whether the book speaks with a voice that is stubbornly distinct, telling [readers] what [war] was like, for *this* man, in *his* war” (xv).

This test, if you will, can be applied to the works of non-fiction we will study herein because the fundamental premise is the same, readers should be seeking the reality, not the ideal; answers, not allegories. Such an example of this is witnessed in the more recent military literature. After the Persian Gulf War, memoirs, biographies, and historical narratives began to make their way to the shelves after a hiatus of almost thirty years, war had brought about another wave of military writing. “The Gulf War,” Chris Hedges asserts in his book War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning, had “made war fashionable again. It was a cause the nation willingly embraced. [And] it gave us media-manufactured heroes and a heady pride in our military superiority and technology. It made war fun” (Hedges 142). It was also an event, which moved President Bush to declare to the entire world that the American military’s sullied image created by Vietnam had finally been wiped clean.

²³ I found it incredibly disturbing that one reader’s notion of “war victims” was limited solely to non-military casualties. This reader could only imagine the soldier as “the killer rather than the killed” and, as such, wrongly concluded that the soldier is incapable of experiencing “the brutality of war as fully as its victims do”.

But the *modern soldiers' words* have a *much different story* to tell. Our modern soldiers are volunteers, and as both Brady and Hackworth reported, many soldiers enlist for reasons outside of duty, honor, and country. But those who did come for that reason found themselves leading great soldiers who were intelligent, motivated, and filled with esprit de corps. Five newly commissioned Armor lieutenants, four from West Point, penned their joint memoir, The Eyes of Orion. It is a detailed and very personal exploration of the twenty-two-year-old men who lead an Armor Battalion into battle during Desert Storm. But it also about how much our society and the soldiers it spawns have changed.

Most notable is that after the Gulf War the five authors left the military. They had led men, both younger and older, into combat and survived with their honor and pride. They had experienced battle, they had witnessed death and destruction, they had taken part in the making of history, but most importantly, through personal experience they had seen through the myth of war.

And this is apt to be the trend in Gulf War writing. Books such as Baghdad Express, Tuskers, and Jarhead all received critical praise for their telling portrayals of the common soldier combating not only a mortal enemy, but also his conscience and history. Another telling sign is that members of the military themselves often denounce these works. For example, Anthony Swafford's Jarhead was written, in the author's words, "[because] the individual soldier has not really been considered and is not being given a voice. [Jarhead] offers a soldier's voice at a time when one need's to be heard." But other marines deemed his work "lies", "bullshit", and "a book for sympathetic sissy's and [marine] wannabe's". Reviewer's from *Salon*, *Esquire*, *The New York Times Book Review*, and *Publishers Weekly*, on the other hand, laud the work, declaring it "fabulous

material”, “the most powerful memoir to emerge thus far from the last gulf war”, “a display of genuine talent”, “witty and profane”, and “... a classic, a bracing memoir [...] that will go down with the best books ever written about military life.”

The reason for the disparity is complex; the American soldier has evolved from the kid escaping a jail sentence, or the death sentence of Middle America, and no longer are the ranks filled with bitter, resentful draftees. Today’s military, for the most part, is bright, energetic and introspective, capable of discerning between nationalism and realism, and their works reflect this. The authors are the men Norman Mailer says are obligated to write about their experiences, and who veteran and author, James Blinn, deems “morally and spiritually [moved] to become authors” (qtd. in Minzesheimer).

Why? Because once the American soldier enters conflict, as Hedges explains: [He is] moved from the abstract to the real, from the mythic to the sensory. When this move takes place we have nothing to do with a world not at war. When we return home we view the society around us from the end of a very long tunnel. There they still believe. In combat such belief is shattered, replaced not with a better understanding, but with a disconcerting confusion and a taste of war’s potent and addictive narcotic. Combatants live only for their herd, those hapless soldiers who are bound into their unit to ward off death. There is no world outside the unit. It alone endows worth and meaning. Soldiers will rather die than betray this bond. And there is—as many combat veterans will tell you—a kind of love in this. (Hedges 40)

Modern non-fictional military literature is different today because the soldier knows this truth, and is intimately aware of the history behind his service. The authors of The Eyes of Orion left the service after Desert Storm because they knew they could never pretend what happened hadn’t happened. They couldn’t go about their days as though they weren’t war veterans, and they couldn’t bear to think of life as something between wars. As one of the authors reported, he left because the idea of playing military games after having survived combat seemed like living a lie. Therefore, when soldiers read chronicles such as Jarhead, which challenge their memory or notion of

service, the author's words are treated like that lie. The bond between brothers in arms is strong, something others cannot understand because it defies both explanation and definition. But it is the reason for the military backlash against writing that betrays the brotherhood by demystifying the brotherhood.

Modern military authors' words have evolved from simple but necessary reportage, to a catharsis required of both soldier and nation, and now to an honest and compelling look into the complex function, thorny role, and unglamorous life of the soldier. Yet, the newest accounts transcend those simple ideas and reflect who we are as a people today because the soldier's roots are wholly evident, he is of the people. This transformation doesn't merely represent a change in literature, but instead, signals a larger, more social change affecting the whole of America today.

Who Serves and Why?²⁴

I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; and that I will obey the orders of the President of the United States and the orders of the officers appointed over me, according to regulations and the Uniform Code of Military Justice. So help me God.²⁵
 – Oath of Enlistment, US Military.

Our first step in understanding the soldier and military literature is to understand *who* serves in the military, and *why*. As military sociologist, Charles Moskos, Jr. explains, today's soldiers have different intentions than those in America's past. During a National Public Radio (NPR) interview, Moskos stated people "join for a variety of motives. Some want it because it's a job, some want the excitement. Patriotism is certainly always an underlying element. But a considerable attraction today is the

²⁴ An interesting topic for further investigation would be who *leaves* the military and why.

²⁵ The relationship of religion and the military is discussed in *Social and Military Values*, page 52.

educational benefits, the GI Bill” (Moskos). Moskos also clarified that the ranks are comprised of “working-class and lower-middle-class young men and women. They are not the bottom of society by any means. They are likely to be higher minority than the general population [...]” (Moskos).

Fictional movies and literature influence social opinions regarding who the soldier is by narrowly and erroneously defining the soldier as impoverished, uneducated, and seeking an escape from dead-end life. Activist reporters, such as Chris Hedges, purport that American soldiers are “poor kids from Mississippi or Alabama or Texas who could not get a decent job or health insurance and joined the Army because it was all we offered them” (qtd. in Zinsmeister 186). This clashes greatly with what Zinsmeister found in the single unit with which he was embedded. He reports that in his line infantry company “there are hillbillies and kids from concrete canyons, wealthy suburbanites and first generation immigrants, people with graduate degrees and self-taught mechanical wizards” (Zinsmeister 51). He goes on to describe the Russian immigrant who is the brigade commander’s driver, a sergeant who a few years earlier walked away from Fordham’s Ph.D. philosophy program to become an army paratrooper, a warrant officer who spent two years in Bolivia as a missionary, a chaplain from Kenya, a pilot who is writing the Army’s doctrine on combined arms warfare, an officer who is fluent in both Mandarin and Arabic, another soldier who taught himself German, a medic who graduated from Wesleyan, and a helicopter mechanic who fled his home in Columbia because of assassination threats by terrorists (Zinsmeister 51-52). This information conflicts with nonviolence and anti-war organizations, as well as misinformed political leaders, such as Rep. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y), who often argue that a “disproportionate number of the poor and members of minority groups make up the enlisted ranks of the

[volunteer] military,” which when combined with Hedges, is meant to insinuate that our soldiers serve for no other reason than desperation (Sailer).²⁶

While Zinsmeister reinforces the validity of Moskos’ claim, the activist argument does serve to illustrate an interesting social phenomena, namely “America's elite, our privileged youth, are not in the military today. [...] Out of 435 congressmen and a hundred senators, only four had children in the military and only one is an enlisted person” (NPR.org). Even more alarming is the discovery that America’s Ivy League citizens are no longer serving, which differs drastically compared to little more than fifty years ago, when the sons of social and political elites were not exempt from service. In his memoir, James Brady points out that the son of Office of Strategic Service (OSS) co-founder, Allen Dulles, did not use his connections to escape combat duty. Young Dulles was a Princeton graduate, came from money, was the nephew of John Foster Dulles, had close connections with Eisenhower, and still elected to serve in Korea. Moskos offers a personal anecdote citing that when he graduated from “Princeton in 1956 [...] Out of 750 males, 450 served. Last year [2002] at Princeton, with a class of 1,000, male and female, only three served” (NPR.org). Perhaps Korea is when the last of the privileged served their nation. During that war, author and marine Martin Russ’ transport ship to Korea was filled with many men who Moskos’ report illustrates no longer find the drive to serve.

I acquired three friends during the two week voyage: Cpl. Maynard Keil from Bicknell, Indiana, a radio relay man. He graduated from Purdue, has done a hitch in the Navy. Pfc. Peter Warner from Larchmont, also a radio relay man; spent two years at Syracuse U. forestry school. Cpl. Dan Rossi, from Norwalk Conn., motor transport; studied at Harvard for a year. Warner is a gentleman of the old school, never complains, stays relaxed, is willing to make it with the euphoria-world and does admirably at it. (The Last Parallel, Russ 38)

²⁶ It would be both interesting and logical to further investigate how, if at all, the military’s demography is reflected during various eras, as illustrated by who served, and how this reflects national demography.

Such is the case more often in our modern society. With that lack of service by there grows an imbalance in social perceptions, especially in the academy, concerning the soldier, military, and warfare. As Desert Shield/Storm veteran, Neal Creighton explains, conveying such issues and experiences to civilians, chickenhawks, and Northwestern Law School professors is a war unto itself.²⁷

I remember a law professor who at a party found out that I was a Desert Storm veteran. He came up to me and asked without shame, "Did you kill anybody?" His smile felt like someone poking fun at my soul.

"Yes, I have killed somebody," I answered. "Have you?"

The professor scoffed as if someone of his intellect would never be placed in such a loathsome situation. "No, I have not. How does it feel to kill?"

"It's incredible," I replied. The professor looked quizzical. "At first you feel raw power. This feeling is stronger than landing a big job, gaining tenure, having sex. The feeling is pure animalistic sensation that comes from the ability to snuff the very existence of life. You become the manifestation of strength and in an instant you can annihilate a family, end a genetic history, preclude future human life. You become God."

The professor's face contorted as if reading a case on which he disagreed with the court's holding. "You might want to consult a doctor, young man. You sound sick," he said with a confident smile.

I felt even more disgusted. "I gave you an honest answer. You didn't ask me how it was to carry the guilt of the kill with me. After the initial rush, you realize that you are not God. You are a human who for one instant was either on the stronger side of had a cleaner shot. It's like your situation. You were lucky, lucky enough to be born with parents who had enough money to send you to the best schools, who provided you the means to excel. You are on the stronger side with a cleaner shot to the top. You could have been a bum, or a criminal, or even a soldier, if your environment had been different. Life is luck. The guilt of my luck is a heavy load. I think about it every day of my life."

The professor nodded in artificial agreement. "How is the guilt? How does it feel?"

I hesitated, "I don't discuss this openly. It's an invisible albatross carried around my neck. I wake up some nights after dreaming of a road junction where we killed several fathers, brothers, and husbands. The rush is gone now ... long gone. All that is left is the act, and I feel very sad. I would ask you how you would feel, but you would not know. You couldn't know. Your educational delay during Vietnam kind of stands in the way." (Vernon et al. 268-269)

²⁷ Creighton's experience echoes that of many soldiers turned students (including my own), stating that "[...] leaving the army caused a great void I my life, and I tried to fill it with [school]. Life at [school] felt mundane, and the egos of the professors were greater than any officer I knew in the service" (Vernon et al. 268).

As the face of American society changes so does the face of the soldier, one can witness this fact in the increased presence and significance of women's roles in today's military. Moskos' study found that during the period of draft, from Vietnam back, "the number of women [serving in the military] was 1 or 2 percent [...]. Today, females make up approximately 15 percent of the armed forces" (moskos). What these facts demonstrate is that America's military is a reflection of its society, not simply in that the military is all-volunteer, but in that it is comprised of a wide array of ethnicities, religions, genders, and so on. The notable exception to this being social-elites and so-called Ivy League students who, almost as a whole, avoid military service.

Otherwise, it is the individual generation which paints a broad, but rather accurate picture of the American soldier. Those who choose to serve do so for a variety of reasons that change by era and generation. And while, as I pointed out in regards to fiction, one person cannot be expected to personify the whole of the military entity, research indicates that for some purposes, such as those studied here, this assertion can be made with a high amount of accuracy. Additionally, if readers follow Hynes's advice of seeking knowledge about an author's personal experience and allow that notion to guide and temper their reading, then such drastic oversimplifications and sweeping generalizations can be avoided altogether.

The soldiers' literature provides each generation an opportunity to reflect on our nation by specific socio-historic era.²⁸ In order to understand how society's perception of service has changed over time, let us begin our investigation with the Korean War era, because if we are searching for who the soldier is *today*, then Korea is a fitting place to begin. This is where and when we find the last generation of American soldiers, as a

²⁸ An investigation into why soldiers volunteer in the face of impending war and how this corresponds with what is transpiring, socially and politically, in our nation would be a logical outgrowth of this idea.

whole and for quite some time to come, who heed the call of service as an undeniable obligation to their homeland. As James Brady, who served as a marine Infantry Platoon Leader during the Korean War, explains, men of his generation often joined the Marines for a variety of reasons:

[...] because of John Wayne movies or to keep from being sent to prison or because they were bored or because of the uniform or because they were the kind of men who enjoyed discipline and really wanted to serve. A few sought adventure. I joined to avoid the draft. In June 1950 graduated and was handed, along with my B.A., a commission in the United States Marine Corps Reserve as a second lieutenant. That was clever, I remember thinking, how nimbly I'd avoided two years of military drudgery. A week or so later the North Koreans crossed the 38th Parallel and the war was on. Within a few months my class was mobilized. I'd joined up to dodge the draft and ended up being sent to war. (Brady 8)

Many of those who fought in Korea were reservists; as Martin Russ explained in Breakout, the Marines of the 1st Marine Division “were divided almost evenly in half between Regulars and Reservists, the latter hailing from selected cities across America” (Breakout, Russ 8). The ranks of America made up the ranks of the USMC, and coming into service during the time of war was not simple; in fact, for those like Captain William B. Hopkins who left his family and medical practice, the experience could only be described as painful. Corporal Roy Pearl, who, during WWII, had “seen action on Bougainville, Peleliu, Guam, and Okinawa [...] answered the unexpected summons without complaint” (Breakout, Russ 9).

While Brady and Russ' words are powerful and scan the population's motivations for, and reactions to serving, they do not account for those among the 1.8 million soldiers who served in the Korean theater who were draftees (“Korean War Veterans- Then and Now”). As author and Korean War veteran William Dannemaier reported, the American public simply did not anticipate military service or the Korean War. Draftees served as expected but:

The announcement of the Korean War was a shock. I had registered for the draft, as did all young men of my generation, but no one expected to go anywhere. World War II was over. The newspapers no longer provided daily updates of campaigns; no longer did every edition list the killed and the wounded. We were at peace. Young men's lives were no longer forfeit. We could plan our futures—and have them. (Dannenmaier 10)

Regardless of whether soldiers enlisted or were drafted, perhaps more important is the Korean War veteran's feelings *about* his service. Rudy Tomdei, author of No Bugles, No Drums reported that “Almost to a man the veterans of Korea believed then and still believe now that whatever their personal beliefs about the war; it was their duty to go” (Tomdei vi). Support for Tomdei's position is found in the number of reservists, WWII veterans and eager citizens whose stories are told in such non-fictional military literature as Heartbreak Ridge, Pork Chop Hill, The Last Parallel, With a Black Platoon in Combat, Breakout, and From the Hudson to the Yalu.

As time passes, those social changes become more pronounced, such is the case in retired Lt. Gen. Harold Moore's, We Were Soldiers Once ... And Young, wherein the author explains that Korea's rationale regarding national service carried over into the beginning of the Vietnam Era. He reports that his generation of soldiers, among the first to fight in Vietnam, were the last of a particular breed.

We were the children of the 1950s and we went where we were sent because we loved our country. We were draftees, most of us, but we were proud of the opportunity to serve just as our fathers had served in World War II and our older brothers in Korea.

We went to war because our country asked us to go, because our new President, Lyndon B. Johnson, ordered us to go, but more importantly because we saw it as our duty to go.

We were the children of the 1950s and John F. Kennedy's young stalwarts of the early 1960s. He told us that Americans would “pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship” in the defense of freedom. (Moore and Galloway xviii)

That was the beginning of the Vietnam War and things changed quickly. The war changed, American politics changed, and our society and culture changed. Each of these evolutions also brought transformation to the military itself. The most significant

contributor to this conversion was the military draft, which introduced a change in the soldier's tone directly reflecting his unwillingness to serve. At times it can be read as hostility to the seemingly futile war being waged, as in Lance Corporal Stephen Daniel's letter to his parents. Although Daniels had volunteered for the Marines, his letters "articulate the sentiments of many demoralized young men," and after his friend Corporal Lee Clark was killed, Daniels wrote his parents:

He didn't deserve dieing [sic] in a damn country not worth fighting for. He didn't deserve diein' for people who won't even fight for themselves. But he is dead and those back home who's freedom he was defending will never know his name. He is just another number. [...] After all Marines are expendible [sic] so who cares when they get it. It makes you wonder when you see a good man die. When you know that those people in the world will never here about it and could care less. It makes you wonder.²⁹
(Carroll 413)

The frustration of soldiers dying turned to frustration with the military and the United States itself. In a letter to his friend, army Specialist 4/C Richard Baltzegar complains about America's involvement in Vietnam. His letter is littered with comments such as "Americans are such fools," "What the hell am I doing here?" "God, I hate the Army and the country it represents. Look at the infamous job I am forced to do," "Americans are ruthless and violent: I hate'em," and in response to the national anthem, "I hate that song-and all it stands for" (Carroll 413-415).

All I see is the corruption of this representative organization of the great US. I see people everyday that I have to salute-people I have no respect for; people who lack the intelligence to be anything other than an Army major. I see a country equally [... aggressive] as CCCP-more disgusting than CCCP because we (America) is backhanded about the whole deal-using words like "freedom," "preservation of Freedom," "heritage of founding forefathers," People tell me that there is no better country.

²⁹ A sentiment that persists even today. See the Chapter quote by King, written during Operation Iraqi Freedom. Another possible topic for future study, how soldiers' perceive the death of their comrades versus public awareness, as well as that death weighed against the value of the mission.

That may be true, but I plan to find out for myself. I'm going to Sweden, Norway, West Germany, England Luxembourg [sic], even CCCP, and see if I can't find something a little better. If the US is the best, then the rest of the world must be in some hell of a shape. (Carroll 414)

In a cruel twist that befits all wars, but Vietnam in particular, Daniels was killed by a North Vietnamese sniper, while Baltzegar returned to the United States. But he did not return the same person, Baltzegar arrived addicted to heroin and later died “at the age of forty-four as a result of substance and alcohol abuse” (Carroll 415). The presence of drugs in Vietnam has since become a defining characteristic of the war, thus perpetuating the myths discussed and refuted in Chapter One.³⁰

Even in those troubled times there were men who understood why America would be involved in such a war. They also remembered the way in which American society formerly perceived war and military service. One such soldier was Lt. Col. Gerald W. Massy III, a fifty-two year old reconnaissance pilot. He wrote his daughter, Lynn, to describe the war as it unfolded around him and to lament about the current state of American society.

American history is filled with dark moments when the odds were great and we have never failed to meet each challenge. The present situation is no more urgent, or filled with danger, than was the attack on Pearl Harbor, or Gettysburg, or Bataan, or the Alamo. There is one big difference now, and this is the area of our greatest concern: In those days Americans were not so adept to wringing their hands despairingly as seems to be the case with many of our countrymen now, young and old. If fears were felt in years gone by –and you can bet they were–people had less trouble concealing them because it was the unpopular thing to show fear, or conversely, not to appear brave and resolute. Today, in some circles, it appears to be the thing to do to reject our previous ideas about the virtue of personal courage. In my judgement [sic], these people are more dangerous than the Nazis or Communists ever were. Our national anthem has a line which is appropriate to quote here: “The land of the free and the home of the brave.” The two go hand in glove. If we are not brave, we soon will not be free. No nation, or person, ever achieved greatness, or even success, without courage. [...]

³⁰ Studies show the actual level of drug usage is nowhere near the level the media portrays it to be.

Maybe some do not appreciate America. Let them visit many other lands, as I have, and they will thank God for the blessing of being an American.
(Carroll 411)

Comparing and contrasting Moore and Massy's words with those of Daniels and Baltzgar demonstrates that Vietnam was more than a military conflict, it was a social event that both challenged and changed the hearts and minds of many Americans, and its aftereffects can still be felt today. Those wounds were refreshed when Operation Desert Shield/Storm came to pass.

It was eighteen years between the end of Vietnam and the next major conflict, the Persian Gulf War. And during those eighteen years, America was involved in a redefining of itself, and so was its military. The military's focus turned from major regional conflicts (MRCs) to small insurgencies, revolutions, rescue operations, retaliation strikes, interdiction, and protection. America found itself operating in theatres such as Iran, Lebanon, Grenada, Libya, Panama and then, in 1991, the next major conflict, the Persian Gulf War.

Compared with both Korea and Vietnam, Operation Desert Shield/Storm fielded a completely unique military, one which was the reflection of a new America. Between Vietnam and the Persian Gulf the American military had entirely reinvented itself, and the soldier was a completely different soldier, like no other in the history of America. What non-fiction military literature representing this period does exist are powerful, telling memoirs and historical accounts such as Baghdad Express, Crusade, Jarhead and The Eyes of Orion. One point made evident throughout the literature of Operation Desert Shield/Storm is the soldier's exploration regarding his reason for service, his reason for being a soldier.

Moskos' insights as to why modern soldiers serve were accurate; yet there is more. Beyond education, escape, adventure and patriotism is another reason: family

tradition.³¹ Such is the case in Anthony Swofford's memoir, Jarhead: A Marine's Chronicle of the Gulf War and Other Battles. He writes that family tradition, as it pertains to the military, often extends beyond what most consider familial obligation and delves deeper into the larger, more social family. Additionally, as Swofford describes, it also involves familial roles of military hierarchy.

I believed I'd enlisted in the Marine Corps in order to claim my place in the military history of my family, the history that included my father's service in Vietnam, his brother dying in the peacetime Marine Corps, and my grandfather serving in the army air force from December 10 1941, through the end of World War II.

This initial impulse had nothing to do with a desire for combat, for killing, or for a heroic death, but rather was based on my intense need for acceptance into the family clan of manhood. By joining the Marine Corps and excelling within the severely disciplined enlisted ranks, I would prove both my manhood and the masculinity of the line. Also, by enlisting as an infantry grunt I was outdoing my brother, who'd spent his first few years in the army learning a practical vocation, teeth cleaning. Even before I hit puberty, Jeff and I had been in competition for the dominant male role just junior to our father's. (Swofford 203)

On the army side of the camp, this issue of family tradition and jockeying for position is just as prevalent. In the Persian Gulf War memoir, The Eyes of Orion: Five Tank Lieutenants in the Persian Gulf War, the authors discuss how their individual families' military histories shaped their own decisions to serve. Notice that a substantial portion of the first chapter is devoted to explaining these backgrounds, thus exemplifying their importance as it pertains to our conversation here.

Neal [Creighton, Jr.] obviously knew something about military life. His father, as Rob [Holmes] soon discovered, was a 1953 [Wesley Point] Academy graduate who had commanded a squadron with the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment in Vietnam and as a major general had commanded the 1st Infantry Division at Fort Riley, Kansas. Neal was born at a U.S. military base in the violent and chaotic Canal Zone in 1965 [...]

Rob [Holmes] also had a military father. A pathologist and retired army colonel, he had received decorations in both World War II and Korea. In World War II he

³¹ I should point out that Moskos disagrees with this point, but gauging by the literature available, research, and my own personal experience, family tradition plays a very significant role in enlistment.

had landed at Normandy in June 1944, fought with Patton's Third Army across Europe, and later served for a year in postwar, postbomb Hiroshima as the army's medical representative on the atomic bomb effect research team [...] he retired shortly after Rob's [Vernon] birth, so Rob grew up on military stories instead of military posts. (Vernon et al. 3-5)

Swofford also introduces another motivating element, family rivalry. Dave Trybula's (one of the authors of The Eyes of Orion) was driven by a need to "[outdo] his older brother Mike" in fact, it "became a point of pride" (Vernon et al. 6). So much so that this rivalry fueled his desire for admission to West Point. Trybula, who would go on to serve as a tank platoon commander during Operation Desert Shield/Storm, explained that he "felt a real need to break away from the trappings associated with my family and chart new territory" (Vernon et al. 6). This was a decision, like that of Swofford in regards to *his* older brother, which "set him on a [...] divergent path. As Dave was preparing his application, Mike registered as a conscientious objector" (6).

As Zinsmeister, Brady and Moskos each reported earlier, many soldiers initially joined for a variety of somewhat cloudy, if not overlapping and well-intentioned reasons. Greg Downey, a scout platoon leader in Operation Desert Shield/Storm, was in his junior year at the University of Nebraska-Kearny "when he realized he was running out of money" and as a result "applied for and won a two-year army ROTC scholarship" (Vernon et al. 15). Since that time, Downey has often wondered if he joined "out of financial desperation or because I truly had a desire to serve my country. I think it was a combination" (Vernon et al. 15). That choice is one which reflects today's service members and serves to distinguish one generation from another. Perhaps nowhere is this more powerfully demonstrated than in Joel Turnipseed's memoir, Baghdad Express.

In me the two worlds of my mother and father met and mixed. My mother is college educated, spoke smatterings of French and Spanish and Swahili, and old volumes of Beckett and Sartre and Camus and Brecht collect dust behind the self-help and airport novels on the shelves in her library. She was, at the time of the Gulf War, an executive vice-president

for a large mortgage company. My father, by trade a carpet layer, was un- or ill- or oddly employed, depending on which year you talked to him. He had recently lost his house in Duluth to a bank or the IRS, and moved without protest to his Wisconsin cabin.

My mother's mother had been a Marine during World War II, then went on to a successful career in copywriting and editing. Her first husband had hit the beaches at Peleliu and New Britain with the First Marine Division. Her second husband, the grandfather I knew, was commissioned by the Navy and attended Harvard on the GI Bill, eventually receiving his doctorate in economics there. (Turnipseed 30)

Socialization and Indoctrination

Each branch of the military is an institution, just as the military as a whole is an institution. As such, every institution has its own methods by which its members are indoctrinated, socialized and taught a unique code of morals, ethics, mores, laws and rules, as well as given an identity, an institutional role and placed somewhere within the hierarchy. This scenario is no different for the military, only more complex and severe, given the nature of this trade and the environments within which soldiers operate. In that way, the military is a subculture of larger, mainstream American society. Using sociological concepts from John J. Macionis' text, Society: The Basics, we can investigate the military subculture through the soldier's inimitable perspective.³² What I hope to accomplish herein is twofold: 1) present a sociological study of the military as a subculture, and 2) highlight the contribution this genre of writing affords the reader. In the process, I want to demonstrate how the two overlap and in doing so, provide us with even more information concerning not just military society and non-fictional military literature, but also our American society.

Governing the military is a set of laws known collectively as the Uniform Code of Military Justice, or UCMJ. It is this which details all manner of military law, ranging from

social etiquette and personal conduct, to job performance and fraternization, to espionage and one's personal, sexual activities. Beneath these laws are branch-specific military manuals, publications, and regulations.³³ These dictate everything to soldiers, from the proper way to change a military vehicle's oil, to how to employ an infantry platoon in desert combat, to precisely how far the soldier's name tag should rest above the breast pocket of his dress uniform. Every minute detail of life is spelled out for the soldier in the appropriate manual. But enforcing these laws and rules and regulations is not the military police, per se. Rather, it is upon the individual soldier and his chain of command to ensure the military's well-defined system of authority is strictly followed.

First among the critical procedures in making a soldier are *the Acts and Methods of Socialization*, a term that refers to "the lifelong social experience by which individuals develop their human potential and learn culture" (Maconis 57). This is the period in life wherein such individual characteristics as personality, cognition, morals, gender roles and self-identity are defined. The major *Agents of Socialization*, as they are called, are rather straightforward: Family, School, Peers, and the Media. Though civilians have already been assimilated and/or indoctrinated into our mainstream American culture, the soldier must re-learn the entire process so as to become a member of a very defined American sub-culture. It is in Basic Training or Boot Camp (depending on branch of service) wherein soldiers learn the ways of their new cultural community.

³² Maconis is a respected professor Sociology at Ohio's Kenyon College, where he also chaired the Anthropology-Sociology Department. Among his publication credits is the widely utilized text, *Sociology*.

³³ For example, von Stuben's Drill and Ceremonies manual would eventually become the Army's FM-22, which dictates precisely how D&C is to be taught.

Train as You Fight!³⁴

One of the immediate lessons the soldier learns is that he no longer belongs to himself. Once he signs the military contract he no longer enjoys the freedoms and privileges which he will be trained to defend. Soldiers are told, in one form or another that their soul may belong to God, but their ass belongs to the army, or marines, or navy, etc. The next lesson shapes every thought and action of the new recruit. It is a change affecting their every decision. As William Dannenmaier explains in his Korean War memoir We Were Innocents: An Infantryman in Korea, military instructors quickly establish that “There are three ways to do things: the right way, the wrong way, and the army way. You will do them the army way” (Dannenmaier 11). As for an explanation as to why, well, that is the next lesson recruits like Dannenmaier learn: “No questions were welcomed, no reasons given. We were to follow instructions to the letter, and to do so again and again and again-- until the required procedure, whatever it happened to be, was so routine that no alternative existed in our minds” (Dannenmaier 11).³⁵

The lessons of self-discipline, high standards, and attention to detail are for good reason; in combat, a soldier’s life, and the lives of those around him, is dependent upon his ability to react correctly and immediately. Hackworth explains this lesson as it was taught to him by his platoon sergeant, Steve Prazenka.

³⁴ A standard and (too) often repeated phrase in military training.

³⁵ This is, as one reviewer pointed out, ironically “anti-democratic”, yet the idea of democracy simply does not exist within the military during the training regiment. After training, when the soldier moves to his permanent duty station, a more forgiving environment allows for more latitude in a soldier’s actions and thoughts. In fact, so-called “lockstep” thinking dissipates rather quickly, and a variety or concept of democracy is reintroduced. The reasoning is that, as the reviewer pointed out, it is essential for all soldiers at all levels to comprehend the lawfulness of an order, as well as immediately make sound decisions while

The importance of close-order drill could not be overestimated; the discipline it instilled was that which would maintain order on a chaotic battlefield. "You're in a life or death situation out there," Prazenka would say. "When you hear an order, you don't respond in ten seconds or ten minutes. You respond NOW, unless you want to get yourself or your buddy blown in half. And I don't want any 'Simon Says' shit either. When I say move, move! When I stop, stop. When I say knock out that machine gun, you knock out that machine gun. I don't want you to think about it. Just do it." (Hackworth 39)

That kind of unquestioned response arises, as William D. Dannenmaier explains, from teaching "recruits--civilians--how to use the tools of war and how best to protect themselves while killing assigned enemies. It also had to prepare us for the hardship and dehumanization of war" (Dannenmaier 16). Dannenmaier explains that this was necessary, as it still is today, because many recruits enter thinking that their civilian train of thought can serve the military well; adding progressive, external logic to what they perceive as a stagnate and backwards way of thinking. "We believed our enthusiasm and our ideas would be appreciated. We were wrong. Disciplined obedience, a necessity for success in combat, was the goal. This was a truth we were still to learn. It is a goal that combat teaches soldiers to appreciate" (Dannenmaier 12).

There is, however, a point wherein this training becomes transparent and seemingly without purpose. Such is the case when soldiers return from combat and (try to) settle back into a life of normalcy. When the 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized) return from Desert Storm, the way in which soldiers perceived field training exercises was vastly different. Young and old, officer and NCO alike, leaders were placed in the difficult position of telling combat veterans how to train, which often times did not emulate the way they had fought. This is precisely the predicament Rob Holmes faced.

I remembered kicking myself many times in Saudi because I hadn't been tougher on my men and more demanding of my NCOs prior to deploying. I was a leader, responsible for my soldiers, and when we landed in the desert they were not ready to fight. That was my fault, and I never wanted it to happen again. Back at Ft. Stewart, I had no patience for people who didn't want to do something the right way the first time. But instead of making us more serious and more focused on combat readiness during training, it seemed like Desert Storm made many soldiers lackadaisical. "Come on, sir," they'd say. "It's not like this is real." And their apathy became contagious. I was losing my edge in peacetime. I felt myself getting soft, and I began to consider leaving.

(Vernon et al. 272)

And, in fact, Rob Holmes did leave. But the army continued to recruit, train, socialize, and indoctrinate civilians into soldiers. And it applied those lessons learned in the desert via variety of methods, the first of which is constant action designed to exhaust but also motivate the soldier. Dannenmaier explains how the instructors kept him and his fellow soldiers constantly busy.

There were long day marches over long dusty trails through the hills, night marches, day exercises, night exercises, weapons classes, marksmanship classes, and individual combat classes. In between we cleaned the barracks, picked up litter, painted anything needing paint, and, in general, did whatever we were told. Life was a kaleidoscope of activity with limited time out for eating, personal hygiene, and sleep. It was harsh, but it worked. Physically and mentally we became tougher as the weeks passed. (Dannenmaier 17)

The experience and function of training is no different from one branch of service to another, nor from one generation to another. One such exercise in purposeful conformity is known as Drill and Ceremonies; also called "D and C", or just Drill. The purpose and function of Drill dates back to the inception of our nation's military and was dictated by Baron von Steuben's manual, Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States, which later became known as the Bluebook. *Von Stuben* declared that in order for a unit to function with precision, cohesion, and discipline it must learn to operate as a single entity. How the military teaches and instills such traits is through Drill. Philip Caputo reports in his classic Vietnam memoir, A Rumor of War, that

in the Marine Corps the purpose of drill “was to instill discipline and teamwork, two of the Corps’ cardinal virtues. And by the third week [of Boot Camp], we had learned to obey orders instantly and in unison, without thinking” (10). This is exactly what the training is designed to do, eliminate the “weak links” before they can place soldiers in jeopardy. “The mental and physical abuse had several objectives,” Caputo writes. “They were calculated first to eliminate the weak [...]. The reasoning was that anyone who could not take being shouted at and kicked in the ass once in a while could never withstand the rigors of combat” (Caputo 10).

Although Caputo’s writing reflects upon a period when many enlisted soldiers were draftees, this principle applies even today when the services are all-volunteer. Even after entering the military many recruits find that they do not wish to become a soldier. In Basic Training or Boot Camp, it is not unusual to see many soldiers drop on request (DOR), injure themselves, or fake some mental or emotional injury. Those who cannot or will not conform are labeled as unsatisfactory and may be discharged with the label, *unable to conform or adapt to the military lifestyle*. The logic is that these soldiers would destroy unit cohesion and combat effectiveness should they be placed in a combat situation. Some, like Caputo, believe there are additional reasons behind the rigorous training, namely it is designed “to destroy each man’s sense of self-worth, to make him feel worthless until he proved himself equal to the Corps’ exacting standards” (10). I believe Caputo’s opinion is rather extreme and reflects the time period in which he was writing; however, the training was effective and thorough, as Swofford illustrates the effect of this training is more than surface level, and it changes even one’s vocabulary.

[...] for the first time in my life actually referring to underwear as *skivvies*, pants as *trousers*, a hat as a *cover*. Now, hands were *dickskinners*, the mouth was a *cum receptacle*, running shoes were *go-fasters*, a flashlight as a *moonbeam*, a pen was an *ink stick*, a bed was a *rack*, a wall was a *bulkhead*, a bathroom was a *head*, a shirt was a *blouse*, a tie was still a *tie*, but many other things would never be the same. (Swofford 30)

Swofford and many others, including those mentioned earlier, admit that with hindsight the indoctrination into the military life seems excessively brutish and socially ignorant. Recalling a brief but relatively violent altercation with his Drill Instructor, Swofford remarks “a further beating wouldn’t have damaged me, a further beating wouldn’t have caused me to run” (Swofford 30). Though it would not have caused *him* to run, such circumstances prevent many potential recruits from pursuing a military career. The reason for this is straightforward; in order to serve one must willfully sacrifice certain rights and privileges, chief among which is autonomy. Foremost among the reasons why most people do not join the military is an inability or unwillingness to operate under a strict authority. This simple ability is what separates two distinctly different social groups. What else separates the two groups is the indoctrination into the subcultures system of values, although the first value we will discuss, religion, is one which transcends the boundary between civilian and military life.

Social and Military Values

There is a military adage which states, “There are no atheists in foxholes.” Religion, as witnessed time and again in this genre, plays a rather significant role in the works of the soldier. At times that relationship is troublesome and other times it is plain. One could speculate that, as the adage alludes, the nature of the soldier’s career naturally presents this polemic. Yet one could also believe that because the soldier is a reflection of American society, this issue is simply indicative of our nation’s ever irresolute religious

culture. No matter the course of logic one pursues, the soldier is confronted early on with religion for it quite literally hangs around his neck. In Swofford's example, it is the so-called "dog tag" that presents this issue – it also demonstrates legendary military bureaucracy and the unique brand of soldier philosophy.

Before going to war, the marine is afforded ample opportunity to order additional dog tags. You are only supposed to order more when you've actually lost a dog tag or a set (two tags to a set), or you need to change some the information, and the only information that can possibly change is your religion of record. You either have a religion of record, or they stamp NO PREFERENCE on your tag, but this still makes it sound as though you want something, in fact it makes you sound like a religion whore, as though you'll take it in any hole, from any pulpit. They make it hard for a nonbeliever.

Shortly after joining the Seventh Marines, I ordered new dog tags, and I requested that NO RELIGION be pressed into the metal, but when I received the tags [...] I realized I was still a Roman Catholic, according to my tags. I ordered a corrective pair, and they came back the same way, and over the years I ordered numerous NO RELIGION pairs, and I requested, finally, NO PREFERENCE, but still the tags came back ROMAN CATHOLIC. My mother insisted these typos were signs from God, but I knew better [...].

The comfort of dog tags is surrounding yourself with and disbursing so many pairs that there is no possible way you could die, because your goddamn dog tags are everywhere [...]. This is the only true religion. (Swofford 174-175)

For other soldiers, religion was involved in their service in more abstract ways.

During the NATO and UN campaign in Kosovo, Gen. Wesley Clark and NATO Secretary General, Javier Solana sat down to discuss pausing a bombing campaign that threatened to occur during Easter, after the Pope had planned to call for a ceasefire. Solana was worried and though Clark tried to comfort him, he did little to assuage his religious-based fears.

I asked how the Pope could [call for a NATO ceasefire] if the Serb campaign was still under way. Couldn't someone explain it to the Vatican? I asked.

"You do not understand the impact he will have," Solana said. "When the Pope speaks, people and governments listen. They will find it very difficult. Try to think like a Southern European Catholic."

"I am a Catholic," I protested, half jokingly. He knew it very well, as we had often talked about our religious views.

“Then perhaps you are not a good Catholic,” he rejoined, smiling a bit at the crazy position we were in, fighting a campaign for moral and humanitarian purposes and having to defend our freedom of action against Christian virtues. I tried to joke that he, a physics professor and socialist, had some nerve accusing me of not being a good Catholic. (Clark 210-211)

Some soldiers enter the service with a devout sense of religion, others do not discover their religious beliefs until the “the shooting starts.” For Michael Durant, who had always considered himself a “casual Catholic”, religion became more real as he anxiously waited behind enemy lines for a rescue that would never come. As a prisoner of the Somali National Alliance (SNA), he believed death was coming to him at any moment.

So this is it, Durant. I closed my eyes and slowly shook my head, feeling a powerful sense of disgust and disappointment. *So this is heaven’s door.* I was too young to have ever seriously envisioned the end of my life, but I definitely hadn’t pictured it in a hellhole like this. *Looks like you’re going to die here. It’s just a question of when and how.* (Durant 56)

Not too long after that, Durant found himself sure that emancipation was moments away.

He feared, however, that the approaching soldiers would force the SNA to kill him.

Again, Durant confronted his religion.

It would be all over in a few minutes, and for the very first time that day, I prayed. I prayed for just a bit more of the mercy that had kept me alive until that moment. I had been a “casual Catholic” before, but I would become a faithful servant forever if I could just have three more minutes of protection until I was on board a Night Stalker helo and we were all flying off to freedom. (Durant 61)

The aforementioned pieces represent individual soldiers and their relationships with, to choose a less troublesome phrase, “a higher power.” Nevertheless, they are not indicative of all soldiers. However, there is always one member of every unit who can be counted upon to bring God into the combat zone, the chaplain. Such is the case with Chaplain Ray W. Stubbe who was assigned to the marine base at Khe Sanh during what

would become a siege lasting several months. Stubbe writes his parents explaining *why* he was in a combat zone halfway around the world.

I feel I am needed here. I give my every waking moment for these men. They are basically good men, but not particularly religious as such, although I'm quite sure many prayed today! Yet I love them all, and give my daily life for them, and I do it not for personal satisfaction or companionship or a sense of personal accomplishment, but because I feel this is God's will. (Carroll 407)

The religious testimony of men like Stubbe is telling, especially given the dangerous circumstances in which he lived, unarmed and surrounded by countless Viet Cong irregulars and North Vietnamese Army soldiers. Stubbe credits the lord for sparing his life and recounts the overt religious change in those marines who surrounded him.

I must say the good Lord was very merciful and gracious. I didn't even receive a cut or bruise. But there for a while I was having very close calls every day. One noon, while eating brunch in my hooch, an incoming [artillery] round went into wall—through four feet of dirt, 3 feet of sandbags, and bent my steel walls held up by u-shaped engineering stakes—it was a dud! [...]

The slogans the men have on their helmets and flak jackets changed from "KILL, KILL, KILL" and "In many a strife we've lost our life and never lost our nerve," etc. to "mom and dad forever," and "you and me, God," and "Please, Mr. Cong, I don't want to die," and crosses. (Carroll 408)

Because of the closeness of soldiers, there is not much which is off limits. The duration spent in proximity with one another affords a familiarity that eschews civilian etiquette and formality. Therefore, typically contentious issues such as politics and religion are openly discussed among soldiers, which is sometimes an impromptu comedy routine. Carl Pugnacci, a farmer by trade, had dropped out of school in the seventh grade, was a sponge for knowledge. Martin Russ recounts a conversation about religion with the man nicknamed, Pugnacious.

Last night he began questioning me concerning the origins of Christianity; it turned out that I knew less than he did. But there was one point when we were discussing the life of Christ, sitting comfortably around the stove. Pugnacious suddenly interrupted me; his big hands were stretched out, batting the air. He was trying to remember something. "Wait a minute,"

he said, "let me think ... Now, who was that feller that-that condemned Christ? No, don't tell me! 'Cause I know ... Ah-oh! I got 'er. It was Pontiac Pluto! Right?" (The Last Parallel, Russ 136)

That feeling of solidarity, evident in both soldiering and religious belief, amongst soldiers is not shared in more recent operations, as is made evident by Islamic American soldiers waging war against other American soldiers. During Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom, numerous soldiers have been arrested for attacking their own troops, supplying the enemy with sensitive information, and conspiring with the enemy to do harm. While this is not a new development -- there have been spy and traitors throughout history; it is an interesting note that it is religion that connects each of the alleged perpetrators. The influence of Islam in mainstream American culture has never been as prevalent as it is today, just another example of society and the soldier being so closely interrelated. Religion is a personal value the soldier typically brings with him into service. It is, to bend the meaning of Plato's words, a portable philosophy. However, like a new uniform, particular ethics and morals are issued to the soldier by way of his military socialization.

Such was the case in the first Gulf War, Operation Desert Shield/Storm, when reporters traveled in pools and their interviews with soldiers were anything but candid; over the shoulders of civilian reporters stood a military Public Affairs Officer who exercised complete control. When a marine complains that being told *what to* and *not to* say to reporters is censorship and therefore un-American, a short debate brews, but it is quickly put down by military authority. As Swofford reports, there is a complicated rationale behind such military logic and law.

I want to come to the defense of free speech, but I know it will be useless. We possess no such thing. The language we own is not ours, it is not a private language, but derived from Marine Corps history and lore and tactics. *Marine Corps birthday? 10 November 1775, the Marine Corps is older than the United States of America. Birthplace? Tun Tavern, Philadelphia, a gang of drunks with long rifles and big balls. Tarawa? Bloodiest battle of World War II. Dan Daly? He killed thirty-seven Chinese by hand during the Boxer Rebellion. Deadliest weapon on earth? The marine and his rifle. You want to win your war? Tell it to the marines!* When you are part of that thing, you speak like it. Reporters are arriving to ask me what I think about sitting in a desert, waiting for war. I'll answer that I like it; I'm prepared for anything that might come my way; I have supreme confidence in all of my leaders, from my team leader to the president. [...]

Staff Sergeant Siek says, "You are marines. There is no such thing as speech that is free. You must pay for everything you say. Especially the unauthorized crap." (Swofford 14-15)

Pairing Literary Themes and Sociological Concepts

While there are many approaches to studying literature, the major themes remain consistent. That is to say, no matter what critical method employed Formalist or Gender Criticism, for instance, a "Coming of Age" or a "Man versus Nature" story remains just that. Obviously, however, given the overarching ideology of this paper I am most concerned with socio-cultural and histo-political critiques. These aren't necessarily ways of reading, but instead, topics which should guide the research conducted. While there are hundreds of potential themes, for the sake of simplicity and cohesion I will explore just a few here.³⁶

What this next illustration provides is an example of how sociological concepts, literary themes, and the soldier's writing may be combined. The examples of those sociological concepts, which parallel common literary themes, are italicized for clarity. The main point herein is that many readers understand what is happening in fiction

inherently. However, non-fictional, though based in reality, remains a mystery to them. There is a feeling that perhaps one should not delve too deeply into this type of writing, for to do so would be to somehow tamper with another person's life story. While that point is in question, what does already exist is a framework of questions, insights, ideas and notions that can guide our reading of non-fiction.

James Brady's memoir powerfully demonstrates my assertion that the military is in-fact, a microcosm of America by highlighting the *deviant behaviors* that exist within the service as they do in mainstream society. While a variety of these attitudes and behaviors are well-demonstrated in The Coldest War, most telling is an incident of rape.

The author explains that one afternoon "six or seven Korean men stood, talking to anyone who would listen. One of my interpreters was with them. There was also two women, one of whom looked middle-aged to me, the other very old," in fact, they were mother and daughter (Brady 176). The mother claimed that earlier that morning two marines entered their village and forced their way into their home, raped the two women, and threatened the other villagers with death should they tell. Upon hearing of the accusations Brady's company commander asked if Brady believed the story. In a brief, but very telling exchange, the *power and authority relationship* --the tension between the military and civilian population-- and the difference between *social systems* manifest themselves.

"You believe the gooks, do you?"

"Yes sir," I said. "I saw their faces."

"Well, don't believe everything a gook tells you."

"No, sir."

³⁶ I encourage further investigation into the study of First is an investigation of **Fate and Free Will** (God, Fate, Divine Providence), which is intertwined with our ceaseless quest to understand **Human Nature, as**

An investigation was begun and the commanding officer stated –over his shoulder- “I don’t mind marines being a little wild. And I don’t much like gooks. But we’re not going to have rape. This Battalion is going to have discipline” (Brady 178). This exchange sets not only the tone of the investigation but, on a larger scale, possibly of the Korean War. Yet, discipline came in the form of vengeance as Brady sought out the guilty with blind ferocity. He forced them to submit urine samples which a medic held to the sun to check for the presence of sperm. When it was found, Brady was convinced of their guilt and the two were officially accused - despite the doctors objections to such procedures. Afterwards, the two ladies picked out the accused marines in a line up and they were incarcerated. Brady mulled over the entire situation in his head:

[...] it disgusted me. Marines shooting up a village, terrorizing people, raping those two old women with their faces like baked potatoes. How could they do it, how did they think they could get away with it? This way they were as bad as the Nazis and the Japs, attacking civilians, attacking women. It undid everything we were trying to do, saving their country for these people, giving it back to them. In that village they wouldn’t remember that Americans died for their two-bit village. They would remember their day of horror when two Americans, two marines, for God’s sake, raped their women at gunpoint. The blond marine was the son of a minister. The other was up for promotion to corporal. Their records had been excellent and they faced a general court.
(Brady 176)

Brady presents the reader with issues of *deviance*, *mob mentality*, *vengeance versus justice*, and numerous other complicated social issues that parallel literary themes. Each of these was a human characteristic or condition capable of being explored realistically, tangibly and with profound social, academic, and personal effect. Offering even more material to the reader was the *lack of justice* that Brady and his investigation served. Later, Brady laments, “we were told the two marines had gotten

off. The case had been badly made, in part by Mack and me, and a good lawyer got them off. They were transferred, of course, and we never saw them again” (Brady 181).

Other sociological concepts with literary equivalents are the ideas of *class systems* and *social stratification*. Given the nature of the military, such concepts and themes are the backbone of many pieces of literature. While each soldier learns to be part of this institution through either Basic Training or Boot Camp, specialized jobs and units have an even finer, more exacting process of indoctrination. The US Army’s Rangers, for example, are punishing in their indoctrination and socialization of new comrades, as their status as the army’s elite soldiers dictates. As Mark Bowden explains in Black Hawk Down, this leads to superior unit cohesion, thorough self-discipline, tremendous combat effectiveness, *esprit de corps*, and an identity steeped in tradition, history, and bound by a creed thicker than blood. These young men who go into combat together, as Bowden explains, have:

[...] lived and trained together for years. Some had come up together through basic training, jump school, and Ranger school. They had traveled the world, to Korea, Thailand, Central America ... they knew each other better than most brothers did. They’d been drunk together, gotten into fights, slept on forest floors, jumped out of airplanes, climbed mountains, shot down foaming rivers with their hearts in their throats, baked and frozen and starved together, passed countless bored hours, teased one another endlessly about girlfriends or lack of same, driven out in the middle of the night from Fort Benning to retrieve each other from some diner or strip club out on Victory Drive after getting drunk and falling asleep or pissing off some barkeep. Through all those things, they had been training for a moment like this. (Bowden 3)

As we have discovered, they come from every walk of life, but what separates the Rangers from more traditional units is the individual’s desire to be part of something decidedly different. This introduces another sociological concept, one that, even within the military itself, differentiates amongst *Social Groups and Structures*. There are two groups, first there is the primary groups –“a small group whose members share personal and enduring relationships”-- and secondary groups –“a large and impersonal social

group whose members pursue a specific interest or activity” (Macionis 104). An elite group, such as the Rangers, would serve as the soldier’s primary group, and his affiliation with the army would represent his secondary group allegiance.

The privilege of belonging to primary groups always necessitates a soldier distinguishing himself in some fashion. For Rangers, this initially manifests itself in the requirement to volunteer three times: once for the army, a second time for the airborne, and a third for Rangers. But the true test comes in Ranger school, where for several months on end they are sleep deprived, starved, physically, emotionally, and psychologically beaten, and all along the way their strength, endurance, commitment, honor, courage, intelligence and mettle is tested. It all culminates in a final exercise that determines the fate of many soldiers’ military career. One does not simply *join* the Rangers; he must *earn* the *right* to be called a Ranger. Yet, that is merely the beginning; becoming a member of such an inclusive and restrictive primary social group means learning to adopt another, even more narrowly defined subculture’s social rules, placing one further away from the military’s conventional majority.

They [are] harder-edged than most young men of their generation [...]. Most of these Rangers had been kicked around some, had tasted failure. But there were no goof-offs. Every man had worked to be here, probably harder than he’d ever worked in his life. Those with troubled pasts had taken harsh measure of themselves. Beneath the best hard-ass act, most were achingly earnest, patriotic, and idealistic. They had literally taken the army up on its offer to “Be All You Can Be.” (Bowden 9)

This distinction of elite military forces versus conventional forces has created sub-cultures within the military itself. As a result, some hold decidedly negative opinions of these sub-cultures. During Operation Desert Shield/Storm this fact was personified by Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf’s “aversion to unleashing American special forces” (Atkinson 144). It was widely known in the military that Schwarzkopf, who was charged with orchestrating the enormous multinational war, “was wary of unorthodox warfare; perhaps

more to the point, he distrusted anything that could subvert the precise timetable of his four-phase attack—such as a few hundred heavily armed commandos crashing through Iraq” (Atkinson 143). The use of the word *subvert* is important here, as it highlights the disdain more conventional leaders have for unconventional warriors. Simply put, Schwarzkopf believed that social groups like special operations threaten military social structure and hence, his authority.

Yet, this distrust exists at larger/higher levels, such as between the military branches where there exists a deeply seeded contention. Within the military there is a loosely agreed upon understanding: The army and marines do not like one another. The army and navy do not like one another. The marines, though technically their brethren, do not like the navy. And all of the branches dislike the Air Force. Hackworth verifies this belief, stating that “there is no small truth in the joke that our Army, Navy, and Air Force hated one another as much as, if not more than, they hated the Soviets” (Hackworth 435). The root of those strong feelings emanates in both perception and experience; however, it is mostly rivalry inspired bravado based upon lore.

Marines are the most frequent perpetrators of these attacks. The basis of their slander is rooted in the belief the army is more concerned with appearance than military professionalism. Russ believes this is evident in the two branches uniforms. “The Marine uniform—aside from the “dress blues” worn on ceremonial occasions—was a simple forest green, plain and unadorned in comparison with the Army uniform with its badges, nameplates, patches, flashes, and brass buttons. (Russ 6) Several wars later, marine Anthony Swofford writes of a soldier who left the army to enlist in the marines. Swofford looks upon him with disdain and mistrust, stating that his reasons for transferring are suspect:

You know he joined the Corps because throughout the many sorry years he spent in the other, lowly service he walked around—and the other services don't march, they walk—wishing he'd had the wisdom to enter the marine recruiter's door, not the army doggy's or squid's or flyboy's.

(Swofford 107-108)

Another marine, according to Swofford, then goes on to berate the former army Ranger, further intensifying the interservice rivalry by trivializing and belittling the elite soldiers' professional ability as soldiers. "A Marine Corps cook could skip and whistle through Ranger school while stewing together twenty vats of the best damn chili-mac any side of Riyadh" (Swofford 108). The truth of the matter is, however, that in a pinch these rivalries are readily overlooked and the singular attribute of being an American soldier is all that matters. Such is the case in Lt. Gen. Harold Moore's explanation of how, when his unit was threatened with being overrun by North Vietnamese soldiers, he "received all available aircraft in South Vietnam for close air support. We had aircraft stacked at 1,000-foot intervals from 7,000 feet to 35,000 feet, each waiting to receive a target and deliver their ordinance" (Moore and Galloway 149).

Still, there exists at all levels of the military a social stratification, "a system by which a society ranks categories of people in a hierarchy" (Macionis 156). As Mark Bowden reports in Black Hawk Down, the Rangers, though considered elite by most, could not measure up to Delta operators such as Paul Howe who believed that the Rangers worst enemy was their ego.

Howe wasn't impressed with a lot of things about the regular army. He and others in his unit had complained to Captain Steele, the Ranger commander, about his men's readiness. They hadn't gotten anywhere. Steele had his own way of doing things, and that was the traditional army way. Howe found the spit-and-polish captain, a massive University of Georgia football lineman, to be an arrogant and incompetent buffoon.

Howe had been through Ranger school and earned the [Ranger] tab himself, but had skipped straight over the Rangers when he qualified for Delta. He disdained the Rangers in part because he believed hard, realistic, stair-stepped training made good soldiers, not the bullshit macho attitude epitomized by the whole *Hoo-ah* esprit. Out of the 120 men who tried out for Delta in his class (these

were 120 highly motivated, exceptional soldiers), only 13 had made it through selection and training. Howe had the massive frame of a serious bodybuilder, and a fine, if impatient, analytical mind. Many of the Rangers found him scary. His contempt for their ways colored relationships between the two units [...].³⁷
 (Bowden 34-35)

Such attitudes are definitely widespread within the military; yet, they are almost entirely held by those who serve in combat units, deemed combat arms. In the army, for example, eighty-five percent of the force is deemed support, leaving the remaining fifteen percent as combat arms. It is this fifteen percent who bear the brunt of military service. Even during peacetime, combat arms soldiers are diligently training for combat. More often than not, support personnel are excused from the dirty work of field exercises, training deployments, mock alerts, and the myriad of pressure generating experiences which define the combat arms soldier's life. As a result, an imbalance is created that exacerbates a pronounced contention between the two types of soldiers. Such differentiations are indicative of *social institutions*, "an organized sphere of social life, or societal subsystem, designed to meet human needs" (Macdonis 266). The institution is, in this context, best envisioned on a micro level wherein the soldier differentiates himself by way of his unit, his military role, and balances that against others in the military. Perhaps this helps to explain why the vast majority of military literature is penned by combat arms soldiers; it is more than machismo or boasting, it is an act of emotional and/or psychological catharsis.

This study of the soldier as a reflection of American society is heavily reliant upon the concepts of time and history. As our society changes with time, so does the soldier and the military. These socio-historic changes are evident in simple things such as uniforms, weapons, ethnicities, and gender of the soldier. But these changes are also present in less obvious areas, such as policy, strategy, and identity. What one cannot

understand simply by looking upon the soldier is how his role, function, and purpose are dictated by changes in political policy and historical consequence. Also not immediately visible is how the soldier not only affects the implementation of such changes, but also creates such transformations due to his presence.

What are also linked to social change are the accessibility, tone, and presence of the soldier's literature. Social changes are in fact, socio-historical and socio-political events creating ripples that epitomize Newton's Third Law of Physics; every action has an equal and opposite reaction.³⁸ Such is the premise of this next chapter, wherein we will investigate how this literature, as the soldier himself, are each inexorably linked with social, historical, and political changes.

³⁷ *Hoo-ah!* is a military "war cry" that has a multitude of meanings and pronunciations, which vary by branch

³⁸ In this case, Newton's Laws of Physics and Social Phenomenon are related in the sense that between society, history, politics and the soldier, there is a great deal of (action-reaction) interaction. The idea that "One cannot touch without also *being* touched" serves us well to illustrate the ethereal relationship between, and amongst, each of these forces. I intend to illustrate how the soldier's literature is one method by which these interactions can be critically interpreted, studied, and understood.

HISTORY, POLITICS AND MILITARY LITERATURE.

Today I lost another friend and brother in arms. He died in an ambush defending his comrades, like so many of the hero's [sic] that I have known. He was not the first to fall in this war and I know he will not be the last. But, in this modern, fickle, desensitized, sensationalistic society we live in nobody will remember the ultimate sacrifice that he made. Nobody will suffer our [loss] except his fellow soldiers, and an innocent, unsuspecting family that will answer their door in the middle of the night and have their world forever changed. Tomorrow brings a new day, with new promises. We will dry our tears and soldier on, and hope that we are not someday forgotten. (King)

Warfare as Historical Identity

Because recorded history immortalizes action, a nation's historicized actions serve as the basis for its identity. What is done in the name of a nation shapes that nation and its people. It is, therefore, a grim and unfortunate reality that few entities and/or events have shaped history, national identity, and historical perceptions more than warfare. From its most ancient occurrence to the wars raging even today, warfare calamitously punctuates our human existence. To some it seems that war is a function of our flawed human nature; and to others, war is an element external to man, pre-dating his existence.

No matter its source, pessimistic views concerning war date back to, and beyond, Plato is often quoted as stating "only the dead have seen an end of war." This concept, and our relationship with it, is reinforced by war's global prevalence, its apparent timelessness, and the social mystique in which it is saturated.

Closer to home, our nation's origin is rooted in the War for Independence, an act of warfare firmly entrenched in both historic and political motivation, thereby establishing early on a tangible linkage between our national history and national identity. Looking back almost 230 years, one could go so far as to claim that without warfare America

would have no identity whatsoever. At the very least, one can declare that without warfare, both our history and politics, and thus our identity, would be quite different from what we currently know. In this chapter I will call attention to what historical and political knowledge the reader gains when he understands the soldier; not as the faceless, nameless fighter waging war in the name of “god and country”, but rather as the creator, carrier, and living instrument of our nation’s history and politics.

This is, however, a contentious arena, and that contentiousness has a particular foundation. Although higher education has been radically transformed during the past thirty years as a result of the civil rights, anti-war, and women’s movements, followed by the impact of postmodernist theory, one thing has remained the same: the undervaluing, if not outright neglect, of non-fictional military literature. Despite modern scholars’ efforts to include all people and all voices, the experience of soldiers, articulated in their own words, continues to be overlooked.

Among the many possible causes are the anti-war perspectives, unconscious or conscious, of scholars themselves. M.H. Abrams confirms that a majority of current literature professors are products “of the radical generation of the Vietnam era, many have imported an anti-establishment and counter-traditional stance into their pedagogic concerns” (Deadalus 114). Also at work is a benign neglect – scholars’ general ignorance of this vast body of literature. Yet, whether it is by choice or ignorance, the absence of this genre constitutes a void in the knowledge of our nation’s history and identity. What is at stake here is more substantial, as “close to one-eighth of all Americans between the ages of twelve and twenty-one right now are enrolled in a course on the history of the United States” (Appleby, Hunt, and Jacob 155).³⁹

³⁹ A report released by the American Federation of Teachers and the Albert Shanker Institute noted that “only 11 percent of eighth-graders have even a basic understanding of United States history” (Fox)

The Truth, the Whole Truth and the Narrative Truth

There is also the danger of allowing such a dispute to become solely theoretical or philosophical, centered on the idea of postmodernist or even social-constructionist theories and/or history. However, my primary concern is not with the instability or ambiguity of language, the problems with periodization or progress, or even the ability to define “the truth”. Such arguments, in the context of this paper, would simply cloud the issue. It is my opinion that there is no reason to immediately assume because the soldier experienced an event firsthand that his rendering of history is innately flawed. Historians such as Appleby, Hunt and Jacob agree, calling this dismissal of the historical narrative “groundless.” There is no “inherent falseness of the narrative form” due to its origin as a human creation, or because of its use of casual language (Apple, Hunt, and Jacob 235).

Yet, journalists and other social commentators/critics claim that the war narrative perpetuates dangerous national myths that bastardize truth in favor of simpler, albeit incorrect, perceptions of the national identity. For example, Chris Hedges argues that such works “give past generations a nobility and greatness they never possessed. [...] These myths are the kindling nationalists use to light a conflict” (Hedges 46). Conversely, the soldier as author and historian addresses this issue at the onset of his narrative. Lyle Rishell, for instance, begins his text with recognition of those very assertions.

Histories of war, and the men and women who served in them, are often seen as an accumulation of memories that offer a catharsis for the writer. Sometimes historians attempt to paint a grand picture of events of the day in order to purge a nation’s conscience. This story does neither. It has been some forty years since the outbreak of the Korean War, and I am not attempting to write a historical account of what was called Truman’s Police Action, nor am I rewriting history of the 24th Infantry Regiment. (Rishell xiii)

This issue concerning the validity of the narrative argument is not limited solely to academics. In fact, it is so important, especially given the context of our national identity, that it should not be determined by historians or politicians. Instead, it should be a concern of every citizen of these United States. One thing is certain, if we are to understand the entirety of our nation's history and identity, we cannot omit the stories of our soldiers. Soldiers turned authors recognize the inherent complexity of their role as historians, especially when the material is produced years after the fact. James Brady begins his Korean War memoir, The Coldest War, with the simple decree that "Some names have been changed. Everything else is as I remember it" (Brady vii). Chief Warrant Officer 3 (CW3) Michael Durant (ret.) states at the beginning of his captivity narrative, "This story is, of course, based upon my perspective. Therefore, some may remember these events slightly differently" (Durant xiii). Expounding upon these admissions, Colonel David Hackworth (ret.) explains in his memoir, About Face: The Odyssey of an American Soldier, the difficulty of writing such a piece.

War stories present two problems to authors striving for The Truth. First of all, if you live long enough to tell them, and have enough of an audience to practice telling them *to* through the years, war stories become just that—stories. Just as time distances the storyteller from the events themselves, so do the repeated tellings. Gradually the stories are embellished in places, honed down in others until they are perfect tales, even if they bear little resemblance to what actually happened. Yet the storyteller is completely unaware of how far he may have strayed from the facts. Those countless tellings have made the stories The Truth. The second problem with war stories is they have their genesis in the fog of war. In battle, your perception is only as wide as your battle sights. Five participants in the same action, fighting side by side, will often tell entirely different stories of what happened, even within hours of the fight. The story each man tells might be virtually unrecognizable to the others. But that does not make it any less true. (Hackworth 9)

Perhaps the hesitancy to adopt such texts as credible sources of historical knowledge is that, just as this chapter is intended to discuss, military literature is a compilation of highly volatile and ambiguous topics, namely: human nature, social ideologies, national

and individual history, global politics, and war. Rick Atkinson, in his book Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War, argues that history is difficult enough to write, but it is never more difficult when it is about war: “the search for an answer to the simplest question—*what really happened?*—is constantly challenged by conflicting memories, secrecy, and vainglory” (Atkinson 503). Atkinson’s frustrated admission explains why those who exclude this genre are so fond of quoting some variation of the *first casualty of war is truth*⁴⁰. The reality, however, is that what we regularly accept as historical record is all-too-often penned by those who were not present, which is far more susceptible to erosion, distortion, and corruption than the soldier’s firsthand, yet admittedly narrow, conveyance of history. Examples of soldiers contesting such recorded, simplified, and sanitized versions of history are quite prevalent.

For instance, Michael Durant, David Hackworth, Lyle Rishell, and the five co-authors of The Eyes of Orion make numerous contestations with both civilian and military versions of recorded history.

Time and again, these and many other writers correct what is widely accepted as factual and objective history based upon their own direct experience: “[we] wrote this book to provide a more accurate and personal portrait of what it was like to live through Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm than that painted by the American news industry,” wrote the authors of The Eyes of Orion (Vernon et al. xv). Lyle Rishell reports that numerous pieces of recorded history in texts are absolutely false, citing Max Hastings’ *The Korean War*’s inaccurate portrayal regarding the performances of entire military units, a misrepresentation that relied upon hearsay and speculation as its basis (46). Rishell also reports that Clay Blair’s *The Forgotten War* incorrectly presents “facts”

⁴⁰ The original quote, “In war, truth is the first casualty” is attributed to Aeschylus. However, many often cite “When war comes the first casualty is truth,” which was spoken by United States Senator, Hiram Johnson.

such as the incorrect time, location, and unit involved regarding the wounding of an army colonel by an enemy sniper (Rishell 77).

The media, as expressed early on, often cannot see beyond their own ego-driven agenda to recognize the historical truth.⁴¹ While it may *seem* trivial, small facts which are deeply rooted in American military history, *as well as* unit lineage and heritage were neglected by such slapdash reportage.

One example of poor journalism disputed by soldiers' accounts is found in Embedded: The Media At War In Iraq, wherein *Newsweek* reporter Scott Johnson explains why all friendly vehicles were marked with a "V".

[...] we had marked a horizontal "V" on our vehicles. The "V" was a symbol enabling the military to identify you. If you had a "V" on your car, it meant that the military would see it and say, "Oh, they're friendly so don't shoot them." It was not a press marking. All of the unilateral journalists who went into Iraq had "V"s on their cars. Nobody had "TV." It was *Newsweek* correspondent Rod Norland's idea, actually. (qtd. in Katovsky and Carlson 396)

The truth is that the "V" symbol has great historical significance, far beyond differentiating between friend and foe. The authors of The Eyes of Orion, who served in the 24th Infantry Division, otherwise known as the Victory Division, explain its origin.

[...] all of us, as soldiers of the Victory Division, wore [the "V"] on the side of our helmets. The division had been given its nickname by liberated citizens after Gen. Douglas MacArthur announced the end of the Philippines campaign on 5 July 1945. Thereafter, the Victory Division has marked its vehicles and helmets with the V symbol. In our generation, a soldier of the division saluting a ranking officer greeting the superior with the division motto, "First to Fight, sir," the latter returned the salute with "Victory." (Vernon et al. 22)

What cannot be deemed trivial is how media and history are so closely interrelated when it concerns social, historical, and political perceptions of warfare. As soldier, war correspondent, and official US Army historian, SLA Marshall explains, the battle of Pork

⁴¹ See the many personal comments of journalists in Embedded that tell of their professional ambitions, not moral or social or historical, which served as motivation to cover the recent Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

Chop Hill is a clear demonstration of how the media, social perceptions, and history are interrelated and how the media's failure has led to the present-day military mistrust of the media.

[...] because Operation Little Switch was going on coincidentally at Freedom Village, and every correspondent rushed to that spot as if all life depended upon it, all that happened, all of the heroism and all of the sacrifice, went unreported. So the very fine victory of Pork Chop Hill deserves the description of the Won-Lost Battle. It was won by the troops and lost to sight by the people who had sent them forth. I felt strongly that the ignoring of the fight by the press and the people only made it more important that some day the story should be told. The neglect was worse because in preceding weeks this same division [...] had been lambasted for the loss of Old Baldy and the staging of Operation Smack. They had been described as weary, slipshod, demoralized troops, and, while the Pork Chop Hill fight was on, this caustic criticism from home was repeated over Red Chinese loud-speakers to the American fighters. Then when the moment came that their brave deeds refuted all disparagement of them, there were no witnesses to sing their praises. It was terribly unfair. (Marshall 14-15)

Simultaneously, other authors take a polar opposite approach to Atkinson and Marshall's quest for verifiable historical truth. That is not to suggest that they attempt to deceive, but an outright admission that what they seek is an opportunity to share their stories, to elucidate the reader, to air their consciences, or to afford themselves a cathartic experience. This is just what Philip Caputo did in A Rumor of War, wherein he begins with what is essentially a broad disclaimer.

This book does not pretend to be history. It has nothing to do with politics, power, strategy, influence, national interests, or foreign policy; nor is it an indictment of the great men who led us into Indochina and whose mistakes were paid for with the blood of some quite ordinary men. In a general sense, it is simply a story about war, about the things men do in a war and the things war does to them. More strictly, it is a soldier's account of our longest conflict, the only one we have ever lost, as well as the record of a long and sometimes painful personal experience. (Caputo xiii)

Caputo does not want for A Rumor of War to be interpreted as historical writing because "it was not an abstract issue, but a deeply emotional experience, the most significant thing that had happened to me. It held my thought, senses, and feelings in an

unbreakable embrace” (xvi). As such, there is the fear that what he calls his “attempt to capture something of [the war’s] ambivalent realities” to be wrongly manipulated so as to represent the whole of the Vietnam experience for all who served (Caputo xvii).

I happen to believe that, contrary to Caputo’s view, these forms of historical record have a lot to offer, especially at the point where history and politics overlap one another. Caputo may not want to serve as a historian, but what he provides is simply invaluable. That is because the role of the soldier as historian is a complex one directly related with his relationship to his government. That is to say, the role and function of soldiers is determined by those who send them into conflict in the name of national interests or policy. And here, in the words of the soldier, is where a record of where, when, and how history and politics overlap. Therefore, it is imperative for us to understand, briefly, what helps shape policy and the soldier’s personal relationship to such policy.

Soldiers’ Interaction with History and Political Policy

There is more to non-fictional military literature than an opportunity to glean kernels of tactical knowledge. As one would expect, there exists an ideological strategy governing the methodology by which the American military conducts its warfighting. Such strategies are devised by Command and Staff College students, implemented by Joint Chiefs, enacted by the nation’s Commander in Chief, and authorized by the Congress of the United States. Nevertheless, it is ultimately the rank and file soldier who is sent into harm’s way. And, more often than not, it is these soldiers who, acting on behalf of the executive branch, both experience *and* shape our nation’s history *and* politics. That is because national policy, warfighting doctrine, and the national military strategy are determined where boots meet the ground, where steel meets steel.

Obviously, war has many consequences: social, political, historical, economic, physical, psychological, spiritual and so on; however, it is always the soldier who bears the brunt of its ferocity – precisely why studying his words is so important. As a result of his experiences, political policies, specifically those governing the usage, function, purpose, role, and actions of the military are constantly in flux.

If I seek to accomplish anything beyond exploring history and politics via the soldier's text, it is to highlight this critical point: Too often those political ideologies that create and fuel war miserably fail to account and provide for those soldiers who wage war. This is a historical lesson, one wherein politics and history overlap, and wherein the soldier's testimony serves to illuminate an egregious flaw in the warfighting and congressional policies.

Examples substantiating this accusation are numerous. One is that of veteran and historian, Peter Huchthausen who comments that an after-action review of Lebanon found that interference by senior military officials and DC policy makers contributed greatly to the deaths of 266 marines and the wounding of 151 more. In response, many military leaders called for a policy of noninterference "viewed as a good thing by many in the chain of command who remembered the long and frustrating years of war in Southeast Asia beleaguered by political micromanagement and obstruction at all levels" (Huchthausen 62). But such hopeful changes were extremely slow in coming, and the implementation of policies, which relied upon lessons like those learned with blood in Lebanon, were outright ignored. Huchthausen explains it would not be long before the same scenario played out once again.

The long and painful American involvement in Lebanon, although executed with valor and determination by forces made up mostly of marines, seemed to have been in vain. Worse yet, the same mistakes would be repeated in a civil war in Somalia in 1993. Little was learned from the intervention in Lebanon. (Huchthausen 63)

During the 1982-1984 operation in Lebanon, then Brigadier Gen. Colin Powell and Lt. Colonel Wesley Clark suggested that the destructive idea of military gradualism (a slow build up of forces to a military commitment, such as in Vietnam) be stricken from military doctrine. Clark, drafting a list of suggestions to the incoming Chief of Staff of the Army, asked rhetorically, "Isn't the most important thing to never again commit U.S. troops unless we're going to win? No more gradualism and holding back like in Vietnam, but go in with overwhelming force?" (Clark 7). Such a change, however, was not to become immediately adopted, especially not in NATO. Politics intervened and the words of the soldier were drowned out by the words of politicians, policy advisors, and political scientists. This ideological paradox between history-based politics and soldiering presents a glimpse of the dilemma with which the soldier is often confronted; it also introduces the imbalance of philosophies regarding war.

Though many can, and do, impress the classic Clausewitzian argument regarding the subject -- "War is a continuation of policy by another means [...]"--, for soldiers, the overt act of war is neither ideological, nor political.⁴² And thus we are presented with the basic dilemma of the Clausewitzian position, namely: it is overly simplistic and fatally idealistic.

Soldiers, not politicians nor policy-makers, wage and die in war. On the front lines, where politicians dare not tread, there simply is no debate concerning the righteousness of combat, no driving notion of freedom and liberty, and certainly no idea of "mom and apple pie." As Chris Hedges was reportedly told by a Marine Corps lieutenant colonel, "none of these boys is fighting for home, for the flag, for all that crap the politicians feed the public. They are fighting for each other, just for each other" (38).

While war itself is declared by governmental bodies, more often than not, the soldier is unconcerned with advancing nationalistic ideals. As historian Peter Paret

⁴² This is not to suggest that soldiers are incapable of perceiving the act of war in this manner, but to explain that soldiers concerns *during* war are more immediate. Additionally, warfare for soldiers is more than an overt action, it is also emotional, psychological, physical, spiritual, etc.

explains, warfare is where politics and the military must determine how their roles, when combined, may achieve a desired socio-political outcome.

Clausewitz's recognition of the political character of war reinforces the point expressed in the dual nature of war that war is not an autonomous or isolated act. The defeat of the enemy's armed power and of his will touse it is not an end in itself but a means to achieve political goals. Violence should express the political purpose, and express it in a rational, utilitarian manner; it should not take the place of the political purpose, nor obliterate it.

(qtd. in Mansbach and Rhodes³⁸)

The soldier determines the outcome of violent political actions; inasmuch as, where politicians cannot act with brute force, or coercive violence, the military, the individual soldier, does. What most clearly and most thoroughly distinguishes soldier and politician is his respective purpose, function, ability, and motivation.

While warfare acts politically, more and more in recent history, the military, led by older and more experienced soldiers, has sought an apolitical role. At the same time, younger and less experienced soldiers have begun a personal, philosophical quest to understand their role in waging America's wars. There is then, a change occurring within the military wherein the vital, yet unfixed and vacillating relationship between the military and politicians is subject to scrutiny. It is an investigation that has been a long time in the making, but originates in the multifarious "lessons" our nation cultured by way of Vietnam. It is a relationship where warfighting, politics, and history converge.

An example of this relationship is found where senior military leadership and politicians are required to work alongside one another, especially when developing policy. As Clark explains, the failure of his proposed *non-gradual* policy (not to be confused with what is commonly, and incorrectly, called the *Powell Doctrine*) was based in misinterpretation, itself determined by two separate ways of perceiving the role, function, purpose, and abilities of the military.

Unfortunately, the idea of decisive force never quite made it into NATO thinking. It seemed incompatible with nuclear realities, and perhaps the limitations of the armed forces of our European allies. And, if not well understood, it could seem to be a kind of naïve throwback, to an earlier, simpler era of warfare that saw a relatively clear separation between the political and the military: the fighting started when the talking ended, it seemed, and the talking would resume when the fighting stopped. This was the kind of misinterpretation that American military students and some of their leaders could hang onto, though, because it seemed to reflect our American military traditions—that when the war begins the civilian leadership will turn us loose to win it, applying all the skills and judgment of our many years of accumulated professional military experience. In fact, that was the misinterpretation: the doctrine of decisive force was not incompatible with continued diplomacy, explicit or implicit. On the contrary, decisive force—rather than gradualism—was precisely what was required to make “compellence” a sure success, along with the diplomacy to produce the “way out” for the loser. (Clark 7)

History, then, is intimately involved in the role of the soldier, as is politics. Yet the two parties have professional views which differ; politicians and soldiers understand the world based not only upon their respective professional roles, but also upon the varied objectives which they seek. As a result, the two often have dissimilar perceptions concerning the same history. And while both soldiers and warfare are direct descendants of a many pieced puzzle, it is a puzzle and concept so convoluted that for generations, historians, politicians, and soldiers alike have struggled to comprehend its intricacies. As societies and armies evolve, how they understand history is affected. Clark makes certain the soldier, when reflecting on his craft's history, values its evolution and linkage to politics.

Modern war [...] emerged as a function of history and culture, as a result of NATO, the media, and technology. Local factors, such as the environment or the particular characteristics of the enemy forces, had a significant impact as well. From the Korean War of 1950-53, through the American war in Vietnam, [...] the U.S. 1989 intervention in Panama, and the 1991 Gulf War, and into Kosovo in 1999, the divergence from the World War II model of warfare has grown more pronounced. The evolution hasn't been linear or particularly well understood, even with the armed forces in most Western countries—but it's there. (Clark 3)

Again, the goal herein is not to explicate and dwell upon that evolution, but to explore the role of the soldier as part of that progression. As such, it is important to recognize that a soldier's concept of history and politics varies from one to another, as does his awareness that in times of war he is taking part in, or acting on behalf, of both. The scope of the average soldier's historical and political awareness is rather limited.

For example, during the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War many soldiers did not understand the rationale of Saddam Hussein's attack into Kuwait, both history and politics were unknown. This is significant in that it demonstrates that soldiers are often deployed to wage war without understanding, beyond simplistic or jingoistic terms, *why* they are waging that war. Conversely, this is often a choice they make rather than a knowledge they lack. Rob Holmes, a tank platoon commander, explains that shortly before deploying for Operation Desert Shield/Storm, his platoon sergeant, Sergeant First Class (SFC.) Randy Sikes, had, in his own way, asked about Hussein's rationale and motivation, "What's the story with this guy Hussein?" Holmes explained:

'Our country is politically and economically hamstrung to the most volatile region of the world,' I answered Sikes with a stone face. I knew that wasn't the answer he wanted but couldn't help myself. Sikes didn't care about foreign policy, and he didn't need a pep talk or a sugar-coated situation report. He wanted to give his enemy a name and a face; beyond that, he only needed clear orders so he knew how to prepare the platoon.

He smiled and repeated, 'Okay sir, so what's the story with this guy Hussein?'
(Vernon et al. 11)

That understanding of the situation is determined, in large part, by what role a soldier is to play in warfare. For combat troops, such as tank platoon commander Dave Trybula, understanding the circumstance meant training to encounter and defeat the potential threats; "we had classes on the Iraqi army's weapons systems, organization, and capabilities; and on chemical weapons defensive procedures, Arabic customs, and techniques to cope with the heat" (Vernon et al. 17). As stated early on, other soldiers,

especially the younger and more inexperienced ones, turn to veteran soldiers for an understanding of their role. Again, at this lower level within the military hierarchy, politics and history are not immediate concerns; instead survival and guidance become priorities. As scout platoon leader, Greg Downey traveled to the desert he sat beside an infantry First Sergeant.

I noticed he wore a combat patch from the 173rd Airborne, a unit that had fought in Vietnam. We talked a lot during the flight. I was after any knowledge he could give me. He had been an infantryman his whole career, just over twenty-one years.

“LT, there’s nothing I can tell you that you don’t already know. Every second lieutenant I ever served with always knew the right thing to do. The difference between the ones who lived and the ones died is that the latter went looking for a fight.’

“You were in an infantry platoon in Vietnam. Wasn’t it your job to fight?’

“Yes, sir,’ he replied. ‘But it wasn’t our job to go looking for one. There is a difference.’ I could tell he was finished with that subject. (Vernon et al. 24)

And other soldiers seek their advice and understanding in historical books about warfare. “Greg Jackson, the company executive officer, already had a book, *Brazen Chariots*, on desert tank warfare during WWII—something we all should have been reading” (Vernon et al. 23). Joel Turnipseed, in order to understand his own place in the war, turned to Emerson, Locke, Thoreau, and Wittgenstein. His fellow marines turned to one Vietnam veteran, a soldier named Boomer.

[...] Solter asked Boomer, “What was it like, Vietnam?”

“Boring.” Everyone snickered after Boomer spoke. “No really, I mean it, it was boring. In fact, it’s going to get so boring you won’t feel like doing anything. Not reading, not sleeping, not shitting, jerking off, nothing.”

“War is *boring*?” asked Blegen. “*Nam* was boring?”

“Ninety-nine percent of the time you just sat around, waiting for the shit to hit the fan. Boredom creeps up on you like a sickness. It makes you stupid.” (Turnipseed 41-42)

Often times it is the seriousness of the soldier regarding his profession which determines how he handles this scenario. The more studious and learned will turn to historical accounts for guidance. The military recognizes the value in such reading and

both the army and marines have developed a professional reading list to aid soldiers in their pursuit of knowledge as well as honing their lethal craft.

Military Uses of History

Another point, one which is fairly silent, is the military's implicit recognition that an understanding of history and politics is critical in professional soldiering. While the individual soldier may not have profound situational awareness, (as Hackworth stated, in times of war, such awareness may be limited to no more than what is immediately in front of him) his recognition of the situation's complexity gained via such literature, is absolutely crucial. That is, a soldier who recognizes the important role he plays in the grander scheme is a soldier dedicated to the most vital principle of warfighting: mission success.

Before the Persian Gulf War, farther up in the hierarchy, the view and overall function of history and politics was dramatically different. Instead of looking back upon history to teach them how to operate within a combat zone, or to understand the interplay of history, politics, and modern war, senior military leadership utilized history so as to forecast the validity of potential threats. For instance, within one week of taking command of the Army's 24th Infantry Division, Major General (Maj. Gen.) Barry R. McCaffery held a meeting in the division's war room informing his leaders that "we will probably see within the next 18 months [...] an execution of OPLAN 1002, the Iraqi attack into Saudi Arabia" (Vernon et al. 9). This Department of Defense (DoD) plan had been drafted many years earlier and forecasted the likelihood of such an act, senior leadership throughout DoD were aware of OPLAN 1002. In fact, the Army's Central Command, under the leadership of Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf was pushing for units to

begin training to a high level of proficiency to counteract what they considered a seriously realistic scenario. As it turned out, other than Iraq's primary target, OPLAN 1002 was extremely accurate. The careful study of both history and politics had shaped military doctrine and would now dictate the military's response. As is the case here, soldiers are pushed into war because of political decisions on both sides.

When military actions are intertwined with, or directly related to political motivations, military leadership is often overruled by aspiring politicians and typically for ulterior motives. In such instances, military action simply cannot be avoided. This usurpation of military command authority is especially true if the risks are deemed worthwhile, such as during America's initially humanitarian involvement in Somalia, 1991-1994.⁴³ Here we again witness the soldier subjected to the forces of both history and politics. It was, after all, Cold War political manipulations that created the situation of unrest in the east African nation.

Again, just as in the previous example, soldiers were unsure of much more than their role, first as evacuees of the U.S. embassy, and then later as peacekeepers. Nevertheless, these realities were not deemed relative or pertinent to the mission package. Soldiers, as a whole, were decidedly unconcerned with understanding or interpreting the complex historical and political situation. Regardless of their ignorance, the peacekeeping mission was fraught with dangers and complexities that were time-and-again overlooked or ignored. In essence, the entirety of the Somali situation was

⁴³ "Worthwhile" is a positionally subjective term, and one which the soldiers, especially in the case of Somalia, are simply not empowered to determine. Somalia presents a unique study of this notion, especially since the initial operation, and thus US involvement, was mandated and controlled by the UN. In this instance, the decision to go and the determination of how to fight (in this case, how *not* to fight) was handed over to the UN. The professional soldiers were at the mercy of the UN, which has proven itself inept at waging and winning wars. Many soldiers believe it was our initial UN presence which enabled the SLA to become as strong as it did, therefore resulting in the now historic outcome. Also, many soldiers remain suspicious and bitter towards the US gov't. and its capitulation before, during and after the operation. For

one of political history shaping both modern politics and history. This chaotic situation led to the use of the military, which drastically affected both history and politics. In the middle of all of this was the soldier.

Military History: Somalia as a Case Study

The reason for America's initially idealistic humanitarian involvement is grounded in history, wherein "the Gulf War's success had instilled in Americans the confidence that they could indeed make a difference in cases of massive human suffering, even in Somalia, where no government, no state, and no order existed" (Huchthausen 167). Again, the decision to deploy was made primarily due to political reasons, motivated by the U.N., which outright ignored the historical facts, not to mention the aforementioned present-day realities of total anarchy. *Washington Post Magazine* writer Vernon Loeb reported that "the U.S. military was going into Somalia knowing nothing about Somalia" (qtd. in Steed 156). The end result, as Huchthausen stated earlier concerning lessons learned in Lebanon, was an abysmal and catastrophic failure that shaped both the politics and history of the American government, people, and soldier. Although there are numerous reasons for the operation's failure, much of it can be attributed to the government's refusal to heed political and historical lessons.

At primary fault is that policy makers shifted Operation Restore Hope's focus from its original objective, largely in part due to political pressure from the United Nations. President George H.W. Bush promised that the mission would not be open-ended, adding that Americans would "not stay one day longer than absolutely necessary" (Huchthausen 171). The original strategy "failed because the forces

committed were woefully insufficient,” and in the end, the Americans withdrew because the ferocity of the fighting and the severity of American casualties caused “a less-than-determined U.S. leadership [to] quit the effort” (Huchthausen 162-63).

Colonel Martin Stanton, who helped lead Task Force 2-87 (two-eight-seven) Infantry of the Army's 10th Mountain Division during the early phases of Operation Restore Hope, recalls that the country was chaotic and uncivilized, and that his unit was under-strength, overwhelmed, and being improperly employed. “Imagine a bunch of Japanese businessmen trying to settle a gang dispute in South Central Los Angeles and you will begin to understand what it was like” (Stanton ix). As two factions of Somalis waged a street war, Stanton and his men were caught in the middle and witnessing acts of torture and cruelty which they simply could not fathom. The Somalis were “bludgeoning, stabbing, and stoning one another to death with reckless abandon” and trying to disarm the assailants was “like trying to disarm the National Rifle Association” (Stanton viii). Stanton's insight offers validation of Gen. Clark's earlier lament over the mismanagement of military operations by politicians.

Another cause of mission failure was the shift in mission, from humanitarian to one of shaping international policing by way of military force. An overview of the Somalia operation reveals that the plan was segmented into distinct phases. This failure to maintain or even accomplish Phase One's goal is a catalyst that ultimately cost the lives of many good soldiers. However, their fates were also determined by politicians who made critical decisions about men fighting in faraway places without the experience or authority to make such decisions. What I speak of here is the decision by then President William J. Clinton and Secretary of Defense, Les Aspin to deny soldiers in Somalia the armor and infantry fighting vehicles they had repeatedly requested. The decision was purely political, Pres. Clinton had decided that he did not want to convey

the appearance of military escalation; yet, he did want the soldiers to carry out the missions he was approving, including the capture of Somali warlords.

Here in Stanton's words we witness several factors highly relevant to our discussion. First, it was policy and history which created the Somali situation. Soldiers were sent into harm's way to, as a fellow veteran described it, "un-fuck the goat, which the U.S. government had impregnated with a terrific social disease." Second, it demonstrates the abysmal failure of politicians to understand the proper usage of the modern military, to include its limitations and weaknesses, an argument that Clark and Powell addressed ten years earlier, 1983. Third, it delineates the soldier's relationship with both history and politics: he is influenced by history and politics, and ultimately, an influencer of history and politics. This final factor will become clearer as we progress through the Somali situation and witness its fallout.

Recognize also the significance of Stanton's critical histo-political evaluation, wherein he asserts that the significance of the operation will be dismissed from memory not because it was deemed a failure, but instead because of the nature of that failure.

Not a heroic-battle-against-the-odds failure, such as Bataan in World War II, nor a spectacular nation-rending failure, such as Vietnam. No, Somalia was a squalid and puzzling little failure. We went there to save the starving and left sixteen months later with our weapons facing out as the last helicopter took off and the last Marine amtrac left the beach. Then we had to go back a year later after that to ensure that all the allies we'd left behind got out too. Such events do not produce epic poetry.

Somalia was important, however. It was the first intervention of the "new world order." Had it succeeded, the history of many other parts of the world might have been different. Why it didn't succeed is worth studying. Though the operation was a failure, the army and the services in Somalia performed magnificently. The tactics, techniques, and procedures applied in Somalia became the cornerstone for the army's doctrine in operations other than war (OOTW). The soldiers, sailors, Marines, and airmen did all that was asked of them. *More's the pity the policymakers were not asking the right things.*⁴⁴ (Stanton xi-xii)

Stanton provides us with an excellent example of the soldier acting as historian. Not simply a military historian, but one who records the scenes that shaped military, political, and social history, as well as their respective social and political policies. The outcome of Somalia, especially the details after the events chronicled in Bowden's Black Hawk Down, are vital in understanding our current day relationship with the United Nations, the creation of policy concerning peacekeeping missions, increased congressional involvement with military operations, the American citizen's voice in shaping policy, and many soldiers and/or veteran's deep-seeded feelings of animosity, disgust and mistrust for his own government.

For those who can perceive history and politics holistically, the Somalia operation is reminiscent of another military campaign yielding similar consequences: The Korean War. It was again Cold War political policy that drew American forces into the Korean War, and it is because of history that more than 38,000 troops remain there today. As Clark explains, the stationing of U.S. troops in South Korea for the past fifty years is a political symbol meant to leave "no doubt in the minds of potential adversaries" as to our nation's resolve to protect democracy (Clark 12). This parallels history as to *how* and *why* America entered into Somalia. In addition, the Korean War also echoes the same rhetoric as a cause for our actions. However, such socio-political idealism is all-too-often left wanting for political, media, and social support.

Soldiers fighting the spread of communism in Korea found that they were waging an unpopular war with one hand tied behind their back. In his memoir, With a Black Platoon in Combat: A Year in Korea, Lyle Rishell explains that newspapers were questioning the ability of American troops. In particular they focused their attention on the army as it was deployed straight from occupation duty in Japan. Rishell recalls that:

⁴⁴ Italics added for emphasis.

There was a lot of adverse criticism about the fighting ability of the American soldier. Some articles portrayed us as being “soft,” stating that the occupation army was “weak and flabby,” that “citizen soldiers” don’t possess the willingness to fight. (Even today, the same refrain can be read.) This was total nonsense. (Rishell 45)

Rishell’s 1993 assertion proves correct, as today’s conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq find the media questioning the large reserve troop call up, as well as the ability of the military to sustain such large and varied operations. Similar claims and questions were leveled during the 1990-91 Persian Gulf War. Rishell goes on to explain that the reality was that he and his fellow soldiers were not incapable, only young recruits who were heretofore, untested. Additionally, newspapers ignored a more threatening menace to the American soldiers, the out-and-out lack of both social and political support for the war. In a scene that has repeated itself time-and-again, congress made financial decisions that adversely affected the troops, and the troops paid the price with both their lives and their honor. Those newspapers, Rishell explains, failed to report the situation in its entirety.

What the news articles failed to mention or report was the fact that an austerity program had been imposed by the U.S. Congress on the Department of Defense, the net effect of which was a reduction in equipment and supplies for the Far East Command. The U.S. forces in Japan got a lot less than was needed. (Rishell 46)

The hardships faced by soldiers because of the congressional cutbacks were numerous, severe, and by today’s standards, almost unimaginable. Soldiers who were outnumbered eight-to-one were ordered to stand and fight, yet those same soldiers lacked weapons, clothing, ammunition, food, showers and reinforcements for months on end, often while enduring a horrifically cold Korean winter.

There were times when we had little to eat and no change of clothing for months on end, when we had neither ponchos or blankets or were short on ammunition and water and slaked our thirst in insect-infested rice paddies. I remember when a gallon can of corned-beef hash and another of peaches were the only food the platoon had all day, and other days

when we had nothing at all. Coupled with our advances and our withdrawals was our sense of frustration at having to give up ground. We gained a quick lesson in humility as the hordes came against us. (Rishell 46)

In both Korea and Somalia, the decisions made in the name of national finances or political image wound up causing American soldiers to suffer. Here the historical and political linkage between Korea, Lebanon, and Somalia are not only tangible, but also visceral. In reaction to such leadership failures, Mike Durant, a pilot and former Prisoner of War during Operation Restore Hope, emphasizes a quote by Gen. Colin Powell (ret.), “‘The Commander in the field is always right and the rear echelon is always wrong, unless proven otherwise.’ In other words, if you are going to overrule decisions or requests from the field, you damn well better have done your homework” (Durant 358).

As soldiers point out, those unheeded lessons occur time and time again. Staff Sergeant Dan Welch wrote home from the Persian Gulf War explaining that he had witnessed, “not a personal feeling of horror, but more of an overall picture of horror. And I think it’s taken so long [to realize the horror] because with only the small number of exceptions on our part, it was almost entirely [the Iraqis]” (Carroll 461). Welch, and many more like him (to include Gen. Schwarzkopf), felt that the coalition had not completed the job. Soldiers, understanding military history, knew that Saddam Hussein remained a viable threat. At the conclusion of his written thoughts, Welch makes an ominous and, we now know, terribly accurate declaration.

I think we’ve made a mistake and not finished this the way it should have been ended. There is now a weakness in my heart for the people of Iraq. I’m still trying to explain what has gone on here.

It may appear to most of us over here and to you back home that we’ve done our jobs, but we’ve screwed up and didn’t finish it. He’s still alive, and unless somehow the rebels finish what we’ve started, we may be back.

(Carroll 462)

And Welch was not alone in this gloomy premonition. Greg Downey reveals that while US forces manned the demilitarized outside Basara, he questioned the logic of not pressing onward into Baghdad.

[I] had begun to question whether we should have stopped the attack when we did. I wondered if we were leaving unfinished business. I did not want to return to Iraq to fight another day, nor would I want any other American soldier refighting [sic] the war we had just won. I kept my thoughts to myself.⁴⁵

(Vernon et al. 255)

Policy flaws hampering military effectiveness, like those addressed by Korea, Lebanon, Grenada, Somalia, and Haiti do eventually materialize. For instance, Clark and Powell's plea for an end to gradualism was eventually realized, its significance was witnessed during Operation Iraqi Freedom, a la the so-called *Shock and Awe* campaign. Other lessons, be they social, historical or political, have yet to blossom with the fruition of change. Sadly, this is not a new phenomenon; however, it is a phenomenon which each time offers us the opportunity for improvement. We should embrace such opportunities and recognize the value of those who sacrifice all in order to secure such chances. Individually and as a nation, we must recognize what President Roosevelt did in his 1910 speech, "Citizenship in a Republic" given at the *Sorbonne* in Paris, France.

It is not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; whose face is marred by the dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs and comes short again and again; who knows the great enthusiasms, the great devotions and spends himself in a worthy course; who at the best, knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who, at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly; so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory or defeat. (Theodore Roosevelt)

⁴⁵ It is a question that, speaking from personal experience, I have heard soldiers pose innumerable times. Without exception, the Desert Storm veterans with whom I served insisted that someday we would return to Iraq.

Roosevelt's famous words can be interpreted in numerous fashions; however, given the context of this chapter the proposed meaning should be clear. While the relationship between history, politics and the military is fairly obvious, the lessons have not been applied. What is needed is an earnest investigation of how we can understand the three issues and their relationship to additional outliers, such as the development and execution of national policy, historical and/or political causality of actions, as well as the legitimacy and justification of military campaigns.

Above all else, it is who this insightful ability is provided that is of utmost importance. My call is for the empowerment of a) the soldier to tell his story so as to provide the audience with an in-depth record of events, filling in the void of public knowledge as it relates to history, politics and the military. And b) the public, in order to elucidate them concerning the entirety of their national history and identity. Though I have only touched briefly upon the possibilities, an astute reader can envision the literature's potential.

For instance, the idea of Korea and the Cold War alone presents us with an overwhelming amount of possibilities: the military and political endeavors of the Soviet Union, China and North Korea, the birth and trial under fire of the UN, McCarthyism and the Red Scare, Marxism, Communism and Democracy, the social historical and political implications of the Cold War upon the West's economy, international relations, policy making, and the list goes on.

ARE WE PATIENT ENOUGH TO UNDERSTAND?

As I have demonstrated, there is much we can learn from non-fictional military literature. But, as with all potential sources of knowledge, we must be discriminating. As many soldiers have explained herein, the fictionalized romance and sensationalized horror of military life, warfare in general and soldiers in particular leaves consumers with a view that is rather askew. I have tried to illustrate that such corruption is not limited to the Hollywood or best-seller list portrayals of the subject, soldiers and veterans themselves are equally capable of supplying us with fiction. Furthermore, soldiers are often drawn in to the military because of this and often contribute to the perpetuation of the dilemma in spite of their own experience.

As such, and I hope that I have made this abundantly clear, the soldier's words are not necessarily *better* than those of non-veterans, but rather, they do provide us with an insight those who lack experience in the realm cannot provide. It does so by, oftentimes inadvertently and rather implicitly, investigating our nation's complex social, historical, and political events from a heretofore unappreciated vantage point. Nevertheless, its significance cannot be understood, save for a reader willing to appreciate, or at least explore its multifarious potentials. What I aimed to provide in the preceding chapters were numerous ideas and examples of how this literature may serve our society, as well as our nation's social consciousness. And while the soldier's writing does not tell the entire story, integrity demands that we allow such works their proper role in teaching the American story.

A holistic view of the relationship of that potential representing its entirety comes from Anthony Swofford's memoir, Jarhead. Therein, during a post-Persian Gulf War road trip, the author finds himself embroiled in an argument with two female German

tourists. The women believe that modern American soldiers cannot comprehend what war is, a premise based solely upon the relative short duration of Operation Desert Shield/Storm. Swofford explains that the “importance of a war is never decided within years and certainly not within months, but rather in decades, or even centuries” (Swofford 114). This recognition of war’s place in history and its affect on society and politics helps explain the soldier’s role, as well as the importance of the soldier’s literature. It is recognition that the soldier is the point of contact, the lens offering an understanding of so many different aspects of human life. It also demonstrates the functionality of the soldier as historian, because decades or generations from now, a major element that will determine the importance of a war will be the soldier’s words. Much to the disagreement of the two Germans; “The value of every war,” Swofford argues, “is negligible” (Swofford 114). War’s value, be it social, historical or political, is not to be found in the war memorial erected, dedicated, and standing long after the enemy is dead, long after the war has concluded. Instead, Swofford demanded, “that large and complex emotional mess called national victory holds no sway for the warrior. It is necessary to remind civilians of this fact, to make them hear the voice of the warrior” (Swofford 114). The question that lingers is this: Are those who have not faced the horrors of combat, have not been the instrument of politicians, have not been both the pawn and king of history, patient enough to understand such a lesson? To hear such voices? And, most importantly, are they capable of comprehending their significance?

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