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*Review Essay*  
Military Histories Old and New: A Reintroduction

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MILITARY HISTORY TODAY IS IN THE SAME CURIOUS POSITION it has been in for decades: extremely popular with the American public at large, and relatively marginalized within professional academic circles. Its public profile continues to expand apace, and it has a particularly imposing media presence, whether it be on television in the form of the History Channel, or on the screen in a steady diet of war-themed movies such as Clint Eastwood's pair of 2006 releases, *Flags of Our Fathers* and *Letters from Iwo Jima*, or the Thermopylae epic *300*. While military history dominates the airwaves, however, its academic footprint continues to shrink, and it has largely vanished from the curriculum of many of our elite universities. It has been this way for a long time, and frankly, there seems little chance that things will change any time soon. No military historian should be pleased with the situation. At the same time, there seems little point in obsessing about it. It helps no one and does nothing to advance understanding on either side of the academic divide.

Luckily, most scholarly military historians seem to agree, and have little interest in spending a career pondering the academic equivalent of "Why do they hate us?" Instead, they do what they have always done. Whether in or out of season, military historians continue to pursue a research agenda that in its breadth and sophistication takes a back seat to no other area of historical inquiry. In recent years, moreover, this research has taken the field into areas that should have a great deal of appeal to broader segments of the profession.

The truth is that scholarly military history has developed over the past few decades into the very epitome of the big tent. At the very least, three major groupings dwell within. There are the "war and society" scholars, still often referred to as the "new military history." They seek the nexus between armies and the societies that spawn them, but are not particularly interested in warfighting as such. There are the traditional operational historians, who remain unabashed in their attempt to analyze the hows and whys of actual warfare, strategy, and battle. The best of them do so in a fashion that goes well beyond the traditional "drum and trumpet" or "good general-bad general" approach. Finally, a more recent cadre of scholars seeks to

This essay is dedicated to the men and women of the Society for Military History, whose scholarship has been a major stimulus to my own thinking, and whose unceasing dedication to their craft has produced so much excellent work. The Society's recent annual meeting in Frederick, Maryland (April 2007), offered both an abundance of intellectual riches and a warm, collegial atmosphere. It is an honor to be a member. I would also like to thank the editors of the *AHR* for inviting me to submit this article, and for working with me so closely in its editing and production.

apply the newest trends in historical inquiry—especially the history of memory and culture—to the study of military affairs in their broadest sense. As in all big tents, there is a certain amount of jostling between the occupants, and in fact getting each of them to recognize the legitimacy of the others is a full-time job.

It has been a generation now since the “new military history” rode into town, promising to save military history from itself by moving the field beyond narrow battlefield analysis in order to concentrate on the interface between war and society.<sup>1</sup> The social composition of armies and officer corps, civil-military relations, the impact of war on race, class, and gender (and vice versa)—these were the questions that excited this school, and still do. In fact, it often stood accused of being interested in everything about armies except the way they fought, interested in everything about war except campaigns and battles. Once controversial, and still the occasional subject of grumbling from a traditionalist old guard, the new military history is today an integral, even dominant, part of the parent field from which it emerged. It has been around so long, in fact, and has established itself so firmly, that it seems silly to keep calling it “new.”

Take, for example, *Crucible of War* (2000), Fred Anderson’s monumental account of the Seven Years’ War and its impact on the British colonies in North America. It is a military history, to be sure, and yet it is far more than a book about war and battle. It is utterly comprehensive, interweaving complex land and naval actions taking place on three widely separated continents, a close reading of the political situation in Europe and the Americas, and a meticulous re-creation of the *mentalités*, not to mention the peculiarities, of European, American, and native societies. Along the way, it offers insight not only into the French and Indian War, but also into the origins of the American Revolution (even as it promises to detach the former conflict from the latter). The immense level of detail included in its 746 pages, which might be off-putting in the hands of a lesser scholar, allows Anderson to highlight the role that misunderstanding and contingency played in all of these momentous events, from George Washington’s real bewilderment at his Indian allies’ slaughter of defenseless French prisoners at “Jumonville’s Glen” to the British government’s equal puzzlement at the fact that neither imposing the Stamp Act nor repealing it seemed to change the tense situation in the colonies. The problem was much more deeply rooted than “taxation without representation” and was virtually impervious to military force. Lexington might have featured “the shot heard ’round the world,” but Anderson describes it in different terms: “With April 19, however, began to dawn the kind of horrified realization that may come to a couple who, after years of bitter arguments and lengthening angry silences, suddenly find themselves hurling crockery at each other across a kitchen battlefield.”<sup>2</sup> Needless to say, Anderson can write, and *Crucible of War* is a rare achievement: a book that is as compelling to the elusive

<sup>1</sup> See the definition of the new military history given by Peter Paret in an address to the Society of Military History on March 23, 1991: “an expansion of the subject of military history from specifics of military organization and action to their widest implications, and also a broadening of the approaches to the subject, [and] of the methodological approaches.” Quoted in John Whiteclay Chambers II, “The New Military History: Myth and Reality,” *Journal of Military History* 55, no. 3 (1991): 397.

<sup>2</sup> Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years’ War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754–1766* (New York, 2000), xxi.

“ordinary reader” as it is stimulating to the scholar. In its deft integration of war and society, it is also the new military history at its best.

Or take the historiography of the American Civil War. Once the exclusive province of battles and leaders—and indeed, of *Battles and Leaders*<sup>3</sup>—it has undergone a transformation in the past few decades. Historians of race,<sup>4</sup> of gender,<sup>5</sup> and of civilian life in the conquered and occupied South<sup>6</sup> have moved discussion of the war well beyond the battlefield controversies that once held sway. In fact, for most present-day scholars, the Civil War has become something more than a mere military conflict. They now generally portray it as a revolution that overthrew the social order of the Old South. In this radical upheaval, groups who were previously thought to have done little more than passively endure the ordeal of war now get credit for a more active role. Southern women left their domestic sphere and often led resistance to the occupiers. Southern slaves boldly threw off the hated system that had held them in bondage and seized land from their former masters. They took their place for the first time as free and equal citizens—unfortunately, for an all too brief span.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Underwood Johnson and Clarence Clough Buel, eds., *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* (New York, 1887–1888). Based on reminiscences from officers on both sides in the war’s major battles, it has been widely reprinted, often in facsimile form, and is still today the primary source of choice for scholars, buffs, and re-enactors alike.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the body of literature on black soldiers in the war. Although Dudley T. Cornish’s groundbreaking *The Sable Arm: Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1861–1865* (New York, 1966) found few immediate successors, things began to change in the 1990s. Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (New York, 1990), was the first to revisit Cornish’s theme, and others joined in: Noah Andre Trudeau, *Like Men of War: Black Troops in the Civil War, 1862–1865* (Boston, 1998); Versalle F. Washington, *Eagles on Their Butts: A Black Infantry Regiment in the Civil War* (Columbia, Mo., 1999). The trickle may be turning into a flood: Keith P. Wilson, *Campfires of Freedom: The Camp Life of Black Soldiers during the Civil War* (Kent, Ohio, 2002), an analysis of camp life as a locus for “intra-military reconstruction”; the collection of essays edited by John David Smith, *Black Soldiers in Blue: African American Troops in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2002); and Martin W. Ofele’s cross-cultural account, *German-Speaking Officers in the U.S. Colored Troops, 1863–1867* (Gainesville, Fla., 2004).

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, George C. Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana, Ill., 1989); Elizabeth D. Leonard, *Yankee Women: Gender Battles in the Civil War* (New York, 1994); and Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1996). Gilpin Faust’s work, in particular, was a challenge to accepted myths of the South at war. She identified the articulate women of the high planter class as having played a key role in the eventual Confederate surrender. They did not simply tend the hearth while the men were away; they adopted new roles, undertook new tasks, and won new autonomy. The dissonance between prewar strictures of patriarchy and wartime realities would eventually instill in them an anger against the war that had turned their lives upside down. Urging their men to stay home or desert or surrender may be seen, therefore, as a gendered act of self-assertion.

<sup>6</sup> Mark Grimsley has been the key scholar here. His seminal *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy toward Southern Civilians, 1861–1865* (New York, 1995) was a challenge to the traditional narrative of Northern brutality. It traced the evolution of Northern policy as it moved from conciliation of Southern civilians to pragmatism and finally to what Grimsley calls “hard war.” Often portrayed as something new, it is in Grimsley’s formulation something very, very old, harking back at least to the *chevauchée*, or mounted raiding expedition, of the Hundred Years’ War. Not the indiscriminate plunder portrayed in film and novel, it was a tightly directed, almost surgical form of violence. The damage inflicted by Sherman’s march to the sea, Grimsley writes, “turns out to be much exaggerated” (199). For a comparative analysis that challenges Grimsley on some points, see Steven V. Ash’s *When the Yankees Came: Conflict and Chaos in the Occupied South, 1861–1865* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1995). Grimsley has also edited two volumes of essays: one with Brooks D. Simpson, *The Collapse of the Confederacy* (Lincoln, Neb., 2001), which includes Jean V. Berlin’s response to Faust’s *Mother’s of Invention*, “Did Confederate Women Lose the War? Deprivation, Destruction, and Despair on the Home Front” (168–193); and another with Clifford J. Rogers, *Civilians in the Path of War* (Lincoln, Neb., 2002), a useful volume that draws cross-cultural and cross-temporal connections between civilians caught up in conflict from ancient times to the present.

The new military history is far from a spent force, and it continues to generate works that inform and challenge. Two entries of note are Donald R. Shaffer's *After the Glory: The Struggles of Black Civil War Veterans* (2004) and Steven J. Ramold's *Slaves, Sailors, and Citizens: African Americans in the Union Navy* (2002). The two offer very different trajectories of race within the U.S. military, with the navy coming out looking quite a bit better than the army. A comparative reading of both books cannot help but suggest that the white power structure in America has been more comfortable with putting a black man on board a faraway ship than it has been with handing him a rifle.<sup>7</sup>

Shaffer's *After the Glory* is a sophisticated and well-researched work, grounded firmly in the pension files of two study groups: first, a random but healthy sampling of Civil War veterans—1,044 soldiers, to be precise; second, a group of another 204 veterans “who engaged in notable activities in the postwar period.” It excels not only as military and social history, but also as gender analysis. Shaffer argues that black soldiers fought for more than a vague concept of liberty. They were after something concrete: manhood. “They fought for freedom,” Shaffer argues, “and the occasion to actualize that freedom by gaining for black men the same opportunities, rights, and status enjoyed by white men.”<sup>8</sup> He carefully traces this gendered struggle in six areas: life patterns (especially the position and reputation of veterans within the black community); political involvement; family and marriage (the topic of the work's most interesting chapter, analyzing the complexity of marriage patterns among the veterans, with the new system of legalized matrimony existing alongside the “old constitution,” the informal system of marriage from slave days); social welfare (a crucial area encompassing the veterans' battle with the federal government for their pensions); comradeship with other veterans, both black and white; and the realm of historical memory. The last topic is crucial. As Shaffer describes it, black soldiers not only had to fight to get into the war, they then had to fight to get into the history of the war, as late-nineteenth-century scholarship (embodied in the works of Thomas P. Kettell, John William Draper, and Theodore Ayrault Dodge) did its best to read them out of it.

One might quibble with the insistent focus on “manhood” in this book; there are numerous spots where the term “equal rights” might have served just as well. But what strikes even the non-specialist on the Civil War about Shaffer's work is the degree to which the problems persist. One of the main demands of African American veterans, for example, was the right to join the principal national veterans' organization, the Grand Army of the Republic. Even as the national GAR followed a color-blind policy, however, a majority of veterans in both North and South belonged to segregated posts, and most GAR activities took place at the local level. Laws and legal status might change, in other words, but patterns of systemic discrimination and power inequities endured.

Ramold's *Slaves, Sailors, and Citizens*, by contrast, offers a more positive example of racial integration within the military. Enlisting by the thousands, black sailors

<sup>7</sup> Donald R. Shaffer, *After the Glory: The Struggles of Black Civil War Veterans* (Lawrence, Kans., 2004); Steven J. Ramold, *Slaves, Sailors, and Citizens: African Americans in the Union Navy* (DeKalb, Ill., 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Shaffer, *After the Glory*, 203, 1.

played a material role in the Union Navy during the war, and Ramold's careful survey of the records shows that the process ran far more smoothly than one might expect. "While African American soldiers endured segregation and abuse from the army," he notes, "black sailors enjoyed a wide range of freedoms." These included equal pay, living accommodations, and benefits. Postwar pensions, an issue that Shaffer's book identifies as a particularly sore spot for black army veterans, were accorded to former sailors in equal measure without regard to race. Military justice, embodied in "a relatively egalitarian and humanitarian system," functioned without egregious racial discrimination, and in fact black defendants accounted for 13.5 percent of the courts-martial in the course of the war, a figure roughly commensurate with their numbers in the navy. All in all, Ramold's verdict that the Civil War navy "conducted a unique experiment in social equality" seems justified.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, the emergence of segregation in both North and South led to a much harsher climate after 1865, and to a gradual reduction in the number of African Americans in the navy. In this sense, the analyses of Ramold and Shaffer, contrary though they may seem, end on a parallel note.

The transformation in the historiography of World War II has been just as complete. "Greatest generation" literature continues to flood the popular market, as do battle books of every size and description, but alongside them is a body of far more interesting work with an increasingly diverse choice of subject matter. Works on the issue of race within the U.S. military,<sup>10</sup> the role of women both in battle<sup>11</sup> and at home,<sup>12</sup> and previously unexplored areas of civilian life in general<sup>13</sup> continue to emerge. So too do works on a heretofore ignored group: prisoners of war. No less than four major works on the topic appeared in 2005, along with the first paperback edition of Chester Hearn's *Sorties into Hell*, a powerful work dealing with the truly

<sup>9</sup> Ramold, *Slaves, Sailors, and Citizens*, 182, 138, 182.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Alice Kaplan, *The Interpreter* (New York, 2005), and Jack Hamann, *On American Soil: Murder, the Military, and How Justice Became a Casualty of World War II* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2005). Popular works on black American soldiers are flooding the market as well, for the first time opening up space within the "greatest generation" to African Americans. See, for example, Christopher Paul Moore, *Fighting for America: Black Soldiers—The Unsung Heroes of World War II* (New York, 2005), as well as two books dealing with the same unit: Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Anthony Walton, *Brothers in Arms: The Epic Story of the 761st Tank Battalion, WWII's Forgotten Heroes* (New York, 2004), and Charles W. Sasser, *Patton's Panthers: The African-American 761st Tank Battalion in World War II* (New York, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Reina Pennington, *Wings, Women, and War: Soviet Airwomen in World War II Combat* (Lawrence, Kans., 2002), a book that should forever lay to rest the supposed unfitness of women for modern combat. Pennington has also edited an essential reference work, *Amazons to Fighter Pilots: A Biographical Dictionary of Military Women* (Westport, Conn., 2003).

<sup>12</sup> A notable recent contribution is Emily Yellin's *Our Mother's War* (New York, 2004). Yellin takes us through a number of different iterations of women's experience in World War II: wives and mothers waiting anxiously at home; entertainers both obscure (Denver disc jockey Jean Ruth) and famous (Carol Lombard); WAVEs and WACVs, SPARs and WASPs. Of particular note are the chapters on African American women ("Jane Crow") and right-wing and antisemitic women's groups such as "We, the Mothers, Mobilize for America."

<sup>13</sup> For a challenge to propagandistic notions of internal solidarity during the war, see Donald Thomas, *The Enemy Within: Hucksters, Racketeers, Deserters and Civilians during the Second World War* (New York, 2003), dealing with Britain. Stephen G. Fritz, *Endkampf: Soldiers, Civilians, and the Death of the Third Reich* (Lexington, Ky., 2004), analyzes the period after the war but before the full restoration of "peace." Specifically, it narrates the American drive into Franconia, the collapse of Nazi society that it precipitated, the huge number of wandering "displaced persons" on the roads, and the change in U.S. attitude as American officials moved from encouraging anti-German acts of violence by former concentration camp inmates to insisting on the maintenance of law and order.



unspeakable fate that befell American prisoners held on the Japanese island-prison of Chichi Jima. If social history really aims to tell the tales of those who have been silent, then these books are the real thing: a true military history of the powerless.<sup>14</sup>

Another scholarly revision in our view of World War II is the increasing tendency to remove the Holocaust from the margins and place it in a position of centrality within the European conflict. In fact, historians working on Nazi racial policy have more or less erased the distinction between the military conflict and the Holocaust. One result is that they have shattered beyond repair the once-clean image of the German Wehrmacht, which supposedly stood in stark contrast to the atrocity-prone SS and death camp personnel. German historians such as Manfred Messerschmidt have been hacking away at this notion of the army's clean hands for years now.<sup>15</sup> In 1995, the issue boiled over into a very public controversy within Germany as a result of the "Crimes of the Wehrmacht" (*Verbrechen der Wehrmacht*) traveling exhibit—the German equivalent of the *Enola Gay* controversy in the United States. In this country, the work of Omer Bartov has had the same effect, with its twin themes of the "barbarization" and "demodernization" of warfare, a transformation attendant upon the Nazi struggle for *Lebensraum* and racial cleansing in the East. Bartov showed us a Wehrmacht that was far more ideologically committed, far more deeply imbued with Nazi racial ideology, than had previously been thought, and this was as true of the ordinary *Landser* in the field as it was of the high command.<sup>16</sup>

One recent indictment is Alexander B. Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology, and Atrocity* (2003). While it is common to argue that the Holocaust proper began after the start of Operation Barbarossa in 1941, Rossino focuses on the "ideological dimensions" of the Polish campaign of 1939. It was "Operation Tannenberg," the murder campaign against the Polish intelligentsia, clergy, nobility, and officer corps, he argues, that established the horrible norms both for the German war of annihilation in the Soviet Union and for the racial war against the Jews. The Polish campaign, therefore, was a "transitional conflict" between the limited violence against civilians of World War I and "the unlimited, almost nihilistic violence of the Wehrmacht" in World War II. "The invasion of Poland," he concludes, "thus occupies a crucial place in the history of Nazi Germany's descent into mass murder and genocide."<sup>17</sup>

Edward B. Westermann, in *Hitler's Police Battalions: Enforcing Racial War in the*

<sup>14</sup> Flint Whitlock, *Given Up for Dead: American GI's in the Nazi Concentration Camp at Berga* (New York, 2005); John A. Glusman, *Conduct under Fire: Four American Doctors and Their Fight for Life as Prisoners of the Japanese, 1941–1945* (New York, 2005); Brian MacArthur, *Surviving the Sword: Prisoners of the Japanese in the Far East, 1942–45* (New York, 2005); Roger Cohen, *Soldiers and Slaves: American POWs Trapped by the Nazis' Final Gamble* (New York, 2005); and Chester Hearn, *Sorties into Hell: The Hidden War on Chichi Jima* (Guilford, Conn., 2005).

<sup>15</sup> Messerschmidt's original blast against the Wehrmacht leadership was *Die Wehrmacht im NS-Staat: Zeit der Indoktrination* (Hamburg, 1969). For an up-to-date report on the state of the question, see Wolfram Wette, *The Wehrmacht: History, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge, Mass., 2006), a translation of the original German work, *Die Wehrmacht: Feindbilder, Vernichtungskrieg, Legenden* (Frankfurt, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Omer Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941–45: German Troops and the Barbarisation of Warfare* (New York, 1986); Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York, 1991). See also the magisterial one-volume history of World War II by Gerhard L. Weinberg, who accuses the Wehrmacht of "willing, even enthusiastic, participation" in the horrors being perpetrated in the East: *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*, new ed. (Cambridge, 2005), 300.

<sup>17</sup> Alexander B. Rossino, *Hitler Strikes Poland: Blitzkrieg, Ideology, and Atrocity* (Lawrence, Kans., 2003), xiv, xv.

*East* (2005), expands upon the research of Christopher Browning and Daniel Jonah Goldhagen.<sup>18</sup> Their well-known—and diametrically opposed—works concentrated on the wartime activity of a single German police battalion in occupied Poland. Westermann's is the first study of the entire phenomenon of German police units, formations that murdered their way across Eastern Europe, killing a hundred here, five hundred there, in a strategy of "cumulative annihilation." He argues that the training of these units had to instill a dual identity. First, the men had to acquire the "soldierly virtues": physical fitness, discipline, obedience to the chain of command. Beyond that, however, came a process of "instilling the SS ethic": the identification of one's honor depended on loyalty to the regime, a grounding in National Socialist ideology, and a belief in the simultaneous struggle against the Jews and against Bolshevism. In the course of "suppressing a hostile population," they had to be ready for a multitude of unpleasant tasks. They had to be prepared "to carry out executions, to transport people away, to take away howling and crying women," in Heinrich Himmler's own words. As Westermann shows, the "men in the green uniform" doggedly did their "duty," and more.<sup>19</sup>

A third book to till similar conceptual ground is Geoffrey P. Megargee's *War of Annihilation: Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front, 1941* (2005).<sup>20</sup> It offers the most explicit connections yet between German military operations in the field and Nazi racial policy. Megargee's award-winning *Inside Hitler's High Command* (2000) was a warts-and-all view of Germany's vaunted General Staff that showed it to be politically naïve, self-serving and careerist, and very often simply inept.<sup>21</sup> *War of Annihilation* moves beyond that earlier work into an analysis of the morality, the ethics, and, ultimately, the criminality of the German military effort in the East. The "military campaign and the policies of exploitation and murder" went hand in hand, Megargee argues.<sup>22</sup> The same political leadership conceived both campaigns, the same staff officers provided the operational planning, and the same soldiers did the actual murderous deeds. The atrocities did not evolve over time or arise in response to frustration as victory eluded the Germans (two explanations often put forth in previous literature). The Germans entered the Soviet Union murdering civilians, and they kept on murdering them. It was as true of the high-water mark of the campaign in August 1941, when Wehrmacht formations were sweeping all before them, as it was of the eventual repulse in front of Moscow in December. Megargee is especially hard on U.S. military planners of the Cold War era who felt that they had something important to learn from the Germans, some secret about how to "fight the Russians." It was an era, after all, in which every memoir penned by a German general automatically became a bestseller, and something resembling holy writ to NATO officers. As *War of Annihilation* demonstrates on every page, no one should ever want to learn what the Wehrmacht had to teach.

<sup>18</sup> Edward B. Westermann, *Hitler's Police Battalions: Enforcing Racial War in the East* (Lawrence, Kans., 2005); Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York, 1992); Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York, 1996).

<sup>19</sup> Westermann, *Hitler's Police Battalions*, 238–239, 77, 103.

<sup>20</sup> Geoffrey P. Megargee, *War of Annihilation: Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front, 1941* (Lanham, Md., 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Geoffrey P. Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command* (Lawrence, Kans., 2000), xiv.

<sup>22</sup> Megargee, *War of Annihilation*, xiv.

Our survey has thus far tended to focus on developments in the modern period, and for a simple reason: modern historians were relative latecomers to the new military history. Until fairly recently, historians of the medieval and early modern periods were much more in touch with the symbiosis between war and society. Medieval historians, for example, have been arguing for more than a century about the precise relationship between military developments—the rise of cavalry, especially—and the origins of feudalism. The nineteenth-century German historian Heinrich Brunner was the first to ground feudalism in the changeover from infantry to cavalry, as majordomo Charles Martel organized a horse army in reaction to the Muslim invasions of the Frankish kingdom. In 1962, Lynn White, Jr., published *Medieval Technology and Social Change*, challenging Brunner's thesis. It was not the need to meet the mounted Muslim invaders on an equal footing, White argued, but the introduction of the stirrup from Asia into the Frankish kingdom that led to the switch from foot to mounted soldiery, and thus gave birth to the feudal age.<sup>23</sup> White's thesis became a new orthodoxy, enshrined in generations of Western civilization textbooks, and still makes an appearance from time to time. It also gave rise to numerous challengers and debunkers, with Bernard S. Bachrach taking pride of place. In a long series of publications, Bachrach not only attacked White on the details, but cast doubt on the very notion of a new dominance of cavalry in the era.<sup>24</sup>

Although both the Brunner and White theses may be seen today as discredited metanarratives, refuting them forced medievalists to move beyond battle descriptions into a much more complex discussion of the interrelationship between war, politics, and society. The distinguished publication lists of John France, the leading expert on the military history of the Crusades, and Kelly DeVries, a prolific historian of late medieval warfare and technology, display remarkable similarities in bringing the broadest possible view to bear on their subjects. Both take a great deal of care to investigate questions of why wars were fought, why they ended, and what the participants expected to achieve by them. At the same time, neither shrinks from a great deal of close analysis of operations and battle, weapons and tactics. DeVries, especially, never fails to cast a skeptical eye on over-reaching claims for rapid and revolutionary technological change; his absolute rejection of any form of technological determinism is perhaps his scholarly signature.<sup>25</sup>

We might accord the same sort of praise to historians of the early modern period, who for decades have been churning out some of the most vibrant military history of all. At issue here has been the "military revolution," a term that first appeared in a lecture by Michael Roberts, published in 1956 as *The Military Revolution, 1560–1660*. Roberts posited a dramatic discontinuity in the history of warfare in that period, as the old reliance on feudal levies and cavalry gave way to professionally trained, uniformed infantry forces equipped with gunpowder weapons. Geoffrey

<sup>23</sup> Lynn White, Jr., *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (New York, 1962).

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, Bernard S. Bachrach, *Merovingian Military Organization, 481–751* (Minneapolis, Minn., 1972); and Bachrach, *Early Carolingian Warfare: Prelude to Empire* (Philadelphia, 2001).

<sup>25</sup> See for example, John France, *Victory in the East: A Military History of the First Crusade* (Cambridge, 1994); France, *Western Warfare in the Age of the Crusades, 1000–1300* (London, 1999); and France, *The Crusades and the Expansion of Catholic Christendom, 1000–1714* (London, 2005). For Kelly DeVries, see *Medieval Military Technology* (Peterborough, Ont., 1992) and *Guns and Men in Medieval Europe, 1200–1500: Studies in Military History and Technology* (Aldershot, 2002).



Parker's article "The Military Revolution, 1550–1660: A Myth?" (1976) was both a critique of Roberts and a broadening of the argument away from Sweden (Roberts's main interest) toward a Europe-wide interpretation.<sup>26</sup> In particular, Parker saw the rise of a new type of fortress, the so-called *trace italienne*, its expense, and the huge number of soldiers required to man it as being crucial to explaining why armies grew so rapidly in the period. The military revolution thus became a crucial ingredient in European state formation, the expansion of royal power, and the creation of absolute monarchy. It also set the stage for the European conquest of the globe, a development whose consequences still endure. Later, John A. Lynn would further sharpen the debate by using the French army as a rigorous test case for both Roberts's and Parker's arguments.<sup>27</sup>

The concept of the military revolution continues to evolve, as scholars push the envelope of periodization and geography. Where Roberts located the military revolution in the Thirty Years' War and Parker pushed it back into the late sixteenth century, Jeremy Black located the key developments in the period from 1680 to 1720, with the adoption of the socket bayonet and the introduction of the flintlock musket. What is at stake here is more fundamental than a technical argument over weaponry. If the military revolution happened this late, then it was triggered by absolute monarchy, and not the other way around. Black locates it so late, in fact, that a recent scholar has seen him as the spearhead of a "military evolution" school. In contrast to Black, there are those who argue for a much earlier start, with both Clifford Rogers and Andrew Ayton placing the date as early as the Hundred Years' War.<sup>28</sup>

There have been similar arguments over whether to limit the concept to Europe. Weston F. Cook, Jr., has reminded us that the West had a monopoly on neither the technology of firearms nor the will to use them. Kaushik Roy rejects the concept of "revolution" in favor of "military synthesis" for developments in India. A 1999 study by Rhoads Murphey analyzes military change and continuity in the Ottoman world, while a recent collection of essays edited by Black offers a comparative perspective on developments in sixteenth-century Japan (from the Onin War to Sekigahara), China under the early Qing Dynasty, the kingdoms of West Africa, and the native societies of North America.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Michael Roberts, *The Military Revolution, 1560–1660: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered before the Queen's University of Belfast* (Belfast, 1956); Geoffrey Parker, "The Military Revolution, 1550–1660: A Myth?" *Journal of Modern History* 48, no. 2 (1976): 195–214, as well as his later book *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and Rise of the West, 1500–1800* (Cambridge, 1988).

<sup>27</sup> See John A. Lynn, "The *trace italienne* and the Growth of Armies: The French Case," *Journal of Military History* 55, no. 3 (1991): 297–330, as well as "Recalculating French Army Growth during the Grand Siècle, 1610–1715," *French Historical Studies* 18, no. 4 (1994): 881–906. One cannot find a better guide to the debate than Clifford J. Rogers, ed., *The Military Revolution Debate: Readings on the Military Transformation of Early Modern Europe* (Boulder, Colo., 1995), which contains reprints of the seminal articles by Roberts, Parker, and Lynn, and much more.

<sup>28</sup> See Jeremy Black, *A Military Revolution? Military Change and European Society, 1550–1800* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1991), as well as Black, *European Warfare, 1660–1815* (New Haven, Conn., 1994); Kaushik Roy, "Military Synthesis in South Asia: Armies, Warfare, and Indian Society, c. 1740–1849," *Journal of Military History* 69, no. 3 (2005): 654; Clifford J. Rogers, "The Military Revolutions of the Hundred Years' War," *Journal of Military History* 57, no. 2 (1993): 241–278; and Andrew Ayton, *Knights and Warhorses: Military Service and the English Aristocracy under Edward III* (New York, 1994).

<sup>29</sup> Weston F. Cook, Jr., *The Hundred Years' War for Morocco: Gunpowder and the Military Revolution in the Early Modern Muslim World* (Boulder, Colo., 1994); Roy, "Military Synthesis in South Asia";

THE DEBATE OVER THE MILITARY REVOLUTION, containing as it does elements of social and political history, the history of technology, and a detailed rendering of war and battle, can serve as a transition to our second historiographical school. Alongside the new military history, there exists a far older, yet still vital tradition of operational military history. This is the province of war, of campaign, and of battle. Once the almost exclusive preserve of “drums and trumpets,” packed with stirring tales of glory and shame, bravery and cowardice, it benefits today from a much more sophisticated conceptual framework that includes questions of culture (both military and civic), sociology, and group psychology. Once dominated by personalist modes of analysis that consisted almost exclusively of blaming General X for zigging when he should have zagged, or turning left when he should have turned right, it is now much more likely to emphasize systemic factors: the uncertainty of the battlefield (often metaphorized, per Carl Maria von Clausewitz, as the “fog of war”), the ever-present problems of information-gathering and -sharing, and the inherently asymmetric nature of war. As historians in all fields seem increasingly willing to recognize the role of contingency, chance, and even “chaos” in historical development, operational military historians find themselves in the unusual position of being well ahead of the scholarly curve: they have been talking about all of these things for years.

The exemplar for this tradition is Dennis E. Showalter. For decades, he has been writing operational histories that combine the broadest possible scholarly perspective with enough military detail to satisfy even the purist. His 1976 book *Railroads and Rifles: Soldiers, Technology, and the Unification of Germany* appeared at a high point of the disparagement of battle history, and it reminded us of the importance of studying the “primary function” of armies, which was, after all, to fight.<sup>30</sup> It made a powerful argument that hardware, doctrine, and military planning were not simply issues for the buff, but had played a key role in German unification. These were the same themes that he had already explored in his 1975 article “A Modest Plea for Drums and Trumpets.” Prussian victories in the wars with Austria and France were not the inevitable result of differing sociopolitical structures. Deficiencies in the French army, for example, “could have been alleviated without making drastic changes in governments, societies, or, indeed, the armies themselves.”<sup>31</sup> Both of Showalter’s early works inspired many younger scholars to see operational history as a going concern rather than as a museum piece, encouragement that they were not often getting in their graduate programs.

He has not let up since. *Tannenberg: Clash of Empires* first appeared in 1991, and has since been reprinted, and both *The Wars of Frederick the Great* (1996) and *The Wars of German Unification* (2004) are indispensable. As Showalter proves again and again in these works, no other author is so adept at contextualizing war and battle, and no one takes so much care to give the matrix equal time with the event. He is a particularly sophisticated military sociologist, with a fine eye for the relationship

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Rhoads Murphey, *Ottoman Warfare, 1500–1700* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1999); Jeremy Black, *War in the Early Modern World, 1450–1815* (Boulder, Colo., 1999).

<sup>30</sup> Dennis E. Showalter, *Railroads and Rifles: Soldiers, Technology, and the Unification of Germany* (Hamden, Conn., 1976).

<sup>31</sup> Dennis E. Showalter, “A Modest Plea for Drums and Trumpets,” *Military Affairs* 39, no. 2 (1975): 72.

of armies to the societies that spawn them, and the complicated mix of factors that turns some forces into sharks and others into their bait.<sup>32</sup>

His treatment of the signal Prussian triumph at Rossbach (*The Wars of Frederick the Great*) can be seen as typical. Here the king faced a coalition force bearing the impossibly tangled designation “Combined Imperial Reichs-Execution and French Army.” It was an adversary that for 250 years has been mocked by historians as a polyglot rabble barely worthy of notice, and in fact they did not notice it: they were too busy obsessing on Frederick’s “genius” or the military virtues of the army he commanded. Showalter, by contrast, spends a great deal of scholarly energy in *The Wars of Frederick the Great* teasing out the strands of Allied motivation—or lack of it—at Rossbach. French officers saw themselves, rightly or wrongly, as caught in an uncomfortable vise: under siege by the increasingly anti-militarist tone of their own society’s *bien-pensant* intellectuals and by the growing inability or unwillingness of the central government to pay its bills. French manpower had *élan*, to be sure, but also included many who felt that their lives had been changed for the worse “by the single misfortune of drawing a ‘mauvais numéro’” in the selection process, and who were too poor to buy a substitute. The Imperial Army, for its part, represented small-state Germany—lands without military traditions, places that good soldierly material tended to abandon at first opportunity in favor of serving in the French (or Prussian) service. It had no organized recruiting system, no real staff, poor supply and administrative services, and little money for an organized logistics net. It lacked a nervous system, in other words, and it had to stay on the move or risk disintegrating altogether, one of the reasons for its erratic performance in the pre-battle contest of maneuver so typical of the eighteenth century. Showalter’s point is not to exonerate the commanders. Rather, it is to remember that they do not command on a parade ground or in a vacuum. Their choices are always limited, and the fact that the individuals involved may be only partly conscious of those limits complicates matters further.<sup>33</sup>

In *The Wars of German Unification*, Showalter likewise looks at the nineteenth-century background in a way that previous historians of these conflicts did not. The context is almost entirely free of personalism, with little on Bismarck’s or Moltke’s “cunning” or Napoleon III’s “bungling”; nor does it spend a great deal of time discussing long-term economic developments such as the Zollverein, whose influence has been much exaggerated by previous scholarship. Instead, Showalter delves into something more fundamental: the issue of military reform in the states of the German Confederation. A key moment, he argues, was the post-1848 revision of the Bund’s military constitution, which required the larger states to accept officers and officer candidates from their smaller neighbors into their military academies:

More and more of the small states of Thuringia and north Germany took advantage of this opportunity to expose at least some of their best and brightest to a Prussian system of officer development, which was held in much higher regard than its Austrian or Bavarian counter-

<sup>32</sup> Dennis E. Showalter, *Tannenberg: Clash of Empires* (Washington, D.C., 2004); Showalter, *The Wars of Frederick the Great* (London, 1996); Showalter, *The Wars of German Unification* (London, 2004).

<sup>33</sup> Showalter, *The Wars of Frederick the Great*, 177–192.

parts. States like Braunschweig, Oldenburg and the Mecklenburg duchies adopted Prussian organizations and Prussian manuals for their regiment- and battalion-sized contingents.<sup>34</sup>

Indeed, military integration of North Germany preceded Prussia's successful wars, playing the kind of role that historians have usually assigned to the Zollverein. In short, Showalter portrays the small and middle states as fundamental to the process of national unification. This is true not only in the expected political sense, but in a military one as well. The participation of these armies on the side of Berlin—the North German states in 1866 and Bavaria, Württemberg, and Baden in 1870—may well have provided a margin of safety, if not of victory, in these so-called “Prussian” wars.

Another scholar in Showalter's league is Reed Browning, a historian of eighteenth-century warfare. His *The War of the Austrian Succession* (1993) is the essential English-language work on this crucial conflict, which featured two failed attempts by Austrian empress Maria Theresa to re-conquer the lost province of Silesia from the Prussians, set the stage for the “diplomatic revolution” of the 1750s, and laid the groundwork for the Seven Years' War to follow.<sup>35</sup> Browning is an expert on the political and diplomatic background of the conflict, to be sure, and he writes thoughtfully on the linkages between politics, society, and war. He also departs sufficiently from the template of the new military history to stress the importance of strategic, operational, and even tactical detail. Indeed, Browning has recently noted that “some historians of the era of the Silesian Wars are conflating the new and the old military history into what we might style a complete-picture military history.” It is, he adds, a “useful merging of perspectives,” one that is interested both in sociological questions (for example, the relationship between armies and modernization, the effect of soldiering on the family) and in more traditional battlefield-oriented questions, such as why it was Prussia, and not much larger and wealthier Austria, that won these wars. For Browning, Frederick the Great's status as *roi-connétable*—both absolute monarch and field commander—was a key advantage, one “that allowed Frederick to contrive the victories at Hohenfriedberg, Rossbach, and Leuthen, and to recover from the disappointment at Zorndorf and the disaster at Kunersdorf.”<sup>36</sup>

Operational history remains a vital part not only of military history, but of history at large. It would be strange indeed if a scholarly field with such broad interests did not make room for analysis of war and battle—surely not the least significant of human undertakings. Moreover, the sustained popularity of military literature places a certain demand on the entire historical profession. Millions of people continue to read these books, and someone is going to be writing them. The profession needs to ask itself, wouldn't it be preferable if that “someone” were a scholar of Showalter's or Browning's stature, or one of the dozens of other fine operational scholars currently active, such as Megargee, Geoffrey Wawro, Adrian R. Lewis, or Michael V. Leggiere, rather than your friendly neighborhood re-enactor or war buff?<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Showalter, *The Wars of German Unification*, 49.

<sup>35</sup> Reed Browning, *The War of the Austrian Succession* (New York, 1993).

<sup>36</sup> Reed Browning, “New Views on the Silesian Wars,” *Journal of Military History* 69, no. 2 (2005): 522, 523, 533.

<sup>37</sup> Next to Showalter, no one currently writes better operational history than Geoffrey Wawro. His works on the wars of German unification—*The Austro-Prussian War: Austria's War with Prussia and Italy in 1866* (Cambridge, 1996) and *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870–1871*

THUS FAR, THE DISCUSSION HAS BEEN of “new” and “old” military history. Of late, however, a new, third school has broken the duopoly. Perhaps the most important development in historical research over the past decade is the new emphasis on culture, especially the history of memory. Here, too, military history has not been unaffected. It would be an exaggeration to say that most military historians are conversant with the theoretical works of Maurice Halbwachs or Pierre Nora. The notion that historical “truth” is a matter of shifting sands, however, that it is often refracted by present-day concerns, and that it can be mobilized by powerful political and social elites has become part of the military historical landscape. So too is the notion that the manner in which we choose to memorialize certain historical events—and to “forget” others—is a highly significant indicator of contemporary values.

While this is not a completely new development in military history (Paul Fussell, for example, published *The Great War and Modern Memory* in 1975), it was not until the 1990s that we might say a school developed.<sup>38</sup> Two notable contributions are Carol Reardon’s *Pickett’s Charge in History and Memory* (1997) and Jill Lepore’s *The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the Origins of American Identity* (1998).<sup>39</sup> The latter resurrects an all but forgotten conflict, in the sense not of an operational narrative (indeed, “battles” were pretty thin on the ground in this war, and operations are almost absent from the book), but rather of its role in constructing an American identity among the white colonists, one that was distinct from their European roots. Today, wars are largely memorialized visually: in photographs, film, and video footage. In a time and place in which even woodcuts were rare, it was the written word that had to suffice, and Lepore’s book thus concentrates on the literature generated by the war. It is at once “a study of war, and of how people write about it,” and an analysis of the relationship between “wounds and words.” The words, in the end, mattered a great deal more than the brief war that generated them. Parsed by the

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(Cambridge, 2003)—as well as his survey *Warfare and Society in Europe, 1792–1914* (London, 2000) all exhibit the same qualities: exhaustive research in multiple languages and multinational archives, a cynical eye toward received versions of the event, and some of the best writing in the profession. He is also adept at incorporating modern trends in military scholarship, especially the post-Vietnam “Clausewitz revival” that took place in U.S. military circles. Elements such as fog, friction, and the tension between personal behavior and systemic constraints all figure prominently here, as does the role of contingency. Adrian R. Lewis, *Omaha Beach: A Flawed Victory* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 2001), is the best single volume written on this campaign. It is exhaustively researched and highly critical of the flawed U.S. planning process that resulted in a near-catastrophe for the troops on the beach. More recently, Lewis has taken up larger, more systemic questions with *The American Culture of War: The History of U.S. Military Force from World War II to Operation Iraqi Freedom* (New York, 2006), a work that traces the painful transformation of a military culture that was built originally on the concept of equality of sacrifice, but that now tries to fight wars that are as divorced from the day-to-day lives of Americans as possible. Another worthy operational historian is Michael V. Leggiere. His *Napoleon and Berlin: The Franco-Prussian War in North Germany* (Norman, Okla., 2002) is a brilliant work by a scholar who is as well versed in the general political and social historiography of his field as he is within his military specialty. See also Krisztián Ungváry, *The Siege of Budapest: 100 Days in World War II* (New Haven, Conn., 2005), for an operational history that places campaign and battle squarely within their political and social matrix. Carol Reardon’s most recent work, *Launch the Intruders: A Naval Attack Squadron in the Vietnam War, 1972* (Lawrence, Kans., 2005), is a complex combination of new and traditional forms of military history: part battle narrative; part social history of a single naval air squadron in the latter years of the Vietnam War, when a fully coalesced antiwar movement had finally begun to have an impact on the mentalities of soldiers abroad; and part history of memory.

<sup>38</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York, 1975).

<sup>39</sup> Carol Reardon, *Pickett’s Charge in History and Memory* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1997); Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip’s War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York, 1998).



colonists as a conflict between “civilization” and Indian “savagery,” but one that saw them carry out more than their fair share of the latter, King Philip’s War continues, even today, to inform the way Americans view the world.

Reardon’s book takes as its backdrop perhaps the most famous battlefield in all of American history: Gettysburg, on that crucial third day. At issue here is the question of how the nation constructed a memory of that day, and how that memory was transformed over time. What might well have been described as a heroic defensive stand by troops of the Union Army’s II Corps morphed over time—a very short time, actually—into something different: a grand but doomed charge by the division of General George Pickett, a *geste* that eventually became an exemplar of Southron heroism. This Southern reading of the event soon came to be accepted by former foes from the North. Calling the final encounter at Gettysburg “Pickett’s Charge” not only removed the Union Army from the scene, it also erased thousands of Confederate soldiers, turning an assault by a major portion of Lee’s army, including an entire division of North Carolinians under General James Pettigrew, into an all-Virginia affair.

In the course of her historical survey, Reardon guides the reader through Gettysburg narratives by sources as diverse as Douglas Southall Freeman, Pickett’s wife Sallie, and the increasingly distorted presentation in generations of U.S. history textbooks. She also parses fictional accounts from William Faulkner’s *Intruder in the Dust* to Michael Shaara’s still very popular *Killer Angels*, the account that is perhaps most influential with present-day Americans and that was the principal source for the film *Gettysburg*. The closing of the book—the reunion of Gettysburg veterans on the battle site in 1913, the fiftieth anniversary of the battle—is a tour de force, replete with historical ironies galore and moments when the reader can only react with a shake of the head. Exhibit A: Veterans from Pickett’s division attended the reunion wearing silk “badges” of identification. Emblazoned on them was the seal of Virginia with the state motto, “Sic semper tyrannis,” words forever linked with another bloody moment in American history.

Emily S. Rosenberg’s *A Date Which Will Live: Pearl Harbor in American Memory* (2003) offers a similar analysis of this seminal “day of infamy.”<sup>40</sup> Rosenberg refuses to privilege scholarly over popular accounts. Like Halbwachs, she sees the former as producing “history,” while the latter generate “memory,” and the two interact rather than oppose. Her book is rife with insight not only into matters as diverse as the controversy over the role of Admiral Husband Kimmel and General Walter Short—the military men on the scene who bore the brunt of the public’s outrage and saw their careers ruined—but also into the ways in which the administration of George W. Bush used Pearl Harbor as a metaphor for 9/11 and for the war on terror itself. They are all here, however: serious academic historians standing cheek to jowl with films such as *Tora! Tora! Tora!* (1970) and the wretched *Pearl Harbor* (2002), along with those irreconcilables on the political right who still insist that President Franklin Roosevelt knew about the whole thing in advance—one of the most durable conspiracy theories in U.S. historical memory. Her discussion of the tripartite matrix that nourishes historical memory (familiarity, the promoting role of “memory ac-

<sup>40</sup> Emily S. Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live: Pearl Harbor in American Memory* (Durham, N.C., 2003).

tivists,” and the importance of intertextual repetition and circulation among print, film, and commemorative sources) is sophisticated and nuanced, and her claim for the inseparability of American memory and mass media is indisputable.

Perhaps most interesting to a military historian is her explanation for why “back-door” conspiracy theories keep coming back, despite the army of respectable historians who feel they have demolished them. “In America,” she writes, “conspiracy theories supporting a distrust of the central government have been popular at least as far back as the revolutionary movement’s campaign against King George III.”<sup>41</sup> Seeing Pearl Harbor as a conspiracy is a means of expressing distrust with Washington. It fans flames on the right (and with some on the extreme left, as well), and it in turn burns brightest when the central government is viewed with the most cynicism. It is no surprise that the ambiguous reading of FDR’s role in *Tora! Tora! Tora!* was a hit with Vietnam-era audiences, who by then were well used to a certain level of duplicity on the part of the government.

Standing alongside these histories of memory, and intertwined with them, has been a growing recognition of the determining role of culture in military affairs. Once again, it is not a completely new phenomenon. John Keegan’s *The Face of Battle* (1976) and *Six Armies in Normandy* (1982) might be seen as its progenitors; Omer Bartov’s work on the German army in World War II and John Dower’s analysis of the U.S. war with Japan as its first flowering; and John Shy’s 1993 article “The Cultural Approach to the History of War” as its official recognition within the field.<sup>42</sup> As we have seen with the emphasis on memory, however, what was once the work of a few leading lights has now become much more widespread. In 2001, for example, noted classicist Victor Davis Hanson published *Carnage and Culture: Landmark Battles in the Rise of Western Power*.<sup>43</sup> Hanson here attempts a bold intellectual stroke, seeking a monocausal explanation for Western dominance of the globe. In one sense, his book appears to be the oldest page in the military history playbook: the list of great battles. In reality, however, it is something new. Hanson is not interested in the tactical or operational details of this or that battle. Instead, he is seeking to locate all of them—from Xenophon and the 10,000 blasting their way out of Persia in 401 B.C.E. to the U.S. Marines blasting their way into Hue in 1968—within a specific cultural tradition. To Hanson, it is a unique kind of “civic militarism,” a pattern emerging out of democracy and free market capitalism, that has rendered the West unbeatable in its conflicts with the rest of the world. He argues, moreover, that it has usually been manifested in a preference for close-order infantry shock combat that is simply absent from other cultures. “The peculiar way Greeks killed,” he argues, “grew out of consensual government, equality among the middling classes, civilian audit of military affairs, and politics apart from religion, freedom and in-

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>42</sup> John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York, 1976); Keegan, *Six Armies in Normandy* (New York, 1982); Bartov, *The Eastern Front, 1941–45*; John W. Dower, *War without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York, 1986); John Shy, “The Cultural Approach to the History of War,” *Journal of Military History* 57, no. 5 (1993): 13–26.

<sup>43</sup> For the research that made Hanson a respected scholar of classical warfare, see *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece* (Berkeley, Calif., 1989), as well as his most recent work, *A War Like No Other: How the Athenians and Spartans Fought the Peloponnesian War* (New York, 2005). The book discussed here is *Carnage and Culture: Landmark Battles in the Rise of Western Power* (New York, 2001).

dividualism, and rationalism.”<sup>44</sup> These traditions endured during the Roman Republic and Empire, survived the fall of Rome, and live on in the Western world today. The rise of the West over the centuries, therefore, was not the product of luck, or of technology, or of command genius. It was instead the result of a process of cultural predetermination.

There is nothing easier than picking apart the details of a broad synthetic argument, and Hanson’s book seems destined to generate a cottage industry all its own. There certainly is a great deal to question here. In what ways was Alexander’s triumph at Gaugamela a victory for a democratic polity? Alexander was a monarch, and a brutal one at that. If democracy really lies at the root of military success, shouldn’t the Greek city-states have won at Chaeronea (338 B.C.E.)? Why should we regard Rome as more “Western” than Carthage? Whose “capitalist” or mercantile tradition—something that Hanson identifies as crucial to military success—was really more vigorous?

Some of the book’s problems are more foundational, however—especially the political ax-grinding taking place just beneath the surface.<sup>45</sup> Hanson seems worried not about the West so much as about America, about a general public “mostly unaware of their culture’s own singular and continuous lethality in arms,” about a land that has perhaps gone soft, “an America of suburban, video-playing Nicoles, Ashleys and Jasons.”<sup>46</sup> He is also most at home in the classical period, and as the centuries and eventually millennia march by in this book, the arguments become more and more *einseitig*, the conclusions more and more far-fetched. The chapter on Vietnam is perhaps the weakest in the book. Here Hanson sings a by now very tired song of blame. He blames the media—with journalists Peter Arnett and David Halberstam taking the heaviest fire—for misreporting what they saw and sympathizing with the enemy. He blames the academy for transforming antiwar protest into “a multimillion-dollar industry” of grants, sabbaticals, and fellowships. He blames civilians who visited North Vietnam during the war. He blames the civilian government for rules of engagement that hampered the men in the field at every turn. He also blames the military—not so much for losing a guerrilla war, but for fighting one in the first place. Discussing the U.S. command’s obsession with the body count, he complains that

American generals never fully grasped, or never successfully transmitted to the political leadership in Washington, that simple lesson: that the number of enemy killed meant little in and of itself if the land of South Vietnam was not secured and held and the antagonist North Vietnam not invaded, humiliated, or rendered impotent . . . It was as if thousands of graduates from America’s top military academies had not a clue about their own lethal heritage of the Western way of war.<sup>47</sup>

Indeed: to invade North Vietnam, or “humiliate” it, or render it impotent. So simple! Who knew?

<sup>44</sup> Hanson, *Carnage and Culture*, 4.

<sup>45</sup> One recent reviewer has gone so far as to say that there are “two Victor Hansons, both prolific.” One is a “distinguished classicist and military historian”; the other is “the hard-right political pundit widely known in print and internet publications.” James P. Holoka, review of Hanson’s *A War Like No Other*, *Michigan War Studies Review*, May 1, 2006, <http://www.michiganwarstudiesreview.com/2006/20060501.asp> (accessed April 30, 2007).

<sup>46</sup> Hanson, *Carnage and Culture*, 5, 351.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 407.

One can go on and on in this vein, but in fact Hanson's work deserves a more systematic critique. Or should we say "deserved"? John A. Lynn's *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture* (2003) is a direct and explicit retort to Hanson. Lynn spends little time picking on the sort of details enumerated above, concentrating rather on the fundamentals of the argument. To Lynn, Hanson's work is faulty in its very essence, since it presupposes the existence of a "universal soldier" (and indeed, Lynn's preface begins with a lyrical selection from Buffy Sainte-Marie's 1963 song of the same name), a warrior who is unchanging from age to age and from place to place, who fights for the same reasons and who views himself in the same way, an "eternal, faceless killer." Lynn questions the existence of this construct in order to adopt a "cultural approach to the study of war and combat." In so doing, he argues, "we better appreciate the variety and change that have typified military institutions, thought, and practice over the ages."<sup>48</sup>

For the most part, he succeeds. *Battle* consists of eight stand-alone chapters, each of which relates the warfare of a particular era to its own unique cultural discourse (defined as "the complex of assumptions, perceptions, expectations, and values" that the particular society holds about war and warriors). The discourse does not remain the same over time. In fact, that is the whole point of the book, and for Hanson to argue for a consistent "Western way of war" over three thousand years, to claim that what motivated an Athenian hoplite is essentially the same as what motivated a U.S. airman in the Battle of Midway, is simplistic and misguided. For some periods, Lynn argues, the discourse called for a bold clash of sword and pike; for others—the early modern period, for example (where he is most at home as a scholar)—it called for a "culture of forbearance," of maintaining order and discipline while absorbing the enemy's best shot or volley. There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the problem of battle.<sup>49</sup>

Lynn's relationship to the "new cultural history" is ambiguous. He has long been in the forefront of those who argue that military history must open itself to new and fresh approaches sweeping the broader profession. His very use of the term "discourse" is a sign of that, and not a few military historians have found it unsettling. Yet he also keeps a certain distance: "This book attempts to apply the basic concerns of the new cultural history without being guilty of its excesses," he writes. These include "elaborate theories borrowed from anthropology, and literary studies . . . , specialized vocabulary, and references" that "tend to make such histories inaccessible to all but the cognoscenti." In addition, he rejects any approaches grounded in overwrought or opaque theory, such as those that discount the possibility of historical "truth": "[E]xtreme proponents of cultural history might dispute the very existence of reality, since all is perception to them. In the realm of military history, such airy discussions tend to become foolish. Thousands of dead and wounded as a result of battle is the kind of hard fact that defies intellectual games."<sup>50</sup> Indeed, it would be hard to tour the battlefields of Gettysburg or the Somme or the Bulge—all sites of fierce fighting, horrendous bloodletting, and the mangled remains of human bodies—and come away with a sense that one had just visited a "construct."

<sup>48</sup> John A. Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture* (Boulder, Colo., 2003), xiv.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, xx–xxi, 128–129.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, xx.

This is entirely in keeping with Lynn's views as he has expressed them since his 1997 article "The Embattled Future of Academic Military History."<sup>51</sup> He argued then that military history was in crisis within the academy, that trends in historical scholarship (interest in race, class, gender, and the new cultural history) were moving away from research into war, and that "the flow of historical fashion is very much against us and promises to remain so for the foreseeable future." His solution was for military historians to embrace elements of both gender studies (particularly "comparative masculinities") and the new cultural history. He was not really a convert or a true believer, however. He gave his advice in a spirit of *Realpolitik*: young scholars in military history who were adept in these fields, or who could point to a dissertation that had embraced them in some way, would be better placed to compete on the contemporary job market.

*Battle*, therefore, plays a dual role. It offers a promising new cultural approach to the study of war, but it also demonstrates the limits to which most military historians feel they can go without breaking faith with their subject. The truth is, as deeply as they probe the culture of war, they will still want to ground themselves in the event itself, as opposed to its later interpretation, its memory, or its instrumentalization. It is highly unlikely, therefore, that they will ever be completely comfortable with Nora's redefinition of history as being "less interested in events themselves than in the construction of events over time," or with focusing exclusively on the constructed cultural icon.<sup>52</sup>

Other works show a similar interest in cultural approaches, within the same sort of limits as Lynn's. Both Kenneth Chase's *Firearms: A Global History to 1700* (2003) and Kenneth M. Pollack's *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness, 1948–1991* (2002), for example, are meticulously researched scholarly inquiries into questions that have defied easy answers. Both authors ground their answers in discussions of culture, broadly conceived. Neither, however, indulges in the complex theoretical language typical of the new cultural history.<sup>53</sup>

Chase, for example, asks why, of all the world's cultural groupings, it was the Europeans who perfected firearms. His answer is a complex one, based on inter-related questions of technology and geography. The inhabited quarter of the globe in 1700 (the "Oikumene") consisted essentially of four regions: Europe, the Middle East, India, and East Asia. Virtually all of the world's firearms were produced there. In the last three regions, however, the principal military problem over the ages was defense against mounted nomads, and infantry armed with early firearms were useless for that purpose. Muskets also generated logistical demands that made campaigning in the dry steppe or desert nearly impossible. Thus, for China or India to have undertaken the sort of long-term development of fire weapons attempted in Europe would have been senseless. It might have been useful a century or two in the future, but the Mongols were a problem that had to be dealt with in the now. Chase's analysis invites response and challenge—that is the nature of any broad synthesis.

<sup>51</sup> John A. Lynn, "The Embattled Future of Academic Military History," *Journal of Military History* 61, no. 4 (1997): 777–789.

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live*, 189.

<sup>53</sup> Kenneth Chase, *Firearms: A Global History to 1700* (Cambridge, 2003); Kenneth M. Pollack, *Arabs at War: Military Effectiveness, 1948–1991* (Lincoln, Neb., 2002).



The research base here is a particularly strong one, however; Chase has consulted sources in Chinese, Japanese, and Persian, as well as the various European tongues.

Pollack's task is to find the roots of the poor battlefield performance of virtually every Arab army since 1948. His is a timely book that has already garnered a great deal of attention from policymakers and scholars alike, and in fact his analysis of the 1973 Arab-Israeli War forms the heart of Lynn's chapter on the Egyptian army's crossing of the Suez Canal. In subjecting the battlefield failures of the armies of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Syria to a detailed analysis, Pollack discounts certain explanations almost immediately. "Cowardice," for example. Say what you will about those Syrian tank divisions lumbering toward the Israeli positions on Golan in 1973: Clumsy, inflexible, and over-reliant on unsuitable Soviet doctrine they may have been. Cowards they certainly were not. They came on gamely, and ultimately went down in a hail of Israeli tank fire. It was the kind of action, in other words, that "cowards" would have avoided altogether.

Ultimately, Pollack settles on four areas: tactical leadership, information management, maintenance, and weapons handling. These were the "consistent and crippling problems."<sup>54</sup> It is a depressing story in many ways, dealing as it does with repeated defeat. The subtext of Pollack's analysis, however, is that areas of present-day deficiency may easily become areas of strength in the future, especially in this era of restless change in the military art. In fact, the very next year after *Arabs at War* appeared, U.S. forces invaded Iraq. While they made short shrift of the regular Iraqi army, they soon found themselves facing a widespread insurgency that enjoyed a great deal of success. The aftermath of Operation Iraqi Freedom should stand as a cautionary tale about making too many assumptions based on historical patterns. One never knows when a culture may find its military *métier*—another example of the law of unintended consequences.

If both Lynn and Pollack tend to keep cultural theory and its "specialized vocabulary" at arm's length, Isabel V. Hull's *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* embraces them wholly. Hers is a complex work that offers a comprehensive theory of modern German military culture, one that emerged out of the "double militarism" of German politics and society, found early expression in colonial wars (especially the genocidal suppression of the Herero people in southwest Africa), and culminated in the terrible, nearly limitless blood-letting of World War I. Hull is especially hard on what she calls the "hegemony of the operative" within the German military, by which the General Staff tended to boil all the political, diplomatic, and logistical complexities of modern war down to a single, highly destructive battle. It viewed fighting the Herero, for example, as essentially the same as fighting the French army, and its solution was identical: concentric operations leading to a battle of encirclement (*Kesselschlacht*). In adopting this view, she argues, it trained itself to ignore material realities—matters such as the balance of forces, the importance of changing technology, and logistical difficulties—and to substitute instead specious notions of "will, extreme daring (*Kühnheit*), optimistic recklessness, and one-sided actionism." As a result, no other military organization in the world was more likely to go to extremes, to take senseless

<sup>54</sup> Pollack, *Arabs at War*, 374.

risks, and to eschew a negotiated peace. Nor was there any other army that treated enemy civilians so harshly as a matter of deliberate policy, a tendency that would come to its awful fruition in the next war. The most useful feature of Hull's book is that it will stimulate comparative research. Surely the German army of the imperial period was not, and is not, the only military establishment in danger of being blinded by its own cultural assumptions.<sup>55</sup>

The cultural history of war, then, is here to stay. A good sign of its increasing importance is the 2005 book by Fred Anderson, whose *Crucible of War* opened this essay. Written with Andrew Cayton, *The Dominion of War: Empire and Liberty in North America, 1500–2000* goes beyond the analysis of individual battles or wars, in order to narrate a “wintry tale”: the degree to which warfare has stood at the heart of five centuries of American history. War has not merely punctuated or interrupted the republican experience, the authors argue, it has defined it. It is a sprawling tale, stretching from the Beaver Wars to Operation Iraqi Freedom, a tale of imperial ambition and empire-building cloaked in the rhetoric of liberty, democracy, and civilization—big themes, in other words—and Anderson and Cayton wisely ground their narrative in the lives of a few prominent individuals, from Samuel Champlain to Colin Powell. At issue here are not individual battles or campaigns, but wars, the often surprising outcomes that accompany even the most “successful” ones, and the way we choose to remember and memorialize them. By the end of the book, the “grand narrative” of American history—the tale of a peaceful people, slow to anger and eager to return to the plow, populating a virgin land without Napoleons or “jack-booted legions”—is as dead as two skilled scholars and writers can make it. That, of course, is not the same thing as saying that it is dead with the American people at large or with their governments present and future.<sup>56</sup>

A book such as *The Dominion of War* indicates that the line of demarcation between “new” and “old” military histories is becoming increasingly indistinct, even antiquated. Perhaps it is time to drop the distinctions altogether, and to describe military history today as a discipline with a strong interest in social and cultural analysis, but with an equally immovable commitment to its battlefield and campaign traditions. This is not a simple-minded irenicism, or an attempt to blur real differences in emphases and approaches. Nor is it meant as a gloss. Military history certainly has its share of pressing agenda items. There is still a regrettable tendency within the subfield—and this is especially pronounced within much operational and battle history—toward conservative methodologies. There are still too many works that indulge in personalist “great man” approaches, praising this individual, criticizing that one, and ignoring broader systemic factors.

Likewise, the estrangement of military history from the main lines of the disci-

<sup>55</sup> Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca, N.Y., 2005), 105–107, 168, 170. The term “double militarism” was coined by German military historian Stig Förster. For another view of German military culture that corroborates Hull in many ways, but that focuses much more tightly on actual military operations, see Robert M. Citino, *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years' War to the Third Reich* (Lawrence, Kans., 2005).

<sup>56</sup> Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton, *The Dominion of War: Empire and Liberty in North America, 1500–2000* (New York, 2005), ix, xi. For another contemporary scholarly argument on the imperial nature of the American republic, see the two controversial works by Andrew J. Bacevich: *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of U.S. Diplomacy* (Cambridge, Mass., 2002) and *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (Oxford, 2005).

pline is not merely the fault of the discipline; it has been a two-way street. Insofar as there is a prejudice against military history among many historians, it ought to stop; prejudging anything is never a good idea. But military historians need to become less resistant to contemporary trends in research—from social history to post-modernism to the new cultural history. Historians of World War II, for example, need to admit that Alice Kaplan's *The Interpreter*, an intriguing and complex account of military justice in the U.S. Army, is just as much a "military history" as the most recent book on the Battle of Normandy, or that Emily Rosenberg's work on the icon of Pearl Harbor is as important as the latest book on the Japanese attack itself. Indeed, military history that does not take into account all three schools (society, culture, and the distinct imperatives of the battlefield) is by definition incomplete. The debate over the "military revolution" might well serve as a model here. It has engaged a wide range of methodologies and schools; it involves political and social historians, historians of technology, as well as those who emphasize the primacy of operational history; and it goes well beyond parochial boundaries to touch upon fundamental issues of state formation, absolute monarchy in early modern Europe, and the subsequent Western domination of the globe.

Despite these problems, which no doubt promise to be contentious, military historians today are doing enough good work, based on exciting and innovative approaches, to re-engage the attention of historians in any number of areas. My final advice to my professional colleagues and friends in the broader discipline? Try something genuinely daring, even countercultural, in terms of today's academy. Read some military history.

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