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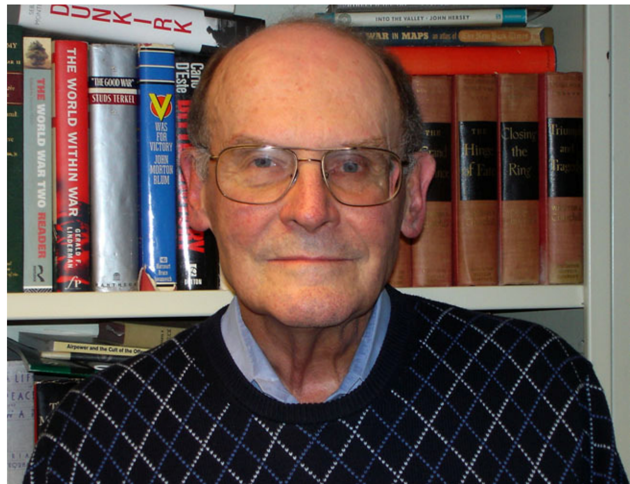
The 2008 George C. Marshall Lecture in Military History: History and the History of War

by

John Shy

The University of Michigan

John Shy is Professor Emeritus of History at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. After graduate study at the University of Vermont (M.A.) and Princeton University (Ph.D.), he taught at Princeton before joining the Michigan faculty in 1968. His published works include A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence *(1976; revised ed. 1990) and "Jomini" in* Makers of Modern Strategy *(1986). The lecture was delivered on 5 January 2008 at the American Historical Association meeting in Washington, D.C. and first published in the* Journal of Military History *72 (2008) 1033-46. It is reproduced here by the kind permission of the Society for Military History.*



Abstract

Studies of war published in the last twenty years by distinguished historians who are not military specialists represent a call to military historians to engage these studies on the common ground of war itself, in effect working to bridge the gulf that has kept military historians on the margins of the historical profession. None of these studies is flawless, but at the same time their great value calls for constructive help from military historians who study the same wars, and who can build on these works to achieve more satisfactory syntheses.

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The title of this lecture is misleading, and I should clarify it. By the word "History," I mean the history of Europe and North America since the seventeenth century. Within this more restricted time and space, I have spent most of my life reading, teaching, exploring a few corners of that still vast field, writing a modest amount, and thinking a great deal, especially about the kind of history related to war.[1] From the outset, even as a graduate student, a familiar complaint has troubled me, and being asked to deliver this lecture offers an opportunity to consider that complaint more fully. The complaint is about the gulf between, on the one side, the profession of history, especially in colleges and universities, and, on the other side, the history of war. The question of why this gulf exists has a variety of answers.

Until the nineteenth century, a great deal of both written and oral history was the history of war. And then, between the battle of Waterloo and the peace conference at Versailles, the history profession and the military profession began to move in very different directions. The emergence of this gulf was closely related to the process of professionalization taking place on both sides, professionalizing historians seeking to broaden and deepen historical inquiry by moving away from its traditional preoccupation with wars and politics, professionalizing soldiers trying to establish military science on universal principles underlying armed conflict by a close study of military strategy and operations.[2]

My concern here is less with the origins of the divide, which became a virtual canyon after the First World War, than with its existence and persistence. At the risk of caricature let me briefly describe how this gulf looks from each side. Military historians in and out of the academy feel they get scant respect and even less attention from their professional colleagues working in all the rest of history; they are sure that those colleagues regard courses and books on military history as not much better than a form of entertainment, ever popular with students and the general public, but lacking the qualities that foster serious critical thinking and genuine understanding of the past. My own experience of this perception from the far side of the gulf has been confirmed, more than once, by being asked by a colleague who is teaching a course, say, on the American Revolution, or the Civil War and Reconstruction, to give a single lecture on the "war," meaning the military stuff. The invitation invariably has come with a modest apology to the effect that he or she just never got around to learning much about all the fighting and bloodletting.

From the other side of the gulf the view is usually less aggrieved than it is one of benign aversion, "toleration" in the worst sense. Only when issues of appointments and curriculum arise; that is, when money and other scarce resources are at issue, is there much that looks like real hostility, and then things can become nasty. I report on good authority that the administrative head of a major American history department, faced by the question of preserving the status of a popular course in military history, pronounced the subject as of interest only to "hormone-driven fraternity boys." In effect, military history may be all

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[1] For a longer, broader, more erudite view of war in history, see Philip Bobbitt, *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History* (New York: Knopf, 2002), as well as its sequel, *Terror and Consent: The Wars for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Knopf, 2008).

[2] Carol Reardon, *Soldiers and Scholars: The U.S. Army and the Uses of Military History, 1865–1920* (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 1990) is invaluable on the origins of the gulf in the United States. But the gulf exists virtually everywhere, at least in the Western world; see, for example, Gordon A. Craig, "Delbrück: The Military Historian," *Makers of Modern Strategy,* edited by Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986), 326–353, a brilliant essay that first appeared in the 1943 first edition of the same work.

right for those who like that sort of thing, but it should not consume scarce resources nor be more than peripheral to what is required of undergraduates who major in history. Recently, Keith Thomas, a supremely gifted Oxford historian, expressed the genteel tone of this patronizing indifference in an essay on "How history's borders have expanded in the past forty years." His sole reference to writing on war was as follows: "Military and naval history are exceptionally vigorous with a huge lay following for accounts of battles and campaigns, *not all of them intellectually demanding*."[3] To the logical argument that war has been and continues to be centrally important in the unfolding of history, an unpleasant truth that the historical profession ignores at its peril, a typical academic replies, Yes, war is important in history, but not in the way most military historians deal with it; few of the books on war that fill the shelves of chain bookstores have much relevance for what professional historians are striving to do. The most important thing about war (I continue to sketch the view from the non-military side of the gulf) for the professional historian is its outcome; all the tiresome details of strategic decision, operational movement, and the violence of the battlefield, whatever their dramatic appeal, are simply not worth the time they require to tell and to learn because those details rarely connect to anything outside warfare itself. So the problem, says the non-military historian, is not with the history of war as such, but with the way military historians do it.

We can agree that the existence of this gulf defies logic, history being the seamless if tangled web of circumstance and action that all historians try to recreate and convey. So the gulf must be imaginary, maybe in current parlance "imagined;" yet it is quite real, and its immediate consequence is, in my judgment, awful. The gulf between history in general and the history of war means that most teachers of history know little or nothing about war and its role in modern history; as teachers, they fail to make it an integral part of historical study but leave the impression that it is an unfortunate excrescence, or, as one perceptive soldier-scholar expressed it almost a century ago, "an irrational blotch."[4] Our students in turn emerge from their years of liberal education ignorant of war, understandably assuming that its absence from their curriculum is a fair measure of its unimportance in human affairs. Words fail me in trying to say what I think of this consequence.

In 1993 The Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, by hosting a large symposium on "The History of War as Part of General History," gave the reality of the gulf something like official recognition even as the symposium was intended to bridge the gulf.[5] And the American Historical Association, despite a demonstrable coolness to the field over the years, has officially proclaimed its underlying friendliness toward military historians by incorporating this, the George C. Marshall Lecture, into its annual meeting, while in 2007 its quarterly journal published a broad survey and valuable discussion of the best recent work in the field of military history. The survey's author, Robert Citino, acknowledges that the imagined gulf is all too real, and exhorts his fellow historians on the far side to take

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[3] *Times Literary Supplement*, 13 October 2006, p. 6. Italics are mine.

[4] Captain Arthur L. Conger, "The Function of Military History," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* III (1916): 161.

[5] A special issue of *The Journal of Military History*, LVII (October 1993), published some of the papers and commentary from this conference. Part III of this volume, containing contributions from Peter Paret, Michael Howard, Carla Hesse, and Michael Geyer, is especially relevant to the subject of this lecture.

time to learn how the best contemporary work in military history transcends the old stereotype of drum and trumpets—strategy, operations, and battles. So, is the imagined gulf closing as we all grow gradually wiser than our benighted predecessors?[6]

In seeking an answer to the question, cross over to the far side where most of our colleagues and friends reside. Is there some stirring over there, some general movement on the far side to end this absurd division? Citino's excellent article should awaken many historians to the quality of the best work being done in military history, but I am not optimistic about any more general movement to remedy decades of aversion and neglect. In the mid-1970s two books set off a flutter of interest among non-military historians in the subject of war: *The Face of Battle* by John Keegan, and *The Great War and Modern Memory* by Paul Fussell.[7] Both books were widely read, even by non-military historians, and much discussed, or at least cited. I recall being asked about them by colleagues who suggested that if military history were done as Keegan and Fussell had done it that it might be worthy of serious attention. Keegan and Fussell may have softened up the opposition, but I see little evidence that they have had any lasting effect in modifying attitudes on the far side of the gulf.

What I do see, and find encouraging, is that since the late 1980s, a small number of accomplished historians who could in no way be labeled military historians have found war to be an important subject, and have written important books about it. From this small number, among well-known and well-regarded academic historians writing in English about war, four have caught my attention, four voices calling, so to speak, from the far side of the gulf. They are the British historian, John Brewer; an American historian of France, David Bell; the British modern economic historian, Niall Ferguson; and an American historian of Japan, John Dower. Taking them in order of publication, I offer a précis of each book, followed by a brief critical appraisal.

John Dower's *War without Mercy* won the National Book Critics Circle Award for 1986. Dower today is a leading American historian of Japan, with a Pulitzer Prize for his great book on Japan under American military occupation.[8] In *War without Mercy* he used all his

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[6] A number of other military historians have also worried about the gulf and what to do about it. Among them are Walter Millis, *Military History*, Publication No. 39 by the Service Center for Teachers of History of the American Historical Association (Washington, 1961), who doubted that the primal appeal of war stories could ever be reconciled with the intellectual challenge of war in the modern world; John Whiteclay Chambers, "The New Military History: Myth and Reality," *The Journal of Military History* LV (July, 1991): 395–406, who was optimistic that military historians were bridging the gulf; and John A. Lynn, "The Embattled Future of Academic Military History," *The Journal of Military History* LXI (1997): 777–789, who is positive but less sanguine. Roger Spiller, "Military History and its Fictions," *The Journal of Military History* LXX (October 2006): 1081–97, chastised military historians for their reluctance to bring their knowledge and skills to bear on urgent, contemporary issues of war. Mark Grimsley, "The Future of Military History: Beyond the Culture of Complaint," *Headquarters Gazette* of the Society for Military History XIX (Fall 2006), 2–3, offers a brief but pungent plea to stop whining and to reach out to non-military historians who show any interest in war as a historical subject.

[7] John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), and Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1975). Fussell was a Professor of English at Rutgers University, and had seen combat in Europe during World War II. Keegan was a Lecturer in War Studies at The Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, and had not seen military service.

[8] John W. Dower, *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (New York and Toronto: Random House, 1986); and *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999).

language and research skills to answer the question, Why was the Pacific War 1942–45 so utterly barbaric, with incredible atrocities committed by both sides? Drawing on a vast trove of words and pictures from Japanese and American archives, Dower offers a blunt answer: Because it was a race war, with each side doing all it could to dehumanize the other. After reading the quoted public utterances, and viewing the grotesque depiction of the evil, subhuman enemy in *War without Mercy*, Dower's argument seems compelling.

John Brewer's *The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State* appeared in 1989.[9] Brewer has a good claim to be the dean of historians of early modern Britain, publishing major work in the political, economic, social, legal, and cultural history of eighteenth-century England. That he would produce a book with "war" in its subtitle is surprising, but that book, *Sinews of Power*, is now regarded as the definitive account of how England after 1688 went from being a fairly weak state, both politically and militarily, and became by mid-century one of the most powerful in the world. War was not exactly the cause of this transformation, but war surely was a catalytic factor. England waged five major wars between 1688 and 1783, when the book ends, and lost only one of them. By mid-century Britain had become a true war state, with military expenditures including the costs of previous wars accounting for about four-fifths of its annual budget.

This is a remarkable story. An earlier book edited by Brewer on eighteenth-century England is titled an "ungovernable people", and at the time the English people were indeed regarded as the most liberal and lightly governed people in Europe.[10] But the facts, seen under Brewer's lens, are clear: while not the richest country in Europe, Britain's government was the best at extracting wealth from its people for the purpose of waging war, better than France, Prussia, Austria, or Russia. The key according to Brewer was a relatively efficient tax-collecting bureaucracy made legitimate by Parliamentary consent, and by its accountability to Parliamentary agencies. Parliament of course did not yet represent the "people," but it represented the propertied and moneyed elite well enough to give Britain a tremendous advantage over its autocratic rivals on the Continent.

Niall Ferguson's *The Pity of War* fairly burst upon the historical scene in 1998.[11] Established by his first two books as a brilliant young economic historian at Oxford University, he turned his talents to the Great War 1914–1918, and proceeded to overturn almost all the standard wisdom about the causes, course, and consequences of that war.[12] British critics Left and Right were outraged by his argument that British foreign policy pre-1914 might have, but failed, to deter a major war, and that British decision-making in the crisis of 1914 was the chief reason a European war became a world war.[13] He depicted a German victory,

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[9] John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money, and the English State, 1688–1783* (London: Century Hutchinson; New York: Knopf, 1988).

[10] *An Ungovernable People: The English and Their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries,* edited by John Brewer and John Styles (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1980).

[11] Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (London: Allen Lane; New York: Basic Books, 1998).

[12] Ferguson's first two books were *Paper and Iron: Hamburg Business and German Politics in the Era of Inflation, 1897–1927* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), and *The House of Rothschild* (New York: Viking, 1998). His turn of mind is perhaps best seen in his edited volume, *Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

[13] Among many critical reviews, the most interesting are by Michael Howard, *The Times* (of London) 13 November 1998, and Paul Kennedy, *The New York Review of Books*, 12 August 1999.

virtually inevitable without British intervention, as probably better for Britain and everyone else—ending in something like today's European Union, dominated by the German economy. Once the war had begun, he argues, superior Allied resources failed to win it because of inefficient utilization by the Allied powers, and because the German Army was a much more efficient fighting machine than any of its opponents, a conclusion he supports by statistics showing that killing an enemy soldier cost the Germans little more than a third of what killing an enemy cost the Allies. In the end he argues that the treaties made at Versailles were not so bad; what failed was their serious enforcement.[14]

Last and most recent of the four, David A. Bell published *The First Total War*, in 2007.[15] Bell is a leading historian of France both before and after the Revolution of 1789. He is Andrew Mellon Professor in the Humanities at Johns Hopkins, and is a regular reviewer for and contributor to *The New Republic*. Nothing in his previous work would suggest that he is in any way a military historian. His book got a lengthy review in *The New Yorker*, and a high-lighted summary by the author in *The New York Times Sunday Magazine*.[16]

The First Total War is brilliantly written, and weaves together at least three separate arguments. The first and most important of these is in the title: that the wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon prefigured the major wars of the twentieth century, when nations brushed aside customary restraints to mobilize every resource, human and material, and ignored legal and moral limits on the use of force, military effort and political direction becoming fused in a superheated emotional climate that made rational control of war and its objectives extremely difficult if not impossible. Bell's argument is not exactly new, dating back to several earlier authors, but it is made forcefully and persuasively.

His other arguments concern the relationship of these events to our own time. He likens the few years after the end of the Cold War in 1989, when hopes were briefly raised that wars were obsolete, to that moment in the French Revolution just two centuries earlier when some proclaimed that an Enlightened polity would bring an end to warfare. Disillusionment rapidly followed in the 1790s as it would in the 1990s, and then in each case an epoch of horrific warfare ensued. The linkage between the two periods, between the hopes before 1789 and 1989, and the violent reality that followed, is less historical than psychological: disappointment and frustration triggered a furious reaction; when war proved un-

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[14] Alan Bennett, dramatist, humorist, and English social critic, identifies Ferguson as one of the "flashier historians" who flourished in the Thatcherite era, but whose archetype was A. J. P. Taylor, using sarcasm, inversion of common sense, and a know-all tone to make a strong impression on the audience, often through the medium of television. Bennett sees fierce competition for entry to Oxford and Cambridge as fostering a showy but superficial style intended to avoid at all costs the danger of seeming dull and unoriginal. See Bennett's *The History Boys* (London and New York: Faber and Faber, 2004), pp. xxiii–xxv, et passim. Bennett has a point, valid not only for the peculiarities of the English educational system, but for the writing of history in general, where dullness and unoriginality are demons for all who practice the craft. The question here is how well Ferguson has reexamined the First World War, not why he did it. Currently a Professor at Harvard, with a condensed version of his latest work, *The World at War: Twentieth-Century Conflict and the Descent of the* West (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2006) playing on Public Television, Ferguson may well have the last laugh.

[15] David A. Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Modern Warfare* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007).

[16] Adam Gopnik, "Slaughterhouse: The Idealistic Origins of Total War ," *The New Yorker,* 12 February 2007, 82–5.

avoidable, it was carried on in each case without mercy or restraint. Throughout, Bell emphasizes every instance in the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars of what can be called terrorism and brutal counterinsurgency, pushing his comparison with our own time to a Goyaesque extreme.

These two arguments, about the emergence of total war and the effect of disappointed hopes on military aggressiveness, tend to overshadow Bell's most original and interesting argument, which is that the wars of 1792–1815 were transformative, changing the very "culture" of war in Western civilization. This culture of total war was effectively stifled after 1815 for almost a century by artful, determined, and lucky statesmen, only to erupt again in 1914, making the twentieth century a nightmare of violence. And where did this transformed culture of war root itself most deeply? Where else but in that Enlightened Paradise, the most powerful nation-state to emerge from the twentieth-century nightmare, the United States? The three arguments twine around one another throughout a long book, but Bell makes the point of origin for his thinking clearest in the short piece he wrote for *The New York Times*; there he asks why the American response to a clever but primitive and quite limited attack on 9/11 was such a grotesque overreaction, declaring a Global War on Terror. "What has happened is a growing willingness to abandon traditional restraints on proved and suspected enemies, foreign and American alike.... Could it be then that dreams of an end to war may be as unexpectedly dangerous as they are noble, because they seem to justify almost anything done in their name."[17]

Now these four very disparate books are hardly perfect models for writing the history of war. All in some way are vulnerable just where more attention to military history might have made them stronger. Let me explain, taking them again in turn.

Dower might have considered another war, a war notorious for its ferocity and brutality, contemporaneous with the Pacific War between the United States and Japan, the war between Germany and the Soviet Union, where millions died not only in battle but because the other side murdered them or deliberately let them die in captivity from starvation and disease.[18] Asking Dower to make his book a comparative study may be asking too much, but he ought at least to have recognized that, in explaining behavior, account must be taken of the behavior itself, which in this case was how the Japanese and Americans actually fought for control of the western Pacific. Large island garrisons, well armed, well trained, and highly disciplined, but utterly cut off from any hope of relief or reinforcement, and with orders to win or die, were defending their islands against larger numbers of attackers with massive firepower, equally determined to win at whatever cost—such was the basic model of battle after battle across this vast ocean. The recent popular film, "Letters from Iwo Jima," conveys very well the essential horror of the operational reality of the Pacific War. If Dower had paid as much attention to these realities as he did to attitudes, he might well have reached a less simple, more nuanced answer to his own question. He would have taken account of the effect on soldiers in combat of terror, frustration, anger, and hopelessness, as

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[17] David A. Bell, "Reflections: The Peace Paradox," *The New York Times Magazine,* 4 February 2007.

[18] On the treatment of prisoners, see Omar Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). On the ferocity of the war, see *A Writer at War: Vasily Grossman with the Red Army, 1941–1945,* edited and translated by Antony Beevor and Luba Vinogradova (New York: Pantheon Books, 2005).

well as of the unique culture of the Imperial Japanese Army and the U.S. Marine Corps.[19] Looking at all the relevant evidence bearing on his question he would have written a better book.

John Brewer does not ignore the actual waging of war by Britain in the eighteenth century, but he confines it to a pallid chapter entitled "The Parameters of War," following the first half of the book where he has developed his main argument. It is a disappointing chapter because it is hardly more than a summary, capturing little of the contingent, unpredictable quality of wars in which British forces lost almost as many battles as they won.[20] Parliament, while not directing but surely constraining British strategy as well as foreign policy, reacted strongly to the ups and downs of military events. For the British people, few of whom were personally involved in warfare, war served as a great spectacle, amplifying the emotional impact of both victory and defeat. If popular acquiescence was indeed the key to British military strength, Brewer offers little sense that the violent political and popular mood swings of wartime made much difference.[21] Instead he offers a fairly bland picture of ever-increasing British strength, undisrupted by wartime crises and euphoria, a picture not unlike the Whig version of British history, with Progress as its main theme. Maybe in retrospect the progressive pattern fits the ultimate outcome, but it hardly captures the historical truth of the wars themselves (which soaked up all that tax money), as those wars were actually waged by the English state. Like Dower writing about racial ideology, Brewer seems to have little heart for the blood-and-guts aspect of warfare that at the time was highly interactive with the Parliamentary and popular opinion that made the fiscal-war state work so effectively. *The Sinews of Power* is a great book, but might have been better history with a less perfunctory treatment of the wars that lay at its heart.

Niall Ferguson's main arguments, based heavily on what-if reasoning, left many of his reviewers unpersuaded, but his book is a lengthy, scholarly reconsideration of the whole war, especially on the Western Front. His arguments, however a reader may eventually judge them, are surely worth serious consideration. What most impresses a military historian is Ferguson's attention to the strategic and operational aspects of the war, to the violent core of war itself. Unlike Brewer and Dower, Ferguson is intensely interested in why men fought, how they fought, and how—in the German case—they stopped fighting. His weakest spot may be in the way he treats the war itself as a bloc, aggregating his numbers to measure casualties and effectiveness, allowing for little variation from one year to the next.[22] Of course that is the way the war has been treated by many military historians who

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[19] Craig M. Cameron, *American Samurai: Myth, Imagination, and the Conduct of Battle in the First Marine Division, 1941–1951* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[20] Jeremy Black makes this point more forcefully in the opening paragraph of his review essay, "Britain as a Military Power, 1688–1815," *The Journal of Military History* LXIV (January 2000): 159–77.

[21] A more recent book provides a detailed account of these emotional swings of wartime as well as the contingent nature of the wars themselves: Brendan Simms, *Three Victories and a Defeat: The Rise and Fall of the First British Empire, 1714–1783* (London: Allen Lane, 2007). Unfortunately for this discussion, Simms is too embroiled in argument with other historians who have stressed imperial and naval factors in the story to engage directly with Brewer's contribution, but his book is valuable nonetheless for its narrative qualities.

[22] It is stretching it to call it a "school," but a group of revisionist historians of the war, mostly Anglophone, has emerged over the last generation. Concentrating their research on the operational aspects of the war, especially in its later years, they argue that within the leadership there was an awareness of the need for innovation and adaptation that

are very critical of its leadership, seeing the war as hopeless deadlock, four years of trenches, mud, death, and futility, which is also the picture presented in most of the memoirs, novels, and poetry arising from the Great War. But a growing number of military historians have been exploring the frantic and not always ineffective search for ways to break the technological stalemate and restore mobile warfare, and their findings surely deserve a place in Ferguson's analysis.[23]

Of Bell's *First Total War* I admit that the book exasperated me on first reading, with its entangled triad of arguments stretching across centuries. But on re-reading the book along with the published reviews, many of them critical, as well as Bell's own response to a series of reviews posted on the French History net, I see better what he was trying to do, and I judge his book to be a truly valuable one. It is, after all, about war, and like Ferguson he does not avert his gaze from the actual violence, or dwell on some peripheral aspect of it that might appeal to social historians; war itself is front and center. Unlike Dower and Brewer, Bell tackles the military side of his subject, and thereby earns our attention.

Unfortunately, his major and most interesting thesis, that the wars of the French Revolution and Napoleon were a cultural transformation in the Western way of war, a transformation that would eventually take hold most strongly in the collective psyche of contemporary America, may be correct, but as it is presented in the book it is hardly more than a plausible conjecture unsupported by much evidence or even argument. Worse is the way he lets our contemporary obsession with terrorism influence his treatment of the Napoleonic wars. Repeatedly, he compares the ruthlessness of French armies and of the civilians who resisted them to events in Iraq in 2007. All war is hell, and Napoleon's wars left the bodies of soldiers and civilians strewn all across Europe, but by focusing on popular resistance to French military occupation wherever it occurred, always with atrocities on both sides, Bell greatly exaggerates its overall significance for what happened in these wars. Armed resistance to French military occupation was not uncommon in the First French Empire, but it was also sporadic and with few exceptions quickly put down; in no case did it cause any serious deviation from the course of French military operations. The exceptions were in Spain, where the term "guerrilla" was coined for the brutal fight by peasants led by priests against French occupation, making service in Spain the least desired in the Grande Armée; and also in the Vendée, where a civil war in western France against the Revolution persisted, a civil war that young General Bonaparte carefully avoided in his rise to supreme power, resistance flickering on in the Vendée to the end of his regime. Yet despite Spain and the Vendée, the Grande Armée rolled on until it was defeated by larger coalition armies. To put it most simply, Bell has allowed his understandable concern with the events of

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bore results in the decisive final phase of combat. The published works of this school appear in Ferguson's notes and bibliography, but their general argument seems not to have caught his attention. See next note.

[23] Among the historians in this "revisionist school," are Shelford Bidwell, Dominick Graham, Paddy Griffith, Robin Prior, Timothy Travers, and Trevor Wilson. See the review by Prior and Wilson of *The Pity of War* in *The Journal of Contemporary History* XXXV (April 2000): 319–28. Though not part of this "school," a volume published soon after the publication of *The Pity of War* deserves mention: Great *War, Total War: Combat and Mobilization on the Western Front, 1914–1918*, edited by Roger Chickering and Stig Förster (Washington: German Historical Institute, 2000). Also of interest is Andrew N. Liaropoulos, "Revolutions in Warfare: Theoretical Paradigms and Historical Evidence—The Napoleonic and First World War Revolutions in Military Affairs", *The Journal of Military History* LXX (April 2006): 363–84, especially pp. 377–82.

the years since 9/11 to distort his account of warfare two centuries ago; not terrorism, but the decisive clash of massive armies was the true leitmotif of the Napoleonic Wars.

Four valuable books on war by outstanding non-military historians, signifying what? Comparable work has appeared between the delivery and publication of this lecture.[24] Even in their imperfections as they bridge the gulf between military history and history in general, these books and others like them should engage and stimulate military historians. Taken together, these and comparable works constitute a wake-up call to military historians to respond, critically but positively, by recognizing what drew these historians to the subject of war, and to meet them at least half way. Times are changing and at least a few of our ablest colleagues hear the message that we know so well. *The Pity of War* may already have become an unhappy example of an important book rejected by military historians for its unorthodox methodology, provocative style, and startling conclusions; this, it seems to me, is a sad error, suggesting that at least some military historians prefer to be left alone on their own side of the gulf.

Each of these authors has seen the light about the historical importance of war. Beyond that shared epiphany, they have written valuable books that go where military historians too rarely tread—into the broader context within which all war is waged. Dower, Brewer, Ferguson, and Bell, respectively, have explored the ideological, administrative and financial, economic, and cultural dimensions of war—terrain where military historians do not often go. Of course we know that the wars we study happen in a wider context, which is what our four historians have been exploring, but military historians as a group have been too comfortable, even complacent, about the accepted limits of our inquiry. Military history, as it is usually conceived, readily accepts conventional boundaries between warfare and peace, between military and civilian, restricting our scope to the questions that can best be answered by the evidence produced and preserved by military organizations themselves, supplemented by whatever a few surviving members of those organizations can recall after the event. We as military historians do not often stray beyond the official end of war to look at its immediate effects in the so-called postwar.[25] These four books are, each in its way, flawed, but they recall us to our main business, which is to study and write about war—unbounded by any customary limits on our inquiry—with the aim of educating ourselves, our colleagues, and ultimately our students and the public about war in all its awful complexity and perversity.

It would be foolish to call for a new military history that incorporated all or even most of the contextual elements of any chosen subject. Historical research is too specialized, and often too interdisciplinary, for any such effort to be feasible. But what is most provocative

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[24] Notably Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2008). Dr. Faust had established herself as a leading scholar for previous work on the antebellum and Confederate South long before the publication of this book, and before her acceptance of the presidency of Harvard University. It is a highly intelligent, beautifully written work, but may benefit from what military historians might contribute on the actualities of battlefield death for its victims, and on the impact of death on comrades, morale, and even military operations, while little is said about badly mutilated survivors.

[25] A notable exception is Fred Anderson, *The Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754–1766* (New York: Knopf, 2000), who does not stop at the conventional peace, in 1763, but pursues the immediate consequences of the war into the first few years of the postwar era, in effect building a bridge to the non-military history of the coming of the American Revolution.

in these four books on war, in their deficiencies as well as their strengths, is how they call attention to just those conventional limits of military history: strategy, operations, battle, and peace (whenever it officially breaks out). They represent a plea to us to loosen up and look outward. Military historians have been content to work within those classic limits, whose observance reinforces the imagined gulf between history in general and the history of war. Samuel Eliot Morison produced an elegantly written fifteen volumes on American naval operations in the Second World War, but he found no room to explore the almost miraculous economic and logistical achievements that made most of those operations possible, perhaps because logistics lack the dramatic excitement of battle.[26]

There are historians, it must be said, who appear blissfully unaware of this awful gulf, who defy easy categorization as military or non-military, and who write excellent military history set firmly within its broader context, historians like Michael Sherry for modern America, Geoffrey Parker for early modern Europe, David Hackett Fischer for the Revolutionary War, James McPherson for the American Civil War, and Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton for the whole of the American experience of war.[27] Robert Middlekauf on the American Revolution, and David Kennedy on the Second World War, both, like McPherson, writing volumes for the series *The Oxford History of the United States*, are other examples.[28] As much as I admire these scholars, I also admire the blue-collar military historian who occasionally looks up from the work at hand to ponder what lies beyond the conventional border of military history, and decides to explore that shadowy ground. Ronald Spector is a model for what is here being advocated. Spector wrote the best one-volume history of strategy and operations in the Pacific War. He also delivered the Marshall Lecture three year ago, in which he sketched the results of not stopping at war's end in 1945, in order to see what happened to the vast Japanese Empire immediately after the Emperor had surrendered. That sketch has become an excellent new book, its subject matter and narrative as exciting and consequential as the battle of Midway or the 1944 decision to attack the Philippines rather than Formosa. Spector tells us that the book began as "a rather nebulous project."[29] Military history needs more nebulous projects like this one.[30]

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[26] Samuel Eliot Morison, *The History of U.S. Naval Operations in World War II,* 15 vols. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1947–1962).

[27] Michael Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1987), and *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930's* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995); Geoffrey Parker, *The Army of Flanders and the Spanish Road, 1567–1659: The Logistics of Spanish Victory and Defeat in the Low Countries' Wars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), and *The Military Revolution: Military Innovation and the Rise of the West, 1500–1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996); David Hackett Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), and *Washington's Crossing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Fred Anderson and Andrew Cayton, *Dominion of War: Empire and Liberty in North America, 1500–2000* (New York: Viking, 2005). I recall being told by a colleague, who specialized in early modern European history, when I inquired about Parker's 1972 book on the Spanish Army in the Low Countries, that it would not interest me because it was social history not military history!

[28] Robert Middlekauf, *The Glorious Cause: The American Revolution, 1763–1789* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982; revised and expanded edition, 2005); David M. Kennedy, *Freedom from Fear: The American People in Depression and War, 1929–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

[29] Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle against the Sun: The American War with Japan* (New York: Free Press, 1985), and *In the Ruins of Empire: The Japanese Surrender and the Battle for Postwar Asia* (New York: Random House, 2007).

If we know anything for sure about war it is that it is extremely complicated and ill-understood even by those charged with its management, a realm of activity of remarkable unpredictability and dynamism, often ramifying far beyond the intentions of those who undertake it. We need look no further than the war in Iraq to recall how an apparently successful military operation, just the kind of subject suited to a monograph in military history, transmogrified into an altogether different form of violence seemingly beyond the comprehension of the putative victors.[31] Peter Paret will be speaking this Fall at Cambridge University on the "cognitive challenge of war"—of how the enemies of Napoleon were as surprised by what they faced as Americans are today in the Middle East. With these complexities of war in mind, the traditional definition of military history ought to be challenged as our selected four books challenge it, reminding all of us who do strategic and operational history that just beyond the accepted boundaries of our study is a context comprised of attitudes and action that should not be forgotten because it may be, or may become, highly relevant to what we and our readers want to know about war.*

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[30] A few recent books that, in differing ways, successfully push beyond the conventional limits of military history are Peter Paret, *Imagined Battles: Reflections of War in European Art* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997); John A. Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2003); and Roger Spiller, *An Instinct for War: Scenes from the Battlefields of History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005).

[31] Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006); Michael Gordon and Bernard Trainor, *Cobra II: The Inside Story of the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2006).

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