

A Conspicuous Absence: Combat Veterans and America's Memory of WWII

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Abstract: For almost thirty years following the end of the Second World War, very few first-person narratives of the war by combat veterans were published in America, and, as a result, those veterans' traumatic experiences failed to inform the national memory of the conflict. A number of cultural influences contributed to these veterans' silence, including wartime propaganda, Hollywood's participation in crafting an image of the war that justified America's large Cold War military, and postwar perceptions of trauma and manhood. Not until Vietnam veterans returned and told their stories did WWII veterans address their experiences publicly in memoir and challenge the national narrative of the conflict.

In the early 1970s, cultural critic and scholar of eighteenth-century literature Paul Fussell began a phase of his career that included extensive writing on the experience and representation of twentieth-century warfare. His first excursions into this new territory were prompted by his own service as a lieutenant in an infantry unit in Europe during World War II, where he had been gravely wounded by a German shell that killed two of his men, deaths that he felt responsible for. After his convalescence, Fussell returned to the infantry and was training for the invasion of Japan when the war abruptly ended. As he later wrote:

Ever since my return to civilian life in 1946 I'd been recalling my experiences in the war and considering their relation to everything else I knew. Did service as a young infantry officer in whatever time and place bring some special knowledge of humanity in relation to oneself? Was my war unique or quite commonplace and hardly worth special notice? (*Doing* 262-3)

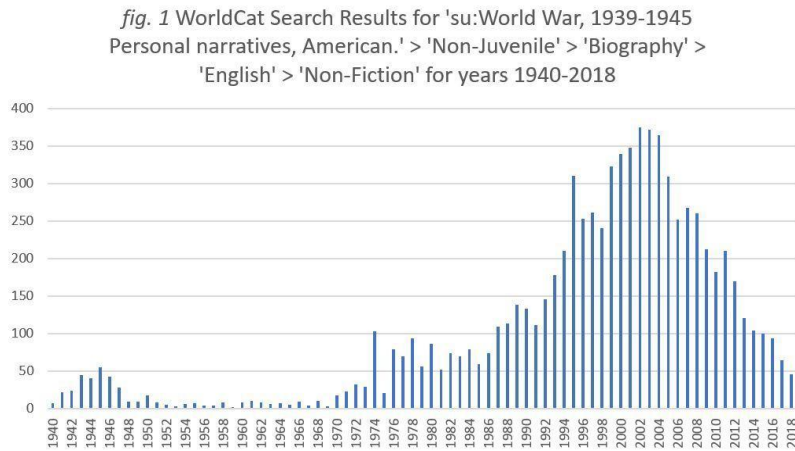
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Fussell hoped that the answers to these questions would lie in the writings of “young literary-minded infantry officers with whom I could in some way identify myself. I didn’t want fiction. I wanted testimony” (*Doing* 263). It is important to recognize that even as Fussell was entering the preliminary stages of a new part of his professional career, he was searching for “authentic” narratives. But Fussell was unable to find the types of narratives he sought from American veterans of his generation: “There was little, those days, from Americans. I found what I wanted (fiction, most of it, but I didn’t understand that until later) in a number of British autobiographies from the First World War” (*Doing* 263). Fussell spent the summer of 1972 at the Imperial War Museum in London studying these narratives (*Doing* 264), and the resulting study, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1975), became a standard work for students of the First World War.

Fussell’s inability to find memoirs by his peers to illuminate his own experiences was neither a fluke nor the product of poor research. For thirty years following the war, combat veterans’ personal experiences and memoirs exerted little influence on the American story of itself during the Second World War. I argue that a number of social factors converged that diminished the importance of individual suffering in the national story of World War II. The groundwork was laid by the highly mediated representation of the war presented to Americans during the war and the fact that a relatively small percentage of the population experienced combat. I suggest that, following the war, three factors shaping the national narrative of the war precluded combat veterans’ participation in its telling: the military’s collaboration with Hollywood in representations of the war, prevailing perceptions of mental trauma at mid-century, and contemporary assumptions about manhood. I will suggest that social changes related to the Vietnam War made it possible for veterans to publish first-person narratives that challenged the prevailing image of World War II. As such, Paul Fussell’s career closely parallels his

generation's initial avoidance of—and eventual return to—the topic of the war.

A sampling of entries from WorldCat (figure 1), which catalogs the holdings of lending libraries worldwide, reveals that the number of personal narratives of the war by Americans published annually dropped to almost nothing after the war and stayed low for about 30 years.



At the lowest point, 1959, only two personal narratives of WWII were published, and as late as 1969 we see only three publications. In the 1970s, we see steady growth in the number of these narratives published annually until the year 2005, when the number of publications peaked at 375. Since then, the pace of publication has dropped off substantially. During this surge, veterans published narratives of trauma that have revised our understanding of the experience of the war, including William Manchester's *Goodbye, Darkness* (1980), Eugene Sledge's *With the Old Breed* (1981), Brendan Phibbs' *The Other Side of Time* (1987), George Wilson's *If You Survive* (1987), Robert Kotlowitz's *Before Their Time* (1997), Fred H. Salter's *Recon Scout* (1994), Roscoe C. Blunt's *Foot Soldier* (2001), Tony Hillerman's *Seldom Disappointed* (2001), William A. Foley's *Visions from a Foxhole* (2004), and Robert C. Dick's *Cutthroats* (2006).

The conditions that ultimately marginalized the experiences of combat veterans from the national narrative preceded the end of the war. In the first instance, during the war, Madison

Avenue constantly reminded Americans of their duty to the war effort and industry (Adams 73-5). Koppes and Black have illustrated how Hollywood and the Office of War Information (OWI) collaborated to promote a particular view of the war, one that was generally unproblematic and patriotic. The press, moreover, also self-censored in a way that diminished the impact of trauma to readers at home. Take, for instance, a dispatch from the Italian front by the widely read and respected columnist Ernie Pyle. Pyle himself sympathized greatly with men at the front and insisted on being among them throughout the war. (He would be killed late in the war at Ie Shima.) Nonetheless, he softened the blow of casualties by qualifying his descriptions of the horrors he encountered while documenting the stories of frontline soldiers:

One soldier had caught a machine-gun bullet right alongside his nose. It had made a small clean hole and gone clear through his cheek, leaving—as it came out—a larger hole just beneath his ear. It gave me the willies to look at it, yet the doctors said it wasn't serious at all and would heal with no bad effects. (37)

Given the evidence he cites, his conclusion is surprising. One might almost be convinced that this poor soldier was *lucky* to be machine-gunned in the face.

The perspectives of the soldiers who were doing the actual fighting did not provide much of a correction to this comparatively rosy image of the war. Letters home from the front were subject to official censorship, and soldiers, as Ralph LaRossa writes, “generally offered fictional accounts of what it meant to be in battle. Their letters seldom told the whole truth of what they were going through. Rather, for the most part, they accentuated the positive, so as to protect their families and friends and boost their loved ones’ morale” (83). Thus, the homefront’s understanding of combat came through highly mediated accounts by both official and quasi-official propaganda and by publishers’ self-censorship. As a result, families back home did not

often encounter imagery of American battle casualties. George H. Roeder, Jr. describes this as a type of rationing; the images were only deployed strategically during the war in ways meant to “inspire viewers rather than discourage them” (14).¹

One type of battle casualty, however, almost never made it past the censors during the war, perhaps because it could only be seen as demoralizing—the psychiatric casualty. Until May of 1944, official policy of the War Department’s Bureau of Public Relations was total censorship of images of these soldiers (Roeder 16). Even the most uplifting depictions of these casualties were generally censored and therefore remained unseen by the public. The best example of this is a documentary produced for the War Department by John Huston in 1946, *Let There Be Light*. The movie was filmed in a stateside psychiatric hospital and destigmatizes the patients’ condition from the onset, when the narrator describes their ailments not as “chronic” neuroses of peacetime, but as acute ailments resulting from the “fulfillment of [the soldiers'] duties.” Nonetheless, despite a poignant and uplifting ending—a baseball game in which a soldier who had been unable to walk runs the bases and another who had developed a stutter is calling balls and strikes—the Army still refused to release the film, going so far as to send two armed MPs to the Museum of Modern Art to seize the film when Huston tried to screen it in the summer of 1946. The Pentagon suppressed the film until 1981 (Edgerton 54-6). As a result, this frank but sympathetic and destigmatizing portrayal of the effects of combat trauma remained unseen for decades.

Though American cultural memory of WWII was initially shaped by civilians’ highly mediated experience of the war, post-war representations of the war conflict further molded the narrative in ways that flattered the nation but excluded veterans’ voices. After the war, for the first time in its history, the United States maintained—and had to justify—a large standing military. Vincent Casaregola has argued that the military used Hollywood to lay out before the

public the rationale for preserving high levels of funding within the new federal budgeting structure.² The suffering of the individual combatant was not the focus of the national narrative the military promoted. The military actively participated in the creation of the national memory of the Second World War in three ways: by providing footage from the conflict to filmmakers, by retired senior officers advising major Hollywood productions, and by providing resources, equipment, and manpower to productions the military approved of.

Perhaps the most ubiquitous way the military shaped postwar memory came through Hollywood's widespread use of military stock footage shot during the war, both as a common narrative device in feature films to establish the context of fictional action as well as an economical way of depicting military hardware that was unavailable or obsolete after the war.³ This footage also appeared in television shows and documentaries about the war, becoming a large part of America's shared visual memory of the conflict. The story of the "war effort" that was told in television documentary series like *Victory at Sea* (1952) and Walter Cronkite's *World War II* (1982) stressed the size of the effort and the proportionate magnitude of the victory.

Consider, for instance, the images that signify the war effort: mass induction, convoys and naval armadas, air raids involving hundreds of long-range bomber crews, fields of mass-produced equipment and vehicles, triumphant Allies parading in ranks down the Champs-Élysées, and ticker-tape parades. When these documentaries touch on individuals, more often than not they focus on "great men," those political and military leaders who commanded armies and influenced countless destinies. Perhaps to convey the scope of this global disaster, one needs to portray it in sweeping terms, but this approach to World War II diminishes the significance of the individual. This sweeping view of the war was used to forge a modern national identity and magnified American achievements at the expense of the intense suffering endured by many of

those who fought. Additionally, footage from the front was almost always recorded without sound, with appropriate sound effects added later. This meant that individuating voices of men engaged in combat were unheard; in this way, soldiers wearing standard GI uniforms in combat could stand in for thousands of others.⁴ The anonymity of soldiers in combat footage makes it easier to imagine the soldier as an abstraction rather than as an individual.

A second type of military involvement in Hollywood productions was the use of retired military officers as advisors in World War II epics. This type of collaboration with senior figures in the war almost guaranteed that the war would be portrayed from the perspective of commanders. For instance, the glowing depiction of General Omar Bradley (or, as he was credited in the film, “General of the Army Omar N. Bradley”) by Karl Maulden in *Patton* (1970) is certainly due in large part and his role as Senior Military Advisor and the use of his memoir, *A Soldier’s Story*, as a source text. General James Gavin, who had commanded the 82nd Airborne Division in Europe, was portrayed in both *The Longest Day* (1962) and *A Bridge Too Far* (1977), two films in which he is credited as a technical adviser. The perspective from the heights of command and scope of these WWII epics precluded the meaningful foregrounding of individual suffering.⁵

A third type of collaboration involved the heavy use of military resources, including men, material, and facilities in film productions. While this reduced cost to studios, it gave the Pentagon a greater say in determining to what ends its resources were going to be used. Some form of military collaboration factored into most big-budget films depicting World War II.⁶ The clearest example of how collaboration with Hollywood served the military’s ends can be seen in what Casaregola calls the “Postwar Quartet,” four films released in 1949, each produced with the cooperation of one of the four military branches authorized by the National Security Act of 1947,

Sands of Iwo Jima (Marines), *Task Force* (Navy), *Twelve O'Clock High* (the newly independent Air Force), and *Battleground* (Army). Take, for instance, *Twelve O'Clock High*, a movie about the burden of command which was only greenlighted by the studio after the Air Force agreed to support the film. As he tried to coax a commitment from the military to back the film, Twentieth Century Fox's production head, Darryl Zanuck, wrote to the Air Force Chief of Staff that "[t]here is no doubt in my mind that unquestionably it can serve as tremendous propaganda to stimulate interest in the Air Force" (qtd. in Suid 111). The Air Force's participation, when granted, was on the condition that it would have the ability to suggest changes to the script and would approve the shooting script, a prerogative it exercised before committing resources and facilities to the movie (Suid 108-115).

The overarching narrative of the war, then, was a product of these wartime and postwar influences, which resulted in what John Bodnar might call the "traditionalist" view of the war, in his words, "the most extensive way in which Americans tried to interpret what had taken place. This perspective saw World War II not as a human tragedy, but as an opportunity to assume a position of dominance in the world and reaffirm their innate (and traditional) moral courage and bravery" (Bodnar 4). According to Fussell, this dominant myth portrays the war as "a notably moral common cause, one moment at least in our history when the well-known American greed, centrifugalism, and jealous individualism briefly subdue themselves in the interests of virtue" ("The War," 231). National cultural memories of wars are strongly influenced by how the nation fared in the war (Paez et al). Victors, therefore, tend to remember wars as positive, and national memories generally tell the story of "how we came to be as we are now." The United States was one of the few combatant nations to emerge with their economy intact, so it should be no surprise that to most Americans the memory of the war was essentially a Horatio Alger story written on

a national scale: a generation grows up during hard times and comes together in a mighty army of citizen soldiers to fight and win a just and necessary war. The wicked are vanquished and the virtuous are rewarded with historically unprecedented prosperity. Of all combatant nations' economies, only America's emerged stronger from the war in terms of domestic consumption, wages, and standard of living, a fact that Murray and Millet suggest "helps explain why [World War II] remains 'the good war' in the American historical imagination" (545). As Michael C. C. Adams says, "Living apart from the rest of suffering humanity, Americans were vouchsafed an ignorance of war's reality that allowed them to cherish an innocent belief in the clean and bracing atmosphere of battle" (73). This is not the image of the war that later emerges in veterans' memoirs.

The traditionalist characterization of the war remained mostly unchallenged for decades, and combat veterans who had endured the emotional, physical and moral extremes of battle had every reason to want to forget what they had witnessed and done. Indeed, J. Glenn Gray acknowledges in his philosophical meditation on his own service that "the effort to assimilate my intense war memories to the rest of my experience is difficult and even frightening. Why attempt it? Why not continue to forget?" (23). At times in his wartime journal, he hints at the coming silence: "I cannot face the prospect of going back to any of my old haunts after the war. I shall not want to speak of these war years, and I cannot be as I was. What is left?" (105). In the unwillingness of many ex-servicemen to join veterans' organizations, Bill Mauldin, a front-line infantryman and creator of the popular Willie and Joe cartoons, recognized a similar impulse toward willful forgetfulness in his collection of postwar cartoons and commentaries, *Back Home*: "Most guys, especially those found in areas close to the shooting war, didn't want anything in the way of clubs, uniforms, parades, or conventions—anything that would remind them of what

they had been through” (72). This for him confirms his earlier prognostications in *Up Front*, his collection of cartoons from the front line, that the vast majority of combat men, he says, “are so damned sick and tired of having their noses rubbed in a stinking war that their only ambition will be to forget it” (9-10).

Even if veterans had wanted to discuss their experiences, according to Gray, there were few outlets for them to talk about them: “Even the simplest soldier suspects it is unpopular today to be burdened with guilt. Everyone from his pastor to his doctor is likely, if he brings up feelings that oppress him, to urge him to ‘forget it.’ Precisely this is what he often longs to hear, and, so, forgetting becomes such a disquieting phenomenon of the modern mind” (174). Both Gray and Mauldin note that most people were tired of hearing about the war,⁷ and this seems consistent with the decline of popular movies about the war produced by Hollywood immediately following the end of hostilities (Hyams 110). A self-help guide jointly published by the Infantry Journal and Penguin advises neuropsychiatric cases (soldiers who suffered non-combat related psychiatric medical problems) about readjusting to family life: “A main trouble may be the way your folks act about your trouble, the things they say and do, because they are badly frightened or feel as if there were some disgrace” (Child and van de Water 171). While Child and van de Water perceptively identify and comment on a number of symptoms that are included in the modern definition of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, including flashbacks, hypersensitivity to stimuli, and substance dependency (181-94), much of the advice in the Infantry Journal publication, for both neuropsychiatric cases and for soldiers who have “combat nerves,” amounts to forgetting about it. For instance, they suggest joining groups, finding a hobby, or, above all, “put[ting] yourself wholeheartedly into some kind of work. [...] Build up a reputation for being a dependable worker, and for knowing your job thoroughly” (179). “Work,” they recommend,

“is good medicine for sick spirits” (192). Most interesting is the list of those with whom veterans with combat nerves are to *avoid* discussing their problems: “Your wife or parents, or other members of your family, are often bad listeners for you because they are likely to be too sympathetic, too shocked and worried about what you have been through, and they are likely to give too much advice in their effort to be helpful” (193). Such advice seems almost designed to cut away a returning soldier’s social support network, and it certainly mitigated against veterans discussing their trauma.

Additionally, the representation of the returning veteran was not always favorable. According to Severo and Milford, “The notion that the soldier had somehow become a different sort of person who could return to the civilian life he left behind only with great and difficult effort was repeated in the press and books” (291-2). The cartoonist Bill Mauldin believed that the press overemphasized crimes committed by veterans: “An ordinary killing or assault seldom rated the front page, but if it involved a jealous veteran or a battle-fatigue case, it could be sure of a prominent play” (*Back* 53-4), or as one of his cartoon characters comments while reading a newspaper, which is covered front and back with headlines about violent veterans: “There’s a small item on page 17 about a triple ax murder. No veterans involved” (54). Mauldin gave an acerbic assessment of the veteran self-help industry, which not only encouraged a view of the veteran as potentially damaged but also isolated him as different. Mauldin considered such books to be “tripe” (24), and to underscore the differences between reality and the civilian’s perception of the veteran, he made sure that Willie’s mother had “purchased all of the literature available on how to rehabilitate the veteran” (40-1).⁸

Even if they could confide in their families and friends about their experiences, soldiers often expressed the opinion that it is difficult, if not impossible, for someone who has never

experienced combat to understand it. Indeed, as Gerald Linderman notes in his study of the experience of men in combat, the memoirs and letters of veterans reveal that they too struggled to understand what had happened to them.⁹ At the end of the war, as the needs of the military changed and veterans increasingly clamored to be discharged, units were disbanded, often one soldier at a time, depending on the service points the soldier had accumulated during his time in the military. What this meant in practical terms was that men from all over the country who had temporarily come together for the experience of combat were redistributed throughout the military and eventually the country. As repositories of communal knowledge and sites of the collective memory of combat, most organizational units were annihilated. Those groups of people from whom a veteran could expect a certain level of understanding—indeed, the only people who had participated in the same battles and had seen what the veteran had seen—dispersed. In terms of communication and rhetorical theory, units functioned as “discourse communities,” communities with unique communicative practices, memories, priorities, sociolinguistic codes, rules, and transgressions.¹⁰ Once a unit had been disbanded, the communicative practices unique to that unit were lost, diminishing veterans’ capacity for meaningful dialogue about their experiences. J. Glenn Gray, a university philosophy professor who taught during the heyday of the G.I. Bill, when college campuses swarmed with vets, suggests that a veteran might find understanding in others who had experienced combat, though opportunities to speak to others with similar experiences dwindled over time. “When a new generation of college students replaced the veterans with whom I could philosophize meaningfully without mentioning our common past,” Gray recounted, “the war receded even faster than before. Now it is almost as though it never took place” (22-3). American combat veterans had experienced the war differently from the rest of the country, including the

overwhelming majority of people who were in the service. Erring generously on the side of caution, let us say, hypothetically, that one half of all of the more than 15 million men who served in uniform were exposed to the full horror of war, even then only about 6 percent of the American population experienced combat, a number that is doubtlessly high.¹¹ Not surprisingly, America's collective memory of the war would largely be determined by the experiences of the other 94% of the population. The incommunicability of the experience of combat, especially in the context of a populace that had not experienced the totality of the destruction in Europe and Asia, made any hope of meaningful dialogue between the combat veteran and the civilian remote.

At midcentury, a pervasive cult of masculinity that colored men's social, domestic, and inner lives also made it difficult for combat veterans to discuss their trauma in memoir. In its most basic manifestation, it was seen in the male relationship to work: in the story of the "traditional" American family, the male is the breadwinner. If a male is unable to provide for his family, he is perceived as weak or unmanly, and he is relegated to the domestic sphere, like a woman.¹² This gendering of work is relevant to a discussion of the relationship between men and mental health following the war. Indeed, telling the mentally ill serviceman to "go to work" was tantamount to telling him to "be a man" and, by extension, "don't be a woman," even if women had been doing much of the work stateside during the war. Adams notes that often cowardliness was aligned with effeminacy: "The cruelest myth about combat stress is that cowards break down and heroes don't. In World War II, psychiatric casualties were often seen as 'mommies' boys,' spoiled brats without manliness" (95). Such concerns about the modern man's womanliness are made explicit in two works of the period. When in 1946 Philip Wylie, a prominent science fiction writer and a civil servant during the war, published his *Generation of Vipers*, a book-length screed against, well, everybody, it met with surprising popularity, with

twenty printings and 180,000 copies sold before 1956 (Yardley). His most potent venom was directed at women. Moms were responsible, said Wylie, for “the mealy look of men today” (197). Wylie’s paroxysm of despair and anger forecasts the end of American civilization, and he lays responsibility for this at women’s feet: “Just as Goebbels has revealed what can be done with [...] a mass-stamping of the public psyche in his nation, so our land is a living representation of the same fact worked out in matriarchal sentimentality, goo, slop, hidden cruelty, and the foreshadow of national death” (202).¹³

Wylie was not alone in finding America’s mothers’ sons prodigiously inadequate to the task of sustaining the nation. Psychiatrist Edward A. Streckler, an advisor to the Surgeons General of the Armed Forces, holds “mom” largely responsible for “500,000 men who tried to evade service to their country,” the “1,825,000 men who were rejected at induction for various neuropsychiatric causes” and the “600,000 more that had to be discharged from the service for similar reasons” (18).¹⁴ While he tries to distance himself from Wylie, his very definition of “mom” belies his own contempt for a large section of the adult population. “Mom,” to him, is “a convenient verbal hook upon which to hang an indictment of the woman who has failed in the elementary mother function of weaning her offspring emotionally as well as physically. I might have called this kind of spurious mother far less pleasant names than Mom” (13). “Mothers,” says Streckler, are responsible parents, while “moms” all share “the emotional satisfaction, almost repletion, [derived] from keeping [their] children paddling about in a kind of psychological amniotic fluid rather than letting them swim away with the bold and decisive strokes of maturity from the emotional maternal womb” (31). All of the military’s amniotic washouts lacked “maturity” (21), which he defines as “a complex set of personality qualities,” including “the ability to see a job through, no matter what,” “the inherent desire to always give

more than is asked for,” “independence of thought and action,” “the capacity to cooperate, to work in an organization, and to work under authority,” and an ability to “alter his own desires according to times, persons, and circumstances” (21-2).¹⁵ The markers of a man who maintained an unhealthy relationship to his mother ranged from an overdeveloped conscience,¹⁶ to homosexuality, which was thought to result when the male child, who “universal[ly], at least at first, is in love with his mother” (Streckler 128), was unable to substitute another female for his mother at the center of his sexual life and turned to other men for sexual gratification (131). Another marker was being a communist, which as David K. Johnson notes, was “seen as the result of psychological maladjustment and early childhood problems, particularly an overdependence on the mother” (35). How in such an environment—and in a culture in which women were increasingly moving into the workplace, no less—could a veteran be persuaded to discuss his traumatization in a straightforward manner? Even *Let There Be Light* stresses the mother’s role in soldiers’ neuroses. Mothers are implicated in about two-thirds of the cases that are depicted at any length; the same analyst finds that whereas one soldier’s troubles stem from his mother’s inability to *restrain* her feelings, another soldier’s problems are rooted in his mother’s inability to *express* hers.¹⁷

Not until notions of masculinity were decoupled from reactions to trauma did a language develop that made it possible for American combat veterans to discuss their experiences directly in memoir. That the effects of trauma might constitute a clinical syndrome—and that literally anyone could develop symptoms, not just *momma’s boys*—emerges from psychiatrists’ work on behalf of two groups: Holocaust survivors and Vietnam veterans. In the 1960s, survivors of the Holocaust insisted that their experiences in the 1940s continued to cause them suffering that merited reparation. According to Ben Shephard, the psychiatrists working with these patients

“created a new professional model: the psychiatrist as patients’ advocate, helping a group of wronged victims to win reparations. It also popularized the idea of a general, loosely-defined ‘syndrome’ among a group of patients, made the idea of *delayed* emotional after-effects of trauma respectable and put guilt, especially *survivor guilt*, on the agenda” (361). At about the same time, the late 1960s and early 1970s, an antiwar group, Vietnam Veterans Against the War, began hosting informal “group rap sessions” to help new veterans who were having trouble readjusting to civilian life. In previous wars, these vets might have been diagnosed with “shell-shock” or “combat exhaustion,” diagnoses that were generally limited to Army medicine and did not receive wide public recognition. These small groups reached out to psychiatrists for insight and expertise in the management of veterans’ psychological problems (Shephard 356). In 1972, about a year after he began working with these groups, one of these psychiatrists, Chaim F. Shatan, published an article about his work in the *New York Times*, in which he outlined some of the characteristics he witnessed in veterans, including guilt, victimization, rage, combat brutalization, and alienation from other people. Shatan’s article is characteristic of the movement to recognize veterans’ suffering as a legitimate psychiatric concern that necessitated new, specialized treatment and attention. Those psychiatrists who spoke on behalf of patients sought to generate public recognition through the mass media while pressing the profession to recognize their concerns.

In his *Times* article, Shatan posited that “extreme situations” caused “impacted grief,” and he coined the phrase “Post-Vietnam Syndrome,” a media-friendly phrase that branded the debate that veterans and their psychiatrists sponsored in the public sphere and professional circles (Shephard 357). Due to their efforts, in 1980, when the American Psychiatric Association published the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-

III), the organization defined and described Post-traumatic Stress Disorder for the first time. Vietnam veterans had initiated a dialogue about the psychological effects of war and trauma in a post-Freudian context that shifted attention away from the presumed innate character flaws causing cognitive dysfunction following exposure to combat. The new model related combat veterans' problems directly to the effects of prolonged traumatic stress. This, in effect, removed much of the stigma from the soldier who had suffered intensely and struggled with his memories following the war. Anyone could experience the long-lasting effects of trauma, not just mama's boys.

Concurrent with the development of a destigmatizing clinical vocabulary which described the effects of modern combat, numerous memoirs and novels by Vietnam veterans and witnesses appeared immediately following the war, mainstreaming public discussion of the psychological toll of combat. Philip Caputo, author of *A Rumor of War*, identifies a number of books that brought attention to the topic, including Larry Heinemann's novel *Close Quarters* (1977), journalist Michael Herr's *Dispatches* (1977), Tim O'Brien's novel *Going After Cacciato* (1978) and James Webb's novel *Fields of Fire* (1978) (Caputo 353).¹⁸ Ron Kovic's 1976 memoir *Born on the Fourth of July*, itself a powerful testament to the power of WWII's representation as a "good war" and Kovic's own disillusionment with that story, illustrates what Bodnar means when he says, "[m]any of the stories by Vietnam soldiers took the mythical version of World War II as a foil to construct their personal stories that they thought were in some ways unique. They assumed that the patriotic version of World War II was the only version Americans held" (240). This disillusionment about the nature of war became an important facet of Vietnam veterans' autobiographical writing in much the same way WWI shattered the expectations of the men who fought it.

It is fair to say that Paul Fussell's public career paralleled his generation's long, gradual return to the subject of the war. He moved from an initial silence about the horrors of combat to providing a corrective lens of personal experience to an image of the Allied war that, in his words, had been "sanitized and romanticized almost beyond recognition by the sentimental, the loony patriotic, the ignorant, and the bloodthirsty" (Fussell, *Wartime* ix).¹⁹ A severely wounded and self-described "thoroughly pissed-off infantryman" (*Doing* 208), Fussell returned from Europe and attended graduate school, choosing an area of interest perhaps as remote from the Second World War as possible: eighteenth-century prosody. In a 2005 interview, when asked whether or not he had deliberately decided to avoid thinking about the war, he replied:

Oh, entirely! My plan, my private plan, was to ignore it because I hated it so much. And I despised just about everybody I had to work with—I never worked with working class people in my life and I found things about them that were utterly offensive to me. They'd go stealing, for example, as part of their lives, looting. They loved bringing distress to the innocents. Sadism. Fantastic, so all of that I had to stow away and say, "I don't want to talk about it. I don't want to remember it. It's awful, and I'm proceeding on a totally different track." And that is why I didn't write anything about it until much later [...] (Personal Interview)

For the next twenty years, Fussell focused on "the peace and quiet and good sense of the eighteenth century, and then [...] as I say, I ended up with nothing more to say about it. I had made the textbooks that were taught from and done everything that I could" (Personal Interview). This closely parallels the sentiments expressed by Mauldin and Gray shortly after the war, to have as little to do with the war as possible.

His own war was clearly on Fussell's mind as he wrote *The Great War and Modern*

Memory, which he later described as “oblique autobiography” (*Doing* 270), and his account of the book’s writing reveals how closely he aligned his own experiences with those of the people he was writing about:

[...] I wanted to make the reader’s flesh creep. I wanted my readers to weep as they sensed the despair of people like themselves, torn and obliterated for a cause beyond their understanding. I had cried so often while writing the book that to steady myself I often had to take a long walk and breathe deeply after writing some heartrending passage. And sometimes I compressed my lips tightly so that those close to me wouldn’t know what I was thinking. [...] To hint at one thing the book was about, I dedicated it to the memory of [Sergeant] Hudson [who died in the same shell burst that had wounded Fussell]. (*Doing* 267)

Much of what Fussell was seeking to accomplish in *The Great War and Modern Memory* was to awaken the general public to the suffering of war in the context of Vietnam:

If in one way [my book] was an act of implicit autobiography, in another it was a refraction of current events. During the Vietnam War I had grown sick of hearing phrases like “body count” from otherwise fairly civilized people. [...] One of my objects in writing this book was to reawaken the reader’s imagination and power of sympathy in a world too far gone in the complacencies of mechanism, scientism, and abstraction. (*Doing* 266)

The turbulence of the Vietnam War era, it seems, gave a new urgency to Fussell’s concerns. Indeed, in a 1996 interview with Sheldon Hackney, Fussell states directly that *The Great War and Modern Memory* is “really is about the Vietnam War as much as it is about the First World War” (“Initial Shock”). Here we find the explicit link between Fussell’s interest in the Great War,

its relationship to his experiences in the Second World War as “implicit autobiography,” and the influence of Vietnam on the trajectory of his career. Vietnam seems to have set Fussell on a course to write directly about his own wartime experiences.

Over the next twenty years, Fussell wrote on topics that inched ever closer to his own war experiences. In 1980, he published the book *Abroad*, which was about interwar British travel writing. He collected and published his essays, like the controversial *New Republic* article “Thank God for the Atom Bomb” (1981), which suggested that postwar arguments over the morality of the atom bomb were mere “canting nonsense” (798) to the infantrymen who had “special empirical knowledge” (“My War” 270) of war and who were sure they were going to Japan to die. In 1989, Fussell published his treatment of World War II, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War*. *Wartime* seeks, in part, to show that America does itself a disservice by retroactively glorifying the Second World War and to illustrate how much of the story of the war is in fact a construction. Only in 1996, twenty-one years after he started writing about war, did Fussell publish his memoir, *Doing Battle: The Making of a Skeptic*, finally adding his story to the memoirs of the veterans of World War II who found their voice in the wake of Vietnam.

¹ The government released images of American war dead more regularly in the last year of the war, when the most American casualties were sustained in Europe and the Pacific, in order to stoke the nation’s continued commitment to seeing the war through despite the mounting human cost.

² Casaregola makes this argument in the fifth chapter of his *Theaters of War: America’s Perception of World War II* (2009).

³ But the straightforward borrowing of stock footage to supply context is made more complicated when one considers how directors in the service during the war, including John Ford (in the 1942 documentary *The Battle of Midway*), John Huston (in 1945’s *The Battle of San Pietro*), and Greg Toland (in the unedited version of the 1943 debacle *December 7th*, which Ford had to edit and fix), used actors and staged shots in their narratives. In the second chapter of *Theaters of War*, Casaregola notes how many such staged scenes worked their way silently into postwar documentaries as presumably *actual footage*, and in the case of Toland, conveniently filled in huge gaps in the visual

record of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. This amounts to cultural representation informing history in turn informing cultural representation.

⁴ The iconic Joe Rosenthal photo of the flag raising at Iwo Jima gains much of its power from the anonymity of the Marines striving together toward a final goal.

⁵ One might consider the soldier-slapping scene in *Patton* as an exception, where psychological trauma of the infantryman is acknowledged, but in the last scene, Bradley tells Patton, “I think that soldier you slapped back in Sicily did more to win the war than any other private in the Army,” implying that Patton’s instincts had actually been right.

⁶ The full extent of military and commercial cooperation involved in the making of many Hollywood war films is fully elaborated and well examined on a case-by-case basis in Lawrence H. Suid’s indispensable *Guts and Glory: The Making of the American Military Image in Film*.

⁷ Gray 23; Mauldin, *Back* 23. Gray goes so far as to suggest that those who publicly recollected the war were “suspected of wanting to magnify their little egos, of being professional legionnaires” (23). Mauldin noted that before the Pacific war ended Americans “wanted to get back to peacetime living” and that many were unintentionally hostile to those in uniform who reminded them of reasons for the continued war rationing and shortages (23). Hollywood also anticipated this desire to move on from the subject, and according to Suid, movie executives dialed back the production of combat films, while those combat films that did appear after V-J Day, “languished at the box office” (97).

⁸ As a character in William Wyler’s 1946 film, *The Best Years of Our Lives*, says during the cab ride home following his return from fighting in the Pacific, “What scares me the most is that everybody’s going to try to rehabilitate me.”

⁹ “In the confusion and distress generated by battle, [combat soldiers] tried to speak from depths dark and complicated. Their language strained to express the inexpressible; their generalizations failed to span their numerous voids. [...] For soldiers, observers, and analysts, much of what happened remains distressingly elusive” (Lindermann 2).

¹⁰ A serviceable definition of discourse communities, as well as a survey of earlier, similar concepts, may be found in John M. Swales’s *Genre Analysis*. The small combat unit’s communicative strategies are partially inherited through military basic and further developed in specialty training. Shared experience of training determines much of the discursive potential between individuals in the small unit and may constitute “expertise,” in Swales’s sense of the word. But there is more to the soldier’s discourse community, especially the importance of the shared experience of combat: no matter how highly trained a replacement soldier, it was difficult for a replacement to enter into the discourse community without gaining practical experience on the line. The costs of this practice were often high to replacements. The American replacement system in World War II, in which wounded soldiers were not necessarily returned to their units and new men were fed directly into the line as individuals, not in coherent, organized trained units, has been much criticized. See Ambrose’s *Citizen Soldiers*, 273-89.

¹¹ According to Gerald Linderman, out of a population of approximately 132 million Americans, only about 800,000 Americans experienced extended combat (1), approximately .6% of the total population. This is in all likelihood a low estimate, probably only taking into account members of combat divisions. Of the fifteen million men who wore American uniforms during the war, perhaps a third were technically in harm’s way. The general principle, however, remains. The number of Americans who saw combat were vastly outnumbered by those who never heard a shot fired in anger.

¹² Julie H. Weiss notes that contemporary sociologists found that “when men lost their status as breadwinners, they lost patriarchal authority as well” (155).

¹³ K.A. Cuodiloene has sketched the extent of the pervasive fear of “momism” in *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (126-33). Colleen Glenn has discussed the relationship of momism to neuropsychological casualties in her study of Jimmy Stewart’s postwar work (30-32).

¹⁴ Streckler does not question whether or not the Army’s testing instruments were at all flawed. He says of the test subjects: “They were *all* sick” (18).

¹⁵ It is interesting to note how heavily Streckler’s definition of maturity relies on the capacity to do work, traditionally the realm of the male. Streckler, like Wylie, believes that the “momism” model holds at the national level, and he goes on to describe the entire Second World War as a sort of infantile temper tantrum: “Nazism [was] a mom surrogate with a swastika for a heart” (133); “I doubt that even the atomic bomb had sufficient force to dis-womb the Japanese people. After Japan yielded, thousands of Japanese bowed to the ground before the walls of the palace, abjectly begging the Emperor-Mom to forgive them for not having tried harder to win the war!” (139). An instructive exploration of the relationship of “maturity” to masculinity can be found in the first two chapters of Barbara Ehrenreich’s *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment*.

¹⁶ “[Y]ou hear men say, ‘I just couldn’t do a thing like that. It goes against my nature.’ The mother’s voice speaking to her child becomes years later a man’s conscience holding him back from what she said was wrong” (Child 173)

¹⁷ Rebecca Jo Plant, working with Philip Wylie’s papers, uncovered the exquisite bind that women were in after the war in a 1947 letter to Wylie from a Mrs. Theodore Blake: “As one of the millions of war wives I am told repeatedly that my husband has just been through a terrible ordeal [...] that he is nervous and confused and it will take time and infinite patience and understanding from me to help him return to normal. Then again I am told as a wife and mother that our service men suffered from a new disease called ‘Momism’ and it is up to we mothers to teach our children to be independent—to help them stand on their own and think for themselves. Those two attitudes contradict each other” (95).

¹⁸ By all accounts, the image of John Wayne as soldier-hero is inextricably tied into the Vietnam generation’s initial understanding of soldiering and of war. According to Katherine Kinney, “*Sands of Iwo Jima* defined the image not only of John Wayne, but of war and the Marine Corps for the generation that fought in Vietnam” (18). He became, she argues, the “unambiguous embodiment of mythic, epic possibilities in spite of the specific attempts to burden his character with a more pedestrian identity” (23). Though the character of Stryker is sketched in contradictory terms—he is a failed father and drunk on leave, but a damned fine father figure on duty—what stuck with the soldiers of the Vietnam generation was Stryker’s perceived greatness. This heroic image of the American fighting man, however, did not arise solely on the basis of patriotic conventions established during the war. Kinney gives a more complete account of the image of Wayne and its influence on the depiction of American wars, especially in the writings of Vietnam veterans, in the first chapter of her *Friendly Fire* (11-42).

¹⁹ A similar dim view of the American craving for optimistic repackaging of the war is clearly evident in Fussell’s comments about the spate of WWII films that appeared in and after the late 1990s: “I think that films can never [represent war faithfully] because films are entertainment. They have to be entertainment [...]. If you have to be entertaining you can’t tell the truth about anything, including behavior, the law, serious things, and war is a very serious thing. [...] If I could honor [any contemporary films about the war] they would be so awful that nobody would go see them.” (Personal Interview)

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