American Military Trends in the 20th Century

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Chapter 1-Introduction

In a multitude of ways, the course of world history has been determined by wars between nations. From the Punic Wars to the current war in Afghanistan, these conflicts have led to the rise and fall of global superpowers as different countries battle for hegemony. In an attempt to understand these historical events, historians have examined the ways in which these battles were rooted in geopolitical, religious, cultural, and ethnic differences. However, these factors alone cannot explain the eruption of conflict over the centuries, and there are many other variables that determine the outcome of wars.

Since the widespread dissemination of Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War*, the historical narrative of war has begun to focus on war strategy and tactics. Through the lens of contemporary history, wars are often won by superior leadership, not the quality of a nation’s foot soldiers. Millions of casualties are grouped together for the sake of understanding the events of war and the individual experience of the average soldier is relegated to the footnotes of history. Although we cannot expect historians to scrutinize the perspectives of every single soldier, most of these viewpoints are lost in the broader account of history. Throughout this paper, I hope to gain a greater
understanding of how soldiers have contributed to the overall outcomes of pivotal conflicts in the twentieth century.

After my introduction, I discuss the impact that leadership can have on a unit’s performance. Utilizing Stephen E. Ambrose’s *Band of Brothers: E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne from Normandy to Hitler's Eagle's Nest*, this chapter will juxtapose two diametrically opposed military leaders: Captain Herbert Sobel and Major Richard Winters. These two different personalities yielded two completely different results. While Major Winters’s men were able to perform at a high level throughout the duration of the Allied invasion, Captain Sobel was never able to lead any troops into combat. The discontent he sowed within his own ranks brought them together, but also motivated them to mutiny against him. In this case, the insight into military leadership which Ambrose provides sheds unique light on the factors which influenced Easy Company’s success.

After exploring the effects of leadership on the efficacy of enlisted men, my third chapter will break down the implications of casualties within the military. In war, thousands, or even millions, of casualties are treated as a statistic despite the fact that each and every number represents a distinct individual. Within a military’s ranks, heavy losses can destroy a division’s chances of success in missions against the enemy and fuel even more insubordination and mutiny. This is compounded by the fact that, although enlisted men are merely foot soldiers, they can never truly be replaced. Replacement troops can often be inadequate in the absence of well-liked veterans who had previously been an essential part of a unit. The loss of a dear friend, a capable comrade, and a trusted companion cannot be quantified by numbers alone. However, these losses continue to weigh heavily on soldiers even after their service. From PTSD to
depression, veterans can go through a wide variety of mental crises due to their traumatic experiences in war.

On the other hand, the strong connection servicemen feel with one another can function as a means to help them through these postwar crises. The bonds forged by soldiers in both training and combat are often unbreakable. Especially in the paratrooper regiments, the lengthy training process brings soldiers together despite their differences. Regional distinctions, conflicting personality traits, and contrasting perspectives often become irrelevant in war as these divisions only serve as an additional way to bring comrades together. Additionally, soldiers are forced to spend countless hours together in combat and form close friendships with each other simply due to their exposure to one another. War is full of intensity and danger, but there is usually a frightening period of inactivity between these relatively short bursts of combat. These hours of inactivity and apprehensive waiting offer opportunities for unique individuals to learn more about each other through their shared circumstances. At the end of this chapter, I will also examine the friendships which soldiers maintain with their comrades long after the war. From offering their best friend a job to reconnecting at reunions, thousands of soldiers connect after deployment because they find solace in the presence of others who understand what they have been through.

Although history rarely tells the story of an individual soldier, war literature which focuses on the individual experiences of these brave soldiers is an effective way to demonstrate the true nature of war. Many members of society are able to understand the impact of a global conflict beyond the seemingly endless numbers of casualties which a nation suffered. By concentrating my paper on the characteristics of war from a soldier’s perspective, I hope to
acquire a greater understanding of the battles, campaigns, and decisions which have altered the
course of history. Throughout my paper, I will also be defending the following thesis as an
overarching theme: the outcome of a war is rarely determined by a slight advantage in manpower
or capabilities, but it is frequently determined by the ability of the winning side’s men to endure
the psychological hardships of combat. Another important factor in war is a unit’s ability to
come together to fight the enemy rather than fighting within their own ranks. Throughout
multiple wars in the 20th century, the foot soldiers of a conflict often determined its ultimate
outcome.
Chapter 2-Military Leadership

General George Patton once said that “wars may be fought with weapons, but they are won by men. It is the spirit of men who follow and of the man who leads that gains the victory” (Roos 5). Throughout conflicts in modern history, Patton’s famous quote concerning leadership has rung true: the Revolutionary War was won by the tactics of George Washington, the American Civil War was almost lost by lackluster Union generals, and the Second World War was won by the execution of daring operations planned by Allied leaders. Men win wars, but exemplary leadership is often what motivates men. Without sound leadership, it is nearly impossible to form a cohesive regiment, company, or even platoon of men. Throughout various war novels, and especially Stephen E. Ambrose’s Band of Brothers, quality of leadership is often what determines the quality of a unit’s performance.

In Band of Brothers, the commanding officer of Easy Company, after D-Day, is Richard Winters. Winters was not only respected by the men in his company, but he was also well liked. Additionally, his superiors recognized his leadership ability early on. During his first week of training at Camp Toccoa, Colonel Robert Sink (the leader of the 506th Regiment) saw Winters,
then a second lieutenant, leading his men in physical training and immediately promoted him to first lieutenant without consulting Easy Company’s commanding officer, Captain Hebert Sobel (Ambrose 26). From that point on, Winters would be repeatedly attacked by Sobel due to his ability to lead the men better than he ever could. He delegated the most tedious and unpleasant tasks to Winters out of jealousy for the universal respect which the young officer effortlessly commanded. A private in Easy Company later remembered that the leadership of Winters “turned our lives around. He was openly friendly, genuinely interested in us and our physical training” (Ambrose 25).

Eventually, Winters would become the leader of Easy Company and lead them into combat from D-Day until the end of the war. In combat, he was also a brilliant leader. When his men all dropped to the ground during an assault on a German battery in France, Winters stood up in the middle of the machine gun fire and yelled at his men to stand up. Members of the company later recalled that “no man in the company had ever before heard Winters shout, it was so out of character” (Ambrose 55). Seeing Winters standing up in the middle of the road to the battery inspired all of his men to get up and move towards the objective. In another attack on a German position in Brécourt Manor, Winters led his smaller unit against a much larger force. He was later awarded the Distinguished Service Cross (the second highest military award) for his leadership after landing in France, and Easy Company’s attack on the German garrison is still cited as a textbook example of an assault on a larger enemy position. The reason why Winters’ leadership at Brécourt Manor was explained in a University of Washington study in which researchers found “that the willingness to expose oneself to danger is associated with effective leadership” (Frost, Fiedler, and Anderson). No one in Easy Company expected their
mild-mannered commanding officer to react with such emotion to their first combat scenario. This turnaround, and the willingness Winters showed to risk his own life for the objection, is likely what spurred the men of Easy Company on to win their first battle in Normandy.

Winters’ ability to lead men did not go unnoticed, as he was quickly promoted to Captain, and then again to Major. As Major, Winters led the entire 2nd battalion of the 506th, an impressive step up from being a platoon leader only three years prior. Easy Company’s exceptional performance throughout their jumps into France, Holland, and Germany was likely due to the levelheaded leadership of Winters. His men followed him because they respected him, not because they feared him. The mature decision to be a fair leader who is approachable yet strict is one that many military officers have failed to make, even in Easy Company.

While Lt. Henry clearly set a bad example for his men, Easy Company’s first commanding officer, Captain Herbert Sobel, led by fear, not by example. From the first day that the original members of Easy Company arrived at Camp Toccoa in Georgia, Sobel was relentless with his disciplinary actions and physical training demands. He would often force his men to run up and down Mount Currahee (a six mile run) despite the fact that all the other companies in the 506th did nowhere near as much physical training as Easy. Sobel also forced his men to endure long marches without water, and, on one occasion, after the soldiers were told there would be no running and given a special meal of spaghetti, Sobel blew his whistle when they exited the mess hall and ordered them to run up Currahee. Private Tipper later recalled that, immediately after lunch, Easy Company ran “to the top of Currahee and back with a couple of ambulances following, and men vomiting spaghetti everywhere along the way. Those who dropped out and accepted the medics' invitation to ride back in the ambulances found themselves shipped out that
same day” (Ambrose 24). In many other cases, Sobel would often deny his men weekend passes off base due to minor or completely false offenses such as failing to wear a wool blouse while training and sleeping (Ambrose 55).

Another one of Sobel’s poor leadership traits was his jealousy of Winters because he perceived him as a threat. After Winters’ initial promotion to first lieutenant after just one week at Camp Toccoa, he was a marked man in Sobel’s eyes (Ambrose 25). Another reason why Sobel was jealous of Winters was his natural ability to lead the men in Easy Company during combat exercises. Sobel was a terrible combat leader. He often had to get help from NCOs to read basic maps, panicked while in defensive positions, and was even tricked into cutting a British farmer’s barbed wire fence in the middle of training by a private imitating Major Horton’s voice (Ambrose 34). Within the company, tensions began to arise as the enlisted men and NCOs realized that Sobel could not lead them into combat, especially not a jump into France. Weeks later, even after NCOs and privates alike had been discussing reporting their disdain of Sobel to Colonel Sink, tensions between Sobel and Winters finally came to a head when Sobel reprimanded Winters for failing to inspect the latrine in the barracks. Winters had been in his quarters at the time and had not received Sobel’s orders, but Sobel attempted to punish him anyway. Instead of having his weekend pass revoked for two months, Winters took a stand and chose to endorse a trial by court martial (Ambrose 36). After this exchange, the battalion’s commander, Lieutenant Colonel Strayer, chose to transfer Winters out of Easy Company and assign him to kitchen duty. Taking this as an insult, Winters was unsatisfied but still tried to convince his men not to mutiny against Sobel. Ultimately, Easy’s NCOs decided to tell Colonel
Sink that they would turn in their stripes if Sobel didn’t leave. This forced Sink to transfer Sobel out of Easy, and reinstate Winters as first platoon’s leader.

Although Sobel lost his battle for control of Easy Company, he may have helped the 101st in their effort to win the war. His departure paved the way for Winters, a competent combat leader, to rise to the top of the 506th’s 2nd Battalion and prevent many casualties. After the war, many members of the 101st even admitted that “Herbert Sobel made Easy Company” (Ambrose 27). His totalitarian leadership style united the men of the company against him, and gave them a common enemy up until their deployment to France. Sobel’s strict training demands also made Easy Company far more physically fit than other units. This likely contributed to their successful march from Camp Toccoa to Atlanta and their perseverance through impossible situations such as their encirclement in Bastogne, Belgium during the Battle of the Bulge.

During the first and second world wars, military leaders, both good and bad, often determined the results of important battles and offensives. Good leaders such as Winters, bad leaders such as Henry, and downright ugly leaders such as Sobel determined the destiny of these wars far more than the equipment or manpower advantages which one side had over the other during wartime. Cohesion, or discord, within a unit is often far more important than the quality of the orders they are given, the plans generals draw up, or the strategies which heads of state adhere to. Especially in the case of the 101st Airborne’s Easy Company, the war was certainly won by men like Winters rather than weapons.
Chapter 3-Loss and Trauma

Basic training allows for a large-scale unit to prepare for war and build relationships with one another, however, these bonds are short lived as most of the unit's members die on the battlefield. The bonds which brought these men together during the difficulties of training are eventually lost as the original group’s ranks thin throughout the war and soldiers find themselves returning to civilian life without close friends who understand their trauma from combat. For members of the United States Army in World War 1, World War 2, and Vietnam, the constantly changing composition of a unit throughout a conflict posed difficult challenges for enlisted men. As soldiers dealt with grieving their comrades, adapting to replacement troops joining the unit, and handling the trauma of seeing their friends die, they were simultaneously expected to fight, and win, an already difficult war. Particularly in conflicts in the 20th century, American soldiers were expected to deal with the psychological trauma of losing their friends without the loss affecting their own lives both during and after the war.

In the Vietnam War, young draftees were sent to a foreign land to fight in a war which they often had no interest in. This disinterest created an attitude of fighting for one’s own life
rather than fighting for one’s country for many drafted men. A lack of support for the war, and motivation to win the war, had a profound effect on thousands of troops as men felt alone in a war in which they were meant to fight together. Since soldiers’ priorities were shifted away from winning the war and more towards ensuring their own survival, this climate had the unintended consequence of making losses even more painful. The lonely nature of the Vietnam War was amplified by the loss of a best friend, respected leader, or key specialist. This was exemplified in Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried* as O’Brien describes an instance in which a soldier nicknamed “Rat” lost his best friend in the unit, Curt Lemon. After the death of Curt, Rat writes a very heartfelt letter to Curt’s sister and “pours his heart out. He says he loved the guy. He says the guy was his best friend in the world. They were like soul mates” (O’Brien 65). After mailing the letter and telling Curt’s sister that he would look her up after the war, Rat receives no response. At the time of Curt’s death, Rat was only a teenager, making it extremely difficult to handle the loneliness of war without his best friend. To add to his feeling of isolation, Rat was never written back and continued to wait for a letter which would never come from halfway around the world.

The most damaging effect that a close friend’s death can have on a soldier is feelings of abandonment. This was particularly pronounced in Vietnam as many soldiers felt abandoned by their country in the latter stages of the war. The American people had begun to reject the war, and support within the States was dwindling. Whereas World War 2 had been caused by a surprise attack and triggered a massive amount of patriotism in late 1941, there had been no such inciting incident in the 1960s for American involvement. Many Americans felt no responsibility for the future of Vietnam despite its geopolitical importance in the Cold War. The United States’
policy of supporting the South Vietnamese had quickly turned into waging an all-out war in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. When the war dragged on with little success, public support rapidly faded as civilians became more and more convinced that young Americans were being sent to the other side of the globe to die in a war which the United States had no obligation. The lack of support at home for troops, and the newfound lack of support among the ranks due to the deaths of thousands of good men, intensified the remoteness of American soldiers in Vietnam. In addition to impacting soldiers’ emotional stability, heavy losses can also leave troops with lasting trauma.

In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the United States has been embroiled in Middle Eastern conflicts that have claimed the lives of thousands of American troops. However, these casualties pale in comparison to the massive losses suffered in the First World War, Second World War, and Vietnam. In these conflicts, thousands of American soldiers were killed in action. This sudden lack of manpower created new problems for the United States military in the last years of World War 2 as commanders struggled to maintain cohesion within units that had very few of their original members survive the initial invasion of Europe. In many cases, some soldiers were simply unable to quickly move on from the horrific situations they had witnessed. An example of a good soldier unable to recover from the trauma of combat is Lt. Compton in Stephen E. Ambrose’s *Band of Brothers*. Before D-Day, the United States military began to assign more officers to the 101st Airborne in anticipation of heavy casualties, and one of those additions to Easy Company in 1943 was 2nd Lt. Lynn "Buck" Compton. Buck was a good leader, respected by his men, and had a good sense of humor. He was also a standout athlete in college as “an all-American catcher on the UCLA baseball team and [he] played football for
UCLA in the January 1, 1943, Rose Bowl game” (Ambrose 16). Buck was extremely close with his platoon of men, which was often unusual for a commissioned officer. He did not like the military’s concepts of rank and status, and, as a result, he became good friends with the enlisted men he was leading. His best friends in the company were Sgt. Guarnere and Sgt. Toye. In Bastogne, Buck emerged from his foxhole after a German artillery barrage to find his two best friends as the nearest wounded men on the ground. Guarnere and Toye’s wounds were not fatal, but their legs were badly wounded and neither of them would be able to fight again for the rest of the war. No one in the unit had any less respect for Buck because he was unable to continue in combat after seeing his best friends on the verge of death. After all, “Compton had won a Silver Star at Brecourt Manor on June 6, 1944. He had been wounded later in Normandy, and again in Holland. He had stood up to everything the Germans had thrown at him from December 17 to January 3. But the sight of his platoon being decimated, of his two friends torn into pieces, unnerved him” (Ambrose 206). For the rest of the war, Easy Company would fight on without a key leader. As a result, the unit had to face encirclement by the Germans in Bastogne, the most grueling battle of the Western front, without a quality leader for 2nd platoon.

The deaths of Buck Compton and other key leaders within the United States Army created a new issue for its generals: how could these men be replaced? The answer to that question was that they simply could not make up for the losses suffered in Normandy, Holland, and Bastogne. While the Allies certainly had enough manpower to eventually prevail against Germany, the bonds which troops had made with each other in 1942, 1943, and 1944 could never be recreated by replacing their deceased comrades. Even soldiers who returned to Easy Company after being wounded felt alienated by their old friends in the 101st Airborne. Private Webster
rejoined Easy Company in France after being wounded in action earlier in the war and said that in the 1st platoon, “eleven men were left out of forty. Nine of them were old soldiers who had jumped in either Holland or Normandy or both” (Ambrose 219). Old soldiers found themselves with fewer friends while new replacements felt as if they were never going to be able to relate to the men who had been through Normandy and the Battle of the Bulge together. In fact, “veterans tried to help replacements, but they also took care not to learn their names, as they expected them to be gone shortly” (Ambrose 171). The problem was not that the battle-tested soldiers did not care about replacements and draftees, but they simply understood that although they were good men, they were unlikely to make it very far in the war. This sentiment was exacerbated by the fact that many replacement troops were as young as 17 or 18 years old. Their young age made them seem like children who had either been forced into war by the draft or were overly enthusiastic about experiencing combat. In the last months of the Second World War, the 101st Airborne was only a small fraction of what it had been in Georgia in 1942. The unit began to lack cohesion as the people and experiences which once brought them together were remembered by a dwindling number of men.

Over the past 100 years, the condition now known as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has affected American troops in a variety of global conflicts. In World War 1, shell shocked soldiers were rendered incapacitated by the thousands while World War 2 saw many of its most hardened soldiers such as Buck Compton become unable to return to the front lines. More recently, the Vietnam War has had a lasting impact on the postwar mental health of countless veterans. Although symptoms of PTSD have been clear in soldiers for centuries, attitudes toward the disorder have only begun to shift over the past few decades. After World
War 2, many soldiers experienced PTSD in some form after the war, but the dominant narrative at the time was relentlessly upbeat. The heroes of World War Two were now building a prosperous post-war society” (Mulvey 2). Veterans were often expected to hide the mental damage caused by the war and people ignored the fact that veterans’ hospitals were full of men in serious mental crises. During the 20th century, more Americans became more aware of the impact that war can have on a veteran’s long-term mental health. As the issue became more prevalent, PTSD “was first officially recognized as a mental health condition in 1980, only five years after the end of the Vietnam War” (Richman 1). Knowledge of PTSD had become more mainstream and there was no longer as much of a stigma around the condition as there had been before the Vietnam War. As lawmakers and the Department of Veterans Affairs worked to create programs for veterans affected by PTSD, the resources for veterans affected by mental health issues slowly expanded. Although steps have been made towards extending public health infrastructure to more veterans impacted by PTSD, there is still much more work to be done to prevent more suicides from occurring and the escalation of PTSD in many veterans.

Throughout the major conflicts of the 20th century, soldiers were often required to cope with the losses of their friends and the burdens of combat while taking new, demanding orders in stride. The trouble for soldiers didn’t stop with the end of the war. Even after combat, and healing the physical scars of battle, the mental damage inflicted upon veterans by their combat experiences was irreversible. Luckily, more and more Americans are becoming aware of the far-reaching impacts of PTSD for millions of veterans. This increased awareness can help ensure that fewer soldiers in the future must hide their psychological wounds.
Chapter 4-Camaraderie

Throughout the first half of my thesis, I have focused on the effects of leadership and casualties on the performance of a military unit. Now I will be exploring how an underlying sense of camaraderie between soldiers has a lasting impact on the men who share this close bond. Although American soldiers come from various states, regions, and territories, they are still able to form a cohesive group when they are deployed together. In the various global conflicts of the 20th century, comrades often formed deep relationships which transcended differences among them such as regional identity.

Despite the varying backgrounds of American soldiers, basic training is an important step towards building trust within a unit. Whether soldiers are volunteers or draftees, basic training forces these men to spend weeks with each other, which creates mutual trust between them. Many recruits do not share common interests and are unable to work smoothly with each other in the first days of training. However, integrating these unique soldiers into a single team is one of the main objectives of military training. In the *Harvard Business Review*, former United States Army commander Richard Farnell writes that “if you don’t help people integrate effectively
through common values, those strengths may not be used to their full potential — and your team probably won’t be more than the sum of its very different members” (Farnell 3). In Stephen E. Ambrose’s *Band of Brothers: E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne from Normandy to Hitler's Eagle's Nest*, Farnell’s views on forming a coherent group is manifested in Easy Company’s common value: despising Captain Sobel. Herbert Sobel was an over-the-top disciplinarian and often forced his company to exceed minimum requirements in improving their physical fitness in addition to maintaining their already demanding exercises imposed by the commander of the 101st Airborne, Colonel Sink. On one occasion in the winter of 1942, Colonel Sink ordered hundreds of his men to march from Camp Toccoa to Atlanta (118 miles) in full military equipment. The physical demands of training alone were more than enough to form an underlying understanding that Easy Company would be in an ongoing struggle with their superiors.

As training at Camp Toccoa continued, members of Easy Company all agreed that Captain Sobel was their enemy until they parachuted into France. Ambrose writes that “anyone who has ever been in the Army knows the type. Sobel was the classic chickensh*t. He generated maximum anxiety over matters of minimum significance” (Ambrose 6). Sobel was not simply imposing his grueling demands upon his soldiers because he was trying to prepare them for combat; he also genuinely enjoyed harassing his soldiers. Captain Sobel often denied weekend passes for his men due to fabricated reasons such as “dirty ears” and seemed to gain satisfaction from revoking privileges from enlisted men. He also did not tolerate any mistakes. Ambrose recalled that some of Easy Company’s original members told him that “when someone was late returning on Sunday night, the next evening, after a full day's training, Sobel would order him to
dig a 6 x 6 x 6-foot pit with his entrenching tools. When the pit was finished, Sobel would tell him to ‘fill it up’” (Ambrose 5). While Captain Sobel’s behavior certainly had the consequence of uniting his men against him, it is unclear whether this was intentional or unintentional. Nevertheless, Sobel’s emphasis on discipline and callous demeanor had a lasting impact on the men of Easy Company. Men began to bond over their common hatred of Sobel, and, for the first time, a mixed bag of soldiers began to feel like a homogeneous company.

Enlisted men do not just bond over their stressful experiences in basic training. They also develop closer friendships when they are deployed on the front lines. In Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*, O’Brien writes about the death of Curt Lemon, a soldier with a great personality and “a great sense of humor, too. Like the time at this river when he went fishing with a whole damn crate of hand grenades. Probably the funniest thing in world history” (O’Brien 64). In many ways, the young soldiers in Vietnam who were drafted as teenagers behaved like teenagers. Although they were constantly threatened in active war zones, there was time to relax or have long conversations simply because they had so much time to spend together. Being out in the field means that there is no way to occupy oneself, and often distract oneself, in the midst of war for hours on end. Another key factor in the rapid formation of friendships between members of the military is that there is often a lack of judgement between the enlisted men. In *The Things They Carried*, there are multiple members in the platoon who could be considered “pretty nutso sometimes, but you could trust them with your life” (O’Brien 189). In the military, the extreme circumstances which deployed men often find themselves thrown into are shared by the other members of their unit. Specifically in Vietnam, American soldiers were relatively uninterested in the geopolitical consequences of the war and often
wondered why they were fighting a battle against a Southeast Asian communist faction that had no discernible impact on the lives of their families and friends back in the United States. The ridiculousness of their situation often justifies the ridiculous actions of their comrades. Through outrageous humor such as fishing with hand grenades, soldiers strengthen the bonds they forged in basic training as they are subjected to horrible conditions in terrible deployments.

The distinctive trauma that soldiers bring home from war is often just as unique as the friends they made in combat. It is often difficult for civilians to understand the impact of PTSD on veterans even though many can empathize with the mental crises veterans are going through. Many Americans are unaware of the mental health issues within our veteran population and many more simply cannot relate to veterans who are struggling with their mental stability post-deployment. One approach to fixing this problem is to use the camaraderie among soldiers as a means to heal the psychological wounds of warfare. In *Foreign Policy*, David Morris writes that it is “essential for veterans to get back in touch with at least one of their comrades from the battalion and to make sure to know where they are mentally, psychologically, and if they’re having challenges, to reach out a hand and help them out” (Morris 2). Because few civilians understand the unique trauma which combat can inflict upon veterans, reunions for particular groups of veterans are often extremely effective ways of healing old wounds. These men have often gotten each other through some of the worst months or years of their life, and it makes sense that they would help each other through successfully reassimilating back into civilian life. In many cases, people neglect the simple fact that veterans need emotional support from someone who can relate directly to their experiences rather than a therapist or ineffective medication. Recently, more and more veterans have become convinced that the best medication
for their struggles with depression, PTSD, and suicidal thoughts are reunions which allow veterans to reunite with their former comrades and remember those who were lost to enemy fire in combat or to suicide back home. Morris wrote about his own reunion that after remembering a well-liked Marine who had recently committed suicide after a series of lengthy operations, honoring their friends who had died in combat, and exchanging information to reach out to each other, one Marine said that “the reunion saved my life. I feel completely different now” (Morris 3). When veterans return to civilian life, a new struggle begins as former soldiers re-enter society. For many combat veterans, the support of those who helped them through their deployments is essential to re-assimilating into civilian life without developing long-term mental health issues which are far more destructive than the physical challenges of war.

Throughout the 20th century, millions of young men served in the armed forces in wars spanning multiple continents and decades. These men were from varying backgrounds, cultures, and hometowns, but their experiences in training, combat, and re-assimilation into society bonded them together. Even during periods of turmoil in domestic politics, soldiers were able to set aside their differences as they found common ground in common attitudes towards their unique situations. The relationships formed in combat are markedly different than relationships formed between civilians, and, as a result, have the ability to heal veterans long after their time in the military. While there has been a recent focus on cutting edge therapeutic methods for “curing” veterans’ mental conditions, it is clear that there is a much more traditional method for providing support systems for combat veterans. In the future, medical opinion may shift towards prescribing contact with other like-minded individuals rather than incentivizing the prescription of drugs which often worsen veteran’ mental crises. Hopefully, we are able to recognize the
power of the friendships which combat veterans share and how these bonds can be used to help them through not only their lengthy deployments, but also their integration back into society as a whole.

Chapter 5-Conclusion

I have examined the impact which individual soldiers have on the overall outcome of a war, and it has become clear to me that the foot soldiers of consequential conflicts are often treated as inconsequential. This is especially true in wars where millions of individual troops are engaged in battles on multiple fronts, or even continents. History cannot be expected to tell the story of each and every soldier in a much larger engagement, but the importance of these soldiers, and their actions, in relation to the end result of a war is often underestimated. I maintain my original stance that the individual soldiers in combat can determine the ultimate outcome of a conflict.

This conclusion is supported by many facets of my paper, beginning with my chapter concerning leadership. A certain side’s success in a war always begins in training and the efficacy of that training. The defining factor in how successfully a unit will perform is often predetermined by the specific leaders which they are assigned. Lackluster leadership can create lackluster troops while exemplary leadership can produce excellent soldiers. This relationship was exemplified in perhaps the most important of my three primary sources: Stephen E. Ambrose’s Band of Brothers: E Company, 506th Regiment, 101st Airborne from Normandy to
**Hitler's Eagle's Nest** (or simply **Band of Brothers**). In this novelization of the real-life experiences of Easy Company, Ambrose explains the dynamic between commissioned officers and enlisted men in great detail. Through interviews with veterans of Easy Company, Ambrose produces an accurate depiction of the impacts which different styles of leadership can have on military units. The difference between life and death, success and failure, or victory and defeat is often made by quality training administered by competent leaders. The events detailed in **Band of Brothers** make it abundantly clear that the tide of war may be turned by seemingly insignificant differences in soldiers’ attitudes, dispositions, and loyalties towards their leaders. A war against a common enemy is almost impossible to win if soldiers choose to fight their superiors rather than the other side.

Another major theme I uncovered during my research was the effects of wartime atrocities on individual men and women involved in the conflict. In **The Things They Carried**, another one of my primary sources, the enlisted men in the Vietnam War were fighting in a conflict which left many of them disillusioned and traumatized. After years of watching horrific events play out within their units, deployment posts, and even friend groups, soldiers in the Vietnam War were often unable to continue on in combat due to the psychological weight of the events happening around them. In **Band of Brothers** Lieutenant Buck Compton and several other soldiers are completely incapacitated for certain periods of time due to their inability to process the massive amounts of loss all around them. This problem was only worsened by the introduction of replacement troops in multiple 20th century conflicts. These new troops took the places of dear friends and capable soldiers, and served as a painful reminder of who they were
replacing. In the midst of a destructive war, it is evident that mental strength is often just as important in a good soldier as physical strength.

Although war reflects a greater trend of two or more nations growing apart and coming into conflict with one another, large-scale wars have a way of bringing the men on a certain side together. For example, in wars waged by the United States, infantrymen from vastly different backgrounds, perspectives, and geographic regions must come together and form a cohesive bond amidst the chaos of war. The common psychological hardships shared by these soldiers inevitably break down the natural barriers between them as they become more compatible with one another. Over the course of several months or years, soldiers who once resented each other for their differences in basic training can grow to cherish each others’ camaraderie. However, these bonds can only form under the right conditions and there are many factors, such as leadership during training, which can affect the relationships between enlisted men. Overall, distinct individuals working toward a common goal is essential for the success of any nation attempting to win a war.

These pieces of evidence, within both fictional and non-fictional works of literature, make it apparent that General George Patton’s famous words are often proven true within a multitude of conflicts: “wars may be fought with weapons, but they are won by men. It is the spirit of men who follow and of the man who leads that gains the victory.” Nevertheless, modern military engagements make this statement seem increasingly outdated. Contrary to the relatively traditional warfare of the 20th century, wars in modern years have become much more influenced by technology than manpower. The world’s strongest militaries are the most well equipped defense forces, not the most numerous. In many instances, such as the civil war in
Yemen, hundreds of airstrikes can be conducted by drones without any risk of human casualties. The methods of waging war have changed far beyond what Sun Tzu or George Patton could have ever predicted. Wars are no longer waged by men, but instead they are fought through the use of technologically advanced weaponry.

While the overarching theme of foot soldiers determining the outcome of a war was clearly true throughout most of the 20th century, the current capabilities of the world’s strongest militaries represent a new era of modern warfare. As the focus of war shifts from manpower to cyberpower, historians and military strategists must adapt to the ever-changing landscapes of global conflicts. Despite these recent advances, it is important to realize that similar advancements were made in the 20th century with the widespread dissemination of airplanes, tanks, and nuclear warheads. Although war will never be the same as it was in the Second World War and Vietnam War, there will always be soldiers behind these weapons and countless civilians affected by their decisions.
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United States - United States - The late 20th century: Reagan took office and pledged to reverse the trend toward big government and to rejuvenate the economy, based on the theory that cutting taxes would stimulate so much growth that tax revenues would actually rise. In May 1981, two months after there had been an assassination attempt on Reagan, Congress approved his program, which would reduce income taxes by 25 percent over a three-year period, cut federal spending on social programs, and greatly accelerate a military buildup that had begun under Carter. One of Clintonâ€™s first acts was to attempt to fulfill a campaign promise to end discrimination against gay men and lesbians in the military. The 20th Century was the bloodiest, costliest century of warfare in human history. Two world wars, and a large number of major revolutions, along with significant social, political, and economic upheavals made the period from 1901 to 2000 of great importance in a historical and military sense. Below is a list (with links) of the major wars of the twentieth century. Any such list is by nature somewhat subjective, but the wars and conflicts listed below all had significant importance in history. China was for a time an ally of the Soviets, but broke away in the 1960s, and pursued their own Cold War policies against the West.

Greek Civil War (1946-1949)--The first major military conflict of the Cold War. The American Wars is an extremely complex and controversial topic. The United States Armed Forces are the military forces of the United States. The army is headed by the Secretary of the Army, and the top military officer in the department is the Chief of Staff of the Army. The highest ranking army officer is currently the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. For the second time in the 20th century, the United States became involved in a devastating world conflict. The mobilization effort of the government in World War II eclipsed even that of World War I. With major operations in both the Atlantic and Pacific theaters, American industries literally fueled two wars simultaneously. The American military was initially influenced in the 18th Century by its European allies and enemies - Britain and France. In World War 1 they were trained in Britain and France by the British, Australian and Canadian armies. What did the Spanish American War expose in US military ideology? US military doctrine had yet to resolve what was the best sources of military strategies for the Spanish American War and thereafter. Sporadic attacks trends and Guerrilla warfare troubled the military experts at the beginning of the 20th century. Who were Hessians in Europe? 18th century German auxiliaries contracted for military service by the British Government to help fight during the American Revolution. Approx. 30,000 in all.