

**Grossman, D. (2009). *On killing: The psychological costs of learning to kill in war and society*. New York: Back Bay Books.**

**Introduction**

**Killing and Science: On Dangerous Ground**

This is the time of year when people would slaughter, back when people did that — Rollie and Eunice Hochstetter, I think, were the last in Lake Wobegon. They kept pigs, and they'd slaughter them in the fall when the weather got cold and the meat would keep. I went out to see them slaughter hogs once when I was a kid, along with my cousin and my uncle, who was going to help Rollie.

Today, if you are going to slaughter an animal for meat, you send it in to the locker plant and pay to have the guys there do it. When you slaughter pigs, it takes away your appetite for pork for a while. Because the pigs let you know that they don't care for it. They don't care to be grabbed and dragged over to where the other pigs went and didn't come back.

It was quite a thing for a kid to see. To see living flesh, and the living insides of another creature. I expected to be disgusted by it, but I wasn't — I was fascinated. I got as close as I could.

And I remember that my cousin and I sort of got carried away in the excitement of it all and we went down to the pigpen and we started throwing litde stones at pigs to watch them jump and squeal and run. And all of a sudden, I felt a big hand on my shoulder, and I was spun around, and my uncle's face was three inches away from mine. He said "If I ever see you do that again I'll beat you 'til you can't stand up, you hear?" And we heard.

I knew at the time that his anger had to do with the slaughter, that it was a ritual and it was done as a Ritual. It was done swiftly, and there was no foolishness. No joking around, very little conversation. People went about their jobs — men and women — knowing exactly what to do. And always with respect for the animals that would become our food. And our throwing stones at pigs violated this ceremony, and this ritual, which they went through.

Rollie was the last one to slaughter his own hogs. One year he had an accident; the knife slipped, and an animal that was only wounded got loose and ran across the yard before it fell. He never kept pigs after that. He didn't feel he was worthy of it.

It's all gone. Children growing up in Lake Wobegon will never have a chance to see it.

It was a powerful experience, life and death hung in the balance.

A life in which people made do, made their own, lived off the land, lived between the ground and God. It's lost, not only to this world: but also to memory.

— Garrison Keillor "Hog Slaughter"

Why should we study killing? One might just as readily ask, Why study sex? The two questions have much in common. Richard Heckler points out that "it is in the mythological marriage of Ares and Aphrodite that Harmonia is born." Peace will not come until we have mastered both sex and war, and to master war we must study it with at least the diligence of Kinsey or Masters and Johnson. Every society has a blind spot, an area into which it has great difficulty looking. Today that blind spot is killing. A century ago it was sex.

For millennia man sheltered himself and his family in caves, or huts, or one-room hovels. The whole extended family — grandparents, parents, and children — all huddled together around the warmth of a single fire, within the protection of a single wall. And for thousands of years sex between a husband and wife could generally only take place at night, in the darkness, in this crowded central room.

I once interviewed a woman who grew up in an American Gypsy family, sleeping in a big communal tent with aunts, uncles, grandparents, parents, cousins, brothers, and sisters all around her. As a young child, sex was to her something funny, noisy, and slightly bothersome that grown-ups did in the night.

In this environment there were no private bedrooms. Until very recently in human history, for the average human being, there was no such luxury as a bedroom, or even a bed. Although by today's sexual standards this situation may seem awkward, it was not without its advantages. One advantage was that sexual abuse of children could not happen without at least the knowledge and tacit consent of the entire family. Another, less obvious benefit of this age-old living arrangement was that throughout the life cycle, from birth to death, sex was always before you, and no one could deny that it was a vital, essential, and a not-too-mysterious aspect of daily human existence.

And then, by the period that we know as the Victorian era, everything had changed. Suddenly the average middle-class family lived in a multiroom dwelling. Children grew up having never witnessed the primal act. And suddenly sex became hidden, private, mysterious, frightening, and dirty. The era of sexual repression in Western civilization had begun.

In this repressed society, women were covered from neck to ankle, and even the furniture legs were covered with skirts, since the sight of these legs disturbed the delicate sensitivities of that era. Yet at the same time that this society repressed sex, it appears to have become obsessed by it. Pornography as we know it blossomed. Child prostitution flourished. And a wave of sexual child abuse began to ripple down through the generations.<sup>1</sup>

Sex is a natural and essential part of life. A society that has no sex has no society in one generation. Today our society has begun the slow, painful process of escaping from this pathological dichotomy of simultaneous sexual repression and obsession. But we may have begun our escape from one denial only to fall into a new and possibly even more dangerous one.

A new repression, revolving around killing and death, precisely parallels the pattern established by the previous sexual repression.

Throughout history man has been surrounded by close and personal death and killing. When family members died of disease, lingering injury, or old age they died in the home. When they died anywhere close to home, their corpses were brought to the house — or cave, or hut, or hovel — and prepared for burial by the family.

*Places in the Heart* is a movie in which Sally Field portrays a woman on a small cotton farm early in this century. Her husband has been shot and killed and is brought to the house. And, repeating a Ritual that has been enacted for countless centuries by countless millions of wives, she lovingly washes his naked corpse, preparing it for burial as tears streak down her face.

In that world each family did its own killing and cleaning of domestic animals. Death was a part of life. Killing was undeniably essential to living. Cruelty was seldom, if ever, a part of this killing. Mankind understood its place in life, and respected the place of the creatures whose deaths were required to perpetuate existence. The American Indian asked forgiveness of the spirit of the deer he killed, and the American farmer respected the dignity of the hogs he slaughtered.

As Garrison Keillor records in "Hog Slaughter," the slaughter of animals has been a vital Ritual of daily and seasonal activity for most people until this last half century of human existence. Despite the rise of the city, by the opening of the twentieth century the majority of the population, even in the most advanced industrial societies, remained rural. The housewife who wanted a chicken dinner went out and wrung the chicken's neck herself, or had her children do it. The children watched the daily and seasonal killings, and to them killing was a serious, messy, and slightly boring thing that everyone did as a part of life.

In this environment there was no refrigeration, and few slaughterhouses, mortuaries, or hospitals. And in this age-old living arrangement, throughout the life cycle, from birth to death,

death and killing were always before you — either as a participant or a bored spectator — and no one could deny that it was a vital, essential, and common aspect of daily human existence.

And then, in just the last few generations, everything began to change. Slaughterhouses and refrigeration insulated us from the necessity of killing our own food animals. Modern medicine began to cure diseases, and it became increasingly rare for us to die in the youth and prime of our lives, and nursing homes, hospitals, and mortuaries insulated us from the death of the elderly. Children began to grow up having never truly understood where their food came from, and suddenly Western civilization seemed to have decided that killing, killing anything at all, was increasingly hidden, private, mysterious, frightening, and dirty.

The impact of this ranges from the trivial to the bizarre. Just as the Victorians put skirts around their furniture to hide the legs, now mousetraps come equipped with covers to hide the killer's handiwork. And laboratories conducting medical research with animals are broken into, and lifesaving research is destroyed by animal-rights activists. These activists, while partaking of the medical fruits of their society — fruits based upon centuries of animal research — attack researchers. Chris DeRose, head of the Los Angeles—based activist group Last Chance for Animals, says: "If the death of one rat cured all diseases it wouldn't make any difference to me. In the scheme of life we're equal."

Any killing offends this new sensibility. People wearing fur or leather coats are verbally and physically attacked. In this new order people are condemned as racists (or "speciests") and murderers when they eat meat. Animal-rights leader Ingrid Newkirk says, "A rat is a pig is a boy," and compares the killing of chickens to the Nazi Holocaust. "Six million people died in concentration camps," she told the *Washington Post*, "but six billion broiler chickens will die this year in slaughterhouses."

Yet at the same time that our society represses killing, a new obsession with the depiction of violent and brutal death and dismemberment of humans has flourished. The public appetite for violence in movies, particularly in splatter movies such as *Friday the 13th*, *Halloween*, and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*; the cult status of "heroes" like Jason and Freddy; the popularity of bands with names like Megadeth and Guns N' Roses; and skyrocketing murder and violent crime rates — all these are symptoms of a bizarre, pathological dichotomy of simultaneous repression and obsession with violence.

Sex and death are natural and essential parts of life. Just as a society without sex would disappear in a generation, so too would a society without killing. Every major city in our nation must exterminate millions of rats and mice each year or become uninhabitable. And granaries and grain elevators must exterminate millions of rats and mice each year. If they fail to do this, instead of being the world's breadbasket the United States would be unable to feed itself, and millions of people around the world would face starvation.

Certain genteel sensitivities of the Victorian era are not without value and benefit to our society, and few would argue for a return to communal sleeping arrangements. In the same way, those who hold and espouse modern sensibilities about killing are generally gentle and sincere human beings who in many ways represent the most idealistic characteristics of our species, and their concerns have great potential value once we bring them into perspective. As technology enables us to butcher and exterminate whole species (including our own), it is vital that we learn restraint and self-discipline. But we must also remember that death has its place in the natural order of life.

It seems that when a society does not have natural processes (such as sex, death, and killing) before it, that society will respond by denying and warping that aspect of nature. As our technology insulates us from a specific aspect of reality, our societal response seems to be to slip deep into bizarre dreams about that "which we flee. Dreams spun from the fantasy stuff of denial. Dreams that can become dangerous societal nightmares as we sink deeper into their tempting web of fantasy.

Today, even as we waken from the nightmare of sexual repression, our society is beginning to sink into a new denial dream, that of violence and horror. This book is an attempt to bring the objective light of scientific scrutiny into the process of killing. A. M. Rosenthal tells us:

The health of humankind is not measured just by its coughs and wheezes but by the fevers of its soul. Or perhaps more important yet, by the quickness and care we bring against them.

If our history suggests unreason's durability, our experience teaches that to neglect it is to indulge it and that to indulge it is to prepare hate's triumph.

"To neglect it is to indulge it." This is, therefore, a study of aggression, a study of violence, and a study of killing. Most specifically, it is an attempt to conduct a scientific study of the act of killing within the Western way of war and of the psychological and sociological processes and prices exacted when men kill each other in combat.

Sheldon Bidwell held that such a study would by its very nature lay on "dangerous ground because the union between soldier and scientist has not yet passed beyond flirtation." I would seek to go in harm's way and effect not just a serious union between soldier and scientist, but a tentative *menage a trois* between soldier, scientist, and historian.

I have combined these skills to conduct a five-year program of research into the previously taboo topic of killing in combat. In this study it is my intention to delve into this taboo subject of killing and to provide insight into the following:

- The existence of a powerful, innate human resistance toward killing one's own species and the psychological mechanisms that have been developed by armies *over the centuries* to overcome that resistance
- The role of atrocity in war and the mechanisms by which armies are both empowered and entrapped by atrocity
- What it feels like to kill, a set of standard response stages to killing in combat, and the psychological price of killing
- The techniques that have been developed and applied with tremendous success in *modern* combat training in order to condition soldiers to overcome their resistance to killing
- How the American soldier in Vietnam was first psychologically enabled to kill to a far greater degree than any other soldier in history, then denied the psychologically essential purification ritual that exists in every warrior society, and finally condemned and accused by his own society to a degree that is unprecedented in Western history. And the terrible, tragic price that America's three million Vietnam veterans, their families, and our society are paying for what we did to our soldiers in Vietnam
- Finally, and *perhaps most important*, I believe that this study will provide insight into the way that rifts in our society combine with violence in the media and in interactive video games to indiscriminately condition our nation's children to kill. In a fashion very similar to the way the army conditions our soldiers. But without the safeguards. And we will see the terrible, tragic price that our nation is paying for what we are doing to our children.

### **A Personal Note**

I am a soldier of twenty years' service. I have been a sergeant in the 82d Airborne Division, a platoon leader in the 9th (High Tech Test Bed) Division, and I have been a general staff officer and a company commander in the 7th (Light) Infantry Division. I am a parachute infantryman and an army Ranger. I have been deployed to the Arctic tundras, the Central American jungles, NATO headquarters, the Warsaw Pact, and countless mountains and deserts.. I am a graduate of military schools ranging from the XVIII Airborne Corps NCO Academy to the British Army

Staff College. I graduated summa cum laude from my undergraduate training as a historian, and Kappa Delta Pi from my graduate training as a psychologist. I have had the privilege of being a co-speaker with General Westmoreland before the national leadership of the Vietnam Veterans Coalition of America, and I have served as the keynote speaker for the Sixth Annual Convention of the Vietnam Veterans of America. I have served in academic positions ranging from a junior-high-school counselor to a West Point psychology professor. And I am currently serving as the Professor of Military Science and Chair of the Department of Military Science at Arkansas State University. But for all this experience, I, like Richard Holmes, John Keegan, Paddy Griffith, and many others who have gone before me in this field, have not killed in combat. Perhaps I could not be as dispassionate and objective as I need to be if I had to carry a load of emotional pain myself. But the men whose words fill this study *have* killed.

Very often what they shared with me was something that they had never shared with anyone before. As a counselor I have been taught, and I hold it to be a fundamental truth of human nature, that when someone withholds something traumatic it can cause great damage. When you share something with someone it helps to place it in perspective, but when you hold it inside, as one of my psychology students once put it, "it eats you alive from the inside out." Furthermore, there is great therapeutic value in the catharsis that comes with lancing these emotional boils. The essence of counseling is that pain shared is pain divided, and there was much pain shared during these periods.

The ultimate objective of this book is to uncover the dynamics of killing, but my prime motivation has been to help pierce the taboo of killing that prevented these men, and many millions like them, from sharing their pain. And then to use the knowledge gained in order to understand first the mechanisms that enable war and then the cause of the current wave of violent crime that is destroying our nation. If I have succeeded, it is because of the help given to me by the men whose tales are told herein.

Many copies of early drafts of this work have been circulating among the Vietnam veterans' community for several years now, and many veterans have carefully edited and commented on those drafts. Many of these vets read this book and shared it with their spouses. Then those wives shared it with other wives, and these wives shared it with their husbands. And so on. Many times the veterans and/or their wives contacted me and let me know how they were able to use this book to communicate and understand what had happened in combat. Out of their pain has come understanding, and out of that understanding has come the power to heal lives and, perhaps, to heal a nation that is being consumed with violence.

The men whose personal narratives appear in this study are noble and brave men who trusted others with their experiences in order to contribute to the body of human knowledge. Many killed in combat. But they killed to save their lives and the lives of their comrades, and my admiration and affection for them and their brothers are very real. John Masefield's poem "A Consecration" serves as a better dedication than any I could write. The exception to this admiration is, of course, addressed in the section "Killing and Atrocities."

If in my absence of euphemisms and my effort to clearly and clinically speak of "killers" and "victims," if in these things the reader senses moral judgment or disapproval of the individuals involved, let me flatly and categorically deny it.

Generations of Americans have endured great physical and psychological trauma and horror in order to give us our freedoms. Men such as those quoted in this study followed Washington, stood shoulder to shoulder with Crockett and Travis at the Alamo, righted the great wrong of slavery, and stopped the murderous evil of Hitler. They answered their nation's call and heeded not the cost. As a soldier for my entire adult life, I take pride in having maintained in some small way the standard of sacrifice and dedication represented by these men. And I would not harm them or besmirch their memory and honor. Douglas MacArthur said it well: "However horrible the incidents of war may be, the soldier who is called upon to offer and give his life for his country, is the noblest development of mankind."

The soldiers whose narratives form the heart and soul of this work understood the essence of war. They are heroes as great as any found in the *Iliad*, yet the words that you will read here, their own words, destroy the myth of warriors and war as heroic. The soldier understands that there are times when all others have failed, and that then he must "pay the butcher's bill" and fight, suffer, and die to undo the errors of the politicians and to fulfill the "will of the people."

"The soldier above all other people," said MacArthur, "prays for peace, for they must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war." There is wisdom in the words of these soldiers. There is wisdom in these tales of a "handful of ashes, a mouthful of mould. / Of the maimed, of the halt and the blind in the rain and the cold." There is wisdom here, and we would do well to listen.

Just as I do not wish to condemn those who have killed in lawful combat, nor do I wish to judge the many soldiers who chose *not* to kill. There are many such soldiers; indeed I will provide evidence that in many historical circumstances these non-firers represented the majority of those on the firing line. As a soldier who may have stood beside them I cannot help but be dismayed at their failure to support their cause, their nation, and their fellows; but as a human being who has understood some of the burden that they have borne, and the sacrifice that they have made, I cannot help but be proud of them and the noble characteristic that they represent in our species.

The subject of killing makes most healthy people uneasy, and some of the specific subjects and areas to be addressed here will be repulsive and offensive. They are things that we would rather turn away from, but Carl von Clausewitz warned that "it is to no purpose, it is even against one's better interest, to turn away from the consideration of the affair because the horror of its elements excites repugnance." Bruno Bettelheim, a survivor of the Nazi death camps, argues that the root of our failure to deal with violence lies in our refusal to face up to it. We deny our fascination with the "dark beauty of violence," and we condemn aggression and repress it rather than look at it squarely and try to understand and control it.

And, finally, if in my focus on the pain of the killers I do not sufficiently address the suffering of their victims, let me apologize now. "The guy pulling the trigger," wrote Alien Cole and Chris Bunch, "never suffers as much as the person on the receiving end." It is the existence of the victim's pain and loss, echoing forever in the soul of the killer, that is at the heart of his pain.

Leo Frankowski tells us that "cultures all develop blind spots, things that they don't even think about because they *know* the truth about them." The veterans quoted in this study have had their faces rubbed in this cultural blind spot. We are truly, as one veteran put it to me, "virgins studying sex," but they can teach us what they have learned at such a dear price. My objective is to understand the psychological nature of killing in combat and to probe the emotional wounds and scars of those men who answered their nation's call and meted out death — or chose to pay the price for not doing so.

Now more than ever we must overcome our revulsion and understand, as we have never understood before, why it is that men fight and kill. And equally important, why it is that they will not. Only on the basis of understanding this ultimate, destructive aspect of human behavior can we hope to influence it in such a way as to ensure the survival of our civilization.<sup>2</sup>

## SECTION I

### Killing and the Existence of Resistance: A World of Virgins Studying Sex

It is therefore reasonable to believe that the average and healthy individual — the man who can endure the mental and physical stresses of combat — still has such an inner and usually unrealized resistance towards killing a fellow man that he will not of his own volition take life if it is possible to turn away from that responsibility.... At the vital point he becomes a conscientious objector.

— S. L. A. Marshall *Men Against Fire*

Then I cautiously raised the upper half of my body into the tunnel until I was lying flat on my stomach. When I felt comfortable, I placed my Smith Wesson .38-caliber snub-nose (sent to me by my father for tunnel work) beside the flashlight and switched on the light, illuminating the tunnel.

There, not more than 15 feet away, sat a Viet Cong eating a handful of rice from a pouch on his lap. We looked at each other for what seemed to be an eternity, but in fact was probably only a few seconds.

Maybe it was the surprise of actually finding someone else there, or maybe it was just the absolute innocence of the situation, but neither one of us reacted.

After a moment, he put his pouch of rice on the floor of the tunnel beside him, turned his back to me and slowly started crawling away. I, in turn, switched off my flashlight, before slipping back into the lower tunnel and making my way back to the entrance. About 20 minutes later, we received word that another squad had killed a VC emerging from a tunnel 500 meters away.

I never doubted who that VC was. To this day, I firmly believe that grunt and I could have ended the war sooner over a beer in Saigon than Henry Kissinger ever could by attending the peace talks.

— Michael Kathman "Triangle Tunnel Rat"

Our first step in the study of killing is to understand the existence, extent, and nature of the average human being's resistance to killing his fellow human. In this section we will attempt to do that.

When I started interviewing combat veterans as a part of this study, I discussed some of the psychological theories concerning the trauma of combat with one crusty old sergeant. He laughed scornfully and said, "Those bastards don't know anything about it. They're like a world of virgins studying sex, and they got nothing to go on but porno movies. And it *is* just like sex, 'cause the people who *really* do it just don't talk about it."

In a way, the study of killing in combat is very much like the study of sex. Killing is a private, intimate occurrence of tremendous intensity, in which the destructive act becomes psychologically very much like the procreative act. For those who have never experienced it, the depiction of battle that Hollywood has given us, and the cultural mythology that Hollywood is based upon, appear to be about as useful in understanding killing as pornographic movies would be in trying to understand the intimacy of a sexual relationship. A virgin observer might get the mechanics of sex right by watching an X-rated movie, but he or she could never hope to understand the intimacy and intensity of the procreative experience.

As a society we are as fascinated by killing as we are by sex — possibly more so, since we are somewhat jaded by sex and have a fairly broad base of individual experience in this area. Many children, upon seeing that I am a decorated soldier, immediately ask "Have you ever killed anyone?" or "How many people have you killed?"

Where does this curiosity come from? Robert Heinlein once wrote that fulfillment in life involved "loving a good woman and killing a bad man." If there is such a strong interest in killing in our society, and if it equates in many minds to an act of manhood equivalent to sex, then why hasn't the destructive act been as specifically and systematically studied as the procreative act?

Over the centuries there have been a few pioneers who have laid the foundation for such a study, and in this section we will attempt to look at them all. Probably the best starting point is with S. L. A. Marshall, the greatest and most influential of these pioneers.

Prior to World War II it had always been assumed that the average soldier would kill in combat simply because his country and his leaders have told him to do so and because it is essential to defend his own life and the lives of his friends. When the point came that he didn't kill, it was assumed that he would panic and run.

During World War II U.S. Army Brigadier General S. L. A. Marshall asked these average soldiers what it was that they did in battle. His singularly unexpected discovery was that, of every hundred men along the line of fire during the period of an encounter, an average of only 15 to 20 "would take any part with their weapons." This was consistently true "whether the action was spread over a day, or two days or three."

Marshall was a U.S. Army historian in the Pacific theater during World War II and later became the official U.S. historian of the European theater of operations. He had a team of historians working for him, and they based their findings on individual and mass interviews with thousands of soldiers in more than four hundred infantry companies, in Europe and in the Pacific, immediately after they had been in close combat with German or Japanese troops. The results were consistently the same: only 15 to 20 percent of the American riflemen in combat during World War II would fire at the enemy. Those who would not fire did not run or hide (in many cases they were willing to risk great danger to rescue comrades, get ammunition, or run messages), but they simply would not fire their weapons at the enemy, even when faced with repeated waves of banzai charges.<sup>1</sup>

The question is why. Why did these men fail to fire? As I examined this question and studied the process of killing in combat from the standpoints of a historian, a psychologist, and a soldier, I began to realize that there was one major factor that was missing from the common understanding of killing in combat, a factor that answers this question and more. That missing factor is the simple and demonstrable fact that there is within most men an intense resistance to killing their fellow man. A resistance so strong that, in many circumstances, soldiers on the battlefield will die before they can overcome it.

To some, this makes "obvious" sense. "Of course it is hard to kill someone," they would say. "I could never bring myself to do it." But they would be wrong. With the proper conditioning and the proper circumstances, it appears that almost anyone can and will kill. Others might respond, "Any man will kill in combat when he is faced with someone who is trying to kill him." And they would be even more wrong, for in this section we shall observe that throughout history the majority of men on the battlefield would *not* attempt to kill the enemy, even to save their own lives or the lives of their friends.



## Chapter One Fight or Flight, Posture or Submit

The notion that the only alternatives to conflict are fight or flight are embedded in our culture, and our educational institutions have done little to challenge it. The traditional American military policy raises it to the level of a law of nature.

— Richard Heckler

*In Search of the Warrior Spirit*

One of the roots of our misunderstanding of the psychology of the battlefield lies in the misapplication of the fight-or-flight model to the stresses of the battlefield. This model holds that in the face of danger a series of physiological and psychological processes prepare and support the endangered creature for either fighting or fleeing. The fight-or-flight dichotomy is the appropriate set of choices for any creature faced with danger *other* than that which comes from its own species. When we examine the responses of creatures confronted with aggression from their own species, the set of options expands to include posturing and submission. This application of animal kingdom intraspecies response patterns (that is, fight, flee, posture, and submit) to human warfare is, to the best of my knowledge, entirely new.

The first decision point in an intraspecies conflict usually involves deciding between fleeing or posturing. A threatened baboon or rooster who elects to stand its ground does not respond to aggression from one of his own kind by leaping instantly to the enemy's throat. Instead, both creatures instinctively go through a series of posturing actions that, while intimidating, *are almost always harmless*. These actions are designed to convince an opponent, through both sight and sound, that the posturer is a dangerous and frightening adversary.

When the posturer has failed to dissuade an intraspecies opponent, the options then become fight, flight, or submission. When the fight option is utilized, it is *almost never to the death*. Konrad Lorenz pointed out that piranhas and rattlesnakes will bite anything, and everything, but among themselves piranhas fight with raps of their tails, and rattlesnakes wrestle. Somewhere during the course of such highly constrained and nonlethal fights, one of these intraspecies opponents will usually become daunted by the ferocity and prowess of its opponent, and its only options become submission or flight. Submission is a surprisingly common response, usually taking the form of fawning and exposing some vulnerable portion of the anatomy to the victor, in the instinctive knowledge that the opponent will not kill or further harm one of its own kind once it has surrendered. The posturing, mock battle, and submission process is vital to the survival of the species. It prevents needless deaths and ensures that a young male will live through early confrontations when his opponents are bigger and better prepared. Having been outposted by his opponent, he can then submit and live to mate, passing on his genes in later years.

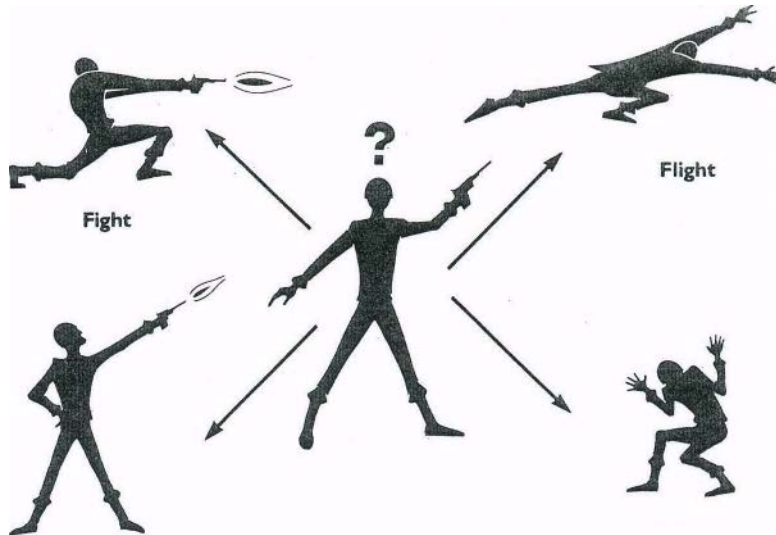
There is a clear distinction between actual violence and posturing. Oxford social psychologist Peter Marsh notes that this is true in New York street gangs, it is true in "so-called primitive tribesmen and warriors," and it is true in almost any culture in the world. All have the same "patterns of aggression" and all have "very orchestrated, highly ritualized" patterns of posturing, mock battle, and submission. These rituals restrain and focus the violence on relatively harmless posturing and display. What is created is a "perfect illusion of violence." Aggression, yes. Competitiveness, yes. But only a "very tiny, tiny level" of actual violence.

"There is," concludes Gwynne Dyer, "the occasional psychopath who really wants to slice people open," but most of the participants are really interested in "status, display, profit, and damage limitation." Like their peacetime contemporaries, the kids who have fought in close combat throughout history (and it is kids, or adolescent males, whom most societies traditionally send off to do their fighting), killing the enemy was the very least of their intentions. In war, as in game war, posturing is the name of the game.

In this account from Paddy Griffith's *Battle Tactics of the Civil War*, we can see the effective use of verbal posturing in the thick woods of the American Civil War's Wilderness campaign:

The yellers could not be seen, and a company could make itself sound like a regiment if it shouted loud enough. Men spoke later of various units on both sides being "yelled" out of their positions.

In such instances of units being yelled out of positions, we see posturing in its most successful form, resulting in the opponent's selection of the flight option without even attempting the fight option.



Adding the posture and submission options to the standard fight-er-flight model of aggression response helps to explain many of the actions on the battlefield. When a man is frightened, he literally stops thinking with his forebrain (that is, with the mind of a human being) and begins to think with the midbrain (that is, with the portion of his brain that is essentially indistinguishable from that of an animal), and in the mind of an animal it is the one who makes the loudest noise or puffs himself up the largest who will win. Posturing can be seen in the plumed helmets of the ancient Greeks and Romans, which allowed the bearer to appear taller and therefore fiercer to his foe, while the brilliantly shined armor made him seem broader and brighter. Such plumage saw its height in modern history during the Napoleonic era, when soldiers wore bright uniforms and high, uncomfortable shako hats, which served no purpose other than to make the wearer look and feel like a taller, more dangerous creature.

In the same manner, the roars of two posturing beasts are exhibited by men in battle. For centuries the war cries of soldiers have made their opponents' blood run cold. Whether it be the battle cry of a Greek phalanx, the "hurrah!" of the Russian infantry, the wail of Scottish bagpipes, or the Rebel yell of our own Civil War, soldiers have always instinctively sought to daunt the enemy through nonviolent means prior to physical conflict, while encouraging one another and impressing themselves with their own ferocity and simultaneously providing a very effective means of drowning the disagreeable yell of the enemy.

A modern equivalent to the Civil War occurrence mentioned above can be seen in this Army Historical Series account of a French battalion's participation in the defense of Chipyeong-Ni during the Korean War:

The [North Korean] soldiers formed one hundred or two hundred yards in front of the small hill which the French occupied, then launched their attack, blowing whistles and bugles, and running with bayonets fixed. When this noise started, the French soldiers began cranking a hand siren they had, and one squad started running toward the Chinese, yelling and throwing grenades far to the front and to the side. When the two forces were within twenty yards of each other the Chinese suddenly turned and ran in the opposite direction. It was all over within a minute.

Here again we see an incident in which posturing (involving sirens, grenade explosions, and charging bayonets) by a small force was sufficient to cause a numerically superior enemy force to hastily select the flight option.

With the advent of gunpowder, the soldier has been provided with one of the finest possible means of posturing. "Time and again," says Paddy Griffith,

we read of regiments [in the Civil War] blazing away uncontrollably, once started, and continuing until all ammunition was gone or all enthusiasm spent. Firing was such a positive act, and gave the men such a physical release for their emotions, that instincts easily took over from training and from the exhortations of officers.

Gunpowder's superior noise, its superior posturing ability, made it ascendant on the battlefield. The longbow would still have been used in the Napoleonic Wars if the raw mathematics of killing effectiveness was all that mattered, since both the longbow's firing rate and its accuracy were much greater than that of a smoothbore musket. But a frightened man, thinking with his midbrain and going "ploink, ploink, ploink" with a bow, doesn't stand a chance against an equally frightened man going "BANG! BANG!" with a musket.

Firing a musket or rifle clearly fills the deep-seated need to posture, and it even meets the requirement of being relatively harmless when we consider the consistent historical occurrences of firing over the enemy's head, and the remarkable ineffectiveness of such fire.

Ardant du Picq became one of the first to document the common tendency of soldiers to fire harmlessly into the air simply for the sake of firing. Du Picq made one of the first thorough investigations into the nature of combat with a questionnaire distributed to French officers in the 1860s. One officer's response to du Picq stated quite frankly that "a good many soldiers fired into the air at long distances," while another observed that "a certain number of our soldiers fired almost in the air, without aiming, seeming to want to stun themselves, to become drunk on rifle fire during this gripping crisis."

Paddy Griffith joins du Picq in observing that soldiers in battle have a desperate urge to fire their weapons even when (perhaps especially when) they cannot possibly do the enemy any harm. Griffith notes:

Even in the noted "slaughter pens" at Bloody Lane, Marye's Heights, Kennesaw, Spotsylvania and Cold Harbor an attacking unit could not only come very close to the defending line, but it could also stay there for hours — and indeed for days — at a time. Civil War musketry did not therefore possess the power to kill large numbers of men, even in very dense formations, at long range. At short range it could and did kill large numbers, but not very quickly [emphasis added].

Griffith estimates that the average musket fire from a Napoleonic or Civil War regiment (usually numbering between two hundred and one thousand men) firing at an exposed enemy regiment at an average range of thirty yards, would usually result in hitting only one or two men per minute! Such firefights "dragged on until exhaustion set in or nightfall put an end to hostilities. Casualties mounted because the contest went on so long, not because the fire "was particularly deadly."

Thus we see that the fire of the Napoleonic- and Civil War—era soldier was incredibly ineffective. This does not represent a failure on the part of the weaponry. John Keegan and Richard Holmes in their book *Soldiers* tell us of a Prussian experiment in the late 1700s in which an infantry battalion fired smoothbore muskets at a target one hundred feet long by six feet high, representing an enemy unit, which resulted in 25 percent hits at 225 yards, 40 percent hits at 150 yards, and 60 percent hits at 75 yards. This represented the potential killing power of such a unit. The reality is demonstrated at the Battle of Belgrade in 1717, when "two Imperial battalions held their fire until their Turkish opponents were only thirty paces away, but hit only thirty-two Turks when they fired and were promptly overwhelmed."

Sometimes the fire was completely harmless, as Benjamin McIntyre observed in his firsthand account of a totally bloodless nighttime firefight at Vicksburg in 1863. "It seems strange . . .," wrote McIntyre, "that a company of men can fire volley after volley at a like number of men at not over a distance of fifteen steps and not cause a single casualty. Yet such was the facts in this instance." The musketry of the black-powder era was not always so ineffective, but over and over again the average comes out to only one or two men hit per minute with musketry.

(Cannon fire, like machine-gun fire in World War II, is an entirely different matter, sometimes accounting for more than 50 percent of the casualties on the black-powder battlefield, and artillery fire has consistently accounted for the majority of combat casualties in this century. This is largely due to the group processes at work in a cannon, machine-gun, or other crew-served-weapons firing. This subject is addressed in detail later in this book in the section entitled "An Anatomy of Killing.")

Muzzle-loading muskets could fire from one to five shots per minute, depending on the skill of the operator and the state of the weapon. With a potential hit rate of well over 50 percent at the average combat ranges of this era, the killing rate should have been hundreds per minute, instead of one or two. The weak link between the killing potential and the killing capability of these units was the soldier. The simple fact is that when faced with a living, breathing opponent instead of a target, a significant majority of the soldiers revert to a posturing mode in which they fire over their enemy's heads.

Richard Holmes, in his superb book *Acts of War*, examines the hit rates of soldiers in a variety of historical battles. At Rorkes Drift in 1897 a small group of British soldiers were surrounded and vastly outnumbered by the Zulu. Firing volley after volley into the massed enemy ranks at point-blank range, it seems as if no round could have possibly missed, and even a 50 percent hit rate would seem to be low. But Holmes estimates that in actuality approximately thirteen rounds were fired for each hit.

In the same way, General Crook's men fired 25,000 rounds at Rosebud Creek on June 16, 1876, causing 99 casualties among the Indians, or 252 rounds per hit. And in the French defense from fortified positions during the Battle of Wissembourg, in 1870, the French, shooting at German soldiers advancing across open fields, fired 48,000 rounds to hit 404 Germans, for a hit ratio of 1 hit per 119 rounds fired. (And some, or possibly even the majority, of the casualties *had* to have been from artillery fire, which makes the French killing rate even more remarkable.)

Lieutenant George Roupell encountered this same phenomenon while commanding a British platoon in World War I. He stated that the only way he could stop his men from firing into the air was to draw his sword and walk down the trench, "beating the men on the backside and, as I got their attention, telling them to fire low." And the trend can be found in the firefights of Vietnam, when more than fifty thousand bullets were fired for every enemy soldier killed.<sup>2</sup> "One of the things that amazed me," stated Douglas Graham, a medic with the First Marine Division in Vietnam, who had to crawl out under enemy and friendly fire to aid wounded soldiers, "is how many bullets can be fired during a firefight without anyone getting hurt."

The focus of primitive tribesmen on posturing at the expense of fighting in times of war is usually blatant and obvious. Richard Gabriel points out that primitive New Guinea tribes were excellent shots with the bow and arrows they used while hunting, but when they went to war

with each other they took the feathers off of the backs of their arrows, and it was only with these inaccurate and useless arrows that they fought their wars. In the same way, the American Indians considered "counting coup," or simply touching their enemy, to be far more important than killing.

This trend can be seen in the roots of the Western way of war. Sam Keen notes that Professor Arthur Nock at Harvard was fond of saying that wars between the Greek city-states "were only slightly more dangerous than American football." And Ardant du Picq points out that in all his years of conquest, Alexander the Great lost only seven hundred men to the sword. His enemy lost many, many more, but almost all of this occurred *after* the battle (which appears to have been an almost bloodless pushing match), when the enemy soldiers had turned their backs and begun to run. Carl von Clausewitz makes the same point when he notes that the vast majority of combat losses historically occurred in the pursuit *after* one side or the other had won the battle. (Why this occurs is a subject that will be looked at in detail in the section "Killing and Physical Distance.")

As we shall see, modern training or conditioning techniques can partially overcome the inclination to posture. Indeed, the history of warfare can be seen as a history of increasingly more effective mechanisms for enabling and conditioning men to overcome their innate resistance to killing their fellow human beings. In many circumstances highly trained modern soldiers have fought poorly trained guerrilla forces, and the tendency of poorly prepared forces to instinctively engage in posturing mechanisms (such as firing high) has given a significant advantage to the more highly trained force. Jack Thompson, a Rhodesian veteran, observed this process in combat against untrained forces. In Rhodesia, says Thompson, their immediate action drill was to "shed our packs and assault into the fire . . . *always*. That was because the [guerrillas] were not able to deliver effective fire, and their bullets went high. We would quickly establish fire superiority, and rarely ever lost a man."

This psychological and technological superiority in training and killing enabling continues to be a vital factor in modern warfare. It can be seen in the British invasion of the Falklands and the 1989 United States invasion of Panama, where the tremendous success of the invaders and the remarkable disparity between the kill ratios can be at least partially explained by the degree and quality of training in the different forces.

Missing the target does not necessarily involve firing obviously high, and two decades on army rifle ranges have taught me that a soldier must fire unusually high for it to be obvious to an observer. In other words, the intentional miss can be a very subtle form of disobedience.

One of the best examples of an intentional miss was the experience of my grandfather John, who had been assigned to a firing squad during World War I. A major source of pride from his days as a veteran was that he was able to not kill while a member of that firing squad. He knew that the commands would be "Ready, aim, fire," and he knew that if he aimed at the prisoner on the command of "aim," he would hit the target he was aiming at on the command of "fire." His response was to aim slightly away from the prisoner on the command of "aim," enabling him to miss when he pulled the trigger on the command of "fire." My grandfather bragged for the rest of his life about outsmarting the army in this manner. Of course, others in the firing squad did kill the prisoner, but his conscience was clear. In the same way, generations of soldiers appear to have either intentionally or instinctively outwitted the powers that be by simply exercising the soldier's right to miss.

Another excellent example of soldiers exercising their right to miss is this mercenary-journalist's account of going with one of Eden Pastora's (a.k.a. Commandante Zero) Contra units on an ambush of a civilian river launch in Nicaragua:

I'll never forget Surdo's words as he gave his imitation of a Pastora harangue prior to going into battle, telling the entire formation, "Si mata una mujer, mata una pircuaco; si mata un nino, mata un pircuaco." Pircuaco is a derogatory term, meaning rabid dog, we

used for the Sandinistas, so in effect Surdo was saying "If you kill a woman, you're killing a Sandinista, if you kill a child, you're killing a Sandinista." And off we went to kill women and children.

Once again I was part of the 10 men who would actually perform the ambush. We cleared our fields of fire and settled back to await the arrival of women and children and whatever other civilian passengers there might be on this launch.

Each man was alone with his thoughts. Not a word was spoken among us regarding the nature of our mission. Surdo paced back and forth nervously some yards behind us in the protection of the jungle.

. . . The loud throb of the powerful diesels of the 70-foot launch preceded its arrival by a good two minutes. The signal to commence firing was given as it appeared in front of us and I watched the RPG-7 [rocket] arc over the boat and into the jungle on the opposite bank. The M60 [machine gun] opened up, I raided off a 20-round burst from my FAL. Brass was flying as thick as the jungle insects as our squad emptied their magazines. *Every bullet sailed harmlessly over the civilian craft.*

When Surdo realized what was happening he came running out of the jungle cursing violently in Spanish and firing his AK [rifle] at the disappearing launch. Nicaraguan peasants are mean bastards, and tough soldiers. But they're not murderers. I laughed aloud in relief and pride as we packed up and prepared to move out.

— Dr. John "American in ARDE"

Note the nature of such a "conspiracy to miss." Without a word being spoken, every soldier who was obliged and trained to fire reverted — as millions of others must have over the centuries — to the simple artifice of soldierly incompetence. And like the firing-squad member mentioned earlier, these soldiers took a great and private pleasure in outmaneuvering those who would make them do that which they would not.

Even more remarkable than instances of posturing, and equally indisputable, is the fact that a significant number of soldiers in combat elect not even to fire over the enemy's head, but instead do not fire at all. In this respect their actions very much resemble the actions of those members of the animal kingdom who "submit" passively to the aggression and determination of their opponent rather than fleeing, fighting, or posturing.

We have previously observed General S. L. A. Marshall's findings concerning the 15 to 20 percent firing rates of U.S. soldiers in World War II. Both Marshall and Dyer note that the dispersion of the modern battlefield was probably a major factor in this low firing rate, and dispersion is indeed one factor in a complex equation of restraints and enabling mechanisms. Yet Marshall noted that even in situations where there were several riflemen together in a position facing an advancing enemy, only one was likely to fire while the others would tend to such "vital" tasks as running messages, providing ammo, tending wounded, and spotting targets. Marshall makes it clear that in most cases the firers were aware of the large body of nonfirers around them. The inaction of these passive individuals did not seem to have a demoralizing effect on actual firers. To the contrary, the presence of the nonfirers seemed to enable the firers to keep going.<sup>3</sup>

Dyer argues that all other forces on the World War II battlefield must have had somewhere near the same rate of nonfirers. If, says Dyer, "a higher proportion of Japanese or Germans had been willing to kill, then the volume of fire they actually managed to produce would have been three, four, or five times greater than a similar number of Americans — and it wasn't."<sup>4</sup>

There is ample supporting evidence to indicate that Marshall's observations are applicable not only to U.S. soldiers or even to the soldiers on all sides in World War II. Indeed, there are compelling data that indicate that this singular lack of enthusiasm for killing one's fellow man has existed throughout military history. A 1986 study by the British Defense Operational Analysis Establishment's field studies division used historical studies of more than one hundred nineteenth- and twentieth-century battles and test trials using pulsed laser weapons to

determine the killing effectiveness of these historical units. The analysis was designed (among other things) to determine if Marshall's nonfirer figures were correct in other, earlier wars. A comparison of historical combat performances with the performance of their test subjects (who were not killing with their weapons and were not in any physical danger from the "enemy") determined that the killing potential in these circumstances was much greater than the actual historical casualty rates. The researchers' conclusions openly supported Marshall's findings, pointing to "unwillingness to take part [in combat] as the main factor" that kept the actual historical killing rates significantly below the laser trial levels.

But we don't need laser test trials and battle reenactments to determine that many soldiers have been unwilling to take part in combat. The evidence has been there all along if we had only looked.

## **Chapter Two Nonfirers Throughout History**

### **Nonfirers in the Civil War**

Imagine a new recruit in the American Civil War.

Regardless of the side he was on, or whether he came in as a draftee or a volunteer, his training would have consisted of mind-numbingly-repetitive drill. Whatever time was available to teach even the rawest recruit was spent endlessly repeating the loading drill, and for any veteran of even a few weeks, loading and firing a musket became an act that could be completed without thinking.

The leaders envisioned combat as consisting of great lines of men firing in unison. Their goal was to turn a soldier into a small cog in a machine that would stand and fire volley after volley at the enemy. Drill was their primary tool for ensuring that he would do his duty on the battlefield.

The concept of drill had its roots in the harsh lessons of military success on battlefields dating back to the Greek phalanx. Such drill was perfected by the Romans. Then, as firing drill, it was turned into a science by Frederick the Great and then mass-produced by Napoleon.

Today we understand the enormous power of drill to condition and program a soldier. J. Glenn Gray, in his book *The Warriors*, states that while soldiers may become exhausted and "enter into a dazed condition in which all sharpness of consciousness is lost" they can still "function like cells in a military organism, doing what is expected of them because it has become automatic."

One of the most powerful examples of the military's success in developing conditioned reflexes through drill can be found in John Masters's *The Road Past Mandalay*, where he relates the actions of a machine-gun team in combat during World War II:

The No. 1 [gunner] was 17 years old — I knew him. His No. 2 [assistant gunner] lay on the left side, beside him, head toward the enemy, a loaded magazine in his hand ready to whip onto the gun the moment the No. 1 said "Change!" The No. 1 started firing, and a Japanese machine gun engaged them at close range. The No. 1 got the first burst through the face and neck, which killed him instantly. But he did not die where he lay, behind the gun. He rolled over to the right, away from the gun, his left hand coming up in death to tap his No. 2 on the shoulder in the signal that means Take over. The No. 2 did not have to push the corpse away from the gun. It was already clear.

The "take over" signal was drilled into the gunner to ensure that his vital weapon was never left unmanned should he ever have to leave. Its use in this circumstance is evidence of a

conditioned reflex so powerful that it is completed without conscious thought as the last dying act of a soldier with a bullet through the brain. Gwynne Dyer strikes right to the heart of the matter when he says, "Conditioning, almost in the Pavlovian sense, is probably a better word than Training, for what was required of the ordinary soldier was not thought, but the ability to .... load and fire their muskets completely automatically even under the stress of combat." This conditioning was accomplished by "literally thousands of hours of repetitive drilling" paired with "the ever-present incentive of physical violence as the penalty for failure to perform correctly."

The Civil War weapon was usually a muzzle-loading, black-powder, rifled musket. To fire the weapon a soldier -would take a paper-wrapped cartridge consisting of a bullet and some gunpowder. He would tear the cartridge open with his teeth, pour the powder down the barrel, set the bullet in the barrel, ram it home, prime the weapon with a percussion cap, cock, and fire. Since gravity was needed to pour the powder down the barrel, all of this was done from a standing position. Fighting was a stand-up business.

With the introduction of the percussion cap, and the advent of oiled paper to wrap the cartridge in, weapons had become generally quite reliable even in wet weather. The oiled paper around the cartridge prevented the powder from becoming wet, and the percussion cap ensured a reliable ignition source. In anything but a driving rainstorm, a weapon would malfunction *only* if the ball was put in before the powder (an extremely rare mistake given the drill the soldier had gone through), or if the hole linking the percussion cap with the barrel was fouled — something that *could* happen after a lot of firing, but that was easily corrected.

A minor problem could arise if a weapon was double loaded. In the heat of battle a soldier might sometimes be unsure as to whether a musket was loaded, and it was not uncommon to place a second load on top of the first. But such a weapon was still quite usable. The barrels of these weapons were heavy, and the black powder involved was relatively weak. Factory tests and demonstrations of weapons of this era often involved firing a rifle with various kinds of multiple loads in it, sometimes with a weapon loaded all the way to the end of the barrel. If such a weapon was fired, the first load would ignite and simply push all the other loads out of the barrel.

These weapons were fast and accurate. A soldier could generally fire four or five rounds a minute. In training, or while hunting with a rifled musket, the hit rate would have been at least as good as that achieved by the Prussians with smoothbore muskets when they got 25 percent hits at 225 yards, 40 percent hits at 150 yards, and 60 percent hits at 75 yards while firing at a 100-foot by 6-foot target. Thus, at 75 yards, a 200-man regiment should be able to hit as many as 120 enemy soldiers in the first volley. If four shots were fired each minute, a regiment could potentially kill or wound 480 enemy soldiers in the first minute.

The Civil War soldier was, without a doubt, the best trained and equipped soldier yet seen on the face of the earth. Then came the day of combat, the day for which he had drilled and marched for so long. And with that day came the destruction of all his preconceptions and delusions about what would happen.

At first the vision of a long line of men with every man firing in unison might hold true. If the leaders maintained control, and if the terrain was not too broken, for a while the battle could be one of volleys between regiments. But even while firing in regimental volleys, something was wrong. Terribly, frightfully wrong. An average engagement would take place at thirty yards. But instead of mowing down hundreds of enemy soldiers in the first minute, regiments killed only one or two men per minute. And instead of the enemy formations disintegrating in a hail of lead, they stood and exchanged fire for hours on end.

Sooner or later (and usually sooner), the long lines firing volleys in unison would begin to break down. And in the midst of the confusion, the smoke, the thunder of the firing, and the screams of the wounded, soldiers would revert from cogs in a machine to individuals doing what



comes naturally to them. Some load, some pass weapons, some tend the wounded, some shout orders, a few run, a few wander off in the smoke or find a convenient low spot to sink into, and a few, a very few, shoot.

Numerous historical references indicate that, like their World War II equivalents, most soldiers of the muzzle-loading-musket era busied themselves with other tasks during battle. For example, the image of a line of soldiers standing and firing at the enemy is belied by this vivid account by a Civil War veteran describing the Battle of Antietam in Griffith's book: "Now is the pinch. Men and officers ... are fused into a common mass, in the frantic struggle to shoot fast. Everybody tears cartridges, loads, passes guns, or shoots. Men are falling in their places or running back into the corn."

This is an image of battle that can be seen over and over again. In Marshall's World War II work and in this account of Civil War battle we see that only a few men actually fire at the enemy, while others gather and prepare ammo, load weapons, pass weapons, or fall back into the obscurity and anonymity of cover.

The process of some men electing to load and provide support for those who are willing to shoot at the enemy appears to have been the norm rather than the exception. Those who did fire, and were the beneficiary of all of this support, can be seen in countless reports collected by Griffith, in which individual Civil War soldiers fired one hundred, two hundred, or even an incredible four hundred rounds of ammunition in battle. This in a period when the standard issue of ammunition was only forty rounds, with a weapon that became so fouled as to be useless without cleaning after firing about forty shots. The extra ammunition and muskets *must* have been supplied and loaded by the firers' less aggressive comrades.

Aside from firing over the enemy's heads, or loading and supporting those who were willing to fire, there was another option well understood by du Picq when he wrote: "A man falls and disappears, who knows whether it was a bullet or the fear of advancing that struck him?" Richard Gabriel, one of the foremost writers in the field of military psychology in our generation, notes that "in engagements the size of Waterloo or Sedan, the opportunity for a soldier not to fire or to refuse to press the attack by merely falling down and remaining in the mud was too obvious for shaken men under fire to ignore." Indeed, the temptation must have been great, and many *must* have done so.

Yet despite the obvious options of firing over the enemy's head (posturing), or simply dropping out of the advance (a type of flight), and the widely accepted option of loading and supporting those who were willing to fire (a limited kind of fighting), evidence exists that during black-powder battles thousands of soldiers elected to passively submit to both the enemy and their leaders through fake or mock firing. The best indicator of this tendency toward mock firing can be found in the salvage of multiply-loaded weapons after Civil War battles.

### **The Dilemma of the Discarded Weapons**

Author of the *Civil War Collector's Encyclopedia* F. A. Lord tells us that after the Battle of Gettysburg, 27,574 muskets were recovered from the battlefield. Of these, nearly 90 percent (twenty-four thousand) were loaded. Twelve thousand of these loaded muskets were found to be loaded more than once, and six thousand of the multiply loaded weapons had from three to ten rounds loaded in the barrel. One weapon had been loaded twenty-three times. Why, then, were there so many loaded weapons available on the battlefield, and why did at least twelve thousand soldiers misload their weapons in combat?

A loaded weapon was a precious commodity on the black-powder battlefield. During the stand-up, face-to-face, short-range battles of this era a weapon should have been loaded for only a fraction of the time in battle. More than 95 percent of the time was spent in loading the weapon, and less than 5 percent in firing it. If most soldiers were desperately attempting to kill

as quickly and efficiently as they could, then 95 percent should have been shot with an empty weapon in their hand, and any loaded, cocked, and primed weapon available dropped on the battlefield would have been snatched up from wounded or dead comrades and fired. There were many who were shot while charging the enemy or were casualties of artillery outside of musket range, and these individuals would never have had an opportunity to fire their weapons, but they hardly represent 95 percent of all casualties. If there is a desperate need in *all* soldiers to fire their weapon in combat, then many of these men should have died with an empty weapon. And as the ebb and flow of battle passed over these weapons, many of them should have been picked up and fired at the enemy.

The obvious conclusion is that most soldiers were *not* trying to kill the enemy. Most of them appear to have not even wanted to fire in the enemy's general direction. As Marshall observed, most soldiers seem to have an inner resistance to firing their weapon in combat. The point here is that the resistance appears to have existed long before Marshall discovered it, and this resistance is the reason for many (if not most) of these multiply loaded weapons.

The physical necessity for muzzle-loaders to be loaded from a standing position, combined with the shoulder-to-shoulder massed firing line so beloved of the officers of this era, presented a situation in which — unlike that studied by Marshall — it was very difficult for a man to disguise the fact that he was not shooting. And in this volley-fire situation, what du Picq called the "mutual surveillance" of authorities and peers must have created an intense pressure to fire.

There was not any "isolation and dispersion of the modern battlefield" to hide nonparticipants during a volley fire. Their every action was obvious to those comrades who stood shoulder to shoulder with them. If a man truly was not able or willing to fire, the only way he could disguise his lack of participation was to load his weapon (tear cartridge, pour powder, set bullet, ram it home, prime, cock), bring it to his shoulder, and then *not actually fire*, possibly even mimicking the recoil of his weapon when someone nearby fired.

Here was the epitome of the industrious soldier. Carefully and steadily loading his weapon in the midst of the turmoil, screams, and smoke of battle, no action of his was discernible as being something other than that which his superiors and comrades would find commendable.

The amazing thing about these soldiers who failed to fire is that they did so in direct opposition to the mind-numbingly repetitive drills of that era. How, then, did these Civil War soldiers consistently "fail" their drillmasters when it came to the all-important loading drill?

Some may argue that these multiple loads were simply mistakes, and that these weapons were discarded because they were mis-loaded. But if in the fog of war, despite all the endless hours of training, you do accidentally double-load a musket, you shoot it anyway, and the first load simply pushes out the second load. In the rare event that the weapon is actually jammed or nonfunctional in some manner, you simply drop it and pick up another. But that is not what happened here, and the question we have to ask ourselves is, Why was firing the only step that was skipped? How could at least twelve thousand men from both sides and all units make the exact same mistake?

Did twelve thousand soldiers at Gettysburg, dazed and confused by the shock of battle, accidentally double-load their weapons, and then were all twelve thousand of them killed before they could fire these weapons? Or did all twelve thousand of them discard these weapons for some reason and then pick up others? In some cases their powder may have been wet (even through their oiled-paper coating), but that many? And why did six thousand more go on to load their weapons yet again, and still not fire? Some may have been mistakes, and some may have been caused by bad powder, but I believe that the only possible explanation for the vast majority of these incidents is the same factor that prevented 80 to 85 percent of World War II soldiers from firing at the enemy. The fact that these Civil War soldiers overcame their powerful

conditioning (through drill) to fire clearly demonstrates the impact of powerful instinctive forces and supreme acts of moral will.

If Marshall had not asked the soldiers immediately after battle in World War II, we would have never known the amazing ineffectiveness of our fire. In the same way, since no one asked the soldiers of the Civil War, or any other war prior to World War II, we cannot know the effectiveness of their fire. What we can do is extrapolate from the available data, and the available data indicate that at least half of the soldiers in black-powder battles did not fire their weapons, and only a minute percentage of those who did fire aimed to kill the enemy with their fire.

Now we can begin to fully understand the reasons underlying Paddy Griffith's discovery of an average regimental hit rate of one or two men per minute in firefights of the black-powder era. And we see that these figures strongly support Marshall's findings. With the rifled muskets of that era, the *potential* hit rate was at least as high as that achieved by the Prussians with smoothbore muskets when they got 60 percent hits at seventy-five yards. But the *reality* was a minute fraction of this.

Griffith's figures make perfect sense if during these wars, as in World War II, only a small percentage of the musketeers in a regimental firing line were actually attempting to shoot at the enemy while the rest stood bravely in line firing above the enemy's heads or did not fire at all.

When presented with this data, some respond that they are specific to a civil war in which "brother fought brother." Dr. Jerome Frank answers such claims clearly in his book *Sanity and Survival in the Nuclear Age*, in which he points out that civil wars are usually more bloody, prolonged, and unrestrained than other types of war. And Peter Watson, in *War on the Mind*, points out that "deviant behavior by members of our own group is perceived as more disturbing and produces stronger retaliation than that of others with whom we are less involved." We need only look at the intensity of aggression between different Christian factions in Europe in the past and in Ireland, Lebanon, and Bosnia today, or the conflict between Leninist, Maoist, and Trotskyist Communists, or the horror in Rwanda and other African tribal battles, to confirm this fact.

It is my contention that most of these discarded weapons on the battlefield at Gettysburg represent soldiers who had been unable or unwilling to fire their weapons in the midst of combat and then had been killed, wounded, or routed. In addition to these twelve thousand, a similar proportion of soldiers must have marched off that battlefield with similarly multiloaded weapons.

Secretly, quietly, at the moment of decision, just like the 80 to 85 percent of World War II soldiers observed by Marshall, these soldiers found themselves to be conscientious objectors who were unable to kill their fellow man. This is the root reason for the incredible ineffectiveness of musket fire during this era. This is what happened at Gettysburg, and if you look deeply enough you will soon discover that this is also what happened in the other black-powder battles about which we do not necessarily have the same kind of data.

A case in point is the Battle of Cold Harbor.

### **"Eight Minutes at Cold Harbor"**

The Battle of Cold Harbor deserves careful observation here, since it is the example that most casual observers of the American Civil War would hold up to refute an 80 to 85 percent nonfiring rate. In the early morning hours of the third of June 1864, forty thousand Union soldiers under the command of Ulysses S. Grant attacked the Confederate army at Cold Harbor, Virginia. The Confederate forces under Robert E. Lee were in a carefully prepared system of trenches and artillery emplacements unlike anything that Grant's Army of the Potomac had ever encountered. A newspaper correspondent observed that these positions were "intricate, zig-zagged lines within lines . . . lines built to enfilade an opposing line, lines within which lies a battery [of artillery]." By the evening of the third of June more than seven

thousand attacking Union soldiers were killed, wounded, or captured while inflicting negligible damage on the well-entrenched Confederates.

Bruce Catton, in his superb and definitive multivolume account of the Civil War, states, "Offhand, it would seem both difficult and unnecessary to exaggerate the horrors of Cold Harbor, but for some reason — chiefly, perhaps, the desire to paint Grant as a callous and uninspired butcher — no other Civil War battle gets as warped a presentation as this one."

Catton is referring largely to exaggerated accounts of Union casualties (usually claiming the thirteen thousand casualties of two weeks' fighting at Cold Harbor as the casualty rate for the one day's fighting), but he also debunks the very common misconception that seven thousand (or even thirteen thousand) casualties occurred in "Eight Minutes at Cold Harbor." This belief is not so much wrong as it is a gross oversimplification. It is quite correct that most of the isolated, disjointed Union charges launched at Cold Harbor were halted in the first 'ten to twenty minutes, but once the attackers' momentum was broken the attacking Union soldiers did not flee, and the killing did *not* end. Catton notes that "the most amazing thing of all in this fantastic battle is the fact that all along the front the beaten [Union soldiers] did not pull back to the rear." Instead they did exactly what Union and Confederate soldiers had done over and over again in that war: "They stayed where they were, anywhere from 40 to 200 yards from the confederate line, gouging out such shallow trenches as they could, and kept on firing." And the Confederates kept on firing at *them*, often with cannons firing from the flanks and rear at horrendously short range. "All daylong," says Catton, "the terrible sound of battle continued. Only an experienced soldier could tell by the sound alone, that the pitch of the combat in midafternoon was any lower than it had been in the murky dawn when the charges were being repulsed."

It took over eight *hours*, not eight minutes, to inflict those horrendous casualties on Grant's soldiers. And as in most wars from the time of Napoleon on down to today, it was not the infantry but the *artillery* that inflicted most of these casualties.

Only when artillery (with its close supervision and mutual surveillance processes among the crew) is brought into play can any significant change in this killing rate be observed. (The greater distance that artillery usually is from its targets, as we will see, also increases its effectiveness.) The simple fact appears to be that, like S. L. A. Marshall's riflemen of World War II, the vast majority of the rifle- and musket-armed soldiers of previous wars -were consistent and persistent in their psychological inability to kill their fellow human beings. Their weapons were technologically capable, and they were physically quite able to kill, but at the decisive moment each man became, in his heart, a conscientious objector who could not bring himself to kill the man standing before him.

This all indicates that there is a force in play here. A previously undiscovered psychological force. A force stronger than drill, stronger than peer pressure, even stronger than the self-preservation instinct. The impact of this force is not limited to only the black-powder era or only to World War II: it can also be seen in World War I.

### **Nonfirers of World War I**

Colonel Milton Mater served as an infantry company commander in World War II and relates several World War II experiences that strongly support Marshall's observations. Mater also provides us with several instances in which World War I veterans warned him to expect that there would be many nonfirers in combat.

When he first joined the service in 1933, Mater asked his uncle, a veteran of World War I, about his combat experience. "I was amazed to find that the experience foremost in his mind was 'draftees who wouldn't shoot.' He expressed it something like this: 'They thought if they didn't shoot at the Germans, the Germans wouldn't shoot at them.'"

Another veteran of the trenches of World War I taught Mater in an ROTC class in 1937 that, based on his experiences, nonfirers would be a problem in any future war. "He took pains to

impress us with the difficulty of making some men fire their rifles to avoid becoming sitting ducks for the fire and movement of the enemy." There is ample indication of the existence of the resistance to killing and that it appears to have existed at least since the black-powder era. This lack of enthusiasm for killing the enemy causes many soldiers to posture, submit, or flee, rather than fight; it represents a powerful psychological force on the battlefield; and it is a force that is discernible throughout the history of man. The application and understanding of this force can lend new insight to military history, the nature of war, and the nature of man.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Why Can't Johnny Kill?**

Why did individual soldiers over hundreds of years refuse to kill the enemy, even when they knew that doing so would endanger their own lives? And why, if this has been so throughout history, have we not been fully aware of it?

#### **Why Can't Johnny Kill?**

Many veteran hunters, upon hearing accounts of nonfirers, might say, "Aha, buck fever," and they would be quite right. But what is buck fever? And why do men experience during the hunt that inability to kill that we call buck fever? (The relationship between the failures to kill on the battlefield and failures to kill in the hunt are explored more completely in a later section.) We must turn back to S. L. A. Marshall for the answer.

Marshall studied this issue during the entire period of World War II. He, more than any other individual prior to him, understood the thousands of soldiers who did not fire at the enemy, and he concluded that "the average and healthy individual . . . has such an inner and usually unrealized resistance towards killing a fellow man that he will not of his own volition take life if it is possible to turn away from that responsibility. . . . At the vital point," says Marshall, the soldier "becomes a conscientious objector."

Marshall understood the mechanics and emotions of combat. He was a combat veteran of World War I, asking the combat veterans of World War II about their responses to battle, and he understood, he had been there. "I well recall . . .," said Marshall, "the great sense of relief that came to [World War I] troops when they were passed to a quiet sector." And he believed that this "was due not so much to the realization that things were safer there as to the blessed knowledge that for a time they were not under the compulsion to take life." In his experience that philosophy of the World War I soldier was "Let 'em go; we'll get 'em some other time."

Dyer also studied the matter carefully, building his knowledge on those who knew, and he too understood that "men will kill under compulsion — men will do almost anything if they know it is expected of them and they are under strong social pressure to comply — but the vast majority of men are not born killers." The U.S. Army Air Corps (now the U.S. Air Force) ran head-on into this problem when it discovered that during World War II less than 1 percent of their fighter pilots accounted for 30 to 40 percent of all enemy aircraft destroyed in the air, and according to Gabriel, most fighter pilots "never shot anyone down or even tried to." Some suggest that simple fear was the force that prevented these men from killing, but these pilots usually flew in small groups led by proven killers who took the nonkillers into dangerous situations, and these men bravely followed. But when it came time to kill, they looked into the cockpit at another man, a pilot, a flier, one of the "brotherhood of the air," a man frighteningly like themselves; and when faced with such a man it is possible that the vast majority simply could not kill him. The pilots of both fighter and bomber aircraft faced the terrible dilemma of air combat against others of their own kind, and this was a significant factor in making their task

difficult. (The matter of the mechanics of killing in air battles and the U.S. Air Force's remarkable discoveries in attempting to preselect "killers" for pilot training are addressed later in this study.)

That the average man will not kill even at the risk of all he holds dear has been largely ignored by those who attempt to understand the psychological and sociological pressures of the battlefield. Looking another human being in the eye, making an independent decision to kill him, and watching as he dies due to your action combine to form the single most basic, important, primal, and potentially traumatic occurrence of war. If we understand this, then we understand the magnitude of the horror of killing in combat.

The Israeli military psychologist Ben Shalit in his book *The Psychology of Conflict and Combat*, referring to Marshall's studies, says that it is "clear that many soldiers do not shoot directly at the enemy. Many reasons are given; one of them — *which, oddly enough, is not often discussed* — may be the reluctance of the individual to act in a direct aggressive way."

Why is this not often discussed? If Johnny can't kill, if the average soldier will not kill unless coerced and conditioned and provided with mechanical and mental leverage, then why has it not been understood before?

British field marshal Evelyn Wood has said that in war only cowards need lie. I believe that to call the men who did not fire in combat cowards is grossly inaccurate, but those who did not fire do, indeed, have something to hide. Or at the very least something that they would not be very proud of and would readily lie about in later years. The point is that (1) an intense, traumatic, guilt-laden situation will inevitably result in a web of forgetfulness, deception, and lies; (2) such situations that continue for thousands of years become institutions based on a tangled web of individual and cultural forgetfulness, deception, and lies tightly woven over thousands of years; and (3) for the most part there have been two such institutions about which the male ego has always justified selective memory, self-deception, and lying. These two institutions are sex and combat. After all, "All is fair in love and war."

For thousands of years we did not understand human sexuality. We understood the big things about sex. We knew that it made babies, and it worked. But we had no idea how human sexuality affected the individual. Until the studies of human sexuality by Sigmund Freud and researchers of this century we had not even begun to really understand the role that sex played in our lives. For thousands of years we did not truly study sex and therefore had no hope of ever understanding it. The very fact that in studying sex we were studying ourselves made impartial observation difficult. Sex was especially difficult to study because so much of the ego and self-esteem of each individual was invested in this area full of myths and misunderstanding.

If someone was impotent or frigid, would he or she let that be common knowledge? If the majority of the marriages of two centuries ago suffered problems with impotence or frigidity, would we have known? An educated man of two hundred years ago would have probably said, "They manage to make plenty of babies, don't they? They must be doing something right!"

And if one hundred years ago a researcher discovered that sexual abuse of children was rampant in society, how would such a discovery be treated? Freud made just such a discovery, and he was personally disgraced and professionally scorned by his peers and by society at large for even suggesting such a thing. It is only today, one hundred years later, that we have begun to accept and address the magnitude of sexual abuse of children in our society. Until someone with authority and credibility asked individuals in privacy and with dignity, we had no hope of ever realizing what was occurring sexually in our culture. And even under such circumstances, society as a whole has to be sufficiently prepared and enlightened in order to throw off the blinders that limit its ability to perceive itself.

In the same way that we did not understand what was occurring in the bedroom, we have not understood what was occurring on the battlefield. Our ignorance of the destructive act matched that of the procreative act. If a soldier would not kill in combat, when it was his duty

and responsibility to do so, would he let that be common knowledge? And if the majority of soldiers two hundred years ago did not fulfill their duties on the battlefield, would we have known? A general of the era would probably have said, "They manage to kill plenty of people don't they? They won the war for us didn't they? They must be doing something right!" Until S. L. A. Marshall asked the individuals involved, immediately after the fact, we had no hope of understanding what was occurring on the battlefield.

Philosophers and psychologists have long been aware of man's basic inability to perceive that which is closest to him. Sir Norman Angell tells us that "it is quite in keeping with man's curious intellectual history, that the simplest and most important questions are those he asks least often." And the philosopher-soldier Glenn Gray speaks from personal experience in World War II when he observes that "few of us can hold on to our real selves long enough to discover the real truths about ourselves and this whirling earth to which we cling. This is especially true," observes Gray, "of men in war. The great god Mars tries to blind us when we enter his realm, and when we leave he gives us a generous cup of the waters of Lethe to drink."

If a professional soldier were to see through the fog of his own self-deception, and if he were to face the cold reality that he can't do what he has dedicated his life to, or that many of his soldiers would rather die than do their duty, it would make his life a lie. Such a man would be apt to deny his weakness with all the energy he could muster. No, the soldiers are not apt to write of their failures or the failures of their men; with few exceptions, it is only the heroes and the glory that make their way into print.

Part of the reason for our lack of knowledge in this area is that combat is, like sex, laden with a baggage of expectations and myth. A belief that most soldiers will not kill the enemy in close combat is contrary to what we want to believe about ourselves, and it is contrary to what thousands of years of military history and culture have told us. But are the perceptions handed down to us by our culture and our historians accurate, unbiased, and reliable?

In *A History of Militarism*, Alfred Vagts accuses military history, as an institution, of having played a large part in the process of militarizing minds. Vagts complains that military history is consistently written "with polemic purpose for the justification of individuals or armies and with small regard for socially relevant facts." He states, "A very large part of military history is written, if not for the express purpose of supporting an army's authority, at least with the intention of not hurting it, not revealing its secrets, avoiding the betrayal of weakness, vacillation, or distemper." Vagts paints an image of military and historical institutions that for thousands of years have reinforced and supported each other in a process of mutual glorification and aggrandizement. To a certain extent, this is probably because those who are good at killing in war are quite often those who throughout history have hacked their way to power. The military and the politicians have been the same people for all but the most recent part of human history, and we know that the victor writes the history books.

As a historian, as a soldier, and as a psychologist, I believe that Vagts is quite correct. If for thousands of years the vast majority of soldiers secretly and privately were less than enthused about killing their fellow man on the battlefield, the professional soldiers and their chroniclers would be the last to let us know the inadequacies of their particular charges.

The media in our modern information society have done much to perpetuate the myth of easy killing and have thereby become part of society's unspoken conspiracy of deception that glorifies killing and war. There are exceptions — such as Gene Hackman's Bat 21, in which an air force officer has to kill people up close and personal for a change and is horrified at what he has done — but for the most part we are given James Bond, Luke Skywalker, Rambo, and Indiana Jones blithely and remorselessly killing off men by the hundreds. The point here is that there is as much disinformation and as little insight concerning the nature of killing coming from the media as from any other aspect of our society.

Even after Marshall's World War II revelations, the subject of nonfirers is an uncomfortable one for today's military. Writing in *Army* magazine — the U.S. Army's foremost military journal — Colonel Mater states that his experiences as an infantry company commander in World War II strongly supported Marshall's findings and noted several World War I anecdotes that suggest that the problem of nonfirers was just as serious in that war.

Mater then bitterly — and appropriately — complains that "thinking back over my many years of service, I cannot remember a single official lecture or class discussion of how to assure that your men will fire." This included "such formal schooling as the wartime Infantry Leadership and Battle School I attended in Italy and the Command and General Staff College at Ft. Leavenworth, Kansas, that I attended in 1966. Nor do I remember any articles on the subject in *Army* magazine or other military publications."<sup>5</sup> Colonel Mater concludes, "It is as if there were a conspiracy of silence around this subject: 'We don't know what to do about it — so let's forget it.'"

There does indeed seem to be a conspiracy of silence on this subject. In his book *War on the Mind*, Peter Watson observes that Marshall's findings have been largely ignored by academia and the fields of psychology and psychiatry, but they were very much taken to heart by the U.S. Army, and a number of training measures were instituted as a result of Marshall's suggestions. According to studies by Marshall, these changes resulted in a firing rate of 55 percent in Korea and, according to a study by Scott, a 90 to 95 percent firing rate was attained in Vietnam. Some modern soldiers use the disparity between the firing rates of World War II and Vietnam to claim that Marshall had to be wrong, for the average military leader has great difficulty in believing that any significant body of his soldiers will not do their job in combat. But these doubters don't give sufficient credit to the revolutionary corrective measures and training methods introduced since World War II.

The training methods that increased the firing rate from 15 percent to 90 percent are referred to as "programming" or "conditioning" by some of the veterans I have interviewed, and they do appear to represent a form of classical and operant conditioning (a la Pavlov's dog and B. F. Skinner's rats), which is addressed in detail in the section "Killing in Vietnam." The unpleasantness of this subject, combined with the remarkable success of the army's training programs, and the lack of official recognition might imply that it is classified. But there is no secret master plan responsible for the lack of attention given to this subject. There is instead, in the words of philosopher-psychologist Peter Marin, "a massive unconscious cover-up" in which society hides itself from the true nature of combat. Even among the psychological and psychiatric literature on war, "there is," writes Marin, "a kind of madness at work." He notes, "Repugnance toward killing and the refusal to kill" are referred to as "acute combat reaction." And psychological trauma resulting from "slaughter and atrocity are called 'stress,' as if the clinicians . . . are talking about an executive's overwork." As a psychologist I believe that Marin is quite correct when he observes, "Nowhere in the [psychiatric and psychological] literature is one allowed to glimpse what is actually occurring: the real horror of the war and its effect on those who fought it."

It would be almost impossible to keep something of this nature classified for more than fifty years now, and those in the military who do understand — the Marshalls and the Maters — are crying out their messages, but no one wants to hear their truths.

No, it is not a military conspiracy. There is, indeed, a cover-up and a "conspiracy of silence," but it is a cultural conspiracy of forgetfulness, distortion, and lies that has been going on for thousands of years. And just as we have begun to wipe away the cultural conspiracy of guilt and silence concerning sex, we *must* now wipe away this similar conspiracy that obscures the very nature of war.



## **SECTION IV**

### **An Anatomy of Killing: All Factors Considered**

The starting point for the understanding of war is the understanding of human nature.  
--S.L.A. Marshall  
*Men Against Fire*

#### **Chapter One**

##### **The Demands of Authority: Milgram and the Military**

Riflemen mass if orders sound unsure; They only are secure who seem secure ...  
— Kingsley Amis "The Masters"

Dr. Stanley Milgram's famous studies at Yale University on obedience and aggression found that in a controlled laboratory environment more than 65 percent of his subjects could be readily manipulated into inflicting a (seemingly) lethal electrical charge on a total stranger. The subjects sincerely believed that they were causing great physical pain, but despite their victim's pitiful pleas for them to stop, 65 percent continued to obey orders, increase the voltage, and inflict the shocks until long after the screams stopped and there could be little doubt that their victim was dead.

Prior to beginning his experiments Milgram asked a group of psychiatrists and psychologists to predict how many of his subjects would use the maximum voltage on their victims. They estimated that a fraction of 1 percent of the subjects would do so. They, like most people, really didn't have a clue — until Milgram taught us this lesson about ourselves.

Freud warned us to "never underestimate the power of the need to obey," and this research by Milgram (which has since been replicated many times in half a dozen different countries) validates Freud's intuitive understanding of human nature. Even when the trappings of authority are no more than a white lab coat and a clipboard, this is the kind of response that Milgram was able to elicit:

I observed a mature and initially poised businessman enter the laboratory smiling and confident. Within 20 minutes he was reduced to a twitching, stuttering wreck, who was rapidly approaching a point of nervous collapse. ... At one point he pushed his fist into his forehead and muttered: "Oh God, let's stop it." And yet he continued to respond to every word of the experimenter and obeyed to the end. If this kind of obedience could be obtained with a lab coat and a clipboard by an authority figure who has been known for only a few minutes, how much more would the trappings of military authority and months of bonding accomplish?

#### **The Demands of Authority**

The mass needs, and we give it, leaders who have the firmness and decision of command proceeding from habit and an entire faith in their unquestionable right to command as established by tradition, law and society.  
— Ardant du Picq *Battle Studies*

Someone who has not studied the matter would underestimate the influence of leadership in enabling killing on the battlefield, but those who have been there know better. A 1973 study by Kranss, Kaplan, and Kranss investigated the factors that make a soldier fire. They found that the individuals who had no combat experience assumed that "being fired upon" would be the critical factor in making them fire. However, veterans listed "being told to fire" as the most critical factor.

More than a century ago, Ardant du Picq found the same thing in his study based on a survey of military officers. He noted one incident during the Crimean War in which, during heavy

fighting, two detachments of soldiers suddenly met unexpectedly face-to-face, at "ten paces." They "stopped thunderstruck. Then, forgetting their rifles, threw stones and withdrew." The reason for this behavior, according to du Picq, was that "neither of the two groups had a decided leader."

### **Authority Factors**

But it is more complex than the simple influence of orders by a leader. There are many factors in the relationship between the potential killer and the authority that influence the decision to kill. In Milgram's experiments the demands of authority were represented by an individual with a clipboard and a white lab coat. This authority figure stood immediately behind the individual who was inflicting shocks and directed that he increase the voltage each time the victim answered a question incorrectly. When the authority figure was not personally present but called over a phone, the number of subjects who were willing to inflict the maximum shock dropped sharply. This process can be generalized to combat circumstances and "operationalized" into a number of subfactors: proximity of the authority figure, respect for the authority figure, intensity of the authority figure's demands, and the authority figure's legitimacy.

- *Proximity of the authority figure to the subject.* Marshall noted many specific World War II incidents in which almost all soldiers would fire their weapons while their leaders observed and encouraged them in a combat situation, but when the leaders left, the firing rate immediately dropped to 15 to 20 percent.

- *Killer's subjective respect for the authority figure.* To be truly effective, soldiers must bond to their leader just as they must bond to their group. Shalit notes a 1973 Israeli study that shows that the primary factor in ensuring the will to fight is identification with the direct commanding officer. Compared with an established and respected leader, an unknown or discredited leader has much less chance of gaining compliance from soldiers in combat.

- *Intensity of the authority figure's demands for killing behavior.* The leader's mere presence is not always sufficient to ensure killing activity. The leader must also communicate a clear expectancy of killing behavior. When he does, the influence can be enormous. When Lieutenant Galley first ordered his men to kill a group of women and children in the village of My Lai, he said, "You know what to do with them," and left. When he came back he asked, "Why haven't you killed them?" The soldier he confronted said, "I didn't think you wanted us to kill them." "No," Galley responded, "I want them dead," and proceeded to fire at them himself. Only then was he able to get his soldiers to start shooting in this extraordinary circumstance in which the soldiers' resistance to killing was, understandably, very high.

- *Legitimacy of the authority figure's authority and demands.* Leaders with legitimate, societally sanctioned authority have greater influence on their soldiers; and legitimate, lawful demands are more likely to be obeyed than illegal or unanticipated demands. Gang leaders and mercenary commanders have to carefully work around their shortcomings in this area, but military officers (with their trappings of power and the legitimate authority of their nation behind them) have tremendous potential to cause their soldiers to overcome individual resistance and reluctance in combat.

## **The Centurion Factor: The Role of Obedience in Military History**

Many factors are at play on the battlefield, but one of the most powerful is the influence of leaders. This influence can be seen throughout history. In particular, the success of the Roman military machine can be seen in light of its mastery of leadership processes.

The Romans pioneered the concepts of leadership development and the NCO corps as we know it, and when the professional Roman army went up against the Greek citizen-soldiers, leadership can be seen as a key factor in the Romans' success.

Both sides had the political legitimacy of their nations and city-states behind them, but there was a real difference in the military legitimacy that these leaders probably had in the eyes of their soldiers. The Roman centurion was a professional leader who had the respect of his soldiers because he had come up through the ranks and had previously demonstrated his ability in combat. This kind of legitimacy is completely different from that associated with leadership in civilian life, and the Greek leader was primarily a civilian whose peacetime legitimacy was not easily transferred to the battlefield and was often tainted by the spoils system and the petty politics associated with the local village he had come from. In the Greek phalanx the leader at squad and platoon level was a spear-carrying member of the masses. The primary function of these leaders (as defined by their equipment and lack of mobility within the formation) was to participate in the killing. The Roman formation, on the other hand, had a series of mobile, highly trained, and carefully selected leaders whose primary job was not to kill but to stand behind their men and demand that they kill.

Many factors led to the military supremacy that permitted the Romans to conquer the world. For example, their volleys of cleverly designed javelins provided physical distance in the killing process, and their training enabled the individual to use the point and overcome the natural resistance to thrusting. But most authorities agree that a key factor was the degree of professionalism in their small-unit leaders, combined with a formation that facilitated the influence of these leaders.

The influence of an obedience-demanding leader can also be observed in many of the killing circumstances seen in this book. It was the command "That's gotta be Charlie, you asshole. . . . Blow their ass up and run" that spurred Steve Banko into killing a Vietcong soldier. For John Barry Freeman it was a pointed machine gun and the order "Shoot the man" that caused him to shoot one of his fellow mercenaries who had been condemned to death. And for Alan Stuart-Smyth the screamed order "KILL HIM, GODDAMMIT, KILL HIM, NOW!" was necessary to bring him to kill a man who was in the process of swinging the muzzle of a weapon toward him.

In these and many other killing circumstances we can see that it was the demand for killing actions from a leader that was the decisive factor. Never underestimate the power of the need to obey.

### **"Our Blood and His Guts": The Price the Leader Pays**

In many combat situations the ultimate mechanism that leads to defeat is when the leader of a group can no longer bring himself to demand sacrifice by his men. One of Bill Mauldin's famous World War II cartoons shows Willie and Joe discussing General "Old Blood and Guts" Patton. "Yeah," says the weary, disheveled combat soldier, "our blood and his guts." Although intended as sarcasm, there is a profound truth in this statement, for often it *is* the soldiers' blood and the leader's guts that stave off defeat. And when the leader's guts or will to sacrifice his men gives out, then the force he is leading is defeated.

This equation becomes particularly apparent in situations in which soldiers are cut off from higher authority. In these kinds of situations the leader is trapped with his men. He sees his soldiers dying, he sees the wounded suffering; there is no buffer of distance to enable any denial of the results of his actions. He has no contact with higher authority, and he knows that at

any time he can end the horror by surrendering and that the decision is solely his to make. As each of his men is wounded or killed, their suffering hangs on his conscience, and he knows that it is he and he alone who is making it continue. He and his will to accept the suffering of his men are all that keep the battle going. At some point he can no longer bring himself to muster the will to fight, and with one short sentence the horror is ended.

Some leaders choose to fight to their deaths, taking their men with them in a blaze of glory. In many ways it is easier for the leader if he can die quickly and cleanly with his men and need never live with what he has done. One of the more striking of such situations is that of Major James Devereux, the commander of the U.S. Marines defending Wake Island. The small marine detachment on Wake held out against overwhelming Japanese forces from December 8 to December 22, 1941. The last message sent out before Devereux and his men were overwhelmed was received by radio telegraphy and said simply:

S...E...N...D...M...O...R...E...J...A...P...S...

But the price for the leader who has lived through such a situation is high. He must answer to the widows and the orphans of his men, and he must live forevermore with what he has done to those who entrusted their lives to his care. When I interview combatants, many tell of remorse and anguish that they have never told anyone of before. But I have not yet had any success at getting a leader to confront his emotions revolving around the soldiers who have died in combat as a result of his orders. In interviews, such men work around reservoirs of guilt and denial that appear to be buried too deeply to be tapped, and perhaps this is for the best. The Lost Battalion of World War I is a famous example of a unit that was sustained by its leader's will. This unit, a battalion of the 77th Division, was cut off and surrounded by Germans during an attack. They continued to fight for days. They ran out of food, water, and ammunition. The survivors were surrounded by friends and comrades suffering from horrible wounds that could not receive medical attention until they surrendered. The Germans brought up flamethrowers and tried to bum them out. Still their commander would not surrender.

They were not an elite or specially trained unit. They were only a composite infantry battalion made up of citizen-soldiers in a National Guard Division. Yet they performed a feat that will shine forever in the annals of military glory.

All the survivors gave full credit for their achievement to the incredible fortitude of their battalion commander, Major C. W. Whittlesey, who refused to surrender and constantly encouraged the dwindling survivors of his battalion to fight on. After five days their battalion was rescued. Major Whittlesey was given the Congressional Medal of Honor. Many people know this story. What they don't know is that Whittlesey committed suicide shortly after the war.

## Chapter Two

### Group Absolution: "The Individual Is Not a Killer, but the Group Is"

Disintegration of a combat unit . . . usually occurs at the 50% casualty point, and is marked by increasing numbers of individuals refusing to kill in combat. . . . Motivation and will to kill the enemy has evaporated along with their peers and comrades.

— Peter Watson *War on the Mind*

A tremendous volume of research indicates that the primary factor that motivates a soldier to do the things that no sane man *wants* to do in combat (that is, killing and dying) is not the force of self-preservation but a powerful sense of accountability to his comrades on the battlefield. Richard Gabriel notes that "in military writings on unit cohesion, one consistently finds the assertion that the bonds combat soldiers form with one another are stronger than the bonds most men have with their wives." The defeat of even the most elite group is usually achieved when so many casualties have been inflicted (usually somewhere around the 50 percent point) that the group slips, into a form of mass depression and apathy. Dinter points out that "The integration of the individual in the group is so strong sometimes that the group's destruction, e.g. by force or captivity, may lead to depression and subsequent suicide." Among the Japanese in World War II this manifested itself in mass suicide. In most historical groups it results in the group suicide of surrender.

Among men who are bonded together so intensely, there is a powerful process of peer pressure in which the individual cares so deeply about his comrades and what they think about him that he would rather die than let them down. A U.S. Marine Corps Vietnam vet interviewed by Gwynne Dyer communicated this process clearly when he said that "your first instinct, regardless of all your training, is to live. . . . But you can't turn around and run the other way. Peer pressure, you know?" Dyer calls this "a special kind of love that has nothing to do with sex or idealism," and Ardant du Picq referred to it as "mutual surveillance" and considered it to be the predominant psychological factor on the battlefield.

Marshall noted that a single soldier falling back from a broken and retreating unit will be of little value if pressed into service in another unit. But if a pair of soldiers or the remnants of a squad or platoon are put to use, they can generally be counted upon to fight well. The difference in these two situations is the degree to which the soldiers have bonded or developed a sense of accountability to the small number of men they will be fighting with — which is distinctly different from the more generalized cohesion of the army as a whole. *If* the individual is bonded with his comrades, and *if he* is with "his" group, then the probability that the individual will participate in killing is significantly increased. But if those factors are absent, the probability that the individual will be an active participant in combat is quite low.

Du Picq sums this matter up when he says, "Four brave men who do not know each other will not dare to attack a lion. Four less brave, but knowing each other well, sure of their reliability and consequently of mutual aid, will attack resolutely. There," says du Picq, "is the science of the organization of armies in a nutshell."

### Anonymity and Group Absolution

In addition to creating a sense of accountability, groups also enable killing through developing in their members a sense of anonymity that contributes further to violence. In some circumstances this process of group anonymity seems to facilitate a kind of atavistic killing hysteria that can also be seen in the animal kingdom. Kruck's 1972 research describes scenes from the animal kingdom that show that senseless and wanton killing does occur. These include the slaughter of gazelles by hyenas, in quantities way beyond their need or capacity to eat, or the destruction of gulls that could not fly on a stormy night and thus were "sitting ducks" for

foxes that proceed to kill them beyond any possible need for food. Shalit points out that "such senseless violence in the animal world — as well as most of the violence in the human domain — is shown by groups rather than by individuals."

Konrad Lorenz tells us that "man is not a killer, but the group is." Shalit demonstrates a profound understanding of this process and has researched it extensively:

All crowding has an intensifying effect. If aggression exists, it will become more so as a result of crowding; if joy exists, it will become intensified by the crowd. It has been shown by some studies . . . that a mirror in front of an aggressor tends to increase his aggression — if he was disposed to be aggressive. However, if this individual were not so disposed, the effect of the mirror would be to further enhance his nonaggressive tendencies. The effect of the crowd seems to be much like a mirror, reflecting each individual's behavior in those around him and thus intensifying the existing pattern of behavior.

Psychologists have long understood that a diffusion of responsibility can be caused by the anonymity created in a crowd. It has been demonstrated in literally dozens of studies that bystanders will be less likely to interfere in a situation in direct relationship to the numbers who are witnessing the circumstance. Thus, in large crowds, horrendous crimes can occur but the likelihood of a bystander interfering is very low. However, if the bystander is alone and is faced with a circumstance in which there is no one else to diffuse the responsibility to, then the probability of intervention is very high. In the same way groups can provide a diffusion of responsibility that will enable individuals in mobs and soldiers in military units to commit acts that they would never dream of doing as individuals, acts such as lynching someone because of the color of his skin or shooting someone because of the color of his uniform.

### **Death in the Crowd: Accountability and Anonymity on the Battlefield**

The influence of groups on killing occurs through a strange and powerful interaction of accountability and anonymity. Although at first glance the influence of these two factors would seem to be paradoxical, in actuality they interact in such a manner as to magnify and amplify each other in order to enable violence.

Police are aware of these accountability and anonymity processes and are trained to unhinge them by calling individuals within a group by name whenever possible. Doing so causes the people so named to reduce their identification with the group and begin to think of themselves as individuals with personal accountability. This inhibits violence by limiting the individuals' sense of accountability to the group and negating their sense of anonymity.

Among groups in combat, this accountability (to one's friends) and anonymity (to reduce one's sense of personal responsibility for killing) combine to play a significant role in enabling killing. As we have seen so far in this study, killing another human being is an extraordinarily difficult thing to do. But if a soldier feels he is letting his friends down if he doesn't kill, and if he can get others to share in the killing process (thus diffusing his personal responsibility by giving each individual a slice of the guilt), then killing can be easier. In general, the more members in the group, the more psychologically bonded the group, and the more the group is in close proximity, the more powerful the enabling can be. Still, just the presence of a group in combat does not guarantee aggression. (It could be a group of pacifists, in which case pacifism might be enabled by the group!) The individual must identify with and be bonded with a group that has a legitimate demand for killing. And he must be with or close to the group for it to influence his behavior.

## **Chariot, Phalanx, Cannon, and Machine Gun: The Role of Groups in Military History**

These processes can be seen throughout military history. For example, military historians have often wondered why the chariot dominated military history for so long. Tactically, economically, and mechanically it was not a cost-effective instrument on the battlefield, yet for many centuries it was the king of battle. But if we examine the psychological leverage provided by the chariot to enable killing on the battlefield, we soon realize that the chariot was successful because it was the first crew-served weapon.

Several factors were at play here — the bow as a distance weapon, the social distance created by the archers' having come from the nobility, and the psychological distance created by using the chariot in pursuit and shooting men in the back — but the key issue is that the chariot crew traditionally consisted of two men: a driver and an archer. And this was all that was needed to provide the same accountability and anonymity in close-proximity groups that in World War II permitted nearly 100 percent of crew-served weapons (such as machine guns) to fire while only 15 to 20 percent of the riflemen fired.

The chariot was defeated by the phalanx, which succeeded by turning the whole formation into a massive crew-served weapon. Although he did not have the designated leaders of the later Roman formations, each man in the phalanx was under a powerful mutual surveillance system, and in the charge it would be hard to fail to strike home without having others notice that your spear had been raised or dropped at the critical moment. And, of course, in addition to this accountability system the closely packed phalanx provided a high degree of mob anonymity.

For nearly half a millennium the Romans' professional military (with, among other things, their superior application of leadership) eclipsed the phalanx in the Western way of war. But the phalanx's application of group processes was so simple and so effective that during the period of more than a thousand years between the fall of the Roman Empire and the full integration of gunpowder, the phalanx and the pike ruled infantry tactics.

And when gunpowder was introduced, it was the crew-served cannon, later augmented by the machine gun, that did most of the killing. Gustavus Adolphus revolutionized warfare by introducing a small three-pound cannon that was pulled around by each platoon, thus becoming the first platoon crew-served weapon and presaging the platoon machine guns of today. Napoleon, an artilleryman, recognized the role of the artillery (often firing grapeshot at very close ranges), which was the real killer on the battlefield, and throughout his years he consistently ensured that he had greater

numbers of artillery than any of his opponents. During World War I the machine gun was introduced and termed the "distilled essence of the infantry," but it really was the continuation of the cannon, as artillery became an indirect-fire weapon (shooting over the soldiers' heads from miles back), and the machine gun replaced the cannon in the direct-fire, mid-range role.

Britain's World War I Machine Gun Corps Monument, next to the Wellington Monument in London, is a statue of a young David, inscribed with a Bible verse that exemplifies the meaning of the machine gun in that terrible war that sucked so much of the marrow from the bones of that great nation:

Sol has slain his thousands  
And David has slain his tens of thousands

### **"They Were Killing My Friends": Groups on the Modern Battlefield**

The influence of groups can be seen clearly when we closely examine the killing case studies outlined throughout this book. Note the absence of group influence in many of the

situations in which combatants chose *not* to kill each other. For example, in the section "Killing and Physical Distance," Captain Willis was alone when he was suddenly confronted with a single North Vietnamese soldier. He "vigorously shook his head" and initiated "a truce, cease-fire, gentleman's agreement or a deal," after which the enemy soldier "sank back into the darkness and Willis stumbled on."

Again, at the beginning of the section "Killing and the Existence of Resistance," Michael Kathman, a tunnel rat crawling alone in a Vietcong tunnel, was alone when he switched on the light and suddenly found "not more than 15 feet away ... a [lone] Viet Cong eating a handful of rice. . . . After a moment, he put his pouch of rice on the floor of the tunnel beside him, turned his back to me and slowly started crawling away." Kathman, in turn, switched off his flashlight and slipped away in the other direction.

And as you read these case studies note also the presence and influence of groups in most situations in which soldiers *do* elect to kill. The classic example is Audie Murphy, the most decorated American soldier of World War II. He won the Medal of Honor by single-handedly taking on a German infantry company. He fought alone, but when asked what motivated him to do this, he responded simply, "They were killing my friends."

### **Chapter Three**

#### **Emotional Distance: "To Me They Were Less than Animals"**

Increasing the distance between the [combatants] — whether by emphasizing their differences or by increasing the chain of responsibility between the aggressor and his victim allows for an increase in the degree of aggression.

— Ben Shalit

*The Psychology of Conflict and Combat*

#### **Cracks in the Veil of Denial**

One evening after giving a presentation on "The Price and Process of Killing" to a group of vets in New York, I was asked by a retired World War II veteran who had been in the audience if I could talk with him privately in the bar. After we were alone he said that there was something he had never told anyone about, something that, after hearing my presentation, he wanted to share with me.

He had been an army officer in the South Pacific, and one night the Japanese launched an infiltration attack on his position. During the attack a Japanese soldier charged him.

"I had my forty-five [-caliber pistol] in my hand," he said, "and the point of his bayonet was no further than you are from me when I shot him. After everything had settled down I helped search his body, you know, for intelligence purposes, and I found a photograph."

Then there was a long pause, and he continued. "It was a picture of his wife, and these two beautiful children. Ever since" — and here tears began to roll down his cheeks, although his voice remained firm and steady — "I've been haunted by the thought of these two beautiful children growing up without their father, because I murdered their daddy. I'm not a young man anymore, and soon I'll have to answer to my Maker for what I have done."<sup>1</sup>

A year later, in a pub in England, I told a Vietnam veteran who is currently a colonel in the U.S. Army about this incident. As I told him about the photographs he said, "Oh, no. Don't tell me. There was an address on the back of the photo."

"No," I replied. "At least he never mentioned it if there was."

Later in the evening I got back around to asking why he would have thought there was an address on the photos, and he told me that he had had a similar experience in Vietnam, but his photos had addresses on the back of them. "And you know," he said, as his eyes lost focus and



he slipped into that haunted, thousand-yard stare I've seen in so many vets when their minds and emotions return to the battlefield, "I've always meant to send those photos back."

Each of these men had attained the rank of colonel in the U.S. Army. Both are the distilled essence of all that is good and noble in their generation. And both of them have been haunted by simple photographs. But what those photographs represented was a crack in the veil of denial that makes war possible.

### **The Social Obstacles to Emotional Distance**

The physical distance process has been addressed previously, but distance in war is not merely physical. There is also an emotional distance process that plays a vital part in overcoming the resistance to killing. Factors such as cultural distance, moral distance, social distance, and mechanical distance are just as effective as physical distance in permitting the killer to deny that he is killing a human being.

There was a popular and rather clever saying during the 1960s that asked, "What if they gave a war and nobody came?" This is not quite as ludicrous a concept as it may seem on the surface. There is a constant danger on the battlefield that, in periods of extended close combat, the combatants will get to know and acknowledge one another as individuals and subsequently may refuse to kill each other. This danger and the process by which it can occur is poignantly represented by Henry Metelmann's account of his experiences as a German soldier on the Russian front during World War II.

There was a lull in the battle, during which Metelmann saw two Russians coming out of their foxhole,

and I walked over towards them . . . they introduced themselves . . . [and] offered me a cigarette and, as a non-smoker, I thought if they offer me a cigarette I'll smoke it. But it was horrible stuff. I coughed and later on my mates said "You made a horrible impression, standing there with those two Russians and coughing your head off." ... I talked to them and said it was all right to come closer to the foxhole, because there were three dead Russian soldiers lying there, and I, to my shame, had killed them. They wanted to get the [dog tags] off them, and the paybooks. ... I kind of helped them and we were all bending down and we found some photos in one of the paybooks and they showed them to me: we all three stood up and looked at the photos. . . . We shook hands again, and one patted on my back and they walked away.

Metelmann was called away to drive a half-track back to the field hospital. When he returned to the battlefield, over an hour later, he found that the Germans had overrun the Russian position. And although there were some of his friends killed, he found himself to be most concerned about what happened to "those two Russians."

"Oh they got killed," they said. I said: "How did it happen?"

"Oh, they didn't want to give in. Then we shouted at them to come out with their hands up and they did not, so one of us went over with a tank," he said, "and really got them, and silenced them that way." My feeling was very sad. I had met them on a very human basis, on a comradely basis. They called me comrade and at that moment, strange as it may seem, I was more sad that they had to die in this mad confrontation than my own mates and I still think sadly about it.

This identification with one's victim is also reflected in the Stockholm syndrome. Most people know of the Stockholm syndrome as a process in which the victim of a hostage situation comes to identify with the hostage taker, but it is actually more complex than that and occurs in three stages:

- First the *victim* experiences an increase in association with the hostage taker.
- Then the victim usually experiences a decrease in identification with the authorities who are dealing with the hostage taker.
- Finally the *hostage taker* experiences an increase in identification and bonding with the victim.

One of the more interesting of many such cases was the Moluccan train siege in Holland in 1975. In this instance the terrorists had already shot one hostage and then selected another for execution. This intended victim then asked permission to write a final note to his family, and his request was granted. He was a journalist, and he must have been a very good one, for he wrote such a heart-wrenching letter that, upon reading it, the terrorists took pity on him . . . and shot someone else instead.

Sometimes this process can happen on a vast scale. Many times in World War I there were unofficial suspensions of hostilities that came about through the process of coming to know each other too well. During Christmas of 1914 British and German soldiers in many sectors met peacefully, exchanged presents, took photographs and even played soccer. Holmes notes that "in some areas the truce went on until well into the New Year, despite the High Command's insistence that it should be war as usual."

Erich Fromm states that "there is good clinical evidence for the assumption that destructive aggression occurs, at least to a large degree, in conjunction with a momentary or chronic emotional withdrawal." The situations described above represent a breakdown in the psychological distance that is a key method of removing one's sense of empathy and achieving this "emotional withdrawal." Again, some of the mechanisms that facilitate this process include:

- Cultural distance, such as racial and ethnic differences, which permit the killer to dehumanize the victim
- Moral distance, which takes into consideration the kind of intense belief in moral superiority and vengeful/vigilante actions associated with many civil wars
- Social distance, which considers the impact of a lifetime of practice in thinking of a particular class as less than human in a socially stratified environment
- Mechanical distance, which includes the sterile Nintendo-game unreality of killing through a TV screen, a thermal sight, a sniper sight, or some other kind of mechanical buffer that permits the killer to deny the humanity of his victim

### **Cultural Distance: "Inferior Forms of Life"**

In the section "Killing in America," we will examine the methodology a U.S. Navy psychiatrist developed to psychologically enable assassins for the U.S. Navy. This "formula" primarily involved classical conditioning and systematic desensitization using violent movies, but it also integrated cultural distance processes in order

to get the men to think of the potential enemies they will have to face as inferior forms of life [with films] biased to present the enemy as less than human: the stupidity of local customs is ridiculed, local personalities are presented as evil demigods.

— quoted in Peter Watson, *War on the Mind*

The Israeli research mentioned earlier indicates that the risk of death for a kidnap victim is much greater if the victim is hooded. Cultural distance is a form of emotional hooding that can

work just as effectively. Shalit notes that "the nearer or more similar the victim of aggression is, the more we can identify with him." And the harder it is to kill him.

This process also works the other way around. It is so much easier to kill someone if they look distinctly different from you. If your propaganda machine can convince your soldiers that their opponents are not really human but are "inferior forms of life," then their natural resistance to killing their own species will be reduced. Often the enemy's humanity is denied by referring to him as a "gook," "Kraut," or "Nip." In Vietnam this process was assisted by the "body count" mentality, in which we referred to and thought of the enemy as numbers. One Vietnam vet told me that this permitted him to think that killing the NVA and VC was like "stepping on ants."

The greatest master of this in recent times may have been Adolf Hitler, with his myth of the Aryan master race: the *Übermensch*, whose duty was to cleanse the world of the *Untermensch*.

The adolescent soldier against whom such propaganda is directed is desperately trying to rationalize what he is being *forced* to do, and he is therefore predisposed to believe this nonsense. Once he begins to herd people like cattle and then to slaughter them like cattle, he very quickly begins to think of them as cattle — or, if you will, *Untermensch*.

According to Trevor Dupuy, the Germans, in all stages of World War II, consistently inflicted 50 percent more casualties on the Americans and British than were inflicted on them. And the Nazi leadership would probably be the first to tell you that it was this carefully nurtured belief in their racial and cultural superiority that enabled the soldiers to be so successful. (But, as we shall see in "Killing and Atrocities," this enabling also contained an entrapment that contributed greatly to the Nazis' ultimate defeat.)

But the Nazis are hardly the only ones to wield the sword of racial and ethnic hatred in war. European imperial defeat and domination of "the darker races" was facilitated by cultural distance factors.

However, this can be a double-edged sword. Once oppressors begin to think of their victims as not being the same species, then these victims can accept and use that cultural distance to kill and oppress their colonial masters when they finally gain the upper hand. This double-edged sword was turned on the oppressors when colonial nations rose up in fierce insurrections such as the Sepoy Mutiny or the Mau Mau Uprising. In the final battles that overthrew imperialism around the world, the backlash of this double-edged sword was a major factor in empowering local populations.

The United States is a comparatively egalitarian nation and therefore has a little more difficulty getting its population to wholeheartedly embrace wartime ethnic and racial hatreds. But in combat against Japan we had an enemy so different and alien that we were able to effectively implement cultural distance (combined with a powerful dose of moral distance, since we were "avenging" Pearl Harbor). Thus, according to Stouffer's research, 44 percent of American soldiers in World War II said they would "really like to kill a Japanese soldier," but only 6 percent expressed that degree of enthusiasm for killing Germans.

In Vietnam cultural distance would have backlashed against us, since our enemy was racially and culturally indistinguishable from our ally. Therefore we tried hard (at a national policy level) not to emphasize any cultural distance from our enemies. The primary psychological distance factor utilized in Vietnam was moral distance, deriving from our moral "crusade" against communism. But try as we might we were not completely successful at keeping the genie of racial hatred in its bottle.

Most of the Vietnam veterans I have interviewed developed a profound love for the Vietnamese culture and people. Many married Vietnamese women. This egalitarian tendency to mingle with and accept, admire, and even love another culture is an American strong point. Because of it America was able to turn occupied Germany and Japan from defeated enemies to friends and allies. But many U.S. soldiers in Vietnam spent their year in-country isolated from the positive, friendly aspects of Vietnamese culture and people. The only Vietnamese they met were either trying to kill them or were suspected of being or supporting Vietcong. This

environment had the capacity to develop profound suspicion and hatred. One Vietnam veteran told me that, to him, "they were less than animals."

Because of this ability to accept other cultures, Americans probably committed fewer atrocities than most other nations would have under the circumstances associated with guerrilla warfare in Vietnam. Certainly fewer than was the track record of most colonial powers. Yet still we had our My Lai, and our efforts in that war were profoundly, perhaps fatally, undermined by that single incident.

It can be easy to unleash this genie of racial and ethnic hatred in order to facilitate killing in time of war. It can be more difficult to keep the cork in the bottle and completely restrain it. Once it *is* out, and the war is over, the genie is not easily put back in the bottle. Such hatred lingers over the decades, even centuries, as can be seen today in Lebanon and what was once Yugoslavia.

It would be easy to feel some smug, self-righteous sense of superiority and convince ourselves that such lingering hatred exists only in distant, insular nations like Lebanon or Yugoslavia. The truth is that we are still trying to suppress racism more than a century after the end of slavery, and our limited use of cultural distance in World War II and Vietnam still tarnishes our dealings with our opponents in those wars.

On some future battlefield we may be tempted to once again manipulate this two-edged sword of cultural distance to our advantage. But before we do, we would be well advised to carefully consider the costs. The costs both during the war and in the peace that we hope to have attained when the war is over.

### **Moral Distance: "Their Cause Is Holy, So How Can They Sin?"**

We who strike the enemy where his heart beats have been slandered as "baby-killers" and "murders of women." . . . What we do is repugnant to us too, but necessary. Very necessary. Nowadays there is no such animal as a non-combatant; modern warfare is total warfare. A soldier cannot function at the front without the factory worker, the farmer, and all the other providers behind him. You and I, Mother, have discussed this subject, and I know you understand what I say. My men are brave and honourable. Their cause is holy, so how can they sin while doing their duty? If what we do is frightful, then may frightfulness be Germany's salvation. — Captain Peter Strasser, head of Germany's World War I airship division, in a letter quoted in Gwynne Dyer, *War*

Moral distance involves legitimizing oneself and one's cause. It can generally be divided into two components. The first component usually is the determination and condemnation of the enemy's guilt, which, of course, must be punished or avenged. The other is an affirmation of the legality and legitimacy of one's own cause. Moral distance establishes that the enemy's cause is clearly wrong, his leaders are criminal, and his soldiers are either simply misguided or are sharing in their leader's guilt. But the enemy is still a human, and killing him is an act of justice rather than the extermination that is often motivated by cultural distance.<sup>2</sup>

In the same way that this process has traditionally enabled violence in police forces, it can also enable violence on the battlefield. Alfred Vagts recognized this as a process in which

enemies are to be deemed criminals in advance, guilty of starting the war; the business of locating the aggressor is to begin before or shortly after the outbreak of the war; the methods of conducting the war are to be branded as criminal; and victory is not to be a triumph of honour and bravery over honour and bravery but the climax of a police hunt for bloodthirsty wretches who have violated law, order, and everything else esteemed good and holy.

Vagts felt that this kind of propaganda has had an increasing influence on modern war, and he may well be right. But this is really nothing new. In the West it dates back at least to those days when the pope, then the undisputed moral leader of Western civilization, established the moral justification for the tragic and bloody wars we call the Crusades.

*Punishment Justification: "Remember the Alamo / Maine / Pearl Harbor"*

The establishment of the enemy's guilt and the need to punish or avenge is a fundamental and widely accepted justification for violence. Most nations reserve the right to "administer" capital punishment, and if a state directs a soldier to kill a criminal who is guilty of a sufficiently heinous crime, then the killing can be readily rationalized as nothing more than the administration of justice.

The mechanism of punishment justification is so fundamental that it can sometimes be artificially manipulated. In World War II, some Japanese leaders cultivated an artificial punishment justification. "Colonel Masonobu Tsuji," says Holmes,

who masterminded Japanese planning for the invasion of Malaya, wrote a tract designed, amongst other things, to screw his soldiers to a pitch of fighting fury. "When you encounter the enemy after landing, think of yourself as an avenger come at last face to face with your father's murderer, Here is the man whose death will lighten your heart of its burden of brooding anger. If you fail to destroy him utterly you can never rest in peace."

*Legal Affirmation: "We Hold These Truths to Be Self-Evident"* When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bonds which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. . . .

We hold these truths to be self-evident.  
— Declaration of Independence

The affirmation of the legality of one's own case is the flip side of punishment motivation. This process of asserting the legitimacy of your cause is one of the primary mechanisms enabling violence in civil wars, since the similarities of the combatants make it difficult to develop cultural distance. But moral distance is, in varying degrees, also a violence-enabling factor in all wars, not just civil wars.

One of the major manifestations of moral distance is what might be called the home-court advantage. The moral advantage associated with defending one's own den, home, or nation has a long tradition that can be found in the animal kingdom as well, and it should not be neglected in assessing the impact of moral distance in empowering a nation's violence. Winston Churchill said that "it is the primary right of men to die and kill for the land they live in, and to punish with exceptional severity all members of their own race who have warmed their hands at the invader's hearth."

American wars have usually been characterized by a distinctive tendency toward moral rather than cultural distance. Cultural distance has been a little harder to develop in America's comparatively egalitarian culture with its ethnically and racially diverse population. In the American Revolution the Boston Massacre provided a degree of punishment justification, and the Declaration of Independence ("We hold these truths to be self-evident") represented the legal affirmation that set the tone for American wars for the next two centuries. The War of 1812 was waged in "self-defense" with the home-court advantage very much on our side and the burning of the White House and the bombardment of Fort McHenry ("Oh! say, can you see, by

the dawn's early light") serving as rallying points for punishment justification. The moral foundations of our legal affirmation for our nation's concern for the oppression of others can be seen in the Civil War and the very sincere motivation on the part of many Northern soldiers to end slavery ("Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord"), while a degree of punishment motivation can be seen in the bombardment of Fort Sumter.

In the last hundred years we have moved slightly away from moral affirmation as a justification for starting wars and have focused more on the punishment aspect of moral distance. In the Spanish-American War it was the sinking of the *Maine* that provided the punishment justification for war. In World War I it was the *Lusitania*, in World War II it was Pearl Harbor, in Korea it was an unprovoked attack on American troops, in Vietnam it was the Gulf of Tonkin Incident, and in the Gulf War it was the invasion of Kuwait.<sup>3</sup>

It is interesting to note that although punishment was used to justify starting American involvement in these wars, moral affirmation came into play later and lent a very American flavor to some of these conflicts. Once the Allies began to liberate concentration camps, General Eisenhower began to view World War II as a Crusade, and the justification for the Cold War had consistent underpinnings as a moral battle against totalitarianism and oppression.

Moral distance processes tend to provide a foundation upon which other killing-enabling processes can be built. In general they are less likely to produce atrocities than cultural distance processes, and they are more in keeping with the kind of "rules" (deterring aggression and upholding individual human dignity) that organizations such as the United Nations have attempted to uphold. But as with cultural distance, there is a danger associated with moral distance. That danger is, of course, that every nation seems to think that God is on its side.

### **Social Distance: Death across the Swine Log**

While working as a sergeant in the 82d Airborne Division in the 1970s, I once visited a sister battalion's operations office. Most such offices have a large in-out roster as you come in the door. Usually these rosters have a list of all the people in the office, organized by rank; but this one had a different twist. On top of the list were the officers, then there was a divider section labeled "Swine Log," and then there was a list of all the enlisted personnel in the office. This concept of the "Swine Log" was a fairly common one, and although it was usually used in good humor, and usually more subtly, there is a social distance between officers and enlisted personnel. I have been a private, a sergeant, and an officer. My wife, my children, and I have all experienced this class structure and the social distance that goes with it. Officers, noncommissioned officers (NCOs), and enlisted members (EMs) all have separate clubs on a military base. Their wives go to separate social functions. Their families live in separate housing areas.

To understand the role of the Swine Log in the military we must understand how hard it is to be the one to give the orders that will send your friends to their deaths, and how easy is the alternative of surrendering honorably and ending the horror. The essence of the military is that to be a good leader you must truly love (in a strangely detached fashion) your men, and then you must be willing to kill (or at least give the orders that will result in the deaths of) that which you love. The paradox of war is that those leaders who are most willing to endanger that which they love can be the ones who are most liable to win, and therefore most likely to protect their men. The social class structure that exists in the military provides a denial mechanism that makes it possible for leaders to order their men to their deaths. But it makes military leadership a very lonely thing.

This class structure is even more pronounced in the British army. During my year at the British Army Staff College, the British officers who were my friends felt very strongly (and I agree with them) that their lifetime of experience in the British class system made them better officers. The influence of social distance must have been very powerful in ages past, when all

officers came from the nobility and had a lifetime's experience in wielding the power of life and death.

In nearly all historical battles prior to the age of Napoleon, the serf who looked down his spear or musket at the enemy saw another hapless serf very much like himself, and we can understand that he was not particularly inclined to kill his mirror image. And so it is that the great majority of close-combat killing in ancient history was not done by the mobs of serfs and peasants who formed the great mass of combatants. It was the elite, the nobility, who were the real killers in these battles, and they were enabled by, among other things, social distance.

### **Mechanical Distance: "I Don't See People . . ."**

The development of new weapon systems enables the soldier, even on the battlefield, to fire more lethal weapons more accurately to longer ranges: his enemy is, increasingly, an anonymous figure encircled by a gunsight, glowing on a thermal imager, or shrouded in armour plate.

— Richard Holmes *Acts of War*

Social distance is generally fading as a form of killing enabling in Western war. But even as it disappears in this more egalitarian age, it is being replaced by a new, technologically based form of psychological distance. During the Gulf War this was referred to as "Nintendo warfare."

The infantry kills the enemy up close and personal, but in recent decades the nature of this close-in battle has changed significantly. Until recently in the U.S. Army the night sight was a rare and exotic piece of equipment. Now we fight primarily at night, and there is a thermal-imagery device or a night-vision device for almost every combat soldier. Thermal imagery "sees" the heat emitted by a body as if it were light. Thus it works to see through rain, fog, and smoke. It permits you to perceive through camouflage, and it makes it possible to detect enemy soldiers deep in wood lines and vegetation that would once have completely concealed them.

Night-vision devices provide a superb form of psychological distance by converting the target into an inhuman green blob.

The complete integration of thermal-imagery technology into the modern battlefield will extend to daylight hours the mechanical distance process that currently exists during the night. When this happens the battlefield will appear to every soldier as it did to Gad, an Israeli tank gunner who told Holmes that "you see it all as if it were happening on a TV screen....It occurred to me at the time; I see someone running and I shoot at him, and he falls, and it all looks like something on TV. I don't see people, that's one good thing about it."

## **Chapter Five**

### **Aggressive Predisposition of the Killer: Avengers, Conditioning, and the 2 Percent Who Like It**

World War II-era training was conducted on a grassy firing range (a known-distance, or KD, range), on which the soldier shot at a bull's-eye target. After he fired a series of shots the target was checked, and he was then given feedback that told him where he hit.

Modern training uses what are essentially B. F. Skinner's operant conditioning techniques to develop a firing behavior in the soldier.<sup>4</sup> This training comes as close to simulating actual combat conditions as possible. The soldier stands in a foxhole with full combat equipment, and man-shaped targets pop up briefly in front of him. These are the eliciting stimuli that prompt the target behavior of shooting. If the target is hit, it immediately drops, thus providing immediate feedback. Positive reinforcement is given when these hits are exchanged for marksmanship badges, which usually have some form of privilege or reward (praise, recognition, three-day passes, and so on) associated with them.

Traditional marksmanship training has been transformed into a combat simulator. Watson states that soldiers who have conducted this kind of simulator training "often report, after they have met a real life emergency, that they just carried out the correct drill and completed it before they realized that they were not in the simulator." Vietnam veterans have repeatedly reported similar experiences. Several independent studies indicate that this powerful conditioning process has dramatically increased the firing rate of American soldiers since World War II.

Richard Holmes has noted the ineffectiveness of an army trained in traditional World War II methods as opposed to an army whose soldiers have been conditioned by modern training methods. Holmes interviewed British soldiers returning from the Falklands War and asked them if they had experienced any incidence of nonfiring similar to that observed by Marshall in World War II. The British, who had been trained by modern methods, had not seen any such thing in their soldiers, but they had definitely observed it in the Argentineans, who had received World War II-style training and whose only effective fire had come from machine guns and snipers.<sup>5</sup>

The value of this modern battleproofing can also be seen in the war in Rhodesia in the 1970s. The Rhodesian security force was a highly trained modern army fighting against an ill-trained band of guerrillas. Through superior tactics *and training* the security force maintained an overall kill ratio of about eight-to-one throughout the war. Their commando units actually improved their kill ratio from thirty-five-to-one to fifty-to-one. The Rhodesians achieved this in an environment in which they did not have air and artillery support, nor did they have a significant advantage in weapons over their Soviet-supported opponents. The only thing they had going for them was superior training, and the advantage this gave them added up to nothing less than total tactical superiority.<sup>6</sup>

The effectiveness of modern conditioning techniques that enable killing in combat is irrefutable, and their impact on the modern battlefield is enormous.

### **Recent Experiences: "That's for My Brother"**

Bob Fowler, F Company's popular, tow-headed commander, had bled to death after being hit in the spleen. His orderly, who adored him, snatched up a submachine gun and unforgivably massacred a line of unarmed Japanese soldiers who had just surrendered.

— William Manchester *Goodbye, Darkness*

The recent loss of friends and beloved leaders in combat can also enable violence on the battlefield. The deaths of friends and comrades *can* stun, paralyze, and emotionally defeat soldiers. But in many circumstances soldiers react with anger (which is one of the well-known response stages to death and dying), and then the loss of comrades can enable killing.

Our literature is full of examples, and even our law includes concepts such as temporary insanity and extenuating and mitigating circumstances. Revenge killing during a burst of rage has been a recurring theme throughout history, and it needs to be considered in the overall equation of factors that enable killing on the battlefield.

The soldier in combat is a product of his environment, and violence can beget violence. This is the nurture side of the nature-nurture question. But he is also very much influenced by his temperament, or the nature side of the nature-nurture equation, and that is a subject that we will now address in detail.



## The Temperament of the "Natural Soldier"

There is such a thing as a "natural soldier": the kind who derives his greatest satisfaction from male companionship, from excitement, and from the conquering of physical obstacles. He doesn't want to kill people as such, but he will have no objections if it occurs within a moral framework that gives him justification — like war — and if it is the price of gaining admission to the kind of environment he craves. Whether such men are born or made, I do not know, but most of them end up in armies (and many move on again to become mercenaries, because regular army life in peacetime is too routine and boring).

But armies are not full of such men. They are so rare that they form only a modest fraction even of small professional armies, mostly congregating in the commando-type special forces. In large conscript armies they virtually disappear beneath the weight of numbers of more ordinary men. And it is these ordinary men, who do not like combat at all, that armies must persuade to kill. Until only a generation ago, they did not even realize how bad a job they were doing.

— Gwynne Dyer *War*

Swank and Marchand's World War II study noted the existence of 2 percent of combat soldiers who are predisposed to be "aggressive psychopaths" and apparently do not experience the normal resistance to killing and the resultant psychiatric casualties associated with extended periods of combat. But the negative connotations associated with the term "psychopath," or its modern equivalent "sociopath," are inappropriate here, since this behavior is a generally desirable one for soldiers in combat.

It would be absolutely incorrect to conclude that 2 percent of all veterans are psychopathic killers. Numerous studies indicate that combat veterans are no more inclined to violence than nonvets. A more accurate conclusion would be that there is 2 percent of the male population that, if pushed or if given a legitimate reason, will kill without regret or remorse. What these individuals represent — and this is a terribly important point that I must emphasize — is the capacity for the levelheaded participation in combat that we as a society glorify and that Hollywood would have us believe that all soldiers possess. In the course of interviewing veterans as a part of this study I have met several individuals who may fit within this 2 percent, and since returning from combat they have, without fail, proven themselves to be above-average contributors to the prosperity and welfare of our society.

Dyer draws from his own personal experiences as a soldier for understanding:

Aggression is certainly part of our genetic makeup, and necessarily so, but the normal human being's quota of aggression will not cause him to kill acquaintances, let alone wage war against strangers from a different country. We live among millions of people who have killed fellow human beings with pitiless efficiency — machine-gunning them, using flame throwers on them, dropping explosive bombs on them from twenty thousand feet up — yet we do not fear these people.

The overwhelming majority of those who have killed, now or at any time in the past, have done so as soldiers in war, and we recognize that that has practically nothing to do with the kind of personal aggression that would endanger us as their fellow citizens.

Marshall's World War II figure of a 15 to 20 percent firing rate does not necessarily contradict Swank and Marchand's 2 percent figure, since many of these firers were under extreme empowering circumstances, and many may have been in a posturing mode and merely firing wildly or above the enemy's heads. And later figures of 55 percent (Korea) and 90 to 95 percent (Vietnam) firing rates represent the actions of men empowered by increasingly more effective conditioning processes, but these figures also do not tell us how many were posturing.

Dyer's World War II figure of 1 percent of U.S. Army Air Corps fighter pilots being responsible for 40 percent of all kills is also generally in keeping with the Swank and Marchand estimates. Erich Hartmann, the World War II German ace — unquestionably the greatest fighter pilot of all time, with 351 confirmed victories — claimed that 80 percent of his victims never knew he was in the same sky with them. This claim, if accurate, provides a remarkable insight into the nature of such a killer. Like the kills of most successful snipers and fighter pilots, the vast majority of the killing done by these men were what some would call simple ambushes and back shootings. No provocation, anger, or emotion empowered *these* killings.

Several senior U.S. Air Force officers have told me that when the U.S. Air Force tried to preselect fighter pilots after World War II, the only common denominator they could find among their World War II aces was that they had been involved in a lot of fights as children. Not bullies — for most true bullies avoid fights with anyone who is reasonably capable of fighting them — but fighters. If you can recapture or imagine the anger and indignity a child feels in a school-yard fight and magnify that into a way of life, then you can begin to understand these individuals and their capacity for violence.

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III-R)* of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) indicates that the incidence of "anti-social personality disorder" (that is, sociopaths) among the general population of American males is approximately 3 percent. These sociopaths are not easily used in armies, since by their very nature they rebel against authority, but over the centuries armies have had considerable success at bending such highly aggressive individuals to their will during wartime. So if two out of three of this 3 percent were able to accept military discipline, a hypothetical 2 percent of soldiers would, by the APA's definition, "have no remorse about the effects of their behavior on others."<sup>7</sup>

There is strong evidence that there exists a genetic predisposition for aggression. In all species the best hunter, the best fighter, the most aggressive male, survives to pass his biological predispositions on to his descendants. There are also environmental processes that can fully develop this predisposition toward aggression; when we combine this genetic predisposition with environmental development we get a killer. But there is another factor: the presence or absence of empathy for others. Again, there may be biological and environmental causes for this empathic process, but, whatever its origin, there is undoubtedly a division in humanity between those who can feel and understand the pain and suffering of others, and those who cannot. The presence of aggression, combined with the absence of empathy, results in sociopathy. The presence of aggression, combined with the presence of empathy, results in a completely different kind of individual from the sociopath.

One veteran I interviewed told me that he thought of most of the world as sheep: gentle, decent, kindly creatures who are essentially incapable of true aggression. In this veteran's mind there is another human subspecies (of which he is a member) that is a kind of dog: faithful, vigilant creatures who are very much capable of aggression when circumstances require. But, according to his model, there are wolves (sociopaths) and packs of wild dogs (gangs and aggressive armies) abroad in the land, and the sheepdogs (the soldiers and policemen of the world) are environmentally and biologically predisposed to be the ones who confront these predators.

Some experts in the psychological and psychiatric community think that these men are simply sociopaths and that the above view of killers is romanticizing. But I believe that there is another category of human beings out there. We know about sociopaths because their condition is, by definition, a pathology or a psychological disorder. But the psychological community does not recognize this other category of human beings, these metaphoric sheepdogs, because their personality type does not represent pathology or disorder. Indeed, they are valuable and contributing members of our society, and it is only in time of war, or on police forces, that these characteristics can be observed.

I have met these men, these "sheepdogs," over and over again as I interviewed veterans. They are men like one U.S. Army lieutenant colonel, a Vietnam veteran, who told me: "I learned early on in life that there are people out there who will hurt you if given the chance, and I have devoted my life to being prepared to face them." These men are quite often armed and always vigilant. They would not misuse or misdirect their aggression any more than a sheepdog would turn on his flock, but in their hearts many of them yearn for a righteous battle, a wolf upon whom to legitimately and lawfully turn their skills.

Richard Heckler speaks of this yearning in his book *In Search of the Warrior Spirit*:

This urgent calling of nature longs to be tested, seeks to be challenged beyond itself. The warrior within us beseeches Mars, the god of War, to deliver us to that crucial battlefield that will redeem us into the terrifying immediacy of the moment. We want to face our Goliath so we may be reminded that the warrior David is alive, in us. We pray to the war gods to guide us to the walls of Jericho so we may dare the steadfastness and strength of our trumpet call. We aspire to be defeated in battles by powers so much greater than ourselves, that the defeat itself will have made us larger than when we arrived. We long for the encounter that will ultimately empower us with dignity and honor. ... Be not mistaken: the longing is there and it's loving and terrible and beautiful and tragic.

Perhaps there is another analogy. According to Carl Jung, there are deeply ingrained models for behavior called archetypes that exist deep in every human's collective unconscious — an inherited, unconscious reservoir of images derived from our ancestors' universal experiences and shared by the whole human race. These powerful archetypes can drive us by channeling our libidinal energy. They include such Jungian concepts as the mother, the wise old man, the hero, and the warrior. I think that Jung might refer to these individuals, not as "sheepdogs," but as "warriors" and "heroes."<sup>8</sup>

According to Gwynne Dyer, USAF research concerning aggressive killing behavior determined that 1 percent of their fighter pilots in World War II did nearly 40 percent of the air-to-air killing, and the majority of USAF World War II pilots never even tried to shoot anyone down. This 1 percent of World War II fighter pilots, Swank and Marchand's 2 percent, Griffith's low Napoleonic and Civil War killing rates, and Marshall's low World War II firing rates can all be at least partially explained if only a small percentage of these combatants were actually willing to actively kill the enemy in these combat situations. Whether called sociopaths, sheepdogs, warriors, or heroes, they are there, they are a distinct minority, and in times of danger a nation needs them desperately.

## SECTION VII

### **Killing in Vietnam: What Have We Done to Our Soldiers?**

With the frost of his breath wreathing his face, the new president proclaimed, "Now the trumpet summons us... to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle . . . against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself."

Exactly twelve years later, in January 1973, an agreement signed in Paris would end U.S. military efforts in Vietnam. The trumpet would be silent, the mood sullen. American fighting men would depart with the war unwon. The United States of America would no longer be willing to pay any price.

— Dave Palmer *Summons of the Trumpet*

What happened in Vietnam? Why do between 400,000 and 1.5 million Vietnam vets suffer from PTSD as a result of that tragic war? Just what have we done to our soldiers?

### **Chapter One Desensitization and Conditioning in Vietnam: Overcoming the Resistance to Killing**

#### **"Nobody Understood": An Incident in a VFW Hall**

As I conducted interviews for this study in a VFW hall in Florida in the summer of 1989, a Vietnam vet named Roger started talking about his experiences over a beer. It was still early in the afternoon, but down the bar an older woman already began to attack him. "You got no right to snivel about your little piss-ant war. World War Two was a real war. Were you even alive then? *Huh?* I lost a brother in World War Two."

We tried to ignore her; she was only a local character. But finally Roger had had enough. He looked at her and calmly, coldly, said: "Have you ever had to kill anyone?"

"Well no!" she answered belligerently.

"Then what right have *you* got to tell *me* anything?"

There was a long, painful silence throughout the VFW hall, as would occur in a home where a guest had just witnessed an embarrassing family argument.

Then I asked quietly, "Roger, when you got pushed just now, you came back with the fact that you had to kill in Vietnam. Was that the worst of it for you?"

"Yah," he said. "That's half of it."

I waited for a very long time, but he didn't go on. He only stared into his beer. Finally I had to ask, "What was the other half?"

"The other half was that when we got home, nobody understood."

#### **What Happened over There, and What Happened over Here**

As discussed earlier, there is a profound resistance to killing one's fellow man. In World War II, 75 to 80 percent of riflemen did not fire their weapons at an exposed enemy, even to save their lives and the lives of their friends. In previous wars nonfiring rates were similar.

In Vietnam the nonfiring rate was close to 5 percent.

The ability to increase this firing rate, though, comes with a hidden cost. Severe psychological trauma becomes a distinct possibility when psychological safeguards of such magnitude are overridden. Psychological conditioning was applied en masse to a body of soldiers, who, in previous wars, were shown to be unwilling or unable to engage in killing activities. When these soldiers, already inwardly shaken by their inner killing experiences,

returned to be condemned and attacked by their own nation, the result was often further psychological trauma and long-term psychic damage.

### **Overcoming the Resistance to Killing: The Problem**

But for the infantry, the problem of persuading soldiers to kill is now a major one. . . . That an infantry company in World War II could wreak such havoc with only about one seventh of the soldiers willing to use their weapons is a testimony to the lethal effects of modern firepower, but once armies realized what was actually going on, they at once set about to raise the average.

Soldiers had to be taught, very specifically, to kill. "We are reluctant to admit that essentially war is the business of killing," Marshall wrote in 1947, but it is readily enough admitted now.

— Gwynne Dyer *War*

At the end of World War II the problem became obvious: Johnny can't kill.

A firing rate of 15 to 20 percent among soldiers is like having a literacy rate of 15 to 20 percent among proofreaders. Once those in authority realized the existence and magnitude of the problem, it was only a matter of time until they solved it.

### **The Answer**

And thus, since World War II, a new era has quietly dawned in modern warfare: an era of psychological warfare — psychological warfare conducted not upon the enemy, but upon one's own troops. Propaganda and various other crude forms of psychological enabling have always been present in warfare, but in the second half of this century psychology has had an impact as great as that of technology on the modern battlefield.

When S. L. A. Marshall was sent to the Korean War to make the same kind of investigation that he had done in World War II, he found that (as a result of new training techniques initiated in response to his earlier findings) 55 percent of infantrymen were firing their weapons — and in some perimeter-defense crises, almost everyone was. These training techniques were further perfected, and in Vietnam the firing rate appears to have been around 90 to 95 percent.<sup>2</sup> The triad of methods used to achieve this remarkable increase in killing are desensitization, conditioning, and denial defense mechanisms.

#### *Desensitization: Thinking the Unthinkable*

The Vietnam era was, of course then at its peak, you know, the kill thing. We'd run PT [physical training] in the morning and every time your left foot hit the deck you'd have to chant "kill, kill, kill, kill." It was drilled into your mind so much that it seemed like when it actually came down to it, it didn't bother you, you know? Of course the first one always does, but it seems to get easier — not easier, because it still bothers you with every one that, you know, that you actually kill and you know you've killed.

— USMC sergeant and Vietnam veteran, 1982 quoted in Gwynne Dyer, *War*

This interview from Dyer's book provides an insight into that aspect of our modern training programs that is clearly and distinctly different from those of the past. Men have always used a variety of mechanisms to convince themselves that the enemy was different, that he did not have a family, or that he was not even human. Most primitive tribes took names that translate as "man" or "human being," thereby automatically defining those outside of the tribe as simply another breed of animal to be hunted and killed. We have done something similar when we call the enemy Japs, Krauts, gooks, slopes, dinks, and Commies.

Authors such as Dyer and Holmes have traced the development of this boot-camp deification of killing as having been almost unheard of in World War I, rare in World War II, increasingly present in Korea, and thoroughly institutionalized in Vietnam. Here Dyer explains exactly how this institutionalization of violent ideation in Vietnam differs from the experiences of previous generations:

Most of the language used in Parris Island to describe the joys of killing people is bloodthirsty but meaningless hyperbole, and the recruits realize that even as they enjoy it. Nevertheless, it does help to *desensitize* them to the suffering of an "enemy," and at the same time they are being indoctrinated in the most explicit fashion (as previous generations were not) with the notion that their purpose is not just to be brave or to fight well; it is to kill people.

### *Conditioning: Doing the Unthinkable*

But desensitization by itself is probably not sufficient to overcome the average individual's deep-seated-resistance to killing. Indeed, this desensitization process is almost a smoke screen for what I believe is the most important aspect of modern training. What Dyer and many other observers have missed is the role of (1) Pavlovian classical conditioning and (2) Skinnerian operant conditioning in modern training.

In 1904, I. P. Pavlov was awarded the Nobel Prize for his development of the concepts of conditioning and association in dogs. In its simplest form, what Pavlov did was ring a bell just before feeding a dog. Over time, the dog learned to associate the sound of the bell with eating and would salivate when he heard the bell, even if no food was present. The conditioned stimulus was the bell, the conditioned response was salivation: the dog had been conditioned to salivate upon hearing a bell ring. This process of associating reward with a particular kind of behavior is the foundation of most successful animal training. During the middle of the twentieth century B. F. Skinner further refined this process into what he called behavioral engineering. Skinner and the behaviorist school represent one of the most scientific and potentially powerful areas of the field of psychology.

The method used to train today's — and the Vietnam era's — U.S. Army and USMC soldiers is nothing more than an application of conditioning techniques to develop a reflexive "quick shoot" ability. It is entirely possible that no one intentionally sat down to use operant conditioning or behavior modification techniques to train soldiers in this area. In my two decades of military service not a single soldier, sergeant, or officer, nor a single official or unofficial reference, has communicated an understanding that conditioning was occurring during marksmanship training. But from the standpoint of a psychologist who is also a historian and a career soldier, it has become increasingly obvious to me that this is exactly what has been achieved.

Instead of lying prone on a grassy field calmly shooting at a bull's-eye target, the modern soldier spends many hours standing in a foxhole, with full combat equipment draped about his body, looking over an area of lightly wooded rolling terrain. At periodic intervals one or two olive-drab, man-shaped targets at varying ranges will pop up in front of him for a brief time, and the soldier must instantly aim and shoot at the target(s). When he hits a target it provides immediate feedback by instantly and very satisfyingly dropping backward—just as a living target would. Soldiers are highly rewarded and recognized for success in this skill and suffer mild punishment (in the form of retraining, peer pressure, and failure to graduate from boot camp) for failure to quickly and accurately "engage" the targets — a standard euphemism for "kill."

In addition to traditional marksmanship, what is being taught in this environment is the ability to shoot reflexively and instantly and a precise mimicry of the act of killing on the modern battlefield. In behavioral terms, the man shape popping up in the soldier's field of fire is the

"conditioned stimulus," the immediate engaging of the target is the "target behavior." "Positive reinforcement" is given in the form of immediate feedback when the target drops if it is hit. In a form of "token economy" these hits are then exchanged for marksmanship badges that usually have some form of privilege or reward (praise, public recognition, three-day passes, and so on) associated with them.

Every aspect of killing on the battlefield is rehearsed, visualized, and conditioned. On special occasions even more realistic and complex targets are used. Balloon-filled uniforms moving across the kill zone (pop the balloon and the target drops to the ground), red-paint-filled milk jugs, and many other ingenious devices are used. These make the training more interesting, the conditioned stimuli more realistic, and the conditioned response more assured under a variety of different circumstances.

Snipers use such techniques extensively. In Vietnam it took an average of 50,000 rounds of ammunition to kill one enemy soldier. But the U.S. Army and USMC snipers in Vietnam expended only 1.39 rounds per kill. Carlos Hathcock, with ninety-three confirmed sniper kills in Vietnam, became involved in police and military sniper training after the war: He firmly believed that snipers should train on targets that look like people — not bull's-eyes. A typical command to one of his students (who is firing from one hundred yards at a life-sized photograph of a man holding a pistol to a woman's head) would be "Put three rounds inside the inside corner of the right eye of the bad guy."

In the same way, Chuck Cramer, the trainer for an Israeli Defense Force antiterrorist sniper course, tried to design his course in such a way that practicing to kill was as realistic as possible. "I made the targets as human as possible," said Kramer.

I changed the standard firing targets to full-size, anatomically correct figures because no Syrian runs around with a big white square on his chest with numbers on it. I put clothes on these targets and polyurethane heads. I cut up a cabbage and poured catsup into it and put it back together. I said, "When you look through that scope, I want you to see a head blowing up."

— Dale Dye

"Chuck Cramer: IDF's Master Sniper"

This is all common practice in most of the world's best armies. Most modern infantry leaders understand that realistic training with immediate feedback to the soldier works, and they know that it is essential for success and survival on the modern battlefield. But the military is not, as a rule, a particularly introspective organization, and it has been my experience that those ordering, conducting, and participating in this training do not understand or even wonder (1) what makes it work or (2) what its psychological and sociological side effects might be. It works, and for them that is good enough.

What makes this training process work is the same thing that made Pavlov's dogs salivate and B. F. Skinner's rats press their bars. What makes it work is the single most powerful and reliable behavior modification process yet discovered by the field of psychology, and now applied to the field of warfare: operant conditioning.

### *Denial Defense Mechanisms: Denying the Unthinkable*

An additional aspect of this process that deserves consideration here is the development of a denial defense mechanism. Denial and defense mechanisms are unconscious methods for dealing with traumatic experiences. Prepackaged denial defense mechanisms are a remarkable contribution from modern U.S. Army training.

Basically the soldier has rehearsed the process so many times that when he does kill in combat he is able to, at one level, deny to himself that he is actually killing another human

being. This careful rehearsal and realistic mimicry of the act of killing permit the soldier to convince himself that he has only "engaged" another target. One British veteran of the Falklands, trained in the modern method, told Holmes that he "thought of the enemy as nothing more or less than Figure II [man-shaped] targets." In the same way, an American soldier can convince himself that he is shooting at an E-type silhouette (a man-shaped, olive-drab target), and not a human being.

Bill Jordan, law-enforcement expert, career U.S. Border Patrol officer, and veteran of many a gunfight, combines this denial process with desensitization in his advice to young law-enforcement officers:

[There is] a natural disinclination to pull the trigger . . . when your weapon is pointed at a human. Even though their own life was at stake, most officers report having this trouble in their first fight. To aid in overcoming this resistance it is helpful if you can will yourself to think of your opponent as a mere target and not as a human being. In this connection you should go further and pick a spot on the target. This will allow better concentration and further remove the human element from your thinking. If this works for you, try to continue this thought in allowing yourself no remorse. A man who will resist an officer with weapons has no respect for the rules by which decent people are governed. He is an outlaw who has no place in world society. His removal is completely justified, and should be accomplished dispassionately and without regret.

Jordan calls this process manufactured contempt, and the combination of denial of, and contempt for, the victim's role in society (desensitization), along "with the psychological denial of, and contempt for, the victim's humanity (developing a denial defense mechanism), is a mental process that is tied in and reinforced every time the officer fires a round at a target. And, of course, police, like the military, no longer fire at bull's-eyes; they "practice" on man-shaped silhouettes.

The success of this conditioning and desensitization is obvious and undeniable. It can be seen and recognized both in individuals and in the performance of nations and armies.

### *The Effectiveness of the Conditioning*

Bob, a U.S. Army colonel, knew of Marshall's study and accepted that Marshall's World War II firing rates were probably correct. He was not sure what mechanism was responsible for increasing the firing rate in Vietnam, but he realized that somehow the rate had been increased. When I suggested the conditioning effects of modern training, he immediately recognized that process in himself. His head snapped up, his eyes widened slightly, and he said, "Two shots. Bam-bam. Just like we had been trained in 'quick kill.' When I killed, I did it just like that. Just like I'd been trained. Without even thinking."

Jerry, another veteran who survived six six-month tours in Cambodia as an officer with Special Forces (Green Berets), when asked how he was able to do the things that he did, acknowledged simply that he had been "programmed" to kill, and he accepted it as necessary for his survival and success.

.One interviewee, an ex—CIA agent named Duane, who was then working as a high-level security executive in a major aerospace corporation, had conducted a remarkable number of successful interrogations during his lifetime, and he considered himself to be an expert on the process known popularly as brainwashing. He felt that he had been "to some extent brainwashed" by the CIA and that the soldiers receiving modern combat training were being similarly brainwashed. Like every other veteran whom I have discussed the matter with, he had no objections to this, understanding that psychological conditioning was essential to his survival and an effective method of mission accomplishment. He felt that a very similar and equally powerful process was taking place in the shoot-no shoot program, which federal and local law-



enforcement agencies all over the nation conduct. In this program the officer selectively fires blanks at a movie screen depicting various tactical situations, thereby mimicking and rehearsing the process of deciding when and when not to kill.

The incredible effectiveness of modern training techniques can be seen in the lopsided close-combat kill ratios between the British and Argentinean forces during the Falklands War and the U.S. and Panamanian forces during the 1989 Panama Invasion.<sup>3</sup> During his interviews with British veterans of the Falklands War, Holmes described Marshall's observations in World War II and asked if they had seen a similar incidence of nonfirers in their own forces. Their response was that they had seen no such thing occur with their soldiers, but there was "immediate recognition that it applied to the Argentineans, whose snipers and machine-gunners had been very effective while their individual riflemen had not." Here we see an excellent comparison between the highly effective and competent British riflemen, trained by the most modern methods, and the remarkably ineffective Argentinean riflemen, who had been given old-style, World War II—vintage training.

Similarly, Rhodesia's army during the 1970s was one of the best trained in the world, going up against a very poorly trained but well-equipped insurgent force. The security forces in Rhodesia maintained an overall kill ratio of about eight-to-one in their favor throughout the guerrilla war. And the highly trained Rhodesian Light Infantry achieved kill ratios ranging from thirty-five-to-one to fifty-to-one.

One of the best examples in recent American history involved a company of U.S. Army Rangers who were ambushed and trapped while attempting to capture Mohammed Aidid, a Somali warlord sought by the United Nations. In this circumstance no artillery or air strikes were used, and no tanks, armored vehicles, or other heavy weapons were available to the American forces, which makes this an excellent assessment of the relative effectiveness of modern small-arms training techniques. The score? Eighteen U.S. troops killed, against an estimated 364 Somali who died that night.

And we might remember that American forces were never once defeated in any major engagement in Vietnam. Harry Summers says that when this was pointed out to a high-ranking North Vietnamese soldier after the war, the answer was "That may be true, but it is also irrelevant." Perhaps so, but it does reflect the individual close-combat superiority of the U.S. soldier in Vietnam.

Even with allowance for unintentional error and deliberate exaggeration, this superior training and killing ability in Vietnam, Panama, Argentina, and Rhodesia amounts to nothing less than a technological revolution on the battlefield, a revolution that represents total superiority in close combat.

#### *A Side Effect of the Conditioning*

Duane, the CIA veteran, told of one incident that provides some insight into a side effect of this conditioning or brainwashing. He was guarding a Communist defector in a safe house in West Germany during the mid-1950s. The defector was a very large, strong, and particularly murderous member of the Stalinist regime then in power. By all accounts he was quite insane. Having defected because he had lost favor among his Soviet masters, he was now beginning to have second thoughts about his new masters and was trying to escape.

Alone for days in a locked and barred house with this man, the young CIA agent assigned to watch him was subject to a series of attacks. The defector would charge at him with a club or a piece of furniture, and each time he would break off the attack at the last minute as Duane pointed his weapon at him. The agent called his superiors over the phone and was ordered to draw an imaginary line on the floor and shoot this unarmed (though very hostile and dangerous) individual if he crossed that line. Duane felt certain that this line was going to be crossed and mustered up all of his conditioning. "He was a dead man. I knew I would kill him. Mentally I *had*

killed him, and the physical part was going to be easy." But the defector (apparently not quite as crazy or desperate as he appeared to be) never crossed that line.

Still, some aspect of the trauma of the kill was there. "In my mind," Duane told me, "I have always felt that I had killed that man." Most Vietnam veterans did not necessarily execute a personal kill in Vietnam. But they had participated in dehumanizing the enemy in training, and the vast majority of them *did* fire, or knew in their hearts that they were prepared to fire, and the very fact that they were prepared and able to fire ("Mentally I *had* killed him") denied them an important form of escape from the burden of responsibility that they brought back from that war. Although they had not killed, they had been taught to think the unthinkable and had thereby been introduced to a part of themselves that under ordinary circumstances only the killer knows. The point is that *this program of desensitization, conditioning, and denial defense mechanisms, combined with subsequent participation in a war, may make it possible to share the guilt of killing without ever having killed.*

### *A Safeguard in the Conditioning*

It is essential to understand that one of the most important aspects of this process is that soldiers are *always* under authority in combat. No army can tolerate undisciplined or indiscriminate firing, and a vital — and easily overlooked — facet of the soldier's conditioning revolves around having him fire only when and where he is told to. The soldier fires only when told to by a higher authority and then only within his designated firing lane. Firing a weapon at the wrong time or in the wrong direction is so heinous an offense that it is almost unthinkable to the average soldier.

Soldiers are conditioned throughout their training and throughout their time in the military to fire *only under authority*. A gunshot cannot be easily hidden, and on rifle ranges or during field training any gunshot at inappropriate times (even when firing blank ammunition) must be justified, and if it is not justifiable it will be immediately and firmly punished.

Similarly, most law-enforcement officers are presented with a variety of targets representing both innocent bystanders and gun-wielding criminals during their training. And they are severely sanctioned for engaging the wrong target. In the FBI's shoot-no shoot program, failure to demonstrate a satisfactory ability to distinguish when an officer can and cannot fire can result in revocation of the officer's right to carry a weapon.

Numerous studies have demonstrated that there is not any distinguishable threat of violence to society from the veterans returning to the United States from any of the wars of this century. There are Vietnam vets who commit violent crimes, but statistically there is no greater a population of violent criminals among veterans than there is among nonveterans.<sup>4</sup> What is a potential threat to society is the *unrestrained* desensitization, conditioning, and denial defense mechanisms provided by modern interactive video games and violent television and movies, but that is a topic for the fast section in this book, "Killing in America: What Are We Doing to Our Children?"

## SECTION VIII

### Killing in America: What Are We Doing to Our Children?

#### Chapter One A Virus of Violence

How simple it now seems for our ancestors to have stood outside their caves guarding against the fang and claw of predators. The evil that we must stand vigilant against is like a virus, starting from deep inside us, eating its way out until we're devoured by and become its madness.

— Richard Heckler *In Search of the Warrior Spirit*

#### The Magnitude of the Problem

If we examine the chart showing the relationship between murder, aggravated assault, and imprisonment in America since 1957, we see something that should astound us.

"Aggravated assault" is defined in the *Statistical Abstract* (from which this data was gathered) as "assault with intent to kill or for the purpose of inflicting severe bodily injury by shooting, cutting, stabbing, maiming, poisoning, scalding, or by the use of acids, explosives, or other means." We are also informed that this "excludes simple assaults."<sup>1</sup>

The aggravated assault rate indicates the incidence of Americans *trying* to kill one another, and it is going up at an astounding rate. Two major factors serve as tourniquets that suppress the bleeding that would occur if the number of murders increased at the same rate as aggravated assaults. First is the steady increase in the presumably violent percentage of our population that we imprison. The prison population in America has quadrupled since 1975 (from just over two hundred thousand to slightly more than eight hundred thousand in 1992: nearly a million Americans in jail!). Professor John J. Dilulio of Princeton states unequivocally that "dozens of credible empirical analyses . . . leave no doubt that the increased use of prisons averted millions of serious crimes." If not for our tremendous imprisonment rate (the highest of any major industrialized nation in the world), the aggravated assault rate and the murder rate would both be even higher.

The other major factor that limits the success of these attempts at killing is the continued progress in medical technology and methodology. Professor James Q. Wilson of UCLA estimates that if the quality of medical care (especially trauma and emergency care) were the same as it was in 1957, today's, murder rate would be three times higher. Helicopter medevacs, 911 operators, paramedics, and trauma centers are but a few of the technological and methodological innovations that save lives at ever-increasing rates. This more rapid and effective response, evacuation, and treatment of victims is *the* decisive factor in preventing the murder rate from being many times higher than it is now.

It is also interesting to note the dip in aggravated assault rates between 1980 and 1983. Some observers believed this was due to the maturing of the baby-boom generation and the overall aging of America and that violent crime would continue to decrease in succeeding years. However, this did not happen, and, in retrospect, although the aging of our society *should* cause a decrease in violence, a major factor may have been the sharp increase in the imprisonment rate during that period.

But demographers predict that our aging society will again become more youthful as the children of the baby boom have their own teenagers. And just how much longer can America afford to imprison larger and larger percentages of its population? And how much longer can advances in medical technology continue to keep up with advances in the aggravated assault rate?

Like Alice, we are running as fast as we can to stay where we are. America's huge imprisonment rate and desperate application of medical progress are technological tourniquets to stop us from bleeding to death in an orgy of violence. But they do so by dealing with the symptoms of the problem rather than the root cause.

### **The Cause of the Problem: Taking the Safety Catch off of a Nation**

We know, as surely as we know that we are alive, that the whole human race is dancing on the edge of the grave. . . .

The easiest and worst mistake we could make would be to blame our present dilemma on the mere technology of war. ... It is our attitudes toward war and our uses for it that really demand our attention.

— Gwynne Dyer *War*

What *is* the root cause of this epidemic of violence in our society? An application of the lessons of combat killing may have much to teach us about the constraint and control of peacetime violence. *Are the same processes the military used so effectively to enable killing in our adolescent, draftee soldiers in Vietnam being indiscriminately applied to the civilian population of this nation?*

The three major psychological processes at work in enabling violence are classical conditioning (a la Pavlov's dog), operant conditioning (a la B. F. Skinner's rats), and the observation and imitation of vicarious role models in social learning.

In a kind of reverse *Clockwork Orange* classical conditioning process, adolescents in movie theaters across the nation, and watching television at home, are seeing the detailed, horrible suffering and killing of human beings, and they are learning to associate this killing and suffering with entertainment, pleasure, their favorite soft drink, their favorite candy bar, and the close, intimate contact of their date.

Operant conditioning firing ranges with pop-up targets and immediate feedback, just like those used to train soldiers in modern armies, are found in the interactive video games that our children play today. But whereas the adolescent Vietnam vet had stimulus discriminators built in to ensure that he only fired under authority, the adolescents who play these video games have no such safeguard, built into their conditioning.

And, finally, social learning is being used as children learn to observe and imitate a whole new realm of dynamic vicarious role models, such as Jason and Freddy of endless *Friday the 13th* and *Nightmare on Elm Street* sequels, along with a host of other horrendous, sadistic murderers. Even the more classic heroes, such as the archetypal law-abiding police detective, is today portrayed as a murderous, unstable vigilante who operates outside the law.

There are more factors involved. This is a complex, interactive process that includes all the factors that enable killing in combat. Gang leaders and gang members demand violent, even killing, activity and create diffusion of individual responsibility; and gang affiliation, loosening family and religious ties, racism, class differences, and the availability of weapons provide forms of real and emotional distance between the killer and the victim. If we look again at our model for killing-enabling factors and apply it to civilian killing, we can see the way in which all of these factors interact to enable violence in America.

All of these factors are important. Drugs, gangs, poverty, racism, and guns are all vital ingredients in a process that has resulted in skyrocketing violence rates in our society. But drugs have always been a problem, just as drugs (alcohol, and so on) have always been present in combat. Gangs have 'always been present, just as combat has always taken place in organized units. Poverty and racism have always been a part of our society (often much more so than today), just as propaganda, class divisions, and racism have always been manipulated

in combat. And guns have always been present in American society, just as they have always been present in American wars.

In the 1950s and 1960s students brought knives to high school, whereas today they bring .22s. But those .22s were pretty much always present at home. And while there is new weapons technology available, fifteen minutes with a hacksaw will make a pistol out of any double-barrel shotgun, a pistol every bit as effective in close combat as any weapon in the world today — this was true one hundred years ago, and it is true today.<sup>2</sup>

The thing we need to ask ourselves is not, Where did the guns come from? They came from home, where they have always been available, or they may have been bought in the street thanks to the drug culture — which deals in illegal weapons as readily as it deals in illegal drugs. But the question we need to ask is, What makes today's children bring those guns to school when their parents did not? And the answer to *that* question may be that the *important* ingredient, the vital, *new, different* ingredient in killing in modern combat *and* in killing in modern American society, is the systematic process of defeating the normal individual's age-old, psychological inhibition against violent, harmful activity toward one's own species. Are we taking the safety catch off of a nation, just as surely and easily as we would take the safety catch off of a gun, and with the same results?

Between 1985 and 1991 the homicide rate for males fifteen to nineteen increased 154 percent. Despite the continued application of an ever-increasing quantity and quality of medical technology, homicide is the number-two cause of death among males ages fifteen to nineteen. Among black males it is number one. The AP wire article reporting this data had a headline announcing, "Homicide Rate Wiping Out Whole Generation of Teens." For once the press was not exaggerating.

In Vietnam a systematic process of desensitization, conditioning, and training increased the individual firing rate from a World War II baseline of 15 to 20 percent to an all-time high of up to 95 percent. Today a similar process of systematic desensitization, conditioning, and vicarious learning is unleashing an epidemic, a virus of violence in America.

The same tools that more than quadrupled the firing rate in Vietnam are now in widespread use among our civilian population. Military personnel are just beginning to understand and accept what they have been doing to themselves and their men. If we have reservations about the military's use of these mechanisms to ensure the survival and success of our soldiers in combat, then how much more so should we be concerned about the indiscriminate application of the same processes on our nation's children?

## **Chapter Two**

### **Desensitization and Pavlov's Dog at the Movies**

I yelled "kill, kill" 'til I was hoarse. We yelled it as we engaged in bayonet and hand-to-hand combat drills. And then we sang about it as we marched. "I want to be an airborne ranger ... I want to kill the Viet Cong." I had stopped hunting when I was sixteen. I had wounded a squirrel. It looked up at me with its big, soft brown eyes as I put it out of its misery. I cleaned my gun and have never taken it out since. In 1969 I was drafted and very uncertain about the war. I had nothing against the Viet Cong. But by the end of Basic Training, I was ready to kill them.

—Jack, Vietnam veteran *Classical Conditioning in the Military*

One of the most remarkable revelations in Watson's book *War on the Mind* is his report of conditioning techniques used by the U.S. government to train assassins. In 1975 Dr. Narut, a U.S. Navy psychiatrist with the rank of commander, told Watson about techniques he was developing for the U.S. government in which classical conditioning and social learning

methodology were being used to permit military assassins to overcome their resistance to killing. The method used, according to Narut, was to expose the subjects to "symbolic modeling" involving "films specially designed to show people being killed or injured in violent ways.

By being acclimatized through these films, the men were supposed to eventually become able to disassociate their emotions from such a situation."

Narut went on to say, "The men were taught to shoot but also given a special type of 'Clockwork Orange' training to quell any qualms they may have about killing. Men are shown a series of gruesome films, which get progressively more horrific. The trainee is forced to watch by having his head bolted in a clamp so he cannot turn away, and a special device keeps his eyelids open." In psychological terms, this step-by-step reduction of a resistance is a form of classical (Pavlovian) conditioning called systematic de-sensitization.

In *Clockwork Orange* such conditioning was used to develop an aversion to violence by administering a drug that caused revulsion while the violent films were shown, until the revulsion became associated with acts of violence. In Commander Narut's real-world training the nausea-creating drugs were left out, and those who were able to overcome their natural revulsion were rewarded, thereby obtaining the opposite effect of that depicted in Stanley Kubrick's movie. The U.S. government denies Commander Narut's claims, but Watson claims that he was able to obtain some outside corroboration from an individual who stated that Commander Narut had ordered violent films from him, and Narut's tale was subsequently published in the *London Times*.

Remember that desensitization is a vital aspect of killing-empowerment techniques used in modern combat-training programs. The experience related by Jack at the beginning of this section is a sample of the desensitization and glorification of killing that has increasingly been a part of combat orientation. In 1974, when I was in basic training, we sang many such chants. One that was only a little bit more extreme than the majority was a running chant (with the emphasis shouted each time the left foot hit the ground):

Iwanna

RAPE,

KILL,

PILLAGE'n'

BURN, annnnn'

EAT dead

BAAA-Bies,

Iwanna

RAPE, KILL....

Our military no longer tolerates this kind of desensitization, but for decades it was a key mechanism for desensitizing and indoctrinating adolescent males into a cult of violence in basic training.

## Classical Conditioning at the Movies

If we believe that Commander Narut's techniques might work, and if we are horrified that the U.S. government might even *consider* doing such a thing to our soldiers, then why do we permit the same process to occur to millions of children across the nation? For that *is* what we are doing when we allow increasingly more vivid depictions of suffering and violence to be shown as entertainment to our children.

It begins innocently with cartoons and then goes on to the countless thousands of acts of violence depicted on TV as the child grows up and the scramble for ratings steadily raises the threshold of violence on TV. As children reach a certain age, they then begin to watch movies with a degree of violence sufficient to receive a PG-13 rating due to brief glimpses of spurting blood, a hacked-off limb, or bullet wounds. Then the parents, through neglect or conscious decision, begin to permit the child to watch movies rated R due to vivid depictions of knives penetrating and protruding from bodies, long shots of blood spurting from severed limbs, and bullets ripping into bodies and exploding out the back in showers of blood and brains.

Finally, our society says that young adolescents, at the age of seventeen, can *legally* watch these R-rated movies (although most are well experienced with them by then), and at eighteen they can watch the movies rated even higher than R. These are films in which eye gouging is often the least of the offenses that are vividly depicted. And thus, at that malleable age of seventeen and eighteen, the age at which armies have traditionally begun to indoctrinate the soldier into the business of killing, American youth, systematically desensitized from childhood, takes another step in the indoctrination into the cult of violence.

Adolescents and adults saturate themselves in such gruesome and progressively more horrific "entertainment," whose antiheroes — like Hannibal the Cannibal, Jason, and Freddy — are sick, unkillable, unquestionably evil, and criminally sociopathic. They have nothing in common with the exotic, esoteric, and misunderstood Frankenstein and Wolf Man villains of an earlier generation of horror films. In the old horror stories and movies, very real but subconscious fears were symbolized by mythic but unreal monsters, such as Dracula, and then exorcised exotically, such as by a stake through the heart. In contemporary horror, terror is personified by characters who resemble our next-door neighbor, even our doctor. Importantly, Hannibal the Cannibal, Jason, and Freddy are not killed, much less exorcised; they return over and over again. Even in movies where the killer is not an obvious sociopath, the common formula is to validate violent acts of vengeance by beginning the movie with a vivid depiction of the villain performing horrible acts on some innocents. These victims are usually related in some way to the hero, thereby justifying the hero's subsequent (and vividly depicted) vigilante acts.

Our society has found a powerful recipe for providing killing empowerment to an entire generation of Americans. Producers, directors, and actors are handsomely rewarded for creating the most violent, gruesome, and horrifying films imaginable, films in which the stabbing, shooting, abuse, and torture of innocent men, women, and children are depicted in intimate detail. Make these films entertaining as well as violent, and then simultaneously provide the (usually) adolescent viewers with candy, soft drinks, group companionship, and the intimate physical contact of a boyfriend or girlfriend. Then understand that these adolescent viewers are learning to associate these rewards with what they are watching. Powerful group processes often work to humiliate and belittle viewers who close their eyes or avert their gaze during these gruesome scenes. Adolescent peer groups reward with respect and admiration those who reflect Hollywood's standard of remaining hardened and undisturbed in the face of such violence. In effect many viewers have their heads bolted in a psychological clamp so they cannot turn away, and social pressure keeps their eyelids open. Discussing these movies and this process in psychology classes at West Point, I have repeatedly asked my students how the audience responds when the villain murders some innocent young victim in a particularly horrible way. And over and over again their answer was "The audience cheers." Society is in a

state of denial as to the harmful nature of this, but in efficiency, quality, and scope, it makes the puny efforts of *Clockwork Orange* and the U.S. government pale by comparison. We are doing a better job of desensitizing and conditioning our citizens to kill than anything Commander Narut ever dreamed of. If we had a clear-cut objective of raising a generation of assassins and killers who are unrestrained by either authority or the nature of the victim, it is difficult to imagine how we could do a better job.

In video stores the horror section repeatedly displays bare breasts (often with blood running down them), gaping eye sockets, and mutilated bodies. Movies rated X with tamer covers are generally not available in many video stores and, if they are, are in separate, adults-only rooms. But the horror videos are displayed for every child to see. Here breasts are taboo if they are on a live woman, but permissible on a mutilated corpse?

When Mussolini and his mistress were publicly executed and hung upside down, the mistress's dress flopped over her head to display her legs and underwear. One woman in the crowd subsequently had the decency to walk up and tuck the corpse's dress between its legs in a show of respect for the dead woman: she may have deserved to die, but she did not deserve to be so degraded after death.

Where did we lose this sense of propriety toward the dignity of death? How did we become so hardened?

The answer to that question is that we, as a society, have become systematically desensitized to the pain and suffering of others. We may believe that tabloids and tabloid TV make us exceedingly conscious of the suffering of others as they spread the stories of victims. But the reality is that they are desensitizing us and trivializing these issues as each year they have to find increasingly more bizarre stories to satisfy their increasingly jaded audiences.

We are reaching that stage of desensitization at which the inflicting of pain and suffering has become a source of entertainment: vicarious pleasure rather than revulsion. We are learning to kill, and we are learning to like it.

## **Chapter Three**

### **B. F. Skinner's Rats and**

### **Operant Conditioning at the Video Arcade**

When I went to boot camp and did individual combat training they said if you walk into an ambush what you want to do is just do a right face — you just turn right or left, whichever way the fire is coming from, and assault. I said, "Man, that's crazy. I'd never do anything like that. It's stupid."

The first time we came under fire, on Hill 1044 in Operation Beauty Canyon in Laos, we did it automatically. Just like you look at your watch to see what time it is. We done a right face, assaulted the hill — a fortified position with concrete bunkers emplaced, machine guns, automatic weapons — and we took it. And we killed — I'd estimate probably thirty-five North Vietnamese soldiers in the assault, and we only lost three killed.

But you know, what they teach you, it doesn't faze you until it comes down to the time to use it, but it's in the back of your head, like, What do you do when you come to a stop sign? It's in the back of your head, and you react automatically.

— Vietnam veteran quoted in Gwynne Dyer, *War*

### **Conditioning Killers in the Military**

On the training bases of the major armies of the world, nations struggle to turn teenagers into killers. The "struggle" for the mind of the soldier is a lopsided one: armies have had thousands of years to develop their craft, and their subjects have had fewer than two decades of life experience. It is a basically honest, age-old, reciprocal process, especially in today's all-



volunteer U.S. Army. The soldier intuitively understands what he or she is getting into and generally tries to cooperate by "playing the game" and constraining his or her own individuality and adolescent enthusiasm, and the army systematically wields the resources and technology of a nation to empower and equip the soldier to kill and survive on the battlefield. In the armed forces of most modern armies this application of technology has reached new levels by integrating the innovations of operant conditioning into traditional training methods.

Operant conditioning is a higher form of learning than classical conditioning. It was pioneered by B. F. Skinner and is usually associated with learning experiments on pigeons and rats. The traditional image of a rat in a Skinner box, learning to press a bar in order to get food pellets, comes from Skinner's research in this field. Skinner rejected the Freudian and humanist theories of personality development and held that *all* behavior is a result of past rewards and punishments. To B. F. Skinner the child is a *tabula rasa*, a "blank slate," who can be turned into anything provided sufficient control of the child's environment is instituted at an early enough age.

Instead of firing at a bull's-eye target, the modern soldier fires at man-shaped silhouettes that pop up for brief periods of time inside a designated firing lane. The soldiers learn that they have only a brief second to engage the target, and if they do it properly their behavior is immediately reinforced when the target falls down. If he knocks down enough targets, the soldier gets a marksmanship badge and usually a three-day pass. After training on rifle ranges in this manner, an automatic, conditioned response called automaticity sets in, and the soldier then becomes conditioned to respond to the appropriate stimulus in the desired manner. This process may seem simple, basic, and obvious, but there is evidence to indicate that it is one of the key ingredients in a methodology that has raised the firing rate from 15 to 20 percent in World War II to 90 to 95 percent in Vietnam.

### **Conditioning at the Video Arcade**

In video arcades children stand slack jawed but intent behind machine guns and shoot at electronic targets that pop up on the video screen. When they pull the trigger the weapon rattles in their hand, shots ring out, and if they hit the "enemy" they are firing at, it drops to the ground, often with chunks of flesh flying in the air.

The important distinction between the killing-enabling process that occurs in video arcades and that of the military is that the military's is focused on the enemy soldier, with particular emphasis on ensuring that the U.S. soldier acts only under authority. Yet even with these safeguards, the danger of future My Lai massacres among soldiers drawn from such a violent population must not be ignored, and, as we saw in the section "Killing and Atrocity," the U.S. armed forces are taking extensive measures to control, constrain, and channel the violence of their troops in future conflicts. The video games that our children conduct their combat training on have no real sanction for firing at the wrong target.

This is not an attack on all video games. Video games are an interactive medium. They demand and develop trial-and-error and systematic problem-solving skills, and they teach planning, mapping, and deferment of gratification. Watch children as they play video games and interact with other children in their neighborhood. To parents raised on a steady diet of movies and sitcoms, watching a child play Mario Brothers for hours on end may not be particularly gratifying, but that is just the point. As they play they solve problems and overcome instructions that are intentionally inadequate and vague. They exchange playing strategies, memorize routes, and make maps. They work long and hard to attain the gratification of finally winning a game. And there are no commercials: no enticements for sugar, no solicitation of violent toys, and no messages of social failure if they do not wear the right shoes or clothes.

We might prefer to see children reading or getting exercise and interacting with the *real* real world by playing outside, but video games are definitely preferable to most television. But video

games can also be superb at teaching violence — violence packaged in the same format that has more than quadrupled the firing rate of modern soldiers.

When I speak of violence enabling I am not talking about video games in which the player defeats creatures by bopping them on the head. Nor am I talking about games where you maneuver swordsmen and archers to defeat monsters. On the borderline in violence enabling are games where you use a joystick to maneuver a gunsight around the screen to kill gangsters who pop up and fire at you. The kind of games that are very definitely enabling violence are the ones in which you actually hold a weapon in your hand and fire it at human-shaped targets on the screen. These kinds of games can be played on home video, but you usually see them in video arcades.

There is a direct relationship between realism and degree of violence enabling, and the most realistic of these are games in which great bloody chunks fly off as you fire at the enemy.

Another, very different type of game has a western motif, in which you stand before a huge video screen and fire a pistol at actual film footage of "outlaws" as they appear on the screen. This is identical to the shoot—no shoot training program designed by the FBI and used by police agencies around the nation to train and enable police officers in firing their weapons.

The shoot—no shoot program was introduced nearly twenty years ago in response to the escalating violence in our society that was resulting in an increase in deaths among police officers who hesitated to shoot in an actual combat situation. And, of course, we recognize it as another form of operant conditioning that has been successful in saving the lives of both law-enforcement officers and innocent bystanders, since the officer faces severe sanctions if he fires in an inappropriate circumstance. Thus the shoot—no shoot program has served successfully to both enable *and* constrain violence among police officers. Its video arcade equivalent has no such sanctions to constrain violence. It only enables.

The worst is yet to come. Just as movies have become successively more realistic in their depiction of violence and death, so too have video games. We are now entering an era of virtual reality, in which you wear a helmet that has a video screen before your eyes. As you turn your head the screen changes just as though you were within the video world. You hold a gun in your hand and fire it at the enemies who pop up around you, or you hold a sword and hack and stab at the enemies around you.

Alvin TofHer, author of *Future Shock*, says, "This manipulation of reality may provide us with exciting games, entertainment, but it will substitute not a virtual reality, but a pseudo reality, so subtly deceptive as to raise the levels of public suspicion and disbelief beyond what any society can tolerate." This new "pseudo reality" will make it possible to replicate all the gore and violence of popular violent movies, except now you are the one who is the star, the killer, the slayer of thousands.

Through operant conditioning B. F. Skinner held that he could turn *any* child into *anything* he wanted to. In Vietnam the U.S. armed forces demonstrated that Skinner was at least partially correct by successfully using operant conditioning to turn adolescents into the most effective fighting force the world has ever seen. And America seems intent on using Skinner's methodology to turn us into an extraordinarily violent society.

## Chapter Four

### Social Learning and Role Models in the Media

The basic training camp was designed to undermine all the past concepts and beliefs of the new recruit, to undermine his civilian values, to change his self-concept — subjugating him entirely to the military system.

— Ben Shalit *The Psychology of Conflict and Combat*

Classical (Pavlovian) conditioning can be done with earthworms, and operant (Skinnerian) conditioning can be conducted on rats and pigeons. But there is a third level of learning that pretty much only primates and humans are capable of, and that is what is called social learning.

This third level of learning, in its most powerful form, revolves primarily around the observation and imitation of a role model. Unlike operant conditioning, in social learning it is not essential that the learner be directly reinforced in order for learning to take place. What is important in social learning is to understand the characteristics that can lead to the selection of a specific individual as a role model.

The processes that make someone a desirable role model include:

- *Vicarious reinforcement.* You see the role model being reinforced in a manner that you can experience vicariously.
- *Similarity to the learner.* You perceive that the role model has a key trait that makes him/her similar to you.
- *Social power.* The role model has the power to reward (but does not necessarily do so).
- *Status envy.* You envy the role model's receipt of rewards from others.

An analysis of these processes can help us understand the role of the drill sergeant as a role model in violence enabling in military training, and it can help us understand why a new type of violent role model is so popular among America's youth.

### Violence, Role Models, and Drill Sergeants in Basic Training

From this time on I will be your *mother, your father, your sister, and your brother.* I will be your best friend and your worst enemy. I will be there to *wake* you up in the morning, and I will be there to *tuck* you in at night. You will *jump* when I say "*frog*" and when I tell you to shit your only *question* will be "*What color.*" *IS THAT CLEAR?*

— Drill Sergeant G., Fort Ord, California, 1974

Lives there a veteran who cannot close his eyes and vividly visualize his drill sergeant? Over the years a hundred bosses, teachers, professors, instructors, sergeants, and officers have directed various aspects of my life, but none has had the impact that Drill Sergeant G. had on that cold morning in 1974.

The armies of the world have long understood the role of social learning in developing aggression in their soldiers. In order to do this their venue has been basic training, and their instrument has been the drill sergeant. The drill sergeant is a role model. He is the ultimate role model. He is carefully selected, trained, and prepared to be a role model who will inculcate the soldierly values of aggression and obedience. He is also the reason that military service has always been a positive factor for young people from delinquent or disadvantaged backgrounds.

He is invariably a decorated veteran. The glory and recognition bestowed on him are things that the trainees deeply envy and desire. Within the young soldiers' new environment the drill sergeant has enormous and pervasive authority, giving him social power. And the drill sergeant looks like his charges. He wears the uniform. He has the haircut. He obeys orders. He does the same things. But he does all of them well.

The lesson that the drill sergeant teaches is that physical aggression is the essence of manhood and that violence is an effective and desirable solution for the problems that the soldier will face on the battlefield. But it is very important to understand that the drill sergeant also teaches obedience. Throughout training the drill sergeant will not tolerate a single blow or a single shot executed without orders, and even to point an empty weapon in the wrong direction or to raise your fist at the wrong time merits the harshest punishment. No nation will tolerate soldiers who do not obey orders on the battlefield, and the failure to obey orders in combat is the surest route to defeat and destruction.

This is a centuries-old, perhaps *millennia-old*, process that is essential to ensuring that our soldiers survive and obey in combat. In the Vietnam era the drill sergeant communicated a glorification of killing and violence of an intensity never before seen. We did it intentionally. We did it calculatingly. And as long as we have armies we must continue to provide some form of appropriate role model if we want our sons and daughters to survive on future battlefields.

### **Role Models, the Movies, and a New Kind of Hero**

If such "manipulation of the minds of impressionable teenagers" is a necessary evil, accepted only reluctantly and with reservations for combat soldiers, how should we feel about its indiscriminate application to the civilian teenagers of this nation? For that is what we are doing through the role models being provided by the entertainment industry today. But while the drill sergeant teaches and models aggression in obedience to law and authority, the aggression taught by Hollywood's new role models is unrestrained by any obedience to law. And while the drill sergeant has a profound one-time impact, the aggregate effect of a lifetime of media may very well be even greater than that of the drill sergeant.

It has long been understood that movies can have a negative effect on a society through this role-modeling process. For example, the movie *Birth of a Nation* has been widely and plausibly credited with the revival of the Ku Klux Klan. But in general, throughout its golden age Hollywood intuitively understood its potential for doing harm and acted responsibly by providing positive role models for society. In the war movies, westerns, and detective movies of the past, heroes only killed under the authority of the law. If not, they were punished. In the end the villain was never rewarded for his violence, and he always received justice for his crimes. The message was simple: No man is above the law, crime does not pay, and for violence to be acceptable it must be guided by the constraints of the law. The hero was rewarded for obeying the law and channeling his desire for vengeance through the authority of the law. The viewer identified with the hero and was vicariously reinforced whenever the hero was. And the audience members left the theater feeling good about themselves and sensing the existence of a just, lawful world.

But today there is a new kind of hero in movies, a hero who operates outside the law. Vengeance is a much older, darker, more atavistic, and more primitive concept than law, and these new antiheroes are depicted as being motivated and rewarded for their obedience to the gods of vengeance rather than those of law. One of the fruits of this new cult of vengeance in American society can be seen in the Oklahoma City bombing, and if we look into the mirror provided by the television screen, the reflection we see is one of a nation regressing from a society of law to a society of violence, vigilantes, and vengeance.

And if America has a police force that seems unable to constrain its violence, and a population that (having seen the videotape of Rodney King and the LAPD) has learned to fear its police forces, then the reason can be found in the entertainment industry. Look at the role models, look at the archetypes that police officers have grown up with. Clint Eastwood's Dirty Harry became the archetype for a new generation of police officers who were not constrained by the law, and when Hollywood's new breed of cop was rewarded for placing vengeance above the law, the audience was also vicariously rewarded for this same behavior.

Feeding their audience a steady stream of vicarious reinforcement through such vengeful, lawless role models, these movies prepare our society for the acceptance of a truly hideous and sociopathic brand of role model. The essence of this new brand of role model is a brutal and usually supernaturally empowered murderer who is depicted as graphically torturing and murdering innocent victims.

In these movies there is usually no real attempt to paint the victims as being criminals; it is generally acceptable to justify their deaths as deserved due to the snobbery or social slights they have inflicted on others (as in the classic horror movie *Carrie*, which has spawned dozens more, cast from the same mold) or due to their membership in some social group or class held in scorn by the bulk of the youthful target audience. In these movies the viewers receive reinforcement by vicariously killing the people in their lives who have socially snubbed or otherwise "dissed" (shown disrespect to) them. And, in real life, the youth and the gangs of America escalate violence in our nation as they learn to take the law into their own hands and mete out "justice" to those who "diss" them.

At a lower level are the vicarious role models who kill without even the tissue of any apparent justification whatsoever. Having been desensitized by the kinds of movies outlined above, a portion of our population is then willing to accept role models who kill entirely without reason. The vicarious reinforcement here is not even vengeance for supposed social slights, but simply slaughter and suffering for its own sake and, ultimately, for the sake of power.

Notice the sequence in this downward spiral of vicarious role models. We began with those who killed within the constraints of the law. Somewhere along the line we began to accept role models who "had" to go outside the law to kill criminals who we know "deserved to die," then vicarious role models who killed in retribution for adolescent social slights, and then role models who kill completely without provocation or purpose.

At every step of the way we have been vicariously reinforced by the fulfillment of our darkest fantasies. This new breed of role models also has social power: the power to do whatever they want in a society depicted as evil and deserving of punishment. These role models transcend the rules of society, which results in great "status" to be envied by a portion of society that has come to adore this new breed of celebrity. And of course we have observed a similarity to the learner in the role model's rage. A rage felt by most human beings toward the slights and perceived crimes inflicted upon them by their society, but which is particularly intense in adolescence.

The increase in divorces, teenage mothers, and single-parent families in our society has often been noted and lamented, but a little-noted side effect of this trend has been to make America's children even more susceptible to this new breed of violent role models. In the traditional nuclear family there is a stable father figure -who serves as a role model for young boys. Boys who grow up without a stable male figure in their lives are desperately seeking a role model. Strong, powerful, high-status role models such as those offered in movies and on television fill the vacuum in their lives. We have taken away their fathers and replaced them with new role models whose successful response to every situation is violence. And then we wonder why our children have become ever more violent.

## **Chapter Five**

### **The Resensitization of America**

Throughout this book we have observed the relevant factors in military training. Men are recruited at a psychologically malleable age. They are distanced from their enemy psychologically, taught to hate and dehumanize. They are given the threat of authority, the absolutism and pressure of groups. Even then they are resistant and have trouble killing. They shoot in the air; they find nonviolent tasks to occupy them. And so they still need to be conditioned. The conditioning is astoundingly effective, but there is a psychological price to pay.

In this last section we have applied what we have learned about killing on the battlefield in order to gain an understanding of killing in our society. Violent movies are targeted at the young, both men and women, the same audience the military has determined to be most susceptible for its killing purposes. Violent video games hardwire young people for shooting at humans. The entertainment industry conditions the young in exactly the same way the military does. Civilian society apes the training and conditioning techniques of the military at its peril.

Add to this the dissolution of the family. Children from all economic strata no longer have a censor, counsel, or role model at home. They turn to their peers as authority figures. In some cases they find a family in gangs.

And then there are factors that provide psychological distance in our society. American society is increasingly divided along lines of race, gender, and so on. It has become compartmentalized. People in ghettos rarely leave their own areas — the larger world, the larger country is foreign land. The reverse is true with middle and upper classes. They travel everywhere except for impoverished - which they avoid anxiously. It is quite easy to maintain this distance. They ride in their cars; they live in the suburbs and eat in nice restaurants. The separation is not as strident as the soldier who learns to think of his enemy as an animal or refer to him as a "gook," but there is distance.

The only connecting point in our society is the media. The media, which should act to bring us together, serves to pull us apart: conditioning and teaching violence, nurturing our darkest instincts, and feeding the nation with violent stereotypes that foster our deepest fears.

We are most assuredly on the road to ruin, and we need desperately to find the road home from this dark and fearful place to which we have traveled.

### **The Road to Ruin**

And in that state of nature, no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short,

— Thomas Hobbes *Leviathan*

Some would claim that modern, ultraviolent movies and their video-game equivalents examined here serve as a form of sublimation that will make violence and war obsolete. "Sublimation" is a term coined by Sigmund Freud referring to the turning of unacceptable urges and desires toward something socially desirable: taking the dark, unacceptable drives of the id and diverting them toward the sublime. Thus someone with a desire to slice open bodies may become a surgeon, or someone with an unacceptable urge toward violence may channel it toward sports, the military, or law enforcement. But watching movies is *not* sublimation.

The entertainment industry is not providing a socially acceptable channeling of energy. Indeed, very little energy is generally spent in the passive reception of television and movies. And this hardly qualifies as a socially acceptable or desirable channel for energies. Unless it has become socially desirable to kill outside the authority of the law, or to murder innocent victims — which, in the twisted world of the entertainment industry, it has.

If violence in television and movies were a form of sublimation, and if it were at all effective, then per capita violence should be going down. Instead it has multiplied nearly seven times in the span of the same generation in which this supposed sublimation has become available. It is not sublimation, or even neutral entertainment. It is classical conditioning, operant conditioning, and social learning, all focused toward the violence enabling of an entire society.

When our 1992 Olympic hockey team displayed a degree of lawlessness, violence, and aggression never before seen in such competitions, we should have begun to wonder. When the mother of one high school cheerleader was convicted of hiring a hit man to murder her daughter's competitor for the cheerleader squad, and when the "bodyguard" for one Olympic

figure skater attempted to eliminate the competition by maiming an opponent, we should have begun to understand that this is a society that is increasingly conditioned to turn to violence as the answer to all of its difficulties.

### **And the Road Home: The Resensitization of America**

Male power, male dominance, masculinity, male sexuality, male aggression are not biologically determined. They are conditioned. . . . What is conditioned can be deconditioned. Man can change.

— Catherine Itzin *Pornography: Women, Violence and Civil Liberties*

So what is the answer? Which is the road home from this dark and fearful place to which we have traveled?

Perhaps it is time to begin the "resensitization" of America.

When the framers of the U.S. Constitution wrote the Second Amendment, guaranteeing the right to keep and bear arms, they never dreamed that the concept of "arms" could someday include weapons of mass destruction that can vaporize whole cities. In the same way, until late in this century, no one ever dreamed that the right to free speech could include mechanisms of mass conditioning and desensitization. During the 1930s our society began for the first time to consider the need to control access to high explosives, and today even the most rabid defender of Second Amendment rights would not argue for private ownership of rental trucks full of high explosives, artillery, nerve gas, or nuclear arms. In the same way, perhaps the time has come for society to consider the price being paid for the implications of technology on some First Amendment rights.

There is no more need to constrain the print media than there is to control bowie knives, tomahawks, or flintlock rifles, but there might just be a justification for controlling the technology that goes beyond print media and flintlocks. The more advanced the technology, the greater the need for control. In the realm of weapons technology that means controlling explosives, artillery, and machine guns, and it may mean that the time has come to consider controlling assault rifles or pistols. In the realm of media technology, that may mean that the time has come to consider controlling TV, movies, and video games.

Technology has leapfrogged in a variety of ways that change the context of violence in our society. Today technology has enabled distribution of a much wider variety of entertainment: movies, television, videos, video games, multimedia and interactive television, specialized magazines, and the Internet. The result is that entertainment is now a private act. In many cases this is good, but in many other cases it has had the potential for developing, feeding, and sustaining individual pathologies. We have a two-hundred-year-old tradition of protecting the right to free speech and the right to bear arms. Obviously, though, our founding fathers did not have these factors (let alone operant conditioning!) in mind when they wrote the Constitution.

Media critic Michael Medved believes that some form of censorship (either self-censorship or the formal, legal kind) is in the cards, and that this might not be so bad, pointing out that the age of censorship in Hollywood was also the age of greatest artistry, yielding movies such as *Gone with the Wind* and *Casablanca*. As Simon Jenkins put it in a London *Times* editorial:

Censorship is external regulation and therefore professional anathema. Yet such sanction is the community's natural response to what it feels might threaten its stability, be it adulterated food, dangerous drugs, guns or films that incite social evils. Film-makers, like all artists, claim a license from such sanction. They are observers outside of society looking in. But the license is held on lease. It is not freehold. It can be withdrawn.

But the road to resensitization is probably not through formal censorship. There may be a legitimate place for new laws and legal constraints in our future, but oppression of one sort can

never truly be relieved by other forms of oppression, and in today's video society it would be difficult to completely squelch all manifestations of violence enabling. However, we may be able to find compromises that can put us back on the road toward becoming the kind of society that most of us want, while still respecting the rights of one' another. What is needed is not censorship, at least not censorship in any legal or legislative sense.

There is a sound argument for changing the way we view and apply First Amendment rights, but I do not advocate it. I do, however, believe that the time has come for our society to censure (not censor) those who exploit violence for profit. In A. M. Rosenthal's words we must "turn entirely away from those ugly people, defeating them by refusing them tolerance or respectability."

What we must realize is that our society is trapped in a pathological spiral with all vectors pulling inward toward a tighter and tighter cycle of violence and destruction.

The prescription for resensitization is as complex and interactive as has been the path to our current dark state. Guns, drugs, poverty, gangs, war, racism, sexism, and the destruction of the nuclear family are just a few of the factors that can act to cheapen human life. The current debates over euthanasia, abortion, and the death penalty indicate that we are divided over the ethics of life and death. To greater or lesser degrees each of these factors helps to pull us toward destruction, and any comprehensive war on crime needs to consider all of them. But these factors have always been there. The *new* factor that is at work today is the same factor that increased the firing rate from 15 to 20 percent in World War II to 90 to 95 percent in Vietnam. The new factor is desensitization and killing enabling in the media.

Television programmers have always tried to claim the "best of two uncomfortably contradictory worlds," as Michael Medved puts it. It is really not new or profound to point out that television executives have for years claimed that they are not capable of influencing our actions or changing behavior, but for decades America's major corporations have paid them billions of dollars for a paltry few seconds or a minute to do just that. To sponsors, media executives claim that just a few well-placed seconds can control how America will spend its hard-earned money. But to Congress and other watchdog agencies they argue that they are not responsible for causing viewers to change the way they will respond to any emotionally charged, potentially violent circumstance that they may subsequently find themselves in. This in spite of the fact that, as of 1994, there have been more than two hundred studies demonstrating the correlation between television and violence.<sup>3</sup>

This body of scientific evidence against the media is overwhelming. In March 1994, Professor Elizabeth Newson, head of the child-development unit at Nottingham University, in England, released a report signed by twenty-five psychologists and pediatricians. They wrote:

Many of us hold our liberal ideals of freedom of expression dear, but now begin to feel that we were naive in our failure to predict the extent of damaging material and its all-too-free availability to children. By restricting such material from home viewing, society must take on a necessary responsibility in protecting children from this, as from other forms of child abuse.

By calling for legislation to limit the availability of "video nasties," Professor Newson and her colleagues raised a storm of controversy in Britain. They also became the latest in a series of scientists to publicly join the ever-swelling ranks of those who are convinced by the scientific research linking violence in the media to violent crime.

In the spring 1993 issue of *The Public Interest*, Dr. Brandon Canterwall, professor of epidemiology at the University of Washington, summarized the overwhelming nature of this body of evidence. His report focused on the effect of television when it was introduced to rural, isolated communities in Canada and when English-language TV broadcasts were permitted in



South Africa in 1975, having previously been banned by the Afrikaans-speaking government. In each case, violent crime among children increased spectacularly.

Canterwall points out that aggressive impulses, like most human phenomena, are distributed along a bell-shaped curve, and the significant effect of any change will occur at the margins. He notes:

It is an intrinsic effect of such "bell curve" distribution that small changes in the average imply major changes at the extremes. Thus, if an exposure to television causes 8 percent of the population to shift from below-average aggression to above-average aggression, it follows that the homicide rate will double.

In statistical terms, an increase in the aggressive predisposition of 8 percent of the population is very small. Anything less than 5 percent is not even considered to be statistically significant. But in human terms, the impact of doubling the homicide rate is enormous. Canterwall concludes:

The evidence indicates that if, hypothetically, television technology had never been developed, there would today be 10,000 fewer homicides each year in the United States, 70,000 fewer rapes, and 700,000 fewer injurious assaults. Violent crime would be half what it is.

The evidence is quite simply overwhelming. The American Psychological Association's commission on violence and youth concluded in 1993 that "there is *absolutely no doubt* that higher levels of viewing violence on television are correlated with increased acceptance of aggressive attitudes and increased aggressive behavior."

Ultimately, in the face of all this evidence, the deglamorization and condemnation of violence in the media are inevitable. It will be done in simple self-defense as our society rises up against the enabling of the violent crimes that are destroying our lives, our cities, and our civilization. When it occurs this process will probably be similar to the deglamorization of drugs and tobacco that has occurred in recent years, and for much the same reasons.

Throughout history nations, corporations, and individuals have used noble-sounding concepts such as states' rights, lebensraum, free-market economics, and First or Second Amendment rights to mask their actions, but ultimately what they are doing is for their own personal gain and the result — intentional or not — is killing innocent men, women, and children. They participate in a diffusion of responsibility by referring to themselves as "the tobacco industry" or "the entertainment industry," and we permit it, but they are ultimately individuals making individual moral decisions to participate in the destruction of their fellow citizens.

The ever-ascending tide of violence in our society must be stopped. Each act of violence breeds ever-greater levels of violence, and at some point the genie can never be put back in the bottle. The study of killing in combat teaches us that soldiers who have had friends or relatives injured or killed in combat are much more likely to kill and commit war crimes. Each individual who is injured or killed by criminal violence becomes a focal point for further violence on the part of their friends- and family. Every destructive act gnaws away at the restraint of other men. Each act of violence eats away at the fabric of our society like a cancer, spreading and reproducing itself in ever-expanding cycles of horror and destruction. The genie of violence cannot really ever be stuffed back into the bottle. It can only be cut off here and now, and then the slow process of healing and resensitization can begin.

It can be done. It has been done in the past. As Richard Heckler observes, there is a precedent for limiting violence-enabling technology. It started with the classical Greeks, who for

four centuries refused to implement the bow and arrow even after being introduced to it in a most unpleasant way by Persian archers.

In *Giving Up the Gun*, Noel Perrin tells how the Japanese banned firearms after their introduction by the Portuguese in the 1500s. The Japanese quickly recognized that the military use of gunpowder threatened the very fabric of their society and culture, and they moved aggressively to defend their way of life. The feuding Japanese warlords destroyed all existing weapons and made the production or import of any new guns punishable by death. Three centuries later, when Commodore Perry forced the Japanese to open their ports, they did not even have the technology to make firearms. Similarly, the Chinese invented gunpowder but elected not to use it in warfare.

But the most encouraging examples of restraining killing technology have all occurred in this century. After the tragic experience of using poisonous gases in World War I the world has generally rejected their use ever since. The atmospheric nuclear test ban treaty continues after almost three decades, the ban on the deployment of antisatellite weapons is still going strong after two decades, and the United States and the former USSR have been steadily reducing the quantity of nuclear weapons for over a decade. As we have de-escalated instruments of mass destruction, so too can we de-escalate instruments of mass desensitization.

Heckler points out that there has been "an almost unnoticed series of precedents for reducing military technology on moral grounds," precedents that show the way for understanding that we do have a *choice* about how we think about war, about killing, and about the value of human life in our society. In recent years we have exercised the choice to move ourselves from the brink of nuclear destruction. In the same way, our society can move away from the technology that enables killing. Education and understanding are the first step. The end result may be that we will come through these dark years as a healthier, more self-aware society.

To fail to do this leaves us with only two possible results: to go the route of the Mongols and the Third Reich, or the route of Lebanon and Yugoslavia. No other result is possible if successive generations continue to grow up with greater and greater desensitization to the suffering of their fellow human beings. We must put the safety catch back on our society.

We have to understand, as we have never understood before, why it is that men fight and kill and, equally important, why it is that they will not. Only on the basis of understanding human behavior can we hope to influence it. The essence of this book has been that there is a force within man that will cause men to rebel against killing even at the risk of their own lives. That force has existed in man throughout recorded history, and military history can be interpreted as a record of society's attempt to force its members to overcome their resistance in order to kill more effectively in battle.

But that force for life, Freud's Eros, is balanced by the Thanatos, the death force. And we have seen how pervasive and consistent has been the battle between these two forces throughout history.

We have learned how to enable the Thanatos. We know how to take the psychological safety catch off of human beings almost as easily as you would switch a weapon from "safe" to "fire." We must understand where and what that psychological safety catch is, how it works, and how to put it back on. That is the purpose of killology, and that has been the purpose of this book.

## Notes

### Introduction: Killing and Science

1. I would like to note that some friends (such as the noted historian Bill Lind, author of the superb book *Retroculture*) disagree with this representation of Victorian sexual repression, but I have yet to meet a single individual who disagrees with the analysis of our modern repression outlined here, and that is the pertinent point.

2. There is not even a name for the specific study of killing. "Necrology" would be the study of the dead, and "homicidology" would have undesired connotations of murder. Perhaps we should consider coining the simple and precise term "killology" for this study, just as "suicidology" and "sexology" are terms that have been recently created for the legitimate study of these precise fields.

### Section I: Killing and the Existence of Resistance

1. There has been considerable controversy concerning the quality of Marshall's research in this area. Some modern writers (such as Harold Leinbaugh, author of *The Men of Company K*), are particularly vociferous in their belief that the firing rate in World War II was significantly higher than Marshall represented it to be. But we shall see that at every turn my research has uncovered information that would corroborate Marshall's basic thesis, if not his exact percentages. Paddy Griffith's studies of infantry regimental killing rates in Napoleonic and U.S. Civil War battles; Ardant du Picq's surveys; the research of soldiers and scholars such as Colonel Dyer, Colonel (Dr.) Gabriel, Colonel (Dr.) Holmes, and General (Dr.) Kinnard; and the observations of World War I and World War II veterans like Colonel Mater and Lieutenant Roupell — all of these corroborate General Marshall's findings.

Certainly this subject needs more research and study, but I cannot conceive of any motive for these researchers, writers, and veterans to misrepresent the truth. I can, however, understand and appreciate the very noble emotions that could cause men to be offended by anything that would seem to besmirch the honor of those infantrymen who have sacrificed so much in our nation's (or any nation's) past.

The latest volley in this ongoing battle was on the side of Marshall. His grandson, John Douglas Marshall, in his book *Reconciliation Road* put forth one of the most interesting and convincing rebuttals. John Marshall was a conscientious objector in the Vietnam War and was completely disowned by his grandfather. He had no cause to love his grandfather, but he concludes in his book that most of what S. L. A. Marshall wrote "still stands, while much of the way he lived deserves criticism."

2. The universal distribution of automatic weapons is probably responsible for much of this large number of shots fired per kill. Much of this firing was also suppressive fire and reconnaissance by fire. And much of it was by crew-served weapons (e.g., squad machine guns, helicopter door gunners, and aircraft-mounted miniguns firing thousands of rounds per minute), which, as mentioned before, almost always fire. But even when these factors are taken into consideration, the fact that so much fire occurred and that so many individual soldiers were *willing to fire* indicate that something different and unusual was happening in Vietnam. This subject is addressed in detail later in this book, in the section entitled "Killing in Vietnam."

3. This is an important concept. In both this section and in later sections we will observe the vital role of groups (including nonkillers) and leaders as we look at "An Anatomy of Killing."

4. Marshall also observed that if a leader came close to an individual and ordered him to fire, then he would do so, but as soon as the obedience-demanding authority departed, the firing would stop. However, the focus in this section is upon the average soldier armed with a rifle or musket and his apparent unwillingness to kill in combat. The impact of obedience-demanding

authority and the effect of group processes on crew-served weapons, i.e., machine guns, which almost always fire, and key weapons (i.e., flamethrowers and automatic rifles), which usually fire, are both addressed in "An Anatomy of Killing."

5. I too have graduated from many a U.S. Army leadership school, including basic training, advanced individual training, the XVIII Airborne Corps NCO Academy, Officer Candidate School, the Infantry Officer Basic Course, Ranger school, the Infantry Officer Advanced Course, the Combined Arms and Services Staff School, and the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth. Not at any time in any of these schools do I remember this problem being mentioned.

## Section II: Killing and Combat Trauma

1. The information in this section has been taken largely from Gabriel's *No More Heroes*, which in turn was taken largely from the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* of the American Psychiatric Association and from *Military Psychiatry: A Comparative Perspective*, an anthology that he edited.

2. The cause of PTSD is associated primarily with the nature of the support structure the soldier receives upon returning to society from combat. This section is primarily concerned with the nature and etiology of psychiatric casualties occurring *during* combat. Post-traumatic stress disorder is a distinctly different type of psychiatric illness that will be addressed in detail in the section of this study entitled "Killing in Vietnam."

3. It is important to note here that, although the lack of battlefield psychiatric casualties among medical personnel has held true in all wars about which I have data, Vietnam was very different in that the incidence of post-traumatic stress disorder appears to have been *higher* among medical personnel. I believe that this was due to the unique nature of what happened *after* the veteran returned from that war, and we will look at this in greater detail in the section "Killing in Vietnam."

4. Frankl (1959), Bettelheim (1960), and Davidson (1967) are but a few of the many who have studied the psychological impact of this environment.

5. For example, Weinberg (1946), Weinstein (1947, 1973), and Spiegel (1973).

6. This is an excerpt from World War I veteran James H. Knight-Adkin's "No Man's Land," a powerful poem that does a superb job of communicating some of the horror of the soldier's dilemma:

No Man's Land is an eerie sight  
At early dawn in the pale gray light . . .  
And never a living soul walks there  
To taste the fresh of the morning air;  
Only some lumps of rotting clay,  
that were friends or foemen yesterday ...

But No Man's Land is a goblin sight  
When patrols crawl over at dead o' night;  
Boche or British, Belgian or French,  
You dice with death when you cross the trench.  
When the "rapid," like fireflies in the dark,  
Flits down the parapet spark by spark,  
And you drop for cover to keep your head  
With your face on the breast of the four months' dead.

The man who ranges in No Man's Land  
Is dogged by shadows on either hand

When the star-shell's flare, as it bursts o'erhead,  
Scares the gray rats that feed on the dead,  
And the bursting bomb or the bayonet-snatch  
May answer the click of your safety-catch,  
For the lone patrol, with his life in his hand,  
Is hunting for blood in No Man's Land.

### Section III: Killing and Physical Distance

1. For an understanding of how it was possible for Nazis and Assyrians to kill at this "extreme" end of the spectrum, see Section V, "Killing and Atrocities."

2. Quoted from an article by R. K. Brown. These are extracts from after-action reports describing the activities of Sergeant First Class (retired) Adelbert F. Waldron who, during his tour of duty as a sniper using a starlight scope and a noise suppressor (silencer) on his match- (competition-) grade M14 rifle, was credited with 113 confirmed kills and 10 blood trails in five months in Vietnam. Waldron's fame spread, and he was given the nom de guerre Daniel Boone. Apparently, the VC were also impressed with his skill and put a fifty-thousand-dollar price on his head. Twelve hours after Army Intelligence discovered that Waldron had been identified and a bounty offered for his scalp, he was on a plane out of Vietnam.

3. This has been mentioned elsewhere, but it bears repeating that the universal distribution of automatic weapons in Vietnam is probably responsible for much of this large number of shots fired per kill. Much of this firing was also suppressive fire and reconnaissance by fire. And much of it was by crew-served weapons (e.g., squad machine guns, helicopter door gunners, and aircraft-mounted mini-guns firing thousands of rounds per minute), which, as mentioned before, almost always fire. But even when these factors are taken into consideration, the fact that so much fire occurred and that so many individual soldiers were *willing to fire* indicates that something different and unusual was happening in Vietnam. This subject is addressed in detail later in this book in the section "Killing in Vietnam."

4. A detailed analysis of these stages of a kill can be found in the section entitled "The Killing Response Stages."

5. Stewart concludes the article with this sentence. The object of his tale, the climax. The point of this lengthy article appears to be this line that communicates the extent of his empathy for his victim and gives him a little peace: "that hard look had left his eyes before he died." The message we can take away from this is that he cared deeply what this dying VC thought of him, and what the reader thinks of him. If we look for it, over and over again in these killing narratives we will find this underlying message of (1) the writer's empathy for his kill and (2) a deep concern for what the reader thinks of the writer. We will address these needs in much greater detail in the section "Killing in Vietnam."

6. But the Greeks refused to use "unmanly" projectile weapons, and the uniquely designed javelins and pilums cast in volleys by Roman soldiers — combined with the Romans' superior training in thrusting the sword, their maneuverability on the battlefield, and their use of leaders — ultimately permitted the professional Roman legions to defeat the citizen-soldiers of the Greek phalanx.

7. Yet even with all their emphasis on stabbing wounds, it appears that many Roman soldiers still slashed and hacked at the enemy, for we read constantly of enemy soldiers who suffer multiple slash wounds as a result of their encounters with the Roman legions. In his *Commentaries on the Gallic War*, Caesar mentions how after a battle the enemy, "at length, worn out with wounds, . . . began to retreat."

8. It is interesting to note that the new U.S. Army M16 bayonet is a very wicked-looking, saw-backed device.

9. Some would claim that writing of such esoteric killing techniques in a public forum is an inappropriate act, since they now become "thinkable." In some martial arts organizations the release of such "secret" or "high-level" techniques can result in disciplining and censure. This whole subject of modeling violence and making the unthinkable thinkable is addressed in the section "Killing in America." In actuality it must also be noted that the construction of the skull and eye socket make it difficult to get into the brain, and I believe that, in consideration of the potential audience, the benefit associated with using this example in this context far outweighs any potential harm.

10. Permit me to caveat all of this just a little. Freud made similar observations as to the latent homosexuality of men who smoked large cigars, but as a cigar smoker himself Freud was quick to add that "sometimes a cigar is just a cigar." In the same way let me simply add, as a soldier and a gun owner, that sometimes a gun is ... just a gun.

#### **Section IV: An Anatomy of Killing**

1. Helping a veteran in such a situation involves encouraging him to share his experience, confronting the word "murder," and discussing the Bible's or Torah's view on killing.

*Encouraging Him to Share This Experience with His Wife.* In this case I suggested that he do this by asking her to read William Manchester's *Goodbye, Darkness* and then use a remarkably similar incident in that book as a point of departure to discuss his experience. (The need for the vet to share with his wife and the value of a book to serve as point of departure are recurring themes in this kind of counseling. Early drafts of this book have served just such a purpose on several occasions.)

*Encouraging Him to Confront His Use of the Word "Murder."* It was not murder, it was self-defense, and if it happened in the street tomorrow no charges would be pressed. His answer, as it is so often when the veteran represses and never discusses these situations, was "I never looked at it that way." (This is a common and repeated theme in such counseling.)

*Discussing What the Bible or the To rah Says about Killing.* I encouraged him to study the matter further or discuss it with a clergyman of his faith. This is another common and important theme. There is a body of belief in America that it is not "good" to be a soldier. Much of this antimilitary bias is founded on the commandment "Thou shalt not kill," but within the realm of Christianity there is great disagreement on this matter, and it is not nearly that simple. For the sake of therapy among soldiers I have found that there is great value in presenting the other side of the theological debate about killing.

In Exodus, chapter 20, we find the Ten Commandments. Almost four hundred years ago the King James Version translated the Sixth Commandment as "Thou shalt not kill." When the translators wrote that, no one ever dreamed that "God's word" would be taken so out of context as to interpret this commandment to mean that the death penalty or killing on the battlefield is wrong. In this century, with only one exception, every major modern translation has translated this commandment as "Thou shall not murder." In chapter 21 of the same book of the Bible (on the same page as the Ten Commandments in most Bibles) the death penalty is commanded when it says: "He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall surely be put to death" (Exodus 21:12). The Hebrew word used in the original text of the Sixth Commandment refers to killing for your own personal gain; it has nothing to do with killing under authority. And this is not the first or the last time that the death penalty is commanded by God. In Genesis 9:6, when he got off the ark, Noah was commanded by God, "Whosoever sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed."

King David was a "man after God's own heart," and he was also a man of war. The Bible praises David for killing Goliath in battle, and as a king he is praised:

"Sol killed his thousands, but David has killed his tens of thousands." Killing in war, under authority, is presented as honorable and acceptable throughout the Bible. It was only when King

David committed murder, in killing Uriah, that he got into trouble with God. The Old Testament is full of such righteous warrior leaders. David, Joshua, and Gideon are just a few of the hundreds of soldiers mentioned in the Old Testament who found favor in God's eyes for their labors on the battlefield. In Proverbs 6:17, the Bible says that God "*hates . . . shedders of innocent blood [emphasis added].*" But there is nothing but honor in the Bible for the soldier who kills in just combat.

In the New Testament the story is the same. When the rich young man came to Jesus he was told that he must give away everything he had in order to follow Jesus. But in Matthew 8:10, when the Roman centurion came to him, Jesus said, "I have not found so great a faith, no, not in Israel." And in Acts, chapter 10, the first non-Jewish Christian was designated by God, and he was Cornelius . . . *a Roman centurion*. God sent Peter to convert him, and it appears to have been a bit of a shock to Peter (and all the other disciples) that a non-Jew could be a Christian, but he never questioned that a *soldier* should have the honor of being the first one. Most of chapter 10 of the Book of Acts is devoted to Peter's sermon to the centurion Cornelius and his guidance as to how to be a Christian, but never once does Peter, or *anyone else, anywhere in the Bible*, state that it is incompatible to be a soldier and a Christian. Indeed, exactly the opposite is communicated over and over again.

In Luke 22:36, just minutes before his arrest and subsequent crucifixion, Jesus commanded his disciples that "he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one." They had three swords among them, and when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus, Peter drew his. But Jesus commanded him to put it away, saying, "He that lives by the sword shall die by the sword," meaning that if the sword is your law, you *should* die by the sword — the sword wielded by the agents of the government, and in Romans 13:4 Paul wrote that the government "beareth not the sword in vain."

Thus there is a foundation for the argument that (1) "Thou shalt not kill" is a poor translation taken grossly out of context and (2) this has been responsible for doing great emotional harm to our veterans. The position outlined above has been, and continues to be, the one accepted by much of Catholic and Protestant Christianity for two millennia. This has been the philosophical justification for the church's support for fighting to free the slaves in the Civil War and fighting Germany and Japan in World War II. Today many churches hold that those who have died for our nation are exemplifying Jesus' love and Jesus' sacrifice for every one of us, for Jesus said, "Greater love has no man than this, that he give his life for his friends."

2. An interview with a veteran who was a retired law-enforcement officer led me to realize that moral distance is the dominant factor that enables violence and the rationalization of violence among police forces. When I described the distance processes to him he pointed out that the establishment and maintenance of what I was calling moral distance are essential to the mental health of police officers, and on a good force it is *the* primary enabling process. If, on the other hand, the racial and ethnic hatred of cultural distance begins to set in, then there are problems, and a kind of moral rot can cut into the soul of the police force.

3. It is interesting to observe how many of these "punishment" motivators were, in retrospect, less than legitimate. We really never did find out what caused the sinking of the *Maine*, and it might very well have been an accident. The *Lusitania* was carrying war munitions, and the Germans did give us fair warning. And the Gulf of Tonkin Incident appears to have been almost completely fabricated by President Johnson. In most of these cases, though, the politicians were motivated to use these incidents as a rally to excite the popular imagination in order to get involved in a war that they (the politicians) thought was morally legitimate.

The great British statesman Benjamin Disraeli observed that the role of such "passion" issues would always be a key aspect of a democracy's entry into war. "If," said Disraeli,

due season submit to peace . . . which will diminish your authority and perhaps  
endanger your independence. You will, in due season you establish a democracy, you

must in due season reap the fruits of a democracy. . . . You will in due season have wars entered into from passion, and not from reason; and you will in, with a democracy find that your property is less valuable and that your freedom is less complete.

4. B. F. Skinner's operant conditioning theory and its application to killing will be looked at in greater detail in subsequent sections. His theory is basically that aspect of psychology which most people associate with the lab rat conditioned to press a bar for food. From Skinner's research has arisen a body of psychological thought and theory that is probably matched only by Freud's in its influence.

5. Modern snipers are enabled by group processes, since they are almost always teamed with a spotter who provides mutual accountability and turns the sniper into a crew-served weapon. In addition, snipers are enabled by (1) the physical distance at which they fire, (2) the mechanical distance created by viewing the enemy through a scope, and (3) a temperament predisposed to the job, due to their careful selection by command and self-selection through their willingness to volunteer for the job.

6. But of course the Rhodesians won all the battles and lost the war — as did the U.S. forces in Vietnam. I would submit that in both cases this is because the "enemy" was willing to absorb these horrendous losses, while the Americans and the Rhodesians were not. This is partially a reflection on the impact of moral distance, but it is also a matter of political will and the effectiveness of democracies versus totalitarian forms of government in times of war, and *that* is a factor that is generally outside the realm of consideration of this study.

7. Like most personality disorders, this one is a continuum that contains many individuals who, while they would not meet the full diagnostic criteria, are on the borderline of antisocial personality disorder. The *DSM-III-R* tells us that some individuals "who have several features of the disorder [but not enough to be diagnosed with it] achieve political and economic success," and some successful combatants may also fit into this category.

8. Terry Pratchett, in his book *Witches Abroad*, captured (in a metaphoric sense that Jung would have loved) the essence of the power of archetypal roles and their ability to entrap and warp lives:

Stories exist independently of their players. If you know that, the knowledge is power.

Stories, great flapping ribbons of shaped space-time, have been blowing and uncoiling around the universe since the beginning of time. And they have evolved. The weakest have died and the strongest have survived and they have grown fat on the retelling . . . stories, twisting and blowing through the darkness.

And their very existence overlays a faint but insistent pattern on the chaos that is history. Stories etch grooves deep enough for people to follow in the same way that water follows certain paths down a mountainside. And every time fresh actors tread the path of the story, the groove runs deeper.

Pratchett calls this "the theory of narrative causality," and he is quite correct in noting that in its most extreme form the archetype, or the "story," can have a dysfunctional influence on lives. "Stories don't care who takes part in them," says Pratchett. "All that matters is that the story gets told, that the story repeats. Or, if you prefer to think of it like this: stories are a parasitical life form, warping lives in the service only of the story itself."

This is especially true if (1) society invests and entraps an individual in a role — for example, the role of the hero who bathes in blood and gore while slaying the "dragon," and then (2) society cuts the story short and refuses to continue to play its part in the age-old drama/story of the returning warrior. Which is exactly what America did to her returning Vietnam veterans. But that is a story for a later chapter.

9. Synthesizing various models and variables into a single paradigm may assist in providing a more detailed understanding of the soldier's response to killing circumstances on the



battlefield. It may even be possible to develop an equation that can represent the total resistance involved in a specific killing circumstance.

The variables represented in our equation include:

- **Probability of Personal Kill** = total probability of execution of specific personal kill (This is an estimation of the total psychological leverage available to enable the execution of a specific personal kill in a specific circumstance.)

- **Demands of Authority** = (intensity of demand for killing) X (legitimacy of obedience-demanding authority) X (proximity of obedience-demanding authority) X (respect for obedience-demanding authority)

- **Group Absolution** = (intensity of support for killing) X (number in immediate killing group) X (identification with killing group) X (proximity of killing group)

- **Total Distance from Victim** = (physical distance from victim) X (cultural distance from victim) X (social distance from victim) X (moral distance from victim) X (mechanical distance from victim)

- **Target Attractiveness of Victim** = (relevance of victim) X (relevance of available strategies) X (payoff in killer's gain + payoff in victim's loss)

- **Aggressive Predisposition of Killer** = (training/conditioning of the killer) X (past experiences of the killer) X (individual temperament of killer)

An equation that would permit us to tie in all of these factors and determine the resistance to a specific personal kill would look something like this:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Probability of Personal Kill} = & \\ & (\text{demands of authority}) \times (\text{group absolution}) \times \\ & (\text{total distance from victim}) \times \\ & (\text{target attractiveness of victim}) \times \\ & (\text{aggressive predisposition of killer}) \end{aligned}$$

Let us say that the baseline for all of these factors is 1. A baseline of 1 works well, since in our multiplicative equation this number would be neutral; any factor under 1 would influence all other factors downward, and any factor over 1 would interact to influence all other factors upward. Since these processes are all multiplicative, an extraordinarily low factor in any one area (such as .01 in aggressive predisposition) would have to be overcome through very high ratings in other factors. On the other hand, all other factors being equal, an extremely high rating in demands of authority (as seen in Milgram's studies) or a high aggressive predisposition (as would be likely if the killer had recently had a buddy or a family member killed by the "enemy") would result in a high probability of a personal kill or even the unrestrained killing resulting in war crimes and other atrocities.

Like most factor analyses, this one has probably not identified all of the factors that would influence this situation, but this model is certainly vastly more effective than anything we have had before — since, to the best of my knowledge, none has ever existed before. Much work is needed to truly quantify these factors, but I would hypothesize that the threshold for a personal kill in wartime would be lower than that in peacetime. In a peacetime killing (murder) the threshold would probably be significantly higher, but the basic factors might still generally apply. Certainly this model would apply to gang killings and most random street violence, but the most common form of murder is that committed by acquaintances and family members upon one another, and I believe that the psychological mechanics of that kind of killing are quite different from what we are studying here.

## Section V: Killing and Atrocities

1. The only other time I have heard this process spoken of was by one particularly astute and unusually introspective British wing commander from the Gulf War. He noted that the RAF ground crews who supported his squadron felt like "impostors" because they had lived in a hotel, did not personally approach the enemy, and had not yet endured any Iraqi Scud missile attacks. However, they were only a few hundred meters from the U.S. National Guard unit that was subsequently hit by a Scud attack at considerable loss of life. "I hope," he said, "that you will not misunderstand if I tell you that my ground crews felt a little better about themselves when the Americans were hit." Again, instead of being diminished by friendly losses, they were strangely magnified and empowered by them.

2. This is the only place in this entire book where I have used a quote from fiction. I do so in this instance because Conrad's Kurtz is an unparalleled representation of a man who is entrapped in the power of atrocity. This was superbly embellished and built upon in Marion Brando's portrayal of Kurtz in *Apocalypse Now*. In that movie Kurtz's representation of how he was ensnared by the power of the Vietcong's use of atrocity represents a singularly powerful insight into the dark attraction of atrocity.

## Section VI: The Killing Response Stages

1. The "obedience versus sympathy" and "cultural versus biological norm" conflicts, which may be at the root of this killing trauma, have been explored by Eibl-Eibesfeldt. He delves deeply into this area and relates how soldiers in firing squads have been traditionally drugged with alcohol and issued the random blank bullet to permit some form of denial. Even so, they often later needed psychological counseling. Eibl-Eibesfeldt also tells of the atonement rituals traditionally used in primitive tribes after killing the enemy.

Eibl-Eibesfeldt does not, however, examine the need for, and quality of, ritual atonement methods for dealing with the trauma of a personal kill in *modern* warfare. These modern atonement processes, and how they failed in Vietnam, are an important part of what we must attempt to examine and understand. But first we must complete our dissection of the stages of a personal kill.

2. A fixation is sometimes defined as too much pain or pleasure associated with a specific stimuli. Classical examples of Freudian fixations include individuals who are fixated by the delight of nursing and the trauma of being weaned (oral fixation) or individuals who have become fixated by traumatic toilet training (anal fixation).

3. Many veterans cut themselves off entirely from their emotions at the time of killing. They tell me (sincerely, I believe) that they feel now and felt then absolutely nothing. This is discussed elsewhere, but it is very important at this point to distinguish between these individuals who have denied and repressed their emotions and those who can truly enjoy killing without any resultant remorse.

4. But all would defend his right to reflect openly on the war as he saw it, in a forum of his peers. It is very much to the credit of *Soldier of Fortune*, the magazine in which this article was published, that for twenty years this was essentially the *only* national forum in which Vietnam veterans could write such deeply emotional, open, and often unpopular reminiscences of their war. The editors added that "(?)" to the title of this article as their subtle means of distancing themselves from the author's statements, and let it go at that. The route of recovery from all combat trauma is through rationalization and acceptance, and this lifelong self-exploration process that I have termed "rationalization and acceptance" is exactly what occurs when veterans write, and read, these first-person narratives. I believe that writing and reading these narratives provide an extremely powerful form of therapy for these men. And I must deeply

respect the courage and fortitude it took to both write and publish such accounts over the last twenty years.

Note that here the "thrill of the kill" is placed before the "terrible bitterness of losing a friend," the latter being a trauma that is intentionally downplayed in relationship to the pleasure that the writer found in combat. It must be emphasized that such a fixation does not make an individual a "bad" person. On the contrary, it was men like this, with a thirst for adventure and addiction to excitement, who pioneered our nation, and it is men such as this whom our country depends upon as the backbone of our military force in time of war. And, again, there are numerous sound studies that demonstrate that the returning veteran represents no greater threat to society than already existed in the society. As always, the objective must be not to judge, but simply to understand.

## **Section VII: Killing in Vietnam**

1. The 1978 President's Commission on Mental Health tells us that approximately 2.8 million Americans served in Southeast Asia. If we accept the Veterans Administration's conservative figures of 15 percent incidence of PTSD among Vietnam veterans, then more than 400,000 individuals in the United States suffer from PTSD. Independent estimates of the number of Vietnam veterans suffering from PTSD range from the Disabled American Veterans figure of 500,000 to Harris and Associates 1980 estimate of 1.5 million. These figures would mean that somewhere between 18 and 54 percent of the 2.8 million military personnel who served in Vietnam are suffering from PTSD.

2. This improvement is so astounding that a few modern observers have publicly questioned Marshall's World War II findings. But to do that means that you have to go on and question his Korean War findings and his Vietnam findings (which have been independently verified by Scott). To do so also refutes the findings of every other author who has looked deeply into this matter, including Holmes, Dyer, Keegan, and Griffith. It is possible these modern writers are partially motivated by a difficulty in believing that they and "their" soldiers exist to do something that is so offensive and horrible that they must be conditioned to do it. See the earlier section "Killing and the Existence of Resistance" for a more detailed discussion of this topic.

3. There was too little close combat in the Gulf War to really make any conclusions of this sort.

4. Stouffer, in "The American Soldier: Combat and Its Aftermath" (in *Studies in Social Psychology in World War II*, vol. 2), says that "Personal readjustment problems of varying degrees of intensity are disclosed by the [World War II] veterans in this study. But the typical veteran pictured in some quarters as a bitter, hardened individual does not emerge from this survey." Charles C. Moskos Jr., in *The American Enlisted Man*, looked at the Vietnam veteran and found that, compared with when they entered the army, these men returned to civilian life more mature and better suited to contribute to society.

The situation, however, is not all that simple. Since Stouffer's and Moskos's studies, we have become aware of the impact of PTSD on Vietnam veterans. It would appear there is no evidence to indicate that, when compared with a nonveteran of the same age, the average Vietnam vet has any greater potential for among Vietnam vets *has* caused is a significant increase in suicides, drug use, alcoholism, and divorce.

5. See Gabriel's *No More Heroes* for more information about these drugs and their physical and mental effects. Gabriel also spends a great deal of time assessing the potential impact of these drugs on killing and their potential effects on the trauma of killing. Those interested in a more detailed assessment of the impact of psychopharmacology in Vietnam should look at *Military Psychiatry: A Comparative Perspective*, which Gabriel edited and drew from extensively for *No More Heroes*.

6. No, the term is not necessarily an oxymoron.

7. Fry and Stockton (1982), Keane and Fairbank (1983), Strech (1985), Lifton (1974), Brown (1984), Egendorf, Kadushin, Laufer, Rothbart, and Sloan (1981), and Levetman (1978) are just a few of the psychiatrists, military psychologists, Veterans Administration mental-health professionals, and sociologists who have identified lack of social support after returning from combat as a critical factor in the development of PTSD.

8. Research is proceeding in this area, and we may someday be able to actually calibrate these numbers. In 1992, twelve cadets from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point spent their summer at the VA Medical Center in Boston. They were participating as part of their Individual Academic Development Program under my supervision, and their mission was to interview veterans about their combat experiences in order to begin to establish a database of information and interviews specifically about killing processes. The cadets involved then evaluated and assessed the data gathered in these summer interviews as a part of subsequent directed individual studies courses under my supervision.

This database continues to grow and will, hopefully, expand further based upon input from veterans as a result of this book. The long-term objective is to be able to begin a detailed analysis of the processes associated with killing, to include the degree of importance and influence represented by the various factors in the killing-enabling model; the validity of the killing response stages; and the interaction between combat trauma (specifically killing experiences) and social support and their relationship to the resulting magnitude of post-traumatic stress response. Individuals who are willing to provide data for this study are invited to write the author care of the publisher.

9. As mentioned before, Stouffer's and Moskos's studies indicate that returning veterans are generally better members of society. There is also no evidence to indicate that a Vietnam vet is more likely than a nonvet to commit crimes of violence. What the epidemic of PTSD among Vietnam vets *has* caused is a statistically significant increase in suicides, drug use, alcoholism, and divorce.

I should note that most Vietnam vets have done quite well for themselves. There is, therefore, a backlash movement among some Vietnam veterans who are tired of the current label, who have had no difficulty themselves (perhaps due to repression and denial, or an unusually strong support structure upon return combined with their own personal psychic strength in the face of the stresses that they have endured), and these individuals sometimes have little patience for the veterans who are having problems.

In the face of this current conflict among veterans I would contribute the observation that the world is big enough, and people are complex enough, that probably both sides are correct.

## **Section VIII: Killing in America**

1. There is some confusion about crime reporting in America, generally due to the fact that there are two crime reports produced each year by the U.S. government. One report is compiled by the FBI based on all crimes reported by law-enforcement agencies across the nation. In recent years this report has reflected a steady *decrease* in overall crime and a steady *increase* in violent crime, as reflected in the graph on page 300.

In 1994 the FBI report reflected a 0.4 percent *decrease* in the per capita aggravated assault rate. This is the first decrease in this area in nearly a decade. But the same report also reflected a 2.2 percent *increase* in the per capita murder rate, and criminologists offer little hope for a long-term decrease in violent crime. "We haven't even begun to see the problem with teenagers that we will see in the next ten years," says Dr. Jack Levin, sociology and criminology professor at Northeastern University in Boston. "There will be a 23 percent increase in the teenage population over the next generation, and as a result, we're going to see the murder rate rise precipitously."

The other annual crime report is based on a national survey of crime victims and reports its findings according to the number of crimes per household. In recent years this report has *also* reflected a steady increase in violent crime. The results of this survey have been questioned by some experts, and it may be that this report is underreporting crime as the nature and number of American "households" increase due to the breakdown of the nuclear family. The data in this report also have potential for error (probably in the direction of underreporting), since they are based on a subjective assessment on the part of the increasingly jaded population being surveyed. Nevertheless, in 1994 this survey reflected a 5.6 percent increase in violent crime.

The fact that the crime victim survey reflected a significant increase in violent crime in the same year that the FBI reported a small decrease supports a school of thought which holds that the FBI report has also been increasingly underreporting crime. This theory holds that law-enforcement agencies will become more and more swamped as the incidence of violent crime increases. As a result of this, both an exhausted police force and a jaded population (which is also increasingly fearful of criminal retribution) will raise the threshold of what is reported. There is evidence to indicate that in many high-crime areas attacks and assaults that would have received immediate attention thirty years ago (for example, drive-by shootings in which no one is hit and beatings in which no one is killed) are routinely ignored today.

As the inner cities continue to sink into lawlessness and anarchy it may well be that an increasing proportion of violent crimes will continue to go unreported and unnoticed. As a result of this, both crime reports will increasingly fail to reflect the full magnitude of the problem of violent crime in America.

2. Another common red herring in this area involves the increasing "deadliness" of modern small arms. This is simply a myth.

For example, the high-velocity, small-caliber (5.56 mm/.223 caliber) ammunition used in most assault rifles today (e.g., the M16, AR-15, Mini-14, etc.) was designed to wound rather than kill. The theory is that wounding an enemy soldier is better than killing him because a wounded soldier eliminates three people: the wounded man and two others to evacuate him. These weapons do inflict great (wounding) trauma, but they are illegal for hunting deer in most states due to their ineffectiveness at quickly and effectively killing game.

Similarly, since World War II the weapon that we associated with criminals was generally a .45 automatic, which was also the current military side arm. In recent years the criminal weapon of choice has reflected the military's transition to the 9 mm pistol, which has a smaller, faster round, which many experts argue is considerably less effective at killing.

What these new smaller ammunitions (5.56 mm for rifle and 9 mm for pistol) *do* make possible is greater magazine capacity, and this has increased the effectiveness of weapons in one way, while decreasing it in another way.

The point is that there has not been any significant increase in the effectiveness of the weapons available today. The shotgun is still the single most effective weapon for killing someone at close range, and it has been available and basically unchanged for more than one hundred years. Medical technology, computer technology, and entertainment technology have all advanced at quantum rates, but the technology of close-range killing has been essentially unchanged throughout the last century.

3. But the situation is more complex. Correlation does not prove causation. To *prove* that TV causes violence you must conduct a controlled, double-blind experiment in which, if you are successful, you will *cause* people to commit murder. Clearly to perform such an experiment with human beings is unethical and largely impossible. This same situation is the foundation for the tobacco industry's continued argument that no one has ever "proven" that cigarettes "cause" cancer.

There comes a point when, in spite of this type of reasoning, we must accept that cigarettes do cause cancer. Similarly, there comes a point at which we must accept the verdict of 217 correlation studies.