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The Social History of the American Soldier: A Review and Prospectus for Research

RICHARD H. KOHN

OVER THE COURSE OF AMERICAN HISTORY, few experiences have been more widely shared than military service. From the seventeenth century to the present, Americans by the millions have served in armed forces of one kind or another, in war and in peace, on frontiers and overseas, as career professionals and temporary militia conscripts. Universal military obligation is one of our oldest and most enduring traditions. Every generation has experienced military conflict of some kind, and through the twentieth century the military has increased dramatically in size and in its impact on national affairs. Between 1940 and 1973 the government through selective service touched the lives of nearly every American family directly, even if a male family member did not serve. In 1980 an estimated 37 percent of the male population over age seventeen were veterans, as many as 70 percent for those in the age bracket forty-five to sixty-four; and, in gross numbers, including women, some thirty million Americans were veterans in 1980. Nor are these figures likely to change significantly. Projections for manning the all volunteer army stress the need for fully one quarter of our eighteen-year-old males to enlist to maintain the armed forces at a strength of two million. And current projections estimate that 28 percent of the male population over seventeen, perhaps twenty-eight million men, will be veterans in the year 2000, even without conscription.¹

With rare exception, American historians, particularly social historians, have

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¹ Peter Karsten, *Soldiers and Society: The Effects of Military Service and War on American Life* (Westport, Conn., 1978), 3, 20; Morris Janowitz and Charles C. Moskos, Jr., "Five Years of the All-Volunteer Force: 1973-1978," *Armed Forces and Society*, 5 (1979): 180-81, 211; Richard V. L. Cooper, *Military Manpower and the All-Volunteer Force* (Santa Monica, Calif., 1977), 44, 189-93; and Harold Wool, *The Military Specialist: Skilled Manpower for the Armed Forces* (Baltimore, 1968), 104-06. In 1971 Adam Yarmolinsky estimated that "roughly one out of eight" Americans were veterans, a very high figure considering women and children in the population; Yarmolinsky, *The Military Establishment: Its Impacts on American Society* (New York, 1971), 45. For statistics on veterans, see Committee on Veterans' Affairs, U.S. Senate, *Study of Health Care for American Veterans: A Report Prepared by the National Academy of Sciences National Research Council* (Washington, 1977), 16; and U.S. Veterans Administration, *National Survey of Veterans: Summary Report* (Washington, n.d.), 6.

neglected this experience. In the last two decades scholars of the military have begun to abandon the old preoccupation with strategy and battle, but few practitioners of the “new” military history have chosen subjects that are frankly social.² Of course, there has existed for generations a vast literature on American soldiers in the form of histories, memoirs, diaries, biographies, literary studies, popular hagiographies, government compilations of statistics, and sociological studies. But little of this material has been concerned with understanding soldiers per se, the military experiences of Americans, or the impact of service on the nation. Most of the history has aimed at calling to memory the patriotism or loyalty of particular individuals and groups; the sociology, at advancing social science methodology or aiding the government in recruiting its armies and using manpower efficiently. What do we really know of this experience for Americans and, indeed, of the Americans who served through our history? Who were they? Why did they enlist or submit to coercion into service? Where did they come from? What did their leaving and their returning mean to their communities? What did they think? Why did they fight? How did they behave? What impact did service have on them and they on the nation? “Several scholarly studies of specific dimensions of the subject do exist and deserve . . . attention,” one historian has written recently. “But such studies are . . . few in number” and focus primarily on the World War II and postwar eras.³ In point of fact, historians have neglected one of the most pervasive experiences in American life, one especially suited to the new social history. Because of the vast literary and statistical source material, examining service in the military ought to reveal much about the American population and society and, even further, begin to explain the significance of that service and fix it firmly in the mosaic of American history, where it has always belonged.

FOR MOST OF OUR HISTORY, our vision of the American soldier—the prototypical enlisted man in the army, navy, or militia (marines have been by their own definition atypical)—has been expressed in various forms of symbol and myth. While historians, and a good proportion of the public, might no longer accept the old stereotypes, they still persist in patriotic rhetoric, in army thinking, and even in some forms of the old scholarship.⁴ The American soldier was a cross

² In fact, there is some argument for returning to more traditional subjects. See Russell F. Weigley, “Introduction,” in Weigley, ed., *New Dimensions in Military History: An Anthology* (San Francisco, 1975), 11–12; Allan Millett, “The Study of American Military History in the United States,” *Military Affairs*, 41 (1977): 58–59; Gunther E. Rothenberg and Dennis Parks, “European Military History in America: The State of the Art,” *ibid.*, 75–77; and John Keegan, “The Historian and Battle,” *International Security*, 3 (1978–79): 140–45.

³ Karsten, *Soldiers and Society*, 3, 4.

⁴ Scholars still take sides on whether major portions of the traditional stereotype hold. The most complete general study by a scholar attempts throughout to explain away any material “derogatory to Americans in uniform.” “What I really intended to do was write a tribute; simple, direct and truthful,” Victor Hicken stated in his preface, chronicling the American fighting man while “sparing none of his faults, emphasizing all his virtues.” Hicken, *The American Fighting Man* (New York, 1969), viii. For examples, see *ibid.*, 16, 19, 21, 32–33, 47, 139–40, 141–49, 164, 178, 185, 237. Some newer work on the American Revolutionary War soldiery also pushes older patriotic interpretations, quite unpersuasively in my opinion. See Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775–1783* (Chapel Hill, 1980); and Robert Mid-

section of the American population; he enlisted and fought out of patriotism; his love of liberty, intelligence, and native individualism meant that the goals of war had to be explained to him. “[M]en must be thoroughly imbued with the spirit of their cause . . . , believe in it and want it with every atom of their being,” a psychological handbook counselled prospective officers in 1943, echoing a theory first publicized by Friedrich von Steuben in 1779 and repeated as dogma ever since.⁵ In battle our soldiers were courageous; if captured, they remained loyal; once the battle ended, they reverted to the kind, adaptive, happy-go-lucky scroungers of Ernie Pyle’s classic World War II reporting. Even as sophisticated an observer as General S. L. A. Marshall, who as an officer and writer studied Americans in four wars and often advised the army on training and leadership, perpetuated some of these generalizations. Marshall believed our soldiers had certain common characteristics, “true in times past from Lexington . . . to Pork Chop Hill”: “resourceful and imaginative . . . , to a certain extent machine-bound . . . , optimistic . . . though their griping is incessant, . . . gregarious,” impatient of “spit-and-polish,” possessive of “an uncanny instinct for ferreting out the truth when anything goes wrong tactically, . . . wasteful of drinking water, food, munitions, and other vital supply,” and hesitant to kill. But, if “led with courage and intelligence, an American will fight as willingly and as efficiently as any fighter in world history.”⁶

These myths have endured for a variety of reasons. Americans have long believed that how they have behaved in service and in battle reflected their character as a people and their virtue as a nation. Moral worth, and our special distinctiveness as a country, seemed somehow to hinge on the people’s eagerness to serve, its bravery under fire, its loyalty in captivity, its virtue in bivouac, and its willingness to melt back silently into civilian life. The government down through our history has also contributed to stereotyping American soldiers. To mobilize the population and justify the cause, propaganda has consistently pictured the American in uniform in the best possible light. Veterans’ organizations have also joined willingly in the celebrations of the American soldier, lest they cheapen their own endeavors or call into question their sacrifice. And a

dlekauff, “Why Men Fought in the American Revolution,” *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 3d ser., 43 (1980): 135–48. For examples in army thinking, see George C. Marshall, “West Point and the Citizen Army” (May 29, 1942), in Major H. A. De Weerd, ed., *Selected Speeches and Statements of General of the Army George C. Marshall* (Washington, 1945), 202; and General Bernard Rogers, *Cedar Falls–Junction City: A Turning Point*, Vietnam Studies (Washington, 1974), 159–60.

⁵ L. A. Pennington et al., *The Psychology of Military Leadership* (New York, 1943), 221, 222. Also see Hicken, *The American Fighting Man*, 57; Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War*, 219, 220–27; Major Edward Lyman Munson, Jr., *Leadership for American Army Leaders* (Washington, 1941), 88; and Colonel James A. Moss, *Officers’ Manual* (8th ed., Menasha, Wis., 1941), 258–60, 286–87, 310–13. Note the ambivalence of a handbook prepared by a team made up mostly of scholars; see National Research Council, *Psychology for the Fighting Man* (Washington, 1943), 310–12. In World War II the army went to great lengths to indoctrinate soldiers, including commissioning the famous film series, “Why We Fight,” by Frank Capra, and running essay contests among the soldiers on that theme. See Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Organizer of Victory, 1943–1945* (New York, 1973), 82–83, 84, 91–92; and Jack J. Zurofsky’s essay in “Brooklyn Soldier Wins Essay Contest,” *New York Times*, May 14, 1944, p. 14.

⁶ Marshall, *The Officer as a Leader* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1966), 268–76.

good deal of the literature and rhetoric has emanated from ethnic groups who have wanted to prove their loyalty and patriotism by portraying their participation in laudatory terms.

Thus the American soldier has been a symbol, a political and cultural artifact for a nation diverse in culture, uncertain in unity, and concerned through much of its history with proving its superiority to the rest of the world. Of necessity has been anonymity, which has further muddied the truth and contributed to the making of myths. Artists from the Revolution to the present have depicted enlisted men in faceless terms: Winslow Homer's *Harper's Weekly* drawings in the Civil War, for example, or Harvey Dunn's "The Machine Gunner" of 1918. Even characters with as much realism as Bill Mauldin's World War II GI's, "Willie" and "Joe," were meant to represent an anonymous mass of citizen soldiers.⁷ And the government—for recruiting, in bond drives, in memorials—has insisted on typicality, an "unknown soldier." From such sources the nation produced symbols that from the outset bore no necessary relationship to reality, and, because of anonymity and repetition generation after generation, the myths have survived with remarkable durability.

While no scholar has yet put together a synthesis of what is known about American soldiers, enough good studies and source material have become available to put finally to rest the popular legends. First of all, our forces have never been homogenous, but a bewildering mixture of ethnic and racial groups. Blacks served throughout American history, comprising, for example, as much as 20 percent of the Union Navy.⁸ Immigrants have also filled the ranks: over 20 percent of the Union Army, some 18 percent of the World War I draftees, and in peacetime in the nineteenth century even greater numbers—over 70 percent of army recruits in 1850 and 1851 and as late as 1894 one-quarter of enlisted ranks overall. In the navy, foreign-born sailors made up such a high percentage of enlisted ranks that officials wondered aloud whether the squadrons would be reliable in event of a crisis.⁹ Often the armed forces formed units from a single

⁷ For examples of battle art, see [Donald H. Mugridge, ed.] *An Album of American Battle Art, 1755-1918* (Washington, 1947); Julian Grossman, *Echo of a Distant Drum: Winslow Homer and the Civil War* (New York, n.d.); and the numerous photo histories of World War II. The anonymity of the enlisted man usually is portrayed explicitly in film documentaries, or specific individuals are offered up as "typical" of greater masses of men. For "Willie" and "Joe," see Bill Mauldin, *Up Front* (Cleveland, 1945).

⁸ Benjamin Quarles, "The Colonial Militia and Negro Manpower," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 45 (1959): 643-52; Jack D. Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History* (New York, 1974); and Joseph Pielucci, "Negro Sailors in the Union Navy, 1861-1865" (honors thesis, City College of the City University of New York, 1971), 17.

⁹ Benjamin Apthorp Gould, *Investigations in the Military and Anthropological Statistics of American Soldiers*, United States Sanitary Commission, *Sanitary Memoirs of the War of the Rebellion*, 2 (New York, 1869): 26-27; Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb: The Common Soldier of the Confederacy* (1943; reprint ed., Garden City, N.Y., 1971), chap. 6; J. H. Baxter, *Statistics, Medical and Anthropological, of the Provost-Marshal-General's Bureau . . . during the Late War of the Rebellion . . .* (Washington, 1875), 1, LXXIV-LXXV; Fred Davis Baldwin, "The American Enlisted Man in World War I" (Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 1964), 59; Marcus Cunliffe, *Soldiers & Civilians: The Martial Spirit in America, 1775-1865* (Boston, 1968), 118-20; Francis Paul Prucha, *Broadax and Bayonet: The Role of the United States Army in the Development of the Northwest, 1815-1860* (Madison, Wis., 1953), 36, 41-45; Bruce White, "Ethnicity, Race, and the American Military, from Bunker Hill to San Juan Hill," in Major David MacIsaac, ed., *The Military and Society: The Proceedings of the Fifth Military History Symposium, United States Air Force Academy, 5-6 October 1972* (Washington, 1975), 122-25, 129-30; Harold D. Langley, *Social Reform in the United States Navy, 1798-1862* (Urbana, Ill., 1967), 38, 71-72, 89-92, 275; Frederick S. Harrod, *Manning the New Navy: The Development of a Modern Naval Enlisted Force, 1899-1940* (Westport, Conn., 1978), chaps. 1-2; and James E. Valle, *Rocks & Shoals: Order and Discipline in the Old Navy, 1800-*

group: the four regiments of blacks in the post-Civil War army, the American Indian regiments in the Civil War, the Indian companies in the 1890s, the Philippine scouts in the twentieth century, the Japanese-American battalions in World War II, and the Eskimo battalions of the Alaska Territorial Guard and Alaska National Guard, formed in World War II and still in existence today.¹⁰

Rarely have our forces constituted an economic or social profile of the general population. The Continental Army of the Revolution drew its soldiers from the poorest third of society and contained disproportionate numbers of drifters, servants, British deserters, captured loyalists, convicts, and drafted substitutes. Of the World War I draftees, three out of ten were illiterate or functionally so, five times the national illiteracy rate of 6 percent. In later conflicts men with college backgrounds or more education often became officers—in World War II, 40 percent of the men with some college background. (Of a sample of 231 select Harvard students and graduates, 80 percent held commissions.) The World War II ground armies could not have reflected the population, because so many of the skilled or technically apt were siphoned off into the air corps and navy. And our forces have rarely included another large group: the physically or mentally deficient. Selective Service rejected one quarter of those physically examined in World War II and nearly 50 percent of those eligible for the draft between 1950 and 1965.¹¹

1861 (Annapolis, 1980), 19–21. No one has, to my knowledge, compared the percentage of immigrants in enlisted ranks with the percentage of immigrants of the same age in American society. Since immigrants tended to be concentrated in the over twenty and under fifty age brackets, it is possible that immigrants were not as over-represented in the Army as is commonly believed.

¹⁰ White, "Ethnicity, Race, and the American Military," 113–30; Marvin Fletcher, *The Black Soldier and Officer in the United States Army, 1891–1917* (Columbia, Mo., 1974); Arlen L. Fowler, *The Black Infantry in the West, 1869–1891* (Westport, Conn., 1971); Bell Irvin Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union* (1952; reprint ed., Garden City, N.Y., 1971), 316–19, and *The Life of Johnny Reb*, 324–27; Jack D. Foner, *The United States Soldier between Two Wars: Army Life and Reforms, 1865–1898* (New York, 1970), 129–31; Eric Feaver, "Indian Soldiers, 1891–95: An Experiment on the Closing Frontier," *Prologue*, 7 (1975): 109–18; Muktuk Marston, *Men of the Tundra: Eskimos at War* (New York, 1969); and Hicken, *The American Fighting Man*, 338–74. The armed forces have also included large numbers of aliens who have often used military service to gain American citizenship; see James B. Jacobs and Leslie Anne Hayes, "Aliens in the U.S. Armed Forces: A Historico-Legal Analysis," *Armed Forces and Society*, 7 (1981): 187–208.

¹¹ Mark Edward Lender, "The Enlisted Line: The Continental Soldiers of New Jersey" (Ph.D. dissertation, Rutgers University, 1975), iii–iv, 112–17, 122–27, 133–34, and "The Social Structure of the New Jersey Brigade: The Continental Line as an American Standing Army," in Peter Karsten, ed., *The Military in America from the Colonial Era to the Present* (New York, 1980), 27–44; John R. Sellers, "The Common Soldier in the American Revolution," in Stanley J. Underdal, ed., *Military History of the American Revolution: The Proceedings of the 6th Military History Symposium, United States Air Force Academy, 10–11 October 1974* (Washington, 1976), 151–56, 164–66; Edward C. Papenfuse and Gregory A. Stiverson, "General Smallwood's Recruits: The Peacetime Career of the Revolutionary War Private," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 30 (1973): 117–32; Baldwin, "The American Enlisted Man in World War I," 85–91; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1970* (Washington, 1975), 382; Samuel Stouffer et al., *The American Soldier: Adjustment during Army Life*, Studies in Social Psychology in World War II, no. 1 (Princeton, 1949), 59, 245–47; Robert R. Palmer et al., *The Procurement and Training of Ground Combat Troops*, United States Army in World War II: The Army Ground Forces (Washington, 1948), 3–4, 6–10, 11, 16–17, 18; John Ellis, *The Sharp End: The Fighting Man in World War II* (New York, 1980), 10, 12, 192; John P. Monks, *College Men at War*, Memoirs of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, vol. 24 (Boston, 1957), 286; U.S. Selective Service System, *Selective Service and Victory: The 4th Report of the Director of Selective Service . . .* (Washington, 1948), 147, 266, 666; Harry A. Marmon, "Historical Background of Selective Service in the United States," in Roger W. Little, ed., *Selective Service and American Society* (New York, 1969), 47; Charles Moskos, *The American Enlisted Man: The Rank and File in Today's Military* (New York, 1970), 41–43, 50–51, 64–74, 169–71, 195, 196; and Paul L. Savage and Richard A. Gabriel, "Cohesion and Disintegration in the American Army: An Alternative Perspective," *Armed Forces and Society*, 2 (1976): 345. For the unrepresentative character of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century peacetime army, see Cunliffe, *Soldiers & Civilians*, 116–20; Prucha, *Broadax and Bayonet*, 37–45; Don Rickey, *Forty Miles a*

Nor does the evidence support the belief that Americans enlist or fight purely out of patriotism. Often at the beginning of a war volunteers flocked to the colors in a surge of nationalistic fervor; invariably, however, the supply of willing recruits dried up as the realities of the sacrifice sank in. In the War of 1812 New England militia refused to turn out, and in 1814 the Madison administration considered introducing a national draft. In both the Revolution and Civil War, the states and the national government resorted to drafts. In both conflicts bounties were so pervasive and rose so high that they became a national scandal. Only in the Mexican and Spanish-American Wars has the nation manned its ranks without using large-scale bribery or coercion. And Americans have not submitted passively to coercion, except during World War II and the Cold War. When permitted in the Revolution and Civil War, thousands purchased substitutes. Others flouted the law. In World War I, 11 percent of those called evaded the draft, and nearly half of the evaders, some one hundred and seventy thousand men, were never apprehended. Long before Vietnam, Americans practiced medical chicanery. As one Civil War surgeon wrote in disgust, "They come fortified with elaborate certificates from sympathizing friends, kind-hearted family physicians, stupid quacks, and the learned homeopathist who has testified to the appalling infirmity of 'paralysis of the scrotum.'" ¹²

Our peacetime forces have never depended on patriotism. Augustus Myers, who joined the Army fife and drum corps at the age of twelve in 1854 and who served ten years on the frontier and with the Army of the Potomac, remembered his comrades as enlisting "for various reasons. Some had the 'Wanderlust'; others . . . a taste for adventure. . . . Some had joined from sheer necessity, or inability to find any other occupation to support themselves, . . . a very common cause."¹³ In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries men joined the peacetime army, and deserted, in direct correlation to pay and treatment inside the army and the state of the civilian economy outside. In fact, pay and bonuses have influenced American soldiers for generations. During the Revolution soldiers mutinied over lack of pay, and their officers three times threatened Congress with resignation unless granted half-pay pensions for life. Until the Cold War, the military pension system primarily benefited our "patriotic" citizen ar-

Day on Beans and Hay: The Enlisted Soldier Fighting the Indian Wars (Norman, Okla., 1963); Robert M. Utley, *Frontiersmen in Blue: The United States Army and the Indian, 1848-1865* (New York, 1967), 40-48; and Robert Kenaston Griffith, Jr., "The Volunteer Army and American Society, 1919-1940" (Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, 1979).

¹² "Extracts from the report of Dr. J. F. Hall," 1st District New Hampshire, June 15, 1865, in Baxter, *Statistics, Medical and Anthropological*, 181. For the draft and bounties, see Marvin A. Kreidberg and Merton G. Henry, *History of Military Mobilization in the United States Army, 1775-1945* (Washington, 1955), 12-15; Lender, "The Enlisted Line," 78-82, 85-90; Eugene Converse Murdock, *Patriotism Limited, 1862-1865: The Civil War Draft and Bounty System* (Kent, Ohio, 1967), 13, 16-21; Russell F. Weigley, *History of the United States Army* (New York, 1967), 206-11; Edward M. Coffman, *The War to End All Wars: The American Military Experience in World War I* (New York, 1968), 28-29; Hicken, *The American Fighting Man*, 37; and Baldwin, "The American Enlisted Man in World War I," 25-28. One in five—20.8 percent—of those called under the North's draft refused to report; see Peter Levine, "Draft Evasion in the North during the Civil War, 1863-1865," *Journal of American History*, 67 (1981): 818-21.

¹³ Myers, *Ten Years in the Ranks U.S. Army* (New York, 1914), 37. Also see Hicken, *The American Fighting Man*, 47-50. The use of groups marginal on the social scale for peacetime forces went back to colonial times. See John Shy, *A People Numerous and Armed: Reflections on the Military Struggle for American Independence* (New York, 1976), 30-32.

mies, not the peacetime constabulary. The very first veterans' organization, the Society of the Cincinnati (for officers only), came into existence in 1783 in large part to press for promised pensions. By the end of the nineteenth century, veterans' lobbies had become such potent political forces that the government paid nearly five billion dollars in Civil War pensions alone. Not surprisingly, with over thirteen million men and women in uniform, the World War II Congress voted the most massive system of postwar benefits in history—before the fighting had even ended.¹⁴

Like soldiers of other nations, Americans have on occasion deserted, run from combat, murdered enemy soldiers, assaulted superiors, and wounded themselves to avoid battle. Rather than being motivated by patriotism or political ideology, our soldiers have sustained themselves in the stress of battle by a variety of means, from the network of esteem and interdependence that creates the solidarity and cohesion of a unit to the will and the instinct for survival and, perhaps, even to the unspoken belief in the superiority of their nation and culture.¹⁵ Away from the constraints of family and community, they have sworn, drank, gambled, fought among themselves, and chased women with enough regularity and in sufficient numbers to dispel any claim to special virtue. (In World War I the army stubbornly determined to stamp out venereal disease by prohibiting all fraternization with French women—and failed utterly.) Soldiers often expressed hate and contempt for enemy and ally alike. A few, on occasion, have been actually attracted to war, to the spectacle and to the excitement, as the philosopher J. Glenn Gray, who in 1940 received his doctorate and draft notice in the same mail, noted. And Americans have not always melted peacefully back into civilian life: they have often demonstrated to hurry demobilization, to receive bonuses, or to settle economic grievances, and they have organized themselves into vocal lobbies that, even today, exercise political influence far beyond matters of specific concern to veterans.¹⁶

¹⁴ See Foner, *Soldier between Two Wars*, 6–10; also see the studies on the nineteenth-century enlisted men cited in note 11, pages 557–58, above. For the correlation between peacetime recruiting or desertion and economic conditions or treatment inside the army, see Robert K. Griffith, Jr., “Quality not Quantity: The Volunteer Army during the Depression,” *Military Affairs*, 43 (1979): 172–76, and “The Volunteer Army in American Society, 1919–1940,” 72, 74–77, 81–83, 250–55. For veterans benefits, see William H. Glasson, *Federal Military Pensions in the United States* (New York, 1918), 273, 274; and Davis R. B. Ross, *Preparing for Ulysses: Politics and Veterans during World War II* (New York, 1969).

¹⁵ For the best studies on motivation in battle, see Edward Shils and Morris Janowitz, “Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II,” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 12 (1948): 280–315; S. L. A. Marshall, *Men against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in Future War* (New York, 1947), chaps. 9–11; Samuel Stouffer *et al.*, *The American Soldier: Combat and Its Aftermath*, Studies in Social Psychology in World War II, no. 2 (Princeton, 1949), chap. 3; Ellis, *The Sharp End*, chap. 8; Roger W. Little, “Buddy Relations and Combat Performance,” in Morris Janowitz, ed., *The New Military: Changing Patterns of Organization* (New York, 1964), 195–223; John Baynes, *Morale—A Study of Men and Courage: The Second Scottish Rifles at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, 1915* (New York, 1967); Charles Moskos, “Vietnam: Why Men Fight,” in Martin Oppenheimer, ed., *The American Military* (n.p., 1971), 16–36, and *The American Enlisted Man*, chap. 6; and John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York, 1976). For a recent review, see Kurt Lang, “American Military Performance in Vietnam: Background and Analysis,” *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, 8 (1980): 269–86. Alexis de Tocqueville, writing in the 1830s, thought Americans naturally undisciplined, but James Bryce, writing after the Civil War, concluded just the opposite; de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. Phillips Bradley, 1 (New York, 1945): 191; and Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, 2 (London, 1888): 442–43.

¹⁶ Jeffrey Geiger, “Morals, Venereal Disease, and the American Expeditionary Forces during World War I” (M.A. thesis, Queens College of the City University of New York, 1977); Baldwin, “The American Enlisted

THUS, AS MANY HISTORIANS HAVE LONG KNOWN, the record casts grave doubt on some of our most cherished folklore. But to portray the American soldier as a self-interested, blue-collar scoundrel motivated solely by money and survival, interested primarily in drink and in the pleasures of the flesh, liable to desert or succumb to his captor at the first opportunity, and kept in check only by the threat of army punishment would be as gross a distortion as the myth of the virtuous patriot. In recent years some of these images have dominated the popular mind: Korean POW's demoralized, disloyal, and collaborating; Vietnam veterans as murderous drug addicts incapable of shedding their alienation and returning to normal civilian lives.¹⁷ The problem, in both scholarship and popular thinking, is our propensity to search for typicality, to think in terms of stereotypes, and to aim for universal generalizations that fit across all of American history. The truth of the matter is that the "American soldier" never existed; the most pernicious myth of all is that there has ever been a prototypical American in uniform. Common sense ought to remind us that the past was different: the pace of life, values and attitudes, occupations, the classes and social structure of the nation, technology and the conditions of battle, the character of discipline, the nature of war and military life. Our experience as scholars should warn us that few, if any, generalizations for something as varied as military service, experienced by so many diverse individuals under such disparate circumstances, can hold over as long a span of time as three centuries. We ought particularly to suspect broad surveys in the absence of very detailed research on specific periods of time. And what we as historians should seek is not some set of large generalizations, but history—change over time, evolution, development.

Certainly many aspects of military organization and experience are universal and timeless; scholars, soldiers, and other writers often emphasize the similarities across national borders and centuries. Battle and the reactions of men caught in combat provides an excellent example of the tendency to generalize—and its pitfalls. John Keegan, a historian on the faculty at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, wrote recently that what "battles have in common is human: the behaviour of men struggling to reconcile their instinct for self-preservation, their sense of honour and the achievement of some aim over which other men are ready to kill them." Studying battle "is therefore always a study of fear and usu-

Man in World War I," 33–41, 112–15, 184–90, 191–94; Hicken, *The American Fighting Man*, 193–205, 296–303; Frederick A. Pottle, *Stretchers: The Story of a Hospital Unit on the Western Front* (New Haven, 1929); Stouffer *et al.*, *The American Soldier: Combat and Its Aftermath*, 156–57; Ernie Pyle, *Here is Your War: Story of G.I. Joe* (Cleveland, 1943), 145, 173–74; J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (New York, 1959), 28–39; Moskos, *The American Enlisted Man*, 151; and Philip Caputo, *A Rumor of War* (New York, 1977), xv, 230. For veterans, see Dixon Wecker, *When Johnny Comes Marching Home* (Boston, 1944); Wallace Evan Davies, *Patriotism on Parade: The Story of Veterans and Hereditary Organizations in America, 1783–1900* (Cambridge, Mass., 1955); and Donald J. Liso, *The President and Protest: Hoover, Conspiracy, and the Bonus Riot* (Columbia, Mo., 1974).

¹⁷ For American prisoners in the Korean War, see Albert D. Biderman, *March to Calumny: The Story of American POW's in the Korean War* (New York, 1963); and H. H. Wubben, "American Prisoners of War in Korea: A Second Look at the 'Something New in History' Theme," *American Quarterly*, 22 (1970): 3–19. For misrepresentations about Vietnam War veterans, see Jack Ladinsky, "Vietnam, the Veterans, and the Veterans Administration," *Armed Forces and Society*, 2 (1976): 435–67. And, for an example of negative generalizing over all of American history, see John Laffin, *Americans in Battle* (New York, 1973).

ally of courage; always of leadership, usually of obedience; always of compulsion, sometimes of insubordination; always of anxiety, sometimes of elation or catharsis; always of uncertainty and doubt, misinformation and misapprehension, usually also of faith and sometimes of vision; always of violence, sometimes also of cruelty, self-sacrifice, compassion; above all, it is always a study of solidarity and usually also of disintegration—for it is toward the disintegration of human groups that battle is directed.” Yet Keegan also insisted that battle belonged “to finite moments in history” and that its character depended heavily on the nature of the war, on the technology of the day, on the economies and societies of the opposing nations, on the armies, and even on the weather and the ground.¹⁸ In short, battle possesses a history of its own, an evolution over time that defines its dimensions and character.

Since battle has varied over hundreds of years, no single phenomenon could possibly explain the motives of soldiers, no matter how universal the emotions Keegan described. And yet many scholars have treated battle as a constant—have searched, with little regard for time and place, for the factors that explain why men fight. They have compared German soldiers in the latter stages of World War II with American soldiers in that war, and both of those with Americans in Korea and in Vietnam. Without doubt the phenomenon of primary group cohesion has, to some extent, been universal. Augustus Myers recalled that in the Civil War “the fear of the contempt of his comrades” was “even more powerful a factor than discipline in keeping a timid or nerveless soldier in the ranks during a battle.”¹⁹ In Vietnam, however, rotation loosened the ties of the unit by promising relief once the tour was over. One scholar has even argued that what sustained men in Southeast Asia was the understanding that only through collective action and cooperation could each individual hope to survive. The problem has been that the literature on primary group cohesion has never clearly shown whether solidarity with the group acted as a psychological prop to bolster men to endure the stress or as a motivation to carry out the mission and perform effectively in battle—or both. The same men in World War II who were supposedly welded together by the dynamics of the group were found by S. L. A. Marshall to have possessed an astonishingly poor frequency of firing their weapons at the enemy.²⁰

Perhaps the main reason for the inordinate focus on universal generalization has been that most of the literature has never sought to understand American soldiers in their own right. One category of study has aimed to celebrate or elucidate American character, another to establish ethnic or regional loyalty, a

¹⁸ Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, 297–98.

¹⁹ Myers, *Ten Years in the Ranks*, 254. For an example of attempting to extend modern sociological findings backwards, see Pete Maslowski, “A Study of Morale in Civil War Soldiers,” *Military Affairs*, 24 (1970): 122–26.

²⁰ See Moskos, *The American Enlisted Man*, 135, 144–46; John H. Faris, “An Alternative Perspective to Savage and Gabriel,” *Armed Forces and Society*, 3 (1977): 458–59; and Frederick J. Kiviv, “Survival in Combat as a Collective Exchange Process,” *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, 6 (1978): 219–32. Caputo noted a real difference in solidarity between the first Vietnam War marine battalions, in which the men enlisted, trained, and entered combat together in 1965, and later units, which operated under the rotation system; *A Rumor of War*, 32, 136–37, 155, 162–63.

third to criticize the government or its policies, usually by invidious comparison to past practice or success. For all of these purposes, writers of necessity lumped together wars and centuries, for bravery or cowardice could never be demonstrated convincingly except over a large span of American history. Much of the literature, in addition, has come from social scientists bent not necessarily on understanding soldiers but on advancing scholarly methodology, or serving the government in its practice of “human engineering,” as psychologist Robert M. Yerkes called manpower policy in 1941.²¹ In 1840 the surgeon general of the army collected statistics on sickness in order to improve health practices in the service.²² After the Civil War both the U.S. Sanitary Commission and the Provost-Marshall-General’s Office published compilations of the physical and sociological characteristics of recruits and draftees to provide information about the American population.²³ The most famous study ever done on American enlisted men, the 1949 multi-volume classic, *The American Soldier*, based on extensive interviews with the troops during World War II and the product of sophisticated analysis by a team of outstanding scholars, was promoted by its publisher and acknowledged by its authors primarily for its breakthrough in social scientific method and for its revelations about human behavior, not for its information about military life or soldiering.²⁴ The 1970 presidential commission on an all-volunteer armed force operated under a charge by the president not to study soldiers but “to develop a comprehensive plan for eliminating conscription and moving toward an all-volunteer Armed Force.”²⁵ Virtually the entire literature on the volunteer army debate of the last decade and a half has treated the American soldier as an object, a unit of labor, an “asset” without humanity in any historical sense.²⁶ Even as solid a study as *The Ineffective Soldier*, by scholars

²¹ Yerkes, “Man-Power and Military Effectiveness: The Case for Human Engineering,” *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 5 (1941): 205–09.

²² Thomas Lawson, *Statistical Report on the Sickness and Mortality in the Army of the United States . . . from January, 1819, to January, 1839* (Washington, 1840), title page, ii–iv, 5, 43.

²³ Gould, *Investigations in the Military*, vi, *passim*; and Baxter, *Statistics, Medical and Anthropological*, i, iii, vii, *passim*.

²⁴ Samuel A. Stouffer, “Some Afterthoughts of a Contributor to ‘The American Soldier,’” and Daniel Lerner, “The American Soldier and the Public,” in Robert K. Merton and Paul F. Lazarsfeld, eds., *Studies in the Scope and Method of “The American Soldier”* (Glencoe, Ill., 1950), 9, 10, 198, 200–01, 216–19, 232–33; and Robert S. Lynd, “The Science of Inhuman Relations,” *New Republic*, August 29, 1949, pp. 22–25.

²⁵ [Thomas Gates et al.] *The Report of the President’s Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force* (Washington, 1970), vii, 6–7. The bias of the commission was also revealed in the *Studies Prepared for the President’s Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force*, 2 vols. (Washington, 1970). For the arguments over the all-volunteer army and the background of the Gates Commission, see Gus C. Lee and Geoffrey Y. Parker, *Ending the Draft—The Story of the All Volunteer Force, HumRRO Final Report 77-1* (Alexandria, Va., 1977), 24–60.

²⁶ Charles C. Moskos, Jr., noted the dominance of economic models; see his “Statement . . .,” *Status of the All-Volunteer Armed Force: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Manpower and Personnel of the Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate*, 95th Cong., 2d session, June 20, 1978 (Washington, 1978), 38, 41, 47–48. The all-volunteer army debate began in the mid-1960s and focused first on the inequities of the draft, then later in the decade more on the feasibility of adequately manning such a force. Once the draft ended and acceptable force levels seemed at least a possibility, emphasis seemed to shift more to the composition and the quality of the soldiers of an all-volunteer army. Arguments over attracting volunteers and over their fitness for service were those most clearly slanted toward the soldier as a unit of labor. Very little of the literature provided any historical background or perspective, and, significantly, much of it used selected (and often distorted) historical facts to buttress policy recommendations. For good examples of such flaws, see [Gates] *Report of the President’s Commission*, 5–6, 14, 130–31, and John L. Rafuse, “United States’ Experience with Volunteer and Conscript Forces,” in *Studies Prepared for the President’s Commission*, 3.1: 1–46. Naturally, the Gates Commission argued that the all-volunteer principle was traditional. Ironically, the Selective Service, trying to justify permanent peacetime

comprising the Columbia Conservation of Human Resources Project in the 1950s, endeavored chiefly to broaden “knowledge about the nation’s human resources” for “better development and utilization of this most valuable resource.”²⁷

Most of these works possess great value for scholars, and in the last few years some excellent histories of enlisted men have come forth. For example, the army on the nineteenth-century frontier has been thoroughly reconstructed, down to specific studies of the black units and of the women and children who accompanied the men out West.²⁸ Yet our knowledge remains piecemeal, tiny in proportion to the vastness of the subject; and, because of the drive for generalization and neglect of change over time, we have hardly begun to address the more difficult—and most revealing—issues raised by military service.

IT IS TIME FOR HISTORIANS to take a fresh look at the American soldier; for too long, political and policy concerns have dictated the very categories of inquiry. As we begin, we need to remind ourselves that the past in many respects did not resemble the present, that youth, battle, warfare, and enlisted life may have changed significantly since the seventeenth century. We ought also to cast a suspicious eye on old assumptions—for example, that military institutions reflect society. The army never reflected American society, unless a centralized, stratified, cohesive, authoritarian institution that has stressed obedience and sacrifice can reflect a decentralized, heterogeneous, individualistic, democratic, capitalist society. If our military forces at any given time have reflected American values and practices, it has only been in comparison to the forces of other nations or if measured against some sociological model of an ideal military organization. We should remember that there have been many different military forces in our history, most of which changed over the course of their existence, and rarely, if ever, comprised a representative cross-section of the American population. Peacetime constabularies and wartime armies have been organized for very different purposes and have been manned by very different types of individuals. Sometimes, the composition of forces differed radically; for a single Indian war in the early 1790s, the government raised three separate armies made up of mixtures of militia, militia substitutes, six-month volunteers, thirty-day volunteer cavalry, and regulars. Some services or units, like the navy and air corps, have purposely drawn on more educated and skilled groups. And through our history officers have almost always come from the wealthier or better educated segments of society, and at the other extreme large numbers of Americans have of-

conscription after World War II, argued that compulsion was both traditional and most consonant with American political ideals. See U.S. Selective Service, *A Historical Review of Citizen Compulsion in the Raising of Armies*, Backgrounds of Selective Service, Special Monograph no. 1 (Washington, 1947).

²⁷ Eli Ginzberg *et al.*, *The Ineffective Soldier: Lessons for Management and the Nation*, 3 vols. (New York, 1959), 3: 9. Also see *ibid.*, 1: vii–x, xvii–xx, 1–2, and 3: xvii–xix, 3–5, 8–13, 23–24.

²⁸ For the nineteenth-century army, see the works cited in notes 10–11, pages 557–58, above; and Patricia Y. Stallard, *Glittering Misery: Dependents of the Indian Fighting Army* (San Rafael, Calif., 1978).

ten been excluded by reason of race or for physical, mental, or moral deficiency.²⁹

In essence, the task will be to construct a history of military service in the United States. Once the experience of service returns to the proper context of time and place, the American soldier will begin to gain an understandable identity. At least three lines of inquiry need to be pursued, each of which will require the same methods, and the same sensitivity and imagination, that historians now apply to the study of other groups of the “inarticulate,” or nonelite masses. Soldiers fortunately have been most articulate. Because they usually left home, they often wrote letters or kept diaries to remember an experience that was so important and so unusual in their lives. A few wrote memoirs or autobiographies. But historians have relied too heavily on the rich literary record, forgetting that the literate few and their perceptions may not have been representative. To recapture the great multitude there exists another documentary record: the mass of enlistment papers, muster rolls, returns, payrolls, court-martial records, hospital rolls, pension files, unit books, personnel files, administrative reports, correspondence, and other materials about military service in the National Archives and in some state archives and private manuscript repositories.³⁰ To use these sources scholars must bridge the traditional boundaries between military history and other professional specialties and use the tools of other disciplines.

First, historians must discover who served, who enlisted in a community and who did not, whom the draft caught and who escaped: their age, ethnic background, wealth, occupation, length of time in the community, and whatever additional information can be gathered or wrung indirectly out of the sources. Except for a few case studies, this basic spadework has never been done, and, until it is, any theories or generalizations about soldiers will not be persuasive. Further, understanding the true identity of the soldiers means grounding them in the communities and times in which they lived. From the profusion of community studies, historical geographies, studies of ethnic groups and urban neighborhoods and industrializing towns that has poured forth in recent years and from older local histories, scholars can begin, for a particular age or group of enlisted men, to establish a benchmark from which to trace the nature and impact of

²⁹ For various armies, see Mark E. Lender, “The Mind of the Rank and File: Patriotism and Motivation in the Continental Line,” in William C. Wright, ed., *New Jersey in the American Revolution III: Papers Presented at the Seventh Annual New Jersey History Symposium . . .* (Trenton, N.J., 1976), 22–25, and “The Enlisted Line,” viii, chap. 3; Richard H. Kohn, *Eagle and Sword: The Federalists and the Creation of the Military Establishment in America, 1783–1802* (New York, 1975), chaps. 6, 8; Wiley, *The Life of Johnny Reb*, 123–27, and *The Life of Billy Yank*, 343–44; Baldwin, “The American Enlisted Man in World War I,” 85; and Palmer et al., *Procurement and Training of Ground Combat Troops*, 14–86. One good example of denial of service occurred in the Spanish American War, when the flood of men enabled the regular army to reject three out of four volunteers; Gerald F. Linderman, *The Mirror of War: American Society and the Spanish American War* (Ann Arbor, 1974), 61–64.

³⁰ See the *Guide to the National Archives of the United States* (Washington, 1974). For an excellent example of the range of sources available, published and in manuscript, for one war, see J. Todd White and Charles H. Lesser, eds., *Fighters for Independence: A Guide to Sources of Biographical Information on Soldiers and Sailors of the American Revolution* (Chicago, 1977).

military service.³¹ The conditions of childhood and youth and the history of education also deserve attention, for how children have been raised and taught, disciplined or neglected, and supported or sent out into the work force undoubtedly affected their adaptation to military life. Perhaps the substitution in the twentieth century of separate basic training for training in the regiment stemmed as much from the creation of the “adolescence” stage in youth and the onset of a youth culture removed from the adult world as from the need for military efficiency or the demands of military technology.³² The treatment of youth might have varied by region or ethnic background, affecting soldier behavior. Historians must find all of this out. In addition, they ought to study the world of work and leisure that has begun recently to attract scholarly attention. In the end, how young men integrated into the military and how they behaved in camp and field undoubtedly depended on the culture and values they brought with them.³³ Without knowing the specific worlds they left, scholars cannot fully comprehend American enlisted men beyond the stereotypes offered up by observers since the time of von Steuben and de Tocqueville.

Second, historians must undertake a new look at military service itself by reconstructing the life and environment of the enlisted man in much greater detail and depth than has ever before been attempted. The method could be that of the *Annales* school of French historiography. *Annales* historians pursue a “total” history: the recreation of the entire world of an age or group, the totality of life, through a consideration of climate, geography, vital statistics of the life cycle, migration, architecture, economic activity, and all of the myriad facets of life in the past.³⁴ By first asking the most basic descriptive questions and using the methods of other disciplines, military historians can recover the fullness of the military experience. Initial research might concentrate on the assumptions that the military has brought to the acquisition, training, and government of

³¹ Historians might wish, for example, to study a group of soldiers, sailors, volunteers, or militiamen from a particular area or town for which a demographical, geographical, or sociological study has already been done. The alternative is to reconstruct the needed elements of wealth, social structure, mobility, and the like, as Mark Lender has partially done for “The Enlisted Line.”

³² The following were suggestive along these lines: Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York, 1977); John R. Gillis, *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations, 1770–Present* (New York, 1974); and Joseph F. Kett, *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America, 1790 to the Present* (New York, 1977).

³³ For a similar point, see Eric J. Leed, *No Man’s Land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge, 1979), 8–14. For an excellent study of the linkage between the civilian world and military service, see Linderman, *The Mirror of War*, chaps. 3–4. And, for a brief, but very suggestive, example of how the total reconstruction of life in a region or community can illuminate the study of enlisted men and suggest ways military service affected the men, see Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870–1914* (Stanford, 1976). In a short chapter entitled “Migration of Another Sort: Military Service,” Weber has argued that “the Army turned out to be an agency for emigration, acculturation, and in the final analysis, civilization, an agency as potent in its way as the schools”; *ibid.*, 302. Weber’s suggestive discussion emphasizes some of the differences between life in service and the peasant civilian world.

³⁴ My understanding of the *Annales* school comes essentially from Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*, trans. Siân Reynolds, 2 vols. (2d French ed., 1966; New York, 1972), *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400–1800*, trans. Miriam Kochan (1967; New York, 1973), and “Personal Testimony,” *Journal of Modern History*, 44 (1972): 448–67; H. R. Trevor-Roper, “Fernand Braudel, the *Annales*, and the Mediterranean,” *ibid.*, 468–79; J. H. Hexter, “Fernand Braudel and the *Monde Braudellien* . . .,” *ibid.*, 480–539; and Trián Stoianovich, *French Historical Method: The Annales Paradigm* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1976).

soldiers, then the regulations of armies and navies, the uniforms and the equipment, the drill and fatigue duty—in short, the minutiae of military life in its entirety. Using such an approach as well as sources long extant but rarely used for this purpose, historians could create so realistically the physical and mental world of the enlisted man that the time-honored reliance on literary sources and on the artistry of fiction could be diminished. Startling new material might emerge on such topics as the large and important role of women in military organization and war before the twentieth century.³⁵ Scholars will need to know not only the traditional areas of what soldiers thought about war, their comrades and officers, the government, service life, and the world around them, but how they thought and behaved, especially in comparison to others of their time and background outside the military.³⁶ Historians might also borrow insights from the approach of anthropology and sociobiology, not only for the study of cohesion in combat but also for older areas of concern such as training and officer-enlisted relationships.³⁷ Another and more complete look at military service will permit testing long-held notions about military isolation from American life and the reciprocal effect of the military on Americans and they on the character of our military institutions.³⁸

The interaction between the military and the rest of society should form a third category of research. Historians might begin with the exit of soldiers from their communities, how the process of providing men and their leaving affected local life. The absence of the men, the burial of the dead, and the return of the wounded also deserve attention, for how a town or region did or did not adjust to the losses or embrace the sick and maimed could reveal much about war and American culture. For this purpose, the role and behavior of women—especially in areas where large numbers of men left—will be crucial. The re-entry of veterans must also be examined to learn the impact of service and homecoming: the changes in the status of veterans compared to those who did not serve, adjust-

³⁵ Linda Grant De Pauw, "Women in Combat: The Revolutionary War Experience," *Armed Forces and Society*, 7 (1981): 209–26. Also see John Todd White, "The Truth about Molly Pitcher," in James Kirby Martin and Karen R. Stubaes, eds., *The American Revolution: Whose Revolution?* (Huntington, N.Y., 1977), 99–105.

³⁶ A large body of sources that historians have not exploited are medical records, such as the statistics of disease and disability, and, for the twentieth century, psychiatric records. See, for example, for World War I, Elmer E. Southard, *Shell-Shock and Other Neuropsychiatric Problems Presented in Five Hundred and Eighty-Nine Case Histories from the War Literature, 1914–1918* (Boston, 1919); and U.S. Surgeon General's Office, *Neuropsychiatry in the United States, in the American Expeditionary Forces, The Medical Department of the United States Army in the World War*, 10 (Washington, 1929).

³⁷ Without either endorsing or rejecting the assumptions, conclusions, and claims of sociobiology, I nonetheless believe historians of enlisted men, particularly those interested in behavior in battle, would benefit from the questions and style of analysis of the field, especially the emphasis on male relationships, aggression, and altruism. For the approach from sociology and anthropology, see Lionel Tiger, *Men in Groups* (New York, 1969); and Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox, *The Imperial Animal* (1971; reprint ed., New York, 1974). For the approach from the sciences, see Edward O. Wilson, *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis* (Cambridge, Mass., 1975), particularly chaps. 1, 2, 5, 11, 27, and *On Human Nature* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978); and N. Tinbergen, "On War and Peace in Animals and Man," *Science*, 160 (1968): 1411–18. For a briefer introduction, see D. P. Barash, *Sociobiology and Behavior* (New York, 1977); and, for a good compilation of the controversy over the field, see Arthur L. Caplan, *The Sociobiology Debate: Readings on the Ethical and Scientific Issues concerning Sociobiology* (New York, 1978). For a wise and perceptive review, see the late Charles Frankel's "Sociobiology & Its Critics," *Commentary*, July 1979, pp. 39–47.

³⁸ The isolation theme has undoubtedly been overemphasized. See, for example, John M. Gates, "The Alleged Isolation of US Army Officers in the Late 19th Century," *Parameters*, September 1980, pp. 32–45.

ments in social structure or political life, the importance of veterans' organizations, the geographic as well as economic mobility of veteran populations, and the like. In every instance scholars should investigate government policy, particularly its effects, for increasingly through American history, national and state benefits for veterans—from bounty lands in the Revolution to Civil War pensions to educational grants and employment preferences for the soldiers of World War II—shaped American society.³⁹

Certainly no single scholar will be able to create a complete portrait of the American soldier; such a history will probably emerge gradually from the work of many, each of whom may choose to focus on one or several aspects of what promises to be a very wide area of inquiry. Nor should military historians necessarily dominate in this quest, for, although the focus may rest on military subjects, the research and the knowledge to be gained ranges far away from what has traditionally been considered “military history.” Social historians have much to gain from such rich records and also much to learn, for military service resides properly within the broader history of American society and may reveal much about nonmilitary subjects.⁴⁰ Beginnings, of course, have been made and research is going forward. But until the outlines of a history emphasizing change over time become clear, a crucial portion of the American past will remain hidden, the subject perhaps no longer of old myths but the subject, equally dangerous, of shaky generalizations based on limited case studies. After so much time, and so many books, the great difficulty will be avoiding those generalizations.⁴¹

Until we, as historians, abandon both our stereotypes and our propensity to think in terms of stereotypes, the American enlisted man will remain as anonymous as the unknown soldier in the tomb at Arlington National Cemetery. For reasons of state, the tomb will continue to serve as a symbol of sacrifice and the gratitude of a nation. For the historical profession, however, the unknown soldier poses a special challenge: a sound, impartial rendering of the past.

³⁹ There is, of course, a large literature on veterans, veterans' organizations, and demobilization, almost none of which focuses in any depth or detail on a specific group of men or local communities.

⁴⁰ For an example suggesting such possibilities, see Roger Norman Buckley, *Slaves in Red Coats: The British West India Regiments, 1795–1815* (New Haven, 1979).

⁴¹ The best general review of the literature on the American soldier is Karsten, *Soldiers and Society*, 3–48. Karsten, however, arranged his source readings topically and argued by implication for generalization across time: “I was struck by the degree to which the experiences and attitudes of eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century American soldiers were more alike than they were different. . . . there were differences But on balance, the differences appear (to me, at least) to be less significant than the similarities.” *Ibid.*, 12. I disagree, particularly on the methodological grounds argued in this essay.