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The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War

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last chapter the authors state that the aircraft did not even have a UHF radio. If this is the case, then the question should have been why U.S. forces did not know that planes flown by our "allies" did not have UHF capability.

Both authors are attorneys, and the chapters describing the investigation and legal proceedings benefit greatly from their expertise. Edwards has over twenty years of military experience in the active and reserve Marine Corps, as is clearly evident in his ability to place events in their proper context. All legal terms are clearly explained so that a layman may follow the proceedings without difficulty. Levison and Edwards also spell out every Navy acronym. Unfortunately, in many cases the words behind the acronyms are not enough to convey to someone without recent Navy experience what the term means. A glossary would have made the book accessible to a wider range of readers.

Missile Inbound presents its story in a manner sympathetic to the officers of the *Stark* while maintaining overall loyalty to the concept of accountability. The authors question whether any other ship would have done better in the same circumstances. The *Stark* incident challenges anyone interested in national security: how well will units untested in actual combat perform in the first minutes of battle? How do we know when training has been sufficient? In peacetime, how does one choose officers who will be effective in combat? While *Missile Inbound* does not answer these questions, it provides interesting material for the debate.

LILLIAN A. BURKE
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(We note with sadness Lieutenant
Burke's passing on 2 May 1998.)

Hynes, Samuel. *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War*. New York: Penguin, 1997. 318pp. \$24.95

Based on a series of lectures given by Samuel Hynes at the University of Toronto in 1994, this book is an extended rumination on twentieth-century war memoirs. The author's stated purpose is to understand what war is actually like by studying the stories of veterans about their wartime experiences. He contends that because wars exact such great costs from society, it has been deemed necessary to surround them with "myths." These myths are not untruths, he writes, but rather simplified narratives that have evolved from war to give it meaning. There are "bad," "good," and "necessary" wars; nonetheless, and however politically necessary they may be in justifying war's terrible costs, these myths obscure its grim realities—realities found only in personal narratives. Hynes believes that by setting these personal narratives against the myths of war we can learn the whole story, not just what is politically acceptable.

However, in his search to discover what war is really like (not just the "war in the head" we imagine), the author faced considerable obstacles. For one, he concedes that war narratives are ultimately contradictory. Indeed, some say that war is an unmitigated disaster, others that it is an experience not to be missed. Another problem is that most veterans are emphatic that the experience cannot be communicated—if you

were not there, you cannot understand. (There is, of course, an element of irony in this stance; why write about an event that cannot be communicated?) Yet despite the lack of agreement about the nature of wartime experience and the consensus that the experience, in any case, cannot be communicated, Hynes maintains that reading such works are indispensable, because they bring us closer to understanding what war is really like.

Hynes brings impressive credentials to the book, as a Marine pilot in World War II, the author of a number of books on war and literature, and a former professor of literature at Swarthmore College, Northwestern University, and Princeton University. His military experience affords him an insider's insight into war, while his scholarly background equips him to judge the literary merits of war narratives and to render his judgments in a fine prose style. In short, Hynes possesses a sharp eye for detail, a good ear for authenticity, and the ability to communicate in an authoritative and engaging fashion.

The book's six chapters examine, in order: World Wars I and II, "which made modern war global and technological and democratic"; Vietnam, "which changed the way Americans thought about their nation in the world"; and what Hynes considers the undeclared war waged in this century against the weak—prisoners of war, victims of the Holocaust, and Japanese civilians in Hiroshima during the atomic bomb attack. According to Hynes, each of the above is a myth-making conflict that has shaped our understanding of the meaning of war.

The book begins slowly. Despite Hynes's knowledge of World War I, his treatment of that war is relatively uninspired. There are few memorable lines, save for the quotes, and his examination is more descriptive than analytical. Given the historical richness and complexity of World War I and Hynes's considerable credentials, his handling of it is somewhat disappointing.

Fortunately, the book picks up steam as it goes along; each chapter is better than the one preceding it. Hynes's writing becomes more passionate and his analysis cuts deeper.

In the chapter on the Second World War, Hynes argues that the men who fought in it had read, and were powerfully influenced by, the canonical literature of World War I. Ironically, the "antiwar" myth created by that literature had fostered among its readers a new kind of romanticism about war. As a result, the World War II generation of soldiers was as enamored of, as much as appalled by, the carnage described in these books. Hynes argues that deep down these men, who were coming into manhood in the late 1930s, longed to fight their own war rather than experience it vicariously.

The chapter on the Vietnam War is perhaps the most emotionally charged in the book. Hynes clearly has strong feelings about it and makes no attempt to hide them. He states that Vietnam brought new voices to the genre of war literature. In previous wars of the twentieth century the most notable memoirs had been written by members of the middle class. Vietnam broke this pattern. This war was largely fought and recorded by America's poor, unemployed, urban youth. Culturally and

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socially distinct from earlier generations of soldiers, Vietnam veterans changed the vocabulary of war memoirs. They introduced into the genre a more prominent role for sex and a coarseness of language heretofore mostly absent. Hynes also notes the direct influence of music on U.S. soldiers in Vietnam. Rock and roll was the voice of this generation of soldiers, and their music's defiant antiestablishment, and often antiwar, stance is a constant undercurrent throughout most of the narratives. Indeed, Hynes finds that Vietnam memoirs are uniquely filled with bitterness and humiliation.

An unexpected treat is the chapter on victims of war who are routinely forgotten in standard histories of armed conflict. The author makes a compelling case that these individuals' experiences are just as valuable to our understanding of war as those of soldiers in the thick of battle. We learn in their writings much, for example, about the psychology of prisoners of war: how they view themselves, how they view each other, and how they are viewed by their captors. The sections on the survivors of the Holocaust and of the atomic bomb at Hiroshima are also fascinating. They offer gripping accounts of merely surviving in the face of unbelievable horrors.

One useful category of individuals left out of the book is war correspondents. The members of the Fourth Estate make a brief appearance in the chapter on Vietnam, but only to illustrate America's growing disillusionment with the conflict. Their absence from the book is unfortunate. They are distinct from the other groups represented here, as noncombatants who voluntarily place themselves on the

frontlines; yet like the groups represented in the book, journalists have experienced the blasts of war, and many have lost their lives as a result of it (the legendary Ernie Pyle comes to mind). Their inclusion would have offered the perspective of trained observers duty bound to report events as accurately as possible.

Another shortcoming of the book, albeit minor, is the lack of subheadings. The text moves through various topics with no breaks, save for additional space between certain paragraphs. Had the author instead used more prominent visual clues and made more of an effort to divide the chapters into sections, he would have imposed greater order on the text and made it easier to read and understand.

The book's positives far outweigh its negatives. Hynes has sifted through a large set of war memoirs and come up with a gem of a book. *The Soldiers' Tale* is a judicious, entertaining, and sure-handed examination of wartime experience through the prism of twentieth-century war narratives. This book deserves the attention of those who wish to understand war beyond tactics, battles, campaigns, and high policy by confronting the voice of raw experience.

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Knott, Richard A. *A Heritage of Wings: An Illustrated History of Naval Aviation*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1997. 339pp. \$49.95

Interesting and informative, this book offers a well written introduction to