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ENG 4300-4390-001-099: War Stories

John Kilgore
Eastern Illinois University

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English 4900:
War Stories
Fall, 2009
Dr. Kilgore
TR 8:00, CH 3159

General Information

COURSE DESCRIPTION: A study of war itself and of ways that stories, plays, poems, and films have interpreted it to us. Assignments include a mid-term, a term paper, and a final. The term paper will entail a brief class presentation and a round of workshop. For a fuller description, see the English Department course description booklet.

INSTRUCTOR: John Kilgore. Office: 3331 Coleman Hall. Hours: TR 3:30-5:00, F 1-3, and by arrangement. Phone: (217) 581-6313 (office); (217) 345-7395 (home). E-mail: jdkilgore@eiu.edu. Please feel free to call my home at reasonable hours.

Feel free to e-mail me, even with fairly complex questions and chunks of papers-in-progress. If I don't have time to answer, I'll say so.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

- Assigned readings
- Attendance and participation, 10%
- Mid-term exam, 15%
- Term Paper, 45% as follows:
  o Proposal, 5%
  o Draft, 10%
  o Final Version, 30%
- Final Exam, 30%, as follows:
  o Take-home portion, 15%
  o In-class portion, 15%
I reserve the right to depart somewhat from these percentages.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

- War Poems (handout)
- Azar Gat, "Evolutionary Theory and the Causes of Hunter-Gatherer Fighting" (online; also handout)
- Homer, The Iliad, trans. Stanley Lombardo
- Grossman, On Killing
- Shakespeare, Henry IV, Part One; Henry V
- Shaara, Michael, The Killer Angels
- London, Call of the Wild
- Wells, The War of the Worlds
- Remarque, All Quiet on the Western Front
- Hemingway, The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway
- Fussell, ed., The Norton Book of Modern War (NBW)
- O'Brien, The Things They Carried
- Two movies: Full Metal Jacket and Patton

ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION. Will count approximately 10% of your grade in the course. Beginning with the first meeting, I will pass around an attendance sheet which you must sign. At the end of the term, I will assign a participation grade according to the following scale: 3 absences — A; 4 absences — B; 5 absences — C; 6 absences — D; 7 absences — F; more than 7 — further, proportional declines in your course grade (your attendance grade becomes a negative number, and your chances of passing the course rapidly dwindle). I will raise the basic grade a bit if I think your contributions to class discussion have been especially good.

Note that you have three "free" absences. Use these if you have to, but otherwise keep them as insurance. I will listen sympathetically to excuses, but I will not award attendance credit for any session which you have missed. But do contact me in case of truly exceptional circumstances.

A final note: Absences from workshop sessions will count double. The reason is to ensure that all class members get a full and clear response to their work from the class as a whole.

READINGS. Are diverse and fairly extensive. Try hard to read ahead early in the term, to make time for your research project and paper. In all cases be sure to complete readings before the class meeting in which they are discussed, as you will get little from the discussion otherwise. Note that the works assigned for the course include two movies. These will be screened partially in class.

TERM PAPER. By the end of Week 3, you must commit to a research area, which you will NOT be allowed to change. Choose an option from the list at the end of this syllabus; or, after reading the list, invent a topic of your own that seems similar in spirit and design. You MUST obtain approval for your project in either case, as no more than 2 students will be allowed to work on any given topic. The idea here (in addition to averting conflicts over research materials) is to let everyone take off in a different direction from our common class discussions, becoming especially knowledgeable in some particular, small area we have touched upon together.

The first draft of the term paper is due Tuesday, October 27 and counts for 10% of your grade in the course. Write the best, most polished paper you can manage and hand in
fourteen copies for workshop discussion in weeks 9-11. The class critique should be probing and rigorous and give you plenty of ideas for revision and improvement. The revised, probably somewhat longer final version of the paper is due Thursday, December 3, in just one copy. Suggested length for the term paper is about ten pages or 3000 words.

Though I will bow to custom in referring to this project as a "research paper," don't take the term too literally. I understand that you are not an expert (neither am I) and am not asking you to become one; I ask only that you go out and find a reasonable amount of information not already included in assigned readings, and that (this is the hard part) you then work the information into an argument of your own that remains substantially personal in tone and outlook. Another way of saying the same thing is that, in the small area you have defined for yourself, you need to become an authority compared to your classmates here. When you know enough to speak comfortably and usefully to the rest of us for 10 pages or so, your research is done — even though you will and should still have dozens of unanswered questions.

For most topics, you should take the syllabus as your point of departure and work hard to sustain the connection, aiming to deepen and extend our grasp of the texts and general issues we have been discussing. Imagine your classmates as your audience and write to them rather than to that intimidating abstraction, the Reader; but don't take informality too far. Define a clear thesis with (usually) a strong argumentative edge, and let your argument drive the research, rather than vice versa. A fairly small amount of extra reading should be sufficient if you can maintain a clear vision of what is necessary to your argument and what is useful or interesting to your audience.

Format. Since you will be submitting your first draft for group discussion, you must provide twelve copies. Copies cost money, so I take the unusual step of allowing you to use small fonts (11 or even 10 point—no smaller) and to single-space. But leave reasonable margins, and skip an extra space between paragraphs (following the format you see in front of you here). The final term paper should be double-spaced with 1" or 1.25" margins. Avoid covers, and make sure the bibliography (or "Works Cited") and notes (if any) are in some reasonable approximation of MLA format. Pages of both drafts must be numbered.

Style. The writer's standing assignment, to quote the late Martin Scott, is "to create something that is beautiful in some way." Revise and polish like a maniac. Aim to write the kind of paper that will be such a pleasure, not just for the information but for the pure delicious sound of it, that when you rediscover it in a box in the attic twenty years from now, you will stop whatever you are doing and re-read every word.

Workshop. The draft term papers, counted as required reading, will be distributed to the class, then discussed in some detail in Weeks 9-11, with about 20-30 minutes budgeted for each paper. Each author will read a portion of his or her paper, then listen quietly to classmates' reactions, then field questions.

Please prepare for our workshop sessions by reading your classmates' work carefully, annotating the copies you have been given and writing at least a brief terminal comment. After each paper is discussed, the annotated copies will be handed back to the author, hopefully to provide material assistance in the writing of the final version. In both your written comments and your questions during workshop, aim to help the author, but remember that "Opposition is true friendship." Spirited objections to a paper's argument may be the best help of all in sparking further development. Be cordial, but be candid.

Exams. The mid-term exam will be a take-home exercise, handed out in class Tuesday October 13, due back at the beginning of class on the 15th. Expect three to five essay questions, closely geared to texts we have discussed to that point. Expect to write four to six
pages, quickly. The final exam will include a take-home portion, very similar to the mid-term, but also an in-class portion that will be quite different, consisting of identifications, short answers, quotations, and multiple choice questions. The final will be comprehensive.

**Late work & misc.** The takehome exams are timed exercises and must be handed in on schedule, period, or they will be penalized one full grade for missing the initial deadline, then an additional full grade per 12 hours late. For the papers, get in touch with me as soon as you possibly can, and we may be able to work something out. Papers that are late without adequate excuse will be penalized one full grade for each calendar day of lateness and will receive no written commentary.

Please be aware that the penalty for plagiarism or cheating — which I trust I will not have to impose — is automatic failure of the course. See me if you have any questions about this policy.

I will be more than happy to make reasonable accommodations for any student with a documented disability. Please contact me if you will need such an accommodation; or call the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services, 581-6583.

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**Schedule**

Note: please try to read ahead. At a minimum, finish all readings by the day on which they will be discussed.

1) August 24-28

War poems (handout).
Gat, "Evolutionary Theory and the Causes of Hunter-Gatherer Fighting"
Begin reserving research topics.

2) August 31-September 4

*The Iliad.* Murnaghan’s Introduction, Lombardo’s Introduction, and Books 1, 6, 9, 19, 21-22.

3) September 7-11

Finish Homer.
Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part I*.

4) September 14-18

Shakespeare, *Henry V*.
Research proposal due on Thursday. Submit both hard copy and e-copy.

5) September 21-25

*Patton*
6) September 28-October 2

Shaara, *The Killer Angels*

7) October 5-8

London, *Call of the Wild*
Wells, *War of the Worlds*

8) October 12-16

Review and catch-up
Mid-term exam: handed out Tuesday, due Thursday.

9) October 19-23

3 term paper drafts due from volunteers

10) October 26-30

Draft of term paper due Tuesday
Workshop

11) November 2-6

Workshop

12) November 9-13


13) November 16-20

O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*

Thanksgiving Break, November 23-27

14) November 30-December 4

*Full Metal Jacket*

Term paper due Thursday. Submit both hard copy and e-copy.

15) December 7-11

Review and catch-up
Take-home portion of final handed out on Thursday
Final Exam: Monday, December 14, 8-10

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Guidelines for Term Paper, Due Tuesday, October 27 (draft) and Thursday, December 3 (final).

This will be a sort-of-research paper in which you combine the insights gained from outside reading with your individual reflections and observations on material included in the course syllabus. You will present an early version of the paper to the class in Week 8, then receive their critique and feedback in a workshop discussion. Then in Week 14, when the final version is due, an e-version will be posted to my website for the rest of the class to view. Keep this in mind. The experience of presenting your work to your peers can be surprisingly gratifying to you and profitable to them (assuming you have done a good job), and knowing that you will do so will help focus your energies as you work on the paper.

In most cases, the chief key to success will be to define a clear and reasonably-sized project which links some genuine interpretive question to factual, informational issues. The chief danger that menaces you at this point is that of defining your thesis and associated research in a way that commits you to learning and reading more than is possible within the tight framework of this course, this semester, your mortal lifetime. Accordingly, you will be required to propose your topic very soon — by September 17, in one or two pages.

The proposal should be more or less a shot in the dark, a statement not of what you know but of what you are interested in, what you incline to think so far, and what you would like to find out. Start by defining a question, e.g., "Why was the Vietnam War so controversial?" (A great question, I modestly think, which is why it is one of the suggested topics below.) Of course you don’t know the answer right now, but that’s the point of the proposal: it documents your present cluelessness so that five weeks from now, when you know appreciably more, you and I and the class will be able to see what you have learned. Not that you will have a final answer, by any means; but you will be far enough along to speak usefully, informatively, and with confidence to the rest of us, who have not been working on this particular question.

In addition to the general question you will be investigating, the proposal should discuss the kind of information you will seek and where you hope to find it. Try to do as much as you can, at this early stage, to nail down your reading plans into a workable plan of research. Don’t bother telling us, “I will log on to the Internet and see what’s there,” or "I will consult Wikipedia and the Encyclopedia Brittanica." This goes without saying. DO tell us, e.g., "I plan to read those sections of Robert McNamara’s 2005 memoir, The Fog of War, that deal with Vietnam." Of course you can’t always be so definite; but push in that direction.

Once you have defined a good general question, particular research objectives should begin to spill out of it like peas from a pod. To judge why Vietnam was so controversial, you will want to know something about draft riots in the American Civil War. You will be interested in analyses of press coverage in this "first televised war" and how it differed from that in other wars, e.g. World War II or the first Persian Gulf War. You will want to know something about the Tonkin Gulf Resolution and (by way of comparison) the Congressional Declaration of War that
inaugurated US participation in World War II. It may occur to you to get hold of some of Truman's speeches during the Korean War and some of Johnson's, then Nixon's, during Vietnam. You will remember Dave Grossman's argument that Vietnam was significantly more traumatic for the soldiers fighting it than either of the World Wars, and feel a need to see if this opinion is shared by other authorities.

At this point, quit likely, you will find yourself in a place I call Research Paper Hell. Suddenly, bewilderingly, your tidy project seems to have gotten completely out of hand. There are dozens of sources you want to consult. Even if you could get your hands on half of them (you can't), you don't have time to read them. You have three times as many of your “own” ideas (whatever that really means) as when you started, and aren’t sure which ones to pursue, which to leave out. The due-date is headed for you like an inbound asteroid. What do you do?

What you should do is, take a breath. Remember that you are not supposed to be an expert, that no one wants you to write in that voice of anonymous omniscience that makes textbooks so dull. Your audience is this class, not the professional scholars whose works you have been sampling. It’s the very nature of research to generate two new questions for every one that gets answered; but if you concentrate on what you do know rather than what you don’t (and now might be a great time to take another look at your proposal), you should find that it’s plenty. Remember, too, that this is also an interpretive paper, and may be primarily so if you so choose. “Research” and “interpretation” are the two poles of this project, and different papers will naturally gravitate more toward one or the other. That’s just fine. Even if the results of your research really are meager in themselves, an energetic and thorough critical argument can take up the slack.

Finally, then, there is just one way out of Research Paper Hell. Choose an evening well in advance of the due date. Sit down. Write the damned paper.

Some other guidelines, quickly:

- Have a clear thesis with an “argumentative edge,” just as in any other kind of essay.
- Remember your audience — your classmates and, to a lesser extent, me — and don't try to sound like a textbook. On the other hand, don't carry informality so far that it becomes distracting.
- Be lively, thoughtful, provocative, personal, energetic, rigorous, and daring.
- Constantly ask yourself about relevance: what you are arguing and how the information you have relates to the question. One of the ways in which research papers typically fail is by turning into “data dumps” of information not clearly related to anything. Don't ever “stick in” information just because you happen to have it.
- Spend a reasonable amount of time working up a preliminary bibliography, getting some sense of “what's out there,” before you settle down to read. But once you have invested time in an article or book, do everything you can to make use of it. That voice that says, “Well, you really should have read this other article” is, in most cases, your enemy.
- If you find an article that deals with exactly the question you have proposed, and does it learnedly and brilliantly, don’t panic, celebrate. You’ve found many of the answers you were looking for. The first part of your paper should be a careful appreciation and review of the wonderful article (and it better really be wonderful) you have found. Your problem then is to find some place for “you” in the paper, but chances are this won’t be all that difficult. By the time you’re done expounding Professor Ziggurat’s ideas, you’ll find you have all sorts of cavils and addenda that seem well worth elaborating.
- Give full credit to your sources. Talk about them directly, praise them, critique them, oppose them as appropriate. Let the reader see you finding the interesting extra

information and weaving it all together.

- Without being overly timid (or wordy), make judicious use of such phrases as "It seems," "apparently," "I believe," "my own conclusion," "in my reading to this point" — and, of course, the indispensable "I don't know."

- On your "Works Cited" page, include every source you have consulted in the writing of this paper, including those not directly cited. The point is to show all your research and get proper credit even for leads that haven't panned out. (But be honest: no sticking in works you haven't actually taken a look at.) Footnotes are probably unnecessary, since you will be using MLA internal citation format; if you have any notes, they will be discursive, not just bibliographical. Internet sources must have full URLs with date found included. Otherwise I won't be too much of a stickler for format; just be clear and consistent in presenting your sources.

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Sample Topics

The following are samples and suggestions only. Some possibilities have been sketched out in detail, while others are mere hints. Many, many other projects are possible, and you are quite free and welcome to propose your own if you prefer it to any of those listed below. No more than two students may work on any one topic among those proposed below. For all topics, try hard to establish and sustain a strong connection to readings on the syllabus.

1. How natural is war? Do we make war primarily due to historical and cultural factors (overpopulation, competition for resources, and a resulting history of warfare and the need to prepare for it, with preparedness itself becoming a causus belli), or because of instinctual factors (innate aggressiveness on both the individual and group level)? Don't feel you must settle this huge question once and for all, but collect and present evidence bearing on one side or the other. Take Azar Gat's essay as your starting point, then look at responses to him and at his sources. Try to relate your conclusions, whatever they are, to Grossman's thesis that killing is completely unnatural, accompanied always by powerful trauma on the part of the killer.

Some particular research areas you might want to consider:

- Primate studies. Do our nearest relatives in the animal kingdom engage in war or in warlike behavior? If so, that suggests that war is genetically programmed in us, too. Authors whose works you may want to look for: Jane Goodall, Judith Harris.
- Anthropological studies. Do preliterate, preindustrial societies tend to be warlike or peaceful? Find examples from around the world and from different eras.
- Testimonies to "the joy of war." Collect examples from both literature (starting with works on our syllabus!) and from nonfictional memoirs. If battle can be a thrilling, ecstatic experience, doesn't this argue that it is somehow natural and "right" for us? Relate the question specifically to works on the syllabus.
- Testimonies to the disgust, shame and trauma of war. If war so frequently leaves the soldier permanently traumatized, and if Grossman is right in arguing that the "myth of easy killing" is a cynical though partially unconscious lie, and that the average person finds it desperately difficult to kill — doesn't this argue that war is deeply unnatural and "wrong" for us? Isn't our detestation of war ipso facto evidence that it is unnatural?

2. Homer's Tactics. Finish reading the Iliad, then try to understand the nature of the combat Homer is depicting. How "true to life" do these battles seem? In terms of weaponry used,
tactics employed, casualties suffered, conventions observed, and so on, how well does Homer’s account correspond to what is known historically about warfare in this time and place (the west coast of Asia Minor in the second millennium BC)? How consistent does his description of tactics seem? Has he possibly superimposed the tactics of different eras? The topic is huge and elusive, though fascinating. You will probably need to be content with partial, tentative, carefully limited conclusions, unless you hit paydirt with an authoritative article that addresses just these questions.

3. **Sport and war: Homer’s heroes as jocks.** Finish reading *The Iliad*, then do some shrewd searching through such publications as *Sports Illustrated*, looking for behaviors and attitudes which parallel those of Achilles and the other warriors. To what extent does the modern sports hero seem to occupy a niche — and display values and behaviors — that seem similar to those of the ancient warrior? Can the service performed by the athlete be compared to that of the war hero? Can the monumental self-absorption of (let’s say) an A. Terrell Owens or a Mike Tyson be usefully paralleled to the vain-glory of Achilles? How does the logic of conflict tend to bring out such qualities in men? At what point does the analogy break down?

4. **Homer’s Women.** Finish reading the *Iliad*, then look through the critical literature for interesting discussions of the role of women in the epic, then arrive at conclusions of your own. In a work dominated by the voices of men, what distinctive note do the voices of Andromache and Helen add? What can be inferred about the attitudes of Briseis, Helen, and even Andromache toward their status, shocking to a modern reader, as prizes of war? Is a degree of feminist sensibility implicit in the work?

5. **History and Romance in [any work from our syllabus].** Choose one or two works on the syllabus that especially interest you, then learn all you can about the factual history of the conflict being presented. Then comment in details on ways that the literary work either faithfully reflects or significantly alters the historical reality, trying to see what you can make of the overall pattern. Does the literary fiction mask the truth about war, or try to bring out a higher truth that might escape the net of mere factual accuracy — or both?

6. **Women soldiers.** What role is appropriate for women in the modern U.S. military? Start by learning in some detail what the current policies for women’s participation are in one of the four branches of our military — and how well those policies seem to be working. Then take a position and defend it against counter-arguments. If, for instance, you advocate female participation in the infantry, what is it about the current rationale for excluding them that you find insufficient? If you oppose any expansion of women’s role, why do you think women could not do what men have always done? Does it seem likely to you that women infantry could bear up as well as men — or better than men — under the kinds of psychological stresses Grossman analyzes? And what of Gat’s point that young men are natural risk-takers while women are not? Doesn’t this imply that women are simply too meek, timid, and sensitive to make good soldiers? Will they fight suicidally, as men have often done?

Note that women’s participation in war, historically, has been quite limited, and that there must have been some reasons for this; depending on your position, you will want to say either that those reasons remain valid, or that they no longer are if they ever were. Remember that the ultimate issue here should not be "What is fair to the soldier?" but "What will give us the most effective military?" A hot-button topic for people who thrive on intellectual combat.

7. **Arms and Strategy in Shakespeare.** The class will touch upon the substantial lack of basic realism in Shakespeare’s renderings of the battles of Shrewsbury and Agincourt. For example, he makes no mention at all of the weapon that was overwhelmingly decisive in both
engagements, while assigning central roles to weapons not even used, and we will wonder why this should be. Make this issue your own. Find out as much as you can about the arms and tactics in these battles, then study and ponder Shakespeare’s departures. Has any scholar zeroed in as yet on his depictions of arms? If so, the book or article might be a gold mine for you.

Some questions that you should ponder in any case: To what extent does Shakespeare’s omission or reinvention of the bald facts of history seem necessary and artistically valid? Is his vision of the way combat unfolds, often “untrue” in the simplest sense, true in some larger artistic sense? Or is something essential lost? Is part of the problem that he is working from imperfect sources, and writing long after the battles he has dramatized? You may want to pursue your question beyond the bounds of just these two plays, to other of Shakespeare’s works that include battles — but there is plenty to work with here, both in terms of fascinating research waiting to be done and important interpretive questions to be wrestled with.

8. Grossman and the critics. Grossman makes some decidedly unorthodox and controversial claims: that most soldiers in most wars are unable to, and do not, kill; that those who do are forever burdened with guilt; that soldiers in the Civil War and other wars usually shot to miss. How have such claims been received by military experts and historians? Track down as many reviews and other sources as you can, and give us a survey of the critical response. Then add your own considered assessment of the validity of Grossman’s arguments. If you like, you may narrow your focus to just ONE claim, e.g. his account of Civil War firing rates.

9. Sins of the Cinema. The camera’s need to show warfare in personalized, dramatic terms — with close-ups, recognizably heroic gestures, and mass outcomes visibly influenced by individual action — tends to lead to a persistent falsification of the realities of combat. (Or so I would argue: feel free to disagree!) Watch, in addition to the movies required for this class, a number of other war movies, then select just 2-4 for close scrutiny. Look at the battle scenes and appraise what is realistic and what is not, doing research as needed to support your contentions. Engage with specific questions like: is there historical justification for the scene in which Patton stands fearlessly in the middle of the street, shooting with a pistol at the German fighter planes, while machine-gun bullets trace a path right up to his feet? For Henry V leading a charge on horseback (!) through the breached wall of Harfleur in Kenneth Branagh’s film? How realistic and probable are such moments? You might also want to consider, e.g., the opening of Saving Private Ryan as a contrasting example — battle scenes that hold to a higher standard of historical realism.

10. The Shaara Trilogy. Read The Last Full Measure, Jeff Shaara’s excellent sequel to his father’s novel. Do a little bit of background reading to learn how this novel (together with Gods and Generals) came to be written so long after The Killer Angels. Then (your main task), compare and contrast the visions of war in the two novels. Is Michael’s vision of combat more heroic than Jeff’s? Does he believe in glory, sacrifice, triumph, and other martial values more fully than his son? Or is this impression more a function of the sharply different designs of the two books, the one concentrating on just the four days of Gettysburg, the other detailing the nearly two year time span from Gettysburg to Appomatox? Give carefully chosen comparisons and contrasts in support of your argument. Remember that you are writing for an audience that has read the one book but (probably) not the other.

11. Shaara vs. Remarque: the anti-heroic and the neoheroic. Finish reading Erich Maria Remaque’s All Quiet on the Western Front, one of the most devastating critiques ever written of the heroic martial ideal. Then analyze the ways in which Shaara, at the unlikeliest of
historical moments (1970, in the midst of the Vietnam debacle) subtly rebuilds the myth Remarque has tried to demolish. Use secondary sources as appropriate, but make a sharp contrast of the two great novels the backbone of your argument.

12. Honor in the trenches: Hemingway and World War I. In World War I, as Robert L. O'Connell remarks, "there was hardly a heroic death to be had anywhere," because modern technology had transformed traditional martial ethics into a recipe for senseless butchery. What lesson does Hemingway, who served in the war, seem to take from this? Does he, like Owen in "Dulce et Decorum Est," essentially condemn the ancient ideal of courage and martial sacrifice? Or does he still find a place for it in his value system? Try to sort out this contradiction or dialectic, with special attention to the three stories on our syllabus. Why does courage still seem to matter, in the era of the machine gun? How has its nature or definition changed? What differentiates courage from suicidal folly? Your research for this paper may well take you to other of Hemingway's works, e.g. A Farewell to Arms or "The Capital of the World," and you should probably learn something about his life. Notice how he alternates between ironic critique of macho ideals to what (to me anyway, though you must decide for yourself) looks like reaffirmation.

13. Wells and Social Darwinism. Read appropriate secondary works to develop a grasp of the philosophical and political context of War of the Worlds. Specifically, you should focus on Social Darwinism, the pseudo-scientific doctrine that purported to find in Evolution a rationale for war, racism, and aggression, quite visibly influencing the thought and actions of (among others) Theodore Roosevelt and Adolf Hitler. Then analyze in some depth Wells's implicit rebuttal of such thinking, and his cautionary message in general. To what extent has Wells foreseen the catastrophes of the twentieth century? Is he questioning traditional ideas of patriotism and valor, or only the jingoism at the level of national policy? Do the shape and substance of his novel reverse traditional expectations for war stories?

14. O'Brien and Vietnam. Though nowhere near as bloody and costly as the World Wars, or even the Korean War on a year-by-year basis, the Vietnam War sparked controversy and disillusionment in a way these other wars did not? Why? With appropriate background readings, learn the chief causes that made Vietnam so controversial, then and now. Then analyze ways in which these historical realities are reflected in O'Brien's stories.

15. Memoir. Do you have a relative or close friend whose experiences in war you would like to chronicle? This summer might be an excellent chance to write that bit of family history you have been wanting to record. See me in conference, soon, to work out the shape of your research and your paper.

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Some Additional Guidelines

• Topic. Must be chosen and approved by September 10. First come, first served. No more than two writers per topic.

• Format. Standard MLA Style for text, notes, and bibliography. I.e., give internal references for all quotations, then include a bibliography ("Works Cited") as part of the paper. Other kinds of notes should be given on a Notes page just before the Works Cited page.
• **Scope of research.** As a very tentative guideline, aim to read about 200 pages beyond what is already required on the syllabus; or about 12 sources. But the far more important criterion is intrinsic: read enough to satisfy the particular needs of the topic you have defined for yourself. Be extremely shrewd and demanding in deciding just what you want to read, and why. Look carefully at the dates of books and articles, and don’t waste time on sources that are out of date. Define your topic in such a way that the research plan, too, is sharply defined. Avoid at all costs the kind of aimless reading that causes you to dump a heap of essentially unrelated, undigested information in your reader’s lap.

For our purposes, "research" means anything you read that is not already required reading in the class. The moment you learn something that the person in the next desk doesn’t know, you have started to be an authority relative to the rest of us. Don’t make the mistake of thinking you must somehow become more knowledgeable than the experts you are reading before you can write. Research by its nature is unfinished business. Do a reasonable amount, then write up what you have. Some options, e.g. # 10, ask you to do additional primary reading, and will probably leave you no time at all for secondary sources. That’s fine; in such cases, think of your project as a special report or review, not the kind of research paper that sifts and integrates a wide range of sources.

You are welcome to use internet sources, but be careful! 90% of what is out there is unreliable. You will need to use all your critical acumen to sift through the junk to what is useful and valid. In general, print sources tend to be more reliable than websites. For all internet sources, keep a hard copy in your notes for the paper.

In writing, be in command of your sources; use them selectively and shrewdly, not massively and mechanically. This is your paper, not theirs; inventing and defending the thesis is your job, not theirs. Quote your sources directly, summarize them succinctly, take issue with them, discuss and analyze them, and always cite them adequately; but avoid merely paraphrasing them. Clarify your own role by saying "I," "my own opinion," etc. as needed. "Scrapbook papers" and "data dumps" will meet with a very chilly reception. See below, "Pitfalls."

For most topics, start your research with journal articles, reading the most recent first, preferring scholarly journals to newspapers and mass-circulation magazines, and recent articles to dated ones. Avoid book-length studies; you don’t have time to read them cover to cover, and if you try you risk being swallowed whole by another author. See below, "The Single-Source Trap."

• **Organization of paper.** Will depend on the nature of the particular project, but in general should not be much different from that of any good essay. The crucial criteria are that the paper have a clear and interesting thesis, that the thesis be developed and supported throughout, that everything in the paper be clearly related to the thesis. The main difference here is that you will be armed with considerably more information than usual, so that you will be proving the thesis more copiously and with more sophistication.

**PITFALLS**

Do your best to avoid the following common errors:

• **The Scrapbook Approach (or "Data Dump").** The paper is so full of quotes and paraphrases, many of them poorly assimilated to the thesis, that overall coherence and interest are lacking. The paper feels padded and directionless. The reader falls asleep. Avoid by
cultivating a firm, definite sense of your own purpose and thesis.

• **The Single-Source Trap.** Halfway through the project, you discover an article that says everything you wanted to say. Abashed and intimidated, you quote this source thirteen times in your own essay, making the reader wish he could be reading it instead of your paper, which seems to have no ideas of its own. Avoid by finishing your research early on, defining your topic clearly, digesting your sources completely, and citing a variety of sources.

• **The "All About" Approach.** The paper has no real focus and consists mainly of background information that is readily available from many sources. Rather than pursuing a thesis, it seems to drift and free-associate. Avoid by focussing on your thesis and argument, declining all tangents.

• **Vague Attribution.** The paper is full of information whose nature and origin is unclear. Though citations occur with some regularity, they tend to be vague, and the paper shows an enormous preference for paraphrase over direct quotation and explicit summary. As a result the reader can't tell, from one sentence to the next, whether he is reading your opinions, someone else's, or common background knowledge. Only the most meticulous reader can tell whether the paper is a mechanical paraphrase of just two or three sources, or a decent job of research poorly presented. Instructors sometimes give students the benefit of such doubt. Not me. I don't believe that doing so is really a favor to the student, who learns to write horribly tedious, murky prose, or to anyone who must read his or her work in the future.

Avoid by talking directly about your sources, using various methods of citation as appropriate (short quote, long quote, summary, etc.), and by taking a more personal tone, explicitly distinguishing your own conclusions, opinions, doubts, and confusions.

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Some Relevant Links:

• Why "suicidal fighting" is necessary to the growth of states
• Celebration of the Primitive: Excerpts
• The true meaning of the *Iliad* (according to Kilgore)
• Henry's St. Crispin's Day Speech
• The Percy Rebellion: Map.
• The Longbow and the Battle of Shrewsbury.
• Gettysburg tour
• High Water Mark Painting
• Melville, "The March Into Virginia."
• Photos of the dead

[Link to some relevant links](http://ux1.eiu.edu/~dkilgore/ltclas/warstor/Current/Svl0908.htm)
- Casualties in Wars of the Twentieth Century
- Casualties in all American Wars
- "War and Self-Deception," a commentary on many of the texts we read
- "War and Persuasion," an essay in progress
- "War is a Racket," 1933 address by General Smedley Butler, two time winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor.
- Map of Eastern Mediterranean
- JFK's speech on governmental secrecy, with an irreverent video collage.
- Map of Pacific Rim
- Summary of Sicilian Expedition, with maps
- Triremes and naval tactics
- Aubrey Beardsley engravings for "Lysistrata"