

Useful Sources on WWI and Teaching -- War, Veterans and Military Experiences

Annotated Bibliography for 2016 NEH Summer Institute on Veterans in Society

Prof. Hilary Lithgow
UNC Chapel Hill

BBC News, and David Botti. *What Makes a Hero?* Video, Web Documentary. Accessed August 2, 2016. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-34698246>.

This 20 minute BBC video is a powerful and effective teaching tool for any class or other forum in which you want to prompt discussion about the current status of veterans in American society and/or the debates about "thank you for your service." Featuring interview excerpts from Karl Marlantes, Roy Scranton, Phil Klay and others, this video prompted productive discussion in a veterans' book group I'm involved in, and I think could be a valuable part of a student veteran transition or possibly even Green Zone training sessions. [Don't be put off by the overused public domain muzac in opening sequence--it gets SO much better]. To save you time, here's a map of the video's key moments:

- Early on, it features veterans discussing their mixed feelings about being called a "hero" and being thanked for their service. In this first section, Karl Marlantes talks about only finding out after many years that a close family friend was, like him, a marine veteran
- 2:38 Veterans pushing back on the "hero" label
- 2:58: What goes through a veteran's head when s/he is thanked for his or her service
- 5:18: Two models of heroism--one based on Achilles' warrior virtues and the other based on ideas of Socratic self-sacrifice.
- At 7:01, Marlantes tells two stories about his experiences with medals and argues that "its your motivations that are what's really important about heroism"
- At 11:17 Several veteran authors talk about the stories they're asked to tell as opposed to the ones that mean the most to them
- At 12:40 the video explores the story of a decorated Iraq war Marine veteran (Seth Moulton) who, while running for congress, chose not to disclose to the public the medals he'd won.
- At 14:56 Moulton suggests that, if more Americans were involved in and connected to these wars, "there wouldn't be this sense of guilt" that he sees as sometimes coming from people who thank him for his service.
- 16:05 veterans discuss the idea that civilians only want to hear certain kinds of war stories
- 18:38 discussion of "Jay" on *Modern Family* (a Navy veteran) as an example of a "neutralized portrayal" of a veteran and argument that we need more media depictions like this in order to get beyond the problematic current stereotypes of all veterans being "broken" and/or "heroes."

Georgetown University. *Afterwar: Healing the Moral Wounds of Our Soldiers*. Accessed August 1, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PhYmCFgwfmM>.

This hour-long video created by Georgetown University features a panel of speakers celebrating the publication of *Afterwar: Healing the Moral Wounds of our Soldiers* (Oxford, 2015) by Georgetown Philosophy Professor Nancy Sherman. The various introductory speeches cover material that will already be familiar to everyone who attended the 2016 NEH Institute, but what makes the video worth watching (and also very useful for teaching) are the guest panelists speaking about moral injury. The first four speakers, all veterans, offer especially powerful accounts, from a broad variety of perspectives. To save you time, I'll bullet out the key contributors' contributions and when they occur in the video:

- 14:30-20:06: Josh Grenard, a former US Army Reserve Captain, expresses his anguish about an incident involving the accidental killing of despite following the rules of engagement at a traffic control point in Iraq

- 22:06-30:10: Meosha Thomas, a former Information Systems Technician in the United States Navy US Navy (Ret), talks about the painful conflict she felt between being a "good soldier" and a good mother throughout her career in the military
- 30:10-41:35: Ian Fishback, a former Army Special Forces officer, discusses instances in which he came into conflict with and felt betrayed by the institution of the military
- 41:40-50:48: Miriam Krieger, a former Fighter Pilot in the USAF, talks about her success in becoming "one of the guys" during her service and the "moral disorientation" she felt as a result of that success.

"The Details Of Drones, From A Pilot Who Flew Them." *All Things Considered*, November 5, 2015.
<http://www.npr.org/2015/11/05/454907560/the-details-of-drones-from-a-pilot-who-flew-them>.

A short, but stunning interview by Kelly McEvers (see *Diary of a Bad Year*, below) of Lt. Col. T. Mark McCurley, a retired drone pilot who wrote the tactical manual for the Predator. (In the fall of 2015 he had also just published a memoir titled *Hunter Killer: Inside America's Unmanned Air War*.) This short interview efficiently and effectively demonstrates the strange intimacy of drone warfare and offers some glimpses into the emotional toll it takes on pilots. While by no means offering a comprehensive overview or analysis of drone warfare and its military significance, in six minutes it explodes the common assumption that drone pilots are entirely removed or insulated from the consequences of their actions. Instead, one walks away from this interview thinking that this kind of warfare—with its surreal ability to allow a person to look into the eyes of someone thousands of miles away before (and after) killing that person—might potentially be even more morally and emotionally difficult to engage in than more traditional forms of combat. This short exchange (in which McEvers asks McCurley about his memories of a particular incident) gives you a sense of some of the interview's emotional force:

MCEVERS: How does it come up when you think about it?

MCCURLEY: I see his face, you know? I will always see his face.

MCEVERS: While you're awake or while you're asleep or both or...

MCCURLEY: Yes.

McEvers, Kelly. *Diary of a Bad Year: A War Correspondent's Dilemma*, 2013.
<http://transom.org/2013/diary-of-a-bad-year-a-war-correspondents-dilemma/>.

This "Audio Diary"/radio documentary in which a foreign correspondent interrogates her choice of careers, makes for fascinating listening, especially for anyone interested in teaching or thinking more about the experience of foreign correspondents covering war. It's made even more interesting by the fact that Kelly McEvers, after completing the reflections she records in this piece, stopped working as a foreign correspondent and now is one of the co-hosts on NPR's *All Things*. Her interviews still take on a distinctive sharpness when they address topics of war (see "The Details of Drones" interview also included on this list for an example). For teaching, this diary is interesting to pair with Michael Herr's *Dispatches*, Chis Hedges' essay "Eros and Thanatos" (in *War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning*) and/or work by Sebastian Junger (an interview with whom is included in this piece). In this piece, McEvers (then NPR's correspondent in the Middle East) reflects on her desire and even need to continue her work despite the risks (the piece's title refers to 2012, the deadliest year on record for journalists worldwide) and despite having a young child at home. In order to better understand her own situation, McEvers interviews doctors, scientists, and fellow conflict journalists. To quote Jay Allison, who helped produce the documentary: "She asked them about how they've kept going, or why they've stopped, or if they could stop even if they wanted to." Obviously journalists are not service-members, but it's interesting how many overlaps and connections McEvers' story has with those of some people serving in the military, and especially given the role that Sebastian Junger is coming to play in current discussions of war and conflict, this documentary seems to me a timely and valuable (as well as incredibly engaging) piece to have on our radar screens.

Hynes, Samuel. *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to a Modern War*. Penguin, 1998.

Samuel Hynes is a Professor of Literature emeritus at Princeton University who served as a Marine Corps pilot from 1943 until 1946 and in 1952 and 1953 and received the Distinguished Flying Cross. *The Soldiers' Tale*

(attendees of our 2016 NEH institute will take note of the placement of the apostrophe—a punctuation decision Hynes justifies eloquently in the introduction to the book). This is quite possibly the most useful book I have found for teaching the literature of war. Its goal is to demonstrate some of the transcendent universals of first-person accounts of war by combatants. Hynes justifies this combat focus in the book, and also offers a larger defense of the importance of first person narratives in understanding war: "If we would understand what war is like, and how it feels," he writes, "we must turn away from history and its numbers, and seek the reality in the personal witness of the men who were there"(5). Beyond this broad project, however, he is also very interested in identifying and mapping what he sees as the distinctive elements and features of first person narratives WWI, WWII and the Vietnam War (he devotes a substantive chapter each to WWI and Vietnam, and two to WWII). Drawing heavily on quotes from a range of diaries, letters and memoirs, Hynes creates an engaging and very readable argument—tons to talk about with students and they won't fall asleep when asked to read it! I don't know the chapters on WWII as well as the others because I don't teach the literature of that war, but the chapters on WWI and Vietnam, and the 35 page introductory chapter are spectacular.

. *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*. Random House, 2011.

Samuel Hynes is a Professor of Literature emeritus at Princeton University who served as a Marine Corps pilot from 1943 until 1946 and in 1952 and 1953 and received the Distinguished Flying Cross. The third work in a trilogy of literary critical works treating British literature of the first half of the twentieth century (the other two are *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* and *The Auden Generation*) is a far more scholarly book than *The Soldiers' Tale*, and I would call it the messy truth lurking underneath the tidy generalizations of Paul Fussell's often cited literary critical assessment of WWI: *The Great War and Modern Memory*. As P.N. Furbank noted in the London Review of Books, Hynes' "method is to follow the sequence of events in the national culture from very close up, laboriously registering each flux and reflux, each ripple and eddy, of attitude." Treating a rich range of sources, from well-known literary works to popular films, advertisements and political speeches, Hynes gives his reader a sense of the complexity and multiplicity of English responses to the war over time, and his chapters "The World After the War" will be of particular interest to those of interested in veterans and their reception on the homefront. Hynes also offers a great discussion of the sections of faked footage from the supposedly documentary film about the battle of the Somme that was created and shown to audiences during the war. This book won't give you or your students and of the grand proclamations to be found in Fussell's book, but it's jammed with fascinating close readings of specific moments and issues in the war. Too huge and rangy to assign in its entirety to undergrads (in my humble opinion), but works well in excerpts if you find one that's relevant to other work or reading you're doing in your course.

Jones, David, and W. S. Merwin. *In Parenthesis*. New York: NYRB Classics, 2003.

If T.S. Eliot had fought on the Western Front (and been a Welshman), this is the book he would have written: a dense, evocative prose-poem filled with allusions to Welsh legends and myth. Jones (1895 – 1974) was a painter and wood-engraver as well as a modernist poet highly praised by Eliot and W. H. Auden, among others. He enlisted with the Royal Welch Fusiliers and served as an infantryman on the Western Front from 1915 to 1918 with the 38th (Welsh) Division, serving longer at the front than any other British war writer. First published in England in 1937 and based partly on Jones' own experiences, *In Parenthesis* tells the story of Private John Ball from his regiment's embarkation from England to the assault on Mametz Wood during the Battle of the Somme seven months later. Jones uses a mix of poetry and prose and a range of voices from liturgical to colloquial Cockney and military slang, but the most obvious stylistic elements are the many allusions to Welsh myth (among other sources) in which the story is grounded. This text is often excerpted in WWI anthologies, and frankly, the book is difficult enough that the excerpts are more than enough for the average undergraduate to chew on. For anyone wanting to know more about how British modernists responded to the war, or wanting to think about literary allusions and religious ritual and the roles both might play in helping people make sense of war experience—and just simply, for anyone curious about one of the great underappreciated texts of the Great War—it's definitely worth exploring beyond the anthologized excerpts of *In Parenthesis*. Jones'

“Preface” also merits attention for its eloquent defense of the sacredness of profane language in the front lines, among several other key points and ideas.

Manning, Frederic. *The Middle Parts of Fortune: Somme and Ancre, 1916*. London; New York: Penguin, 2014.

Another great, largely forgotten Great War novel –Hemingway claimed to have re-read it annually “to remember how things really were so that I will never lie to myself or anyone else about them.” Though it’s long for teaching, it is very readable, and while it’s certainly not a hawkish piece and doesn’t hold back on the horrors of the western front, it’s also, interestingly, less overtly anti-war than some of the more famous WWI narratives like *All Quiet*. It’s also interesting for its celebration of enlisted life and skepticism about officers (Manning himself was eventually commissioned, but didn’t thrive in the role, and resigned his commission in 1918). Finally, it’s yet another WWI novel bound to be of interest to literary types for its allusions and engagement with literary tradition (cf. the book’s title, a reference to a quote from *Hamlet*, and the Shakespeare quotations heading each chapter, among many literary allusions). Manning (1882-1935) was born in Sydney, Australia in 1882, went to England to pursue a career as a writer, enlisted in 1915 and served in France in the Battle of the Somme.