War is Hell: Military Fiction, Reporting for Duty

About Military Fiction:

- Based in history
- Re-interpretation of events
- Primary action is in field of combat
- Characters are preparing for, in, returning from war
- Features battles, war horrors/atrocities
- Common themes are heroism, nationalism, cowardice, morality

Common viewpoints:

- Company-level
  - Platoon and squad also common
    - Company K by William March
    - The Thin Red Line by James Jones
    - Fives and Twenty-Fives by Michael Pitre
  
- Command-level
  - Wide variety of characters
  - Melting pot of “American boys”
    - Early: Civil War army units from same state
    - Later: national units led to cliché of melting pot
  
  - Battle Cry by Leon Uris
  
  - The Naked and the Dead by Norman Mailer
  
  - Three Soldiers by John Dos Passos

- Change with Vietnam War
  - Minorities featured more prominently
  - Men sent as replacements
  - Veterans isolated, alienated, loyal to each other
  - Fields of Fire by James Webb
  - Paco’s Story by Larry Heinemann

- Middle East
  - Soldier and journalist memoirs most common
  - Fiction tends to be soldier-focused
    - First person or close third person
  
  - The Yellow Birds by Kevin Powers
  
  - Redeployment by Phil Kay
• War experience is often personal
  o Individual being tested
  o Becoming a man/coming-of-age
  o The Red Badge of Courage by Stephen Crane
  o Going After Cacciato by Tim O’Brien
  o All Quiet on the Western Front by Erich Maria Remarque

• Consequences of war
  o On person, country, culture
  o How do you put war behind you?
  o Indian Country by Philip Caputo
  o In Country by Bobbie Ann Mason
  o Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk by Ben Fountain

Appeal:

• Better understanding of events
• Students learning about a place/time
• Exploring unfamiliar/exotic cultures
• Current events
• Action-packed books
• Certain author/time period
• Shared experiences
  o Combat soldiers/vets, wives/spouses, children
• Details of combat
  o Emotions, physical challenge, soldier skills
• Moral issues

In this class:

• Major wars with U.S. involvement
• War is main subject, not just part of the setting
  o See historical fiction for war as setting

Revolutionary War (1775-1783)

• Also called American War of Independence
• Defining war of American character and experience
• Pamphlets written during war
  o American Revolution series by Jeff Shaara (2001-2002)
  o Love and Honor by Randall Wallace (2004)
George Washington novels by Newt Gingrich (2009-2012)
The Fort by Bernard Cornwell (2010)

Civil War (1861-1865)

- Popular military fiction topic
- Early novels focused on romance of the South
  - Gone With the Wind by Margaret Mitchell (1936)
- Very few Civil War veteran authors
  - Reasons are debated
  - The March by E.L. Doctorow (2005)
  - The Battle of the Crater by Newt Gingrich (2011)
  - Novels of the Civil War by Jeff Shaara (2012-2015)

World War I (1914-1918)

- U.S. joined late, in 1917
- “Lost Generation” writers
  - Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Dos Passos, Faulkner
- Mass casualties led to criticism, disillusionment
- Introduction of realism
- Hemingway most associated with this time period
  - A Farewell to Arms (1929)
  - Flanders by Patricia Anthony (1998)
  - To the Last Man by Jeff Shaara (2004)
  - The First of July by Elizabeth Speller (2013)
  - 1914 by Jean Echenoz (2014)
  - The Harlem Hellfighters by Max Brooks (2014)

World War II (1939-1945)

- Lots written, varied
- Pragmatic, non-romantic fiction
- Common themes:
  - Battle, loyalty, courage/cowardice, endurance...
- Combat novels are most numerous
- Began seeing books critical of military command
- The Naked and the Dead by Norman Mailer (1948)
- From Here to Eternity by James Jones (1951)
- Josh Thurlow novels by Homer Hickam (2003-2007)
- World War II novels by Jeff Shaara (2006-2011)
- Killing Rommel by Steven Pressfield (2008)
- The Commodore by P.T. Deutermann (2016)

Korean War (1950-1953)
- “The Forgotten War”
- Much written during/immediately following
  - Don’t Touch Me by Mackinlay Kantor (1951)
- Resurgence due to Memorial & anniversary
- Focus on Army & Marines
- Most follows whole war or last two years
- Much written by veterans
- Recent works often self-published
  - War Remains by Jeffrey Miller (2011)
  - Hope in Hungnam by David Watts, Jr. (2012)
  - Divisions by Larry Krantz (2013)
  - The Frozen Hours by Jeff Shaara (2017)

Vietnam War (1954-1975)
- Tradition of distinguished war literature
  - The Quiet American by Graham Greene (1955)
- Realistic/naturalistic
- Heller’s Catch 22 (1961) influenced Vietnam authors
- Much written on war’s effects on veterans
  - Matterhorn by Karl Marlantes (2010)
  - Vietnam series by Chris Lynch (YA, 2011-2014)
  - Don’t Mean Nuthin’ by Ron Lealos (2015)
  - Viet Man by D.S. Lliteras (2015)
  - The Low Bird by David L. Robbins (2016)
The Middle East (1990-)

- Gulf War, Afghan War/Iraq War/War on Terror
- Cultural and historical appeal:
  - Historical villains (bin Laden, Hussein, Qaddafi...)
  - Birthplace of three major religions
  - Previous conflicts/wars
- Terrorism threat ensures popularity
- Much is set in U.S.
- Focus on individual soldiers
  - Sniper Elite series by Scott McEwen (2013-)
  - Fives and Twenty-Fives by Michael Pitre (2014)
  - Redeployment by Phil Klay (2014)
  - Wynne’s War by Aaron Gwyn (2014)
  - And the Whole Mountain Burned by Ray McPadden (2018)

Technothrillers

- Plot revolves around military weapons system
- Technology, action, pacing over characters
- High, sustained action; military jargon & acronyms
- Hero fights for truth, justice, America
- Very, very bad guys
- Usually highly researched
  - The Last Line by Anthony Shaffer (2013)
  - Troy Pearce series by Mike Maden (2013-)
  - Trident Deception novels by Rick Campbell (2014-)
  - Drone Strike by Dale Brown (2014)
  - Tom Locke novels by Sean McFate (2016-)

POW Stories

- Stories of human condition, survival
- Overlaps with non-military incarceration tales
- Tough-skinneled readers or history buffs
  - The Special Prisoner by Jim Lehrer (2000)
  - War Trash by Ha Jin (2004)
  - In the Shadows of the Sun by Alexander Parsons (2005)
  - Dawn of a Thousand Nights by Tricia Goyer (2005)
Shame and the Captives by Thomas Keneally (2015)

Literary Military Fiction

- Poetic, lyrical language; slower read; character-driven
- Straightforward or experimental
- Good for book groups
- Often critically acclaimed
- “Literary” refers to style, not quality
  - Three Day Road by Joseph Boyden (2005)
  - The Judas Field by Howard Bahr (2006)
  - The Coldest Night by Robert Olmstead (2012)
  - Youngblood by Matt Gallagher (2016)
  - Bring Out the Dog: Stories by Will Mackin (2018)

Alternate History

- What if...?
- One event that changes everything
  - Carries out premise in great detail
- Authors typically have good historical knowledge
- Appeal to fans of technothrillers
  - Historical military readers may shun
- May appear under Sci-Fi or speculative fiction
  - The Great War series by Harry Turtledove (1997-2007)
  - The Plot Against America by Philip Roth (2004)
  - Pacific War series by Newt Gingrich (2007-2008)
  - Leviathan trilogy by Scott Westerfeld (YA, 2009-2011)
  - The War that Came Early series by Harry Turtledove (2009-2014)
  - Liberty 1784 by Robert Conroy (2014)

Readers’ Advisory Tips

- Military fiction RA = reference interview
- Listen for references to historical accuracy
- Match readers to books based on tone, style, language
- Suggested questions:
  - Time period or theater preference?
  - Land, air, or sea battles?
  - Interest in future/ imaginary battles?
• Has your patron “read it all?”
  o Sci-Fi military fiction – *Ender’s Game* by Orson Scott Card
  o Sea adventures = conflicts and history – *Master & Commander* by Patrick O’Brien
  o Non-fiction war accounts – *Band of Brothers* by Stephen Ambrose
• Don’t be intimidated… be prepared!
  o Bibliographies/lists
    ▪ By place
    ▪ By subject
    ▪ What-to-read-next
  o Create a bookmark

**Selection Tips**

• Scan catalog and stacks
  o Too heavy/light in certain sections?
• Judging historical accuracy
  o Know the “Old Faithfuls”
  o Read reviews
  o Look for bibliographies, notes, epilogues, maps, photos, etc.

**Marketing Tips**

• Create shelf talkers
  o Recommend other books/authors
• Popular with your patrons?
  o Designated section
  o Genre stickers
• Useful, relevant subject and genre headings
  o War stories, Military fiction, Alternative histories, Techno-thrillers, Literary fiction, etc.
• Include in book group selections
• Create a display!
  o Educate your patrons on military anniversaries
  o Mix fiction and non-fiction
  o Movie tie-ins
  o Books featuring veterans
  o Include local history materials
  o Passive programming
    ▪ *Operation Gratitude, Military Missions*
Recommended Websites

- D-Day/Battle of Normandy 75th anniversary - dday-anniversary.com/
- WWI Centennial Commission: http://worldwar-1centennial.org/
- Vietnam War Commemoration: http://www.vietnamwar50th.com/
- Military.com: www.military.com
- KY Dept. of Veterans Affairs: http://veterans.ky.gov/Pages/default.aspx
- U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs: http://www.va.gov/
- U.S. Army Center of Military History: http://www.history.army.mil/index.html
- National Military Appreciation Month: http://www.nmam.org/index.htm
- Novelist: http://www.kyvl.org/resources.shtm

References


Military Observances

- May – National Military Appreciation Month
- May 18 – Armed Forces Day
- May 27, 2019 – Memorial Day
- June 6, 2019 – 75th anniversary of D-Day and the Battle of Normandy
- June 28, 2019 – 100th anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles
- November 11, 2019 – Veteran’s Day
- December 16, 2019 – 75th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge
- June 25, 2020 – 70th anniversary of the start of the Korean War
- September 2, 2020 – 75th anniversary of V-J Day
- Armed Forces birthdays:
  - Air Force – Sept. 18, 1947
  - Army – June 14, 1775
- Coast Guard – Aug. 4, 1790
- Marine Corps – Nov. 10, 1775
- National Guard – Dec. 13, 1636
- Navy – Oct. 13, 1775

**Recommended Books**

- **Revolutionary War**
  - Redcoat by Bernard Cornwell (1987)
    - By Force of Arms (1996)
    - The Maddest Idea (1997)
    - The Continental Risque (1998)
    - Lords of the Ocean (1999)
    - All the Brave Fellows (2000)
  - American Revolution series by Jeff Shaara (2001-02)
    - Rise to Rebellion (2001)
    - The Glorious Cause (2002)
  - Geoffrey Frost series by J.E. Fender (2002-04)
    - Audacity, Privateer out of Portsmouth (2003)
  - Love and Honor by Randall Wallace (2004)
  - Ghost Legion by Johnny D. Boggs (2005)
  - Shadow Patriots by Lucia St. Clair Robson (2005)
  - Saratoga by David Garland (2005)
  - Valley Forge by David Garland (2006)
  - George Washington novels by Newt Gingrich (2009-2012)
    - To Try Men’s Souls (2009)
    - Valley Forge (2010)
    - Victory at Yorktown (2012)
  - The Fort by Bernard Cornwell (2010)
  - Woods Runner by Gary Paulsen (YA, 2010)
  - The Secret Mission of William Tuck by Eric Pierpoint (2015, YA)
  - The Rifleman by Oliver North (July 2019)

- **Civil War**
    - Gods and Generals by Jeff Shaara (1996)
- **The Killer Angels** by Michael Shaara (1974)
- **The Last Full Measure** by Jeff Shaara (1998)

  - **Starbuck chronicles** by Bernard Cornwell (1993-96)
    - Rebel (1993)
    - Copperhead (1994)
    - Battle Flag (1995)
    - The Bloody Ground (1996)

  - **Civil War at sea series** by David Poyer (2001-2005)
    - Fire on the Waters (2001)
    - That Anvil of Our Souls (2005)

  - **A Distant Flame** by Philip Lee Williams (2004)
  - **Sons of Liberty** by Marie Jakober (2005)
  - **The March** by E.L. Doctorow (2005)
  - **The Widow of the South** by Robert Hicks (2005)
  - **Fort Pillow** by Harry Turtledove (2006)
  - **No Greater Courage** by Richard Croker (2006)
  - **The Battle of the Crater** by Newt Gingrich (2011)
  - **Novels of the Civil War** by Jeff Shaara (2012-2015)
    - A Blaze of Glory (2012)
    - A Chain of Thunder (2013)
    - The Smoke at Dawn (2014)
    - The Fateful Lightning (2015)

  - **Nostalgia** by Dennis McFarland (2013)
  - **The Battle Hymn Cycle** by Ralph Peters (2012-2017)
    - Cain at Gettysburg (2012)
    - Hell or Richmond (2013)
    - Valley of the Shadow (2015)
    - The Damned of Petersburg (2016)
    - Judgment at Appomattox (2017)

  - **Divided We Fall** by C. Alexander London (2014, YA)

- **World War I**
  - **Three Soldiers** by John Dos Passos (1921)
  - **All Quiet on the Western Front** by Erich Maria Remarque (1929)
  - **Fear** by Gabriel Chevallier (1930)
  - **Company K** by William March (1933)
  - **Paths of Glory** by Humphrey Cobb (1935)
Parade’s End by Ford Madox Ford (1950)
Johnny Got His Gun by Dalton Trumbo (1959)
  - Regeneration (1992)
  - The Eye in the Door (1994)
  - The Ghost Road (1996)
Flanders by Patricia Anthony (1998)
To the Last Man by Jeff Shaara (2004)
The First of July by Elizabeth Speller (2013)
1914 by Jean Echenoz (2014)
The Harlem Hellfighters by Max Brooks (2014)
The Great War: Stories Inspired by Items from the First World War (2015, YA)

World War II
The Naked and the Dead by Norman Mailer (1948)
Battle Cry by Leon Uris (1953)
The Thin Red Line by James Jones (1962)
Todd Ingram series by John J. Gobbell (1995-2014)
  - The Last Lieutenant (1995)
  - When Duty Whispers Low (2002)
  - Edge of Valor (2014)
World War II series by David L. Robbins (1999-2009)
  - War of the Rats (1999)
  - The End of War (2000)
  - Last Citadel (2003)
  - Liberation Road (2005)
  - Broken Jewel (2009)
Josh Thurlow novels by Homer Hickam (2003-2007)
  - The Keeper’s Son (2003)
  - The Ambassador’s Son (2005)
  - The Far Reaches (2007)
Nobody Comes Back by Donn Pearce (2005)
World War II novels by Jeff Shaara (2006-2011)
  - The Rising Tide (2006)
  - The Steel Wave (2008)
  - No Less Than Victory (2009)
  - The Final Storm (2011)
- **Killing Rommel** by Steven Pressfield (2008)
- **Pacific Glory** by P.T. Deutermann (2011)
- **Code Name Verity** by Elizabeth Wein (YA, 2012)
- **Shadow on the Mountain** by Margi Preus (YA, 2012)
- **One Man’s War** by P.M. Kippert (2016)
- **The Commodore** by P.T. Deutermann (2016)

  - **Korean War**
    - **The Bridges at Toko-Ri** by James A. Michener (1953)
    - **The Hunters** by James Salter (1955)
    - **MASH** by Richard Hooker (1968)
    - **Chrysanthemum in the Snow** by James Hickey (1990)
    - **Dog Company Six** by Edwin Simmons (2000)
    - **The Marines of Autumn** by James Brady (2000)
    - **War Remains** by Jeffrey Miller (2011)
    - **Ice, Fire, & Blood** by Norman Black (2012)
    - **Hope in Hungnam** by David Watts, Jr. (2012)
    - **Divisions** by Larry Krantz (2013)
    - **The Frozen Hours** by Jeff Shaara (2017)

  - **Vietnam War**
    - **Fields of Fire** by James Webb (1978)
    - **Going After Cacciato** by Tim O'Brien (1978)
    - **In Country** by Bobbie Ann Mason (1985)
    - **Paco’s Story** by Larry Heinemann (1986)
    - **Indian Country** by Philip Caputo (1987)
    - **The Things They Carried** by Tim O’Brien (1990)
    - **The Stone Ponies** by Tom Willard (2000)
    - **Jackson Monroe novels** by Richard H. Dickinson (2002-04)
      - The Silent Men (2002)
    - **The Fearless Man** by Donald Pfarrer (2004)
    - **The Quick and the Dead** by Randy Lee Eickhoff (2005)
    - **Tree of Smoke** by Denis Johnson (2007)
    - **Matterhorn** by Karl Marlantes (2010)
    - **Red Flags** by Juris Jurjevics (2011)
    - **Vietnam series** by Chris Lynch (YA, 2011-2014)
- I Pledge Allegiance (2011)
- Sharpshooter (2012)
- Free-Fire Zone (2012)
- Casualties of War (2013)
- Walking Wounded (2014)
  - Who Shot the Water Buffalo? by Ken Babbs (2011)
  - Don’t Mean Nuthin’ by Ron Lealos (2015)
  - Viet Man by D.S. Lliteras (2015)
  - The Low Bird by David L. Robbins (2016)
- Middle East
  - Michael Parson series by Thomas W. Young (2010-14)
    - The Mullah’s Storm (2010)
    - Silent Enemy (2011)
    - The Renegades (2012)
    - The Warriors (2013)
    - Sand and Fire (2014)
  - The Sandbox by David Zimmerman (2010)
  - Sand Queen by Helen Benedict (2011)
  - The Towers by David Poyer (2011)
  - Billy Lynn’s Long Halftime Walk by Ben Fountain (2012)
  - Fobbit by David Abrams (2012)
  - The Yellow Birds by Kevin Powers (2012)
  - Fire and Forget: Short Stories From the Long War (2013)
  - SEAL Team Six outcasts series by Howard E. Wasdin (2013)
    - Outcasts: SEAL Team Six (2013)
    - Easy Day for the Dead (2013)
  - Sniper Elite series by Scott McEwen (2013- )
    - Sniper Elite: One Way Trip (2013)
    - Target America (2014)
    - The Sniper and the Wolf (2015)
    - Ghost Sniper (2016)
  - Fives and Twenty-Fives by Michael Pitre (2014)
  - Pashtun by Ron Lealos (2014)
  - Redeployment by Phil Klay (2014)
  - Wynne’s War by Aaron Gwyn (2014)
  - And the Whole Mountain Burned by Ray McPadden (2018)
- Technothrillers
- Patrick McClanahan series by Dale Brown (1987-)
  - 22 books in series; most recent: The Moscow Offensive (2018)
- Tales of the Modern Navy series by David Poyer (1988-)
  - 18 books in series; most recent: Deep War (2018)
- Jeffrey Fuller/USS Challenger series by Joe Buff (2000-2006)
  - Deep Sound Channel (2000)
  - Thunder in the Deep (2001)
  - Crush Depth (2002)
  - Tidal Rip (2003)
  - Straits of Power (2004)
  - Seas of Crisis (2006)
- Navy pilots series by Ward Carroll (2001-04)
  - Punk’s War (2001)
  - Punk’s Wing (2003)
  - Punk’s Fight (2004)
- Goliath by Steve Alten (2002)
- By Dawn’s Early Light by David Hagberg (2003)
- Typhoon by Robin White (2003)
- Jerry Mitchell novels by Larry Bond (2005-)
  - Dangerous Ground (2005)
  - Cold Choices (2009)
  - Exit Plan (2012)
  - Shattered Trident (2013)
  - Fatal Thunder (2016)
  - Arctic Gambit (2018)
- Cat and Mouse by Harold Coyle (2007)
- The Last Line by Anthony Shaffer (2013)
- Troy Pearce series by Mike Maden (2013-)
  - Drone (2013)
  - Blue Warrior (2014)
  - Drone Command (2015)
  - Drone Threat (2016)
- Trident Deception novels by Rick Campbell (2014-)
  - The Trident Deception (2014)
  - Empire Rising (2015)
  - Ice Station Nautilus (2016)
  - Blackmail (2017)
- Drone Strike by Dale Brown (2014)
- Tom Locke novels by Sean McFate (2016-)
  - Shadow War (2016)
  - Deep Black (2017)

- POW novels
  - Andersonville by MacKinlay Kantor (1955)
  - The Special Prisoner by Jim Lehrer (2000)
  - War Trash by Ha Jin (2004)
  - In the Shadows of the Sun by Alexander Parsons (2005)
  - Dawn of a Thousand Nights by Tricia Goyer (2005)
  - Escape from Andersonville by Gene Hackman (2008)
  - Rose Under Fire by Elizabeth Wein (YA, 2013)
  - Shame and the Captives by Thomas Keneally (2015)
  - Prisoner of War: A Novel of World War II by Michael P. Spradlin (YA, 2017)

- Literary Military Fiction
  - The Wolf Pit by Marly Youmans (2001)
  - When the Emperor Was Divine by Julie Otsuka (2002)
  - Wilderness Run by Maria Hummel (2002)
  - Once Two Heroes by Calvin Baker (2003)
  - Three Day Road by Joseph Boyden (2005)
  - The Judas Field by Howard Bahr (2006)
  - Coal Black Horse by Robert Olmstead (2007)
  - Day by A.L. Kennedy (2008)
  - The Lotus Eaters by Tatjana Soli (2010)
  - The Coldest Night by Robert Olmstead (2012)
  - The Watch by Joydeep Roy-Bhattacharya (2012)
  - Somewhere in France by Jennifer Robson (2013)
  - Sparta by Roxana Robinson (2013)
  - The Daughters of Mars by Thomas Keneally (2013)
  - Youngblood by Matt Gallagher (2016)
  - Brave Deeds by David Abrams (2017)
  - Bring Out the Dog: Stories by Will Mackin (2018)

- Alternate History
  - The Man in the High Castle by Philip K. Dick (1962)
  - The Great War series by Harry Turtledove (1997-2007)
    - 11 in series; last is In at the Death (2007)
Includes subseries “American Empire” and “Settling Accounts”

- A Date Which Will Live in Infamy, ed. by Brian M. Thomsen (2001)
- Gettysburg trilogy by Newt Gingrich (2003-05)
  - Gettysburg (2003)
  - Grant Comes East (2004)
  - Never Call Retreat (2005)
- The Plot Against America by Philip Roth (2004)
- MacArthur’s War by Douglas Niles (2007)
- Pacific War series by Newt Gingrich (2007-2008)
  - Pearl Harbor (2007)
  - Days of Infamy (2008)
- Leviathan trilogy by Scott Westerfeld (YA, 2009-2011)
  - Leviathan (2009)
  - Behemoth (2010)
  - Goliath (2011)
- The War that Came Early series by Harry Turtledove (2009-2014)
  - Hitler’s War (2009)
  - West & East (2010)
  - The Big Switch (2011)
  - Coup d’Etat (2012)
  - Two Fronts (2013)
  - Last Orders (2014)
- Liberty 1784 by Robert Conroy (2014)