THE COMBAT SOLDIER

Infantry Tactics and Cohesion in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries

ANTHONY KING
THE COMBAT SOLDIER
The Changing Character of War Programme is an interdisciplinary research group located at the University of Oxford.
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ANTHONY KING
Contents

List of Figures vi
Preface viii

1. The Elementary Forms of the Military Life 1
2. Cohesion 24
3. The Marshall Effect 40
4. Combat Motivation 62
5. Mass Tactics 98
6. Modern Tactics 129
7. The Persistence of Mass 164
8. Battle Drills 208
9. Training 266
10. Professionalism 338
11. The Female Soldier 376
12. The Professional Society 419

Notes 446
Bibliography 503
Index 521
### List of Figures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Makin Islands</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1a</td>
<td>Trench to trench attack. Platoon in the first wave</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1b</td>
<td>Trench to trench attack. Platoon in the second wave</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Attack in open warfare</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3a</td>
<td>Plate I (a platoon advancing to attack)</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3b</td>
<td>Plate II (a platoon attacking a strong point)</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>Phase line battle drill</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2a</td>
<td>Demonstrating the 90 degree pivot</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2b</td>
<td>He pivots with the feet</td>
<td>246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2c</td>
<td>Assuming the combat position</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>Canadian soldiers practise the combat glide</td>
<td>248</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4a</td>
<td>Stacking, Royal Marines CQB course</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4b</td>
<td>Marines stack in the compound</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5a</td>
<td>The five-step entry sequence</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5b</td>
<td>No. 3 enters and clears in depth</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5c</td>
<td>No. 4 enters and team establishes dominant position</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5d</td>
<td>Two-man dominant position</td>
<td>256</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.6</td>
<td>A room clearance demonstration by directing staff</td>
<td>257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>Body armour to body armour drill</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>Infantry officer course ROC drill</td>
<td>285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>ROC drill</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>British army ROC drill</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>French army ROC drill</td>
<td>292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>The infantry immersion trainer, Camp Pendleton</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>Range 220, 29 Palms, MCAGCC</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.7a</td>
<td>The compound, Commando Training Centre</td>
<td>309</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.7b</td>
<td>The compound, Commando Training Centre</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.7c</td>
<td>The compound, Commando Training Centre</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>Stanford Training Area</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>Shin Kallay, Stanford Training Area</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

9.10a. CENZUB, Jeoffrecourt. The modern town 314
9.10b. CENZUB, Jeoffrecourt. The old town 315
9.10c. CENZUB, Jeoffrecourt. The suburbs 316
9.10d. CENZUB, Jeoffrecourt. Attack on new town 317
9.11a. Groningen urban combat facility 318
9.11b. C-Can village 318
9.12a. Royal Marines practise pivoting 322
9.12b. Pivoting 322
9.13a. Canadian soldiers practise the pivot 323
9.13b. Pivot 323
Preface

There are few obvious advantages to being a sociologist in Britain today. The status of the discipline in the academy and wider society has never been as high as its intellectual influence has perhaps deserved and, after a high point in the 1950s and 1960s, its political influence in the United Kingdom has now also declined, notwithstanding Anthony Giddens’s relationship with New Labour. With the ending of the post-war settlement and especially after the end of the Cold War, sociologists in the UK seem to have struggled to fire the imagination of students in a way their predecessors did up to the 1970s. Yet, for all these ills, the sociologist still enjoys one often overlooked but extraordinary privilege. While they might complain about their status or the condition of the contemporary university, sociologists are accorded the rare benefit of being allowed and, indeed, required by their profession to engage with individuals and groups, with whom, in reality, they have no proper business to interact and whom, as mere citizens or even as scholars in other disciplines, they would never have the opportunity of meeting. These acquaintances may be initiated for purely intellectual reasons in the first instance but the experience of participating in other life-worlds and alternative cultures can often become among the most enriching and edifying of any sociologist’s life, even if the insights gained from the field find no place in formal academic journals or monographs. In my previous work, I have enjoyed the hospitality of First Peoples in British Columbia and football fans in Manchester and been lucky enough to participate in events of rare intensity with them. During the research for this book, I have once again been privileged to have been invited into a world to which I was a stranger; to be surprised, shocked, and delighted by innumerable unexpected and fascinating experiences, from the deserts of California and Afghanistan to the woods of Hammelburg.

Yet, in some ways, this research has been more poignant than any of my previous engagements. Samuel Johnson famously claimed ‘that every man thinks meanly of himself for not having been a soldier’. Perhaps. Yet, during this research, it was difficult to envy the soldiers whose duty it was to patrol daily out from their bases in Afghanistan. I felt no desire to experience the deprivations and dangers endured by combat soldiers and, rather than inadequacy, I felt relieved that, unlike previous generations from the First World War to Vietnam, I had not been conscripted into forced military service by the state. Accordingly, whatever an individual might think about the strategic wisdom and morality of these campaigns in Iraq or Afghanistan or even the
very legitimacy of the armed forces themselves, it would be difficult not to feel humble in the presence of the young men and women who have served on the front line in these theatres, especially when it is remembered how young most of them have been. Although senior non-commissioned officers and commissioned field officers approach maturity, the vast majority of soldiers currently in Afghanistan were born in the late 1980s, some in the early 1990s; they are half my age—or less. Yet, despite their youth, they have experienced a level of hardship, trauma, and, above all, personal loss which is unimaginable to me and probably to most of us, spared the ordeal of combat. It is hard not to be moved by the depth of their experiences. I am grateful for the time which these soldiers—male and female—gave me and their interest in the project. Perhaps their stories might reinvigorate the interest of their civilian peers in sociology as a discipline, convincing them that it has an enduring, even unique, relevance to the world-historical processes which are currently under way.

There are too many individual servicemen and women to thank personally. Indeed, in many cases, individual soldiers and Marines whom I watched or with whom I spoke were unknown to me, even though they may have provided me with important insights. In other cases, I cannot thank certain individuals publicly here since it would undermine the anonymity which I have sought to protect in the text. I have tried to thank them individually through personal communications; I hope they know who they are and that their absence from this list does not in any way reflect ingratitude on my behalf. I would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their assistance without which this project would not have been possible. While my own perspective will not accord at all points with the views of these contributors, I hope that the analysis forwarded here is recognizable to them and that, perhaps, the work is useful in illuminating their own experiences. I am particularly grateful to: Neil Brown and A Company 5 Scots for their extraordinary Hibernian hospitality especially in Paris and to Eugene Berger who assisted with translations in France. In Kandahar, I am grateful to Nick Carter and Dickie Davies, the Commander and Chief of Staff Regional Command South 2009–10, respectively, for allowing me to take up a position in their headquarters, and to Ewen McLay, J. D. Stevens, Cassie Dunlap, Randy Brumit, Lee McCarthy, Guy Harrison, Keith Adams, and Debi Lomax, who made that headquarters a good deal less depressing than in reality I, as a civilian, found it. I have only fond memories of the Prism Cell’s shack and its recurrently entertaining (but eventually removed) trip hazard; I will never look at an exercise ball in quite the same way again. I am especially indebted to Ewen McLay’s continued support and advice.

The Royal Marines have always been very supportive of my research and it is not an exaggeration to say that without their help both in Britain and the United States, much of the research for this project would have never happened. I am particularly indebted to Ged Salzano and the Commando Training Centre Royal Marines and, above all, the Platoon
Weapons Branch there. Al Livingstone kindly gave me permission to watch training which was more than facilitated by Russ Coles, Richard ‘Chippy’ Thornton, Nick Olive, Mick O’Donnell, and Al Weldon; these Marines formed the core of a highly experienced training team; the novelty of what they do is evident in the text. I learnt much from them and thank each of them personally. The staff at the Royal Marines’ Junior Command Course in 2009 were extremely helpful, especially Phil Robinson for facilitating my visits. I am grateful to Royal Marines Liaison Officers in the USA, without whose efforts visits to the United States Marines Corps’ Infantry Officer Course would not have happened: Martin Price and Matthew Jones. Individually, Tom Dingwall, Ross Preston, Richard Cantrill, Andy Watkins, and Kate Nesbitt gave me much time. Robert Thompson, an old friend, and the OPTAG Team at Camp Bastion Helmand and in the UK provided essential support and assistance; I cannot name each member of staff individually but would like to acknowledge their help here. I am indebted to Edward Short and Sean Leach.

In Germany, the Infantry School at Hammelburg and its staff were generous with their time and I am particularly grateful to the assistance of Alexander-Nils Simon. In France, Colonel Hubert Legrand and Lieutenant Colonel Jan de Kermenguy at CENZUB were very kind in allowing me to visit what is clearly the premier urban training site in Europe and demonstrates French vision and commitment. That trip was enabled by Paul Newton, in his capacity as Commander Force Development and Training, Sebastian and Emma Miller, and Paul Corden. To observe the US Marines Corps is a privilege accorded to few foreign civilians and I am thankful to Colonel Julian Alford, Major Carlos Barela, Captains Cummings, Antolini, and Perkins of the United States Marines Corps’ Basic School and Infantry Officer Course for allowing me to visit and for looking after me at the extraordinary Range 220 in 29 Palms. Involving memorable dawn walks and evening runs in Joshua Tree National Park and concluding with a couple of surfs at San Clemente, it was one of the most interesting and enjoyable weeks of research I have ever conducted. In Canada, I am grateful to the Gregg Centre, University of New Brunswick, and the Combat Training Centre at Gagetown and especially to Lieutenant Colonel Gallinger, Major Andrew Hartson, Captain Giselle Holland, Marc Milner, Valerie Gallant, and, above all, Captains Greg Grant and Chris Anderson (for whose patient driving I am very indebted). I am also grateful to Irena Goldenburg for her generous provision of materials for Chapter 11.

As Randall Collins described in his work on intellectual production, scholarship is only an apparently isolated activity. In fact, any programme of research necessarily involves a conversation with a multiplicity of scholars
both living and dead. Scholarship is a communal activity too. Much of the material which I have studied for this project was unusual terrain for a sociologist but I have found my conversations with even long-dead scholars enlightening. This book traverses a number of different fields including military history, international relations, security studies, military anthropology, and sociology. Each of these fields is vibrant and I have found my interactions with colleagues in them enriching, entertaining, and instructive. I have benefited immeasurably from my discussions and indeed friendships with a variety of fellow scholars, and this work is dependent upon their interventions and support. This work is intended as a continuation of many of those conversations and could not have been possible without the help and advice of numerous individuals. Specifically, the research was, in fact, initiated in a debate in 2007 in *Armed Forces & Society* with Guy Siebold on the question of cohesion in the military. In my response to his intervention, I first articulated the central thesis of this book in a short footnote, when I expressed an only half-formed thought which began to occur to me as I began to research more deeply into the question of cohesion. This entire work might be seen as an elaboration of that footnote and, therefore, as an extended response to Guy Siebold himself. I am indebted to him for stimulating these ideas. There are many, many other scholars without whom this work could not have been completed. I am particularly grateful to Hew Strachan, Antulio Enchevarria, Ingo Trauschweizer, Richard Carrier, Martin Thomas, Garth Pratten, Victoria Basham, Rachel Woodward, Andrew Godefroy, Paul Higate, Anthony Forster, Paul Cornish, Huw Davies, Patrick Porter, Tim Bird, John Hockey, Philip Langer, David Segal, Eyal Ben-Ari, Karl Yden, Alexander Watson, Jonathon Fennell, Jonathon Boff, Pat Shields and *Armed Forces & Society*, the Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society, Rene Moelker, Tibor Tresch, Manon Andres, and the European Research Group on the Military and Society; all of whom provided essential support at certain points in the project. Theo Farrell and Rob Foley provided perceptive guidance on the book proposal submitted to Oxford and, thereby, improved the book. I am also very grateful to Mattias Varul, a close and trusted colleague here at Exeter, who helped me with a number of awkward German translations as well as many other less practical but no less important forms of assistance. Since the start of my research on the armed forces, Christopher Dandeker has consistently provided wise and much appreciated counsel. I have benefited from the help of Jeffrey Alexander and Philip Smith (and their Centre for Cultural Sociology at Yale University where I presented an early version of this work); this project cannot be defined as part of their ‘strong programme’ but I do see it as compatible with their advocacy of cultural sociology. I was delighted to be able to discuss the issue of combat with the Vietnam veteran and now celebrated author Karl Marlantes.
His interest in the project and comments on my thesis on the basis of his own genuine experiences were deeply appreciated.

There are five scholars for whom a special mention has to be made. I have worked with Bruce Coleman for over a decade at Exeter and have enjoyed our many conversations about cricket and other things. He read Chapters 3 to 7 and provided detailed and apposite comments on them; I thank him personally for his efforts and am confident the chapters are better for his contribution, though I accept that there are wider political questions which he raised that I have failed to answer here. Approximately a decade ago, Randall Collins visited Exeter to give a talk on his recently published work *The Sociology of Philosophies*. It was a pleasure to meet him then and to retain his generous support since that time. I visited the University of Pennsylvania in November 2009 where I presented the initial thesis of this project and when Randall was able to give me a guided ‘Mafia’ tour of the Italian area of the city, pointing out venues in which various hits had been made; at one point we seemed to be improbably confused for a Mafia don and his lieutenant by a local citizen bemused by two obvious outsiders wandering about his neighbourhood. As with the Yale strong programme, *The Combat Soldier* is not a straightforward example of Randall Collins’s interaction ritual chain theory. Yet, with a Durkheimian influence evident throughout the text, the connections with Randall Collins’s work and my indebtedness to both Randall personally and his scholarship are clear. Randall kindly read and commented on Chapters 8–10 and provided me with detailed and highly pertinent observations. My responses to his questions are likely to have been inadequate but his observations forced me to improve the text and I hope will provide a more advanced starting point for future discussions. I also record my great appreciation to Jeremy Black, another close colleague, near neighbour, and military historian, from whom I have always learnt a great deal. He read the entire manuscript and was not only hugely supportive of the work but crucially gave me honest critical advice on it. Tim Edmunds, a long-time friend and colleague, who had previously assisted me with *The Transformation of Europe’s Armed Forces*, read and commented on the entire manuscript. I remain indebted not only to his careful critical reading and the identification of tensions and deficiencies in the argument but also to his warm enthusiasm for the project. Authors are often the worst judges of their work and, with a project which came to take such a specialized interest in the minutiae of infantry tactics, he was able to assure me that I had not become an obsessive pedant narrowly focused on a topic of interest to no one but myself but that the issue of combat was of import to a much wider audience. That constituted some of the most important support and guidance I received. The same is true of Andrew Dorman, another long-standing friend and colleague from whose work I have learnt a great deal. His advice
and support throughout the project has been very important to me and must be fully acknowledged.

The project could not have been completed without institutional support. The research was supported by a Nuffield Small Grant (‘The Profession of Violence: infantry tactics in the twenty-first century’, SG 04403) and by an ESRC grant (‘Combat, Cohesion and Gender’ ES/J006645/1); I am deeply grateful to both institutions and I hope that my work shows that numerous small grants to a diversity of projects may be a productive way of funding research. At Exeter, I am grateful to Hannah Pike, Rosamund Davies, Paul Woolnough, and Debra Myhill whose advice and assistance on my applications was invaluable and without whose help I certainly would not have received the ESRC award. The very final stages of the book were completed at All Souls College Oxford, where I currently hold a visiting fellowship. The support of the college and Hew Strachan and his Changing Character of War programme, of whose series this book is a part, has been very important to me.

I am grateful to the support of a number of libraries. First and foremost, I am very grateful to Conrad Crane’s Army. Not only is the archive held in AHEC impressive but, somewhat disconcertingly for a British academic, the staff at this library seem to regard it as their duty to assist visiting scholars and to make every endeavour to help them; even more surprisingly, they seemed even to relish their role. It is a rare thing today: a library for readers. I am grateful to one of the staff (whose name I never knew) for kindly driving me to a local mall to purchase a digital camera; it did not work—mainly, as I now recognize, due to my incompetence—but the gesture was not forgotten. I am also indebted to the library at the Joint Services Command and Staff College and its always accessible staff, especially Rhys Thomas, Alison Pratt, and Olga Wronecki who were all exceptionally helpful, to the point of sending me scanned material by email. Research was also conducted at the British Library and the National Archive whose holdings proved essential. The Bundesarchiv-Militär-archiv in Freiburg im Breisgau was also very helpful and provided some useful supporting material. I am very grateful to the American Military History Centre, both for its public provision of the official US Army history series, but also for its permission to reproduce the map of the Makin Islands (a scan of which they sent to me) without cost. The MOD’s Defence Intellectual Property Rights at Abbey Wood gave me permission to reproduce a series of images from British army First World War doctrine for Chapter 6; I am grateful to them and particularly to Tim Allsop for their assistance. I would also like to add my gratitude to the team at OUP: Dominic Byatt, Lizzie Suffling, Karen Villahermosa, Jackie Pritchard, and Edwin Pritchard.

The private, domestic sphere has become an increasing focus of public concern and fascination in contemporary culture and it is typical for families to be acknowledged in ways which would have been inconceivable and
unnecessary in the past. I prefer privacy. Nevertheless, some obvious acknowledgements have to be made to a small group of people who are neither soldiers nor scholars but without whom this project could never have happened. While the actual writing of this book has been less difficult, despite its length, than some of my previous works, the research for it has involved numerous long trips away from Exeter. I am grateful to my family for accepting those absences and especially to my wife, Cathy King, who has endured the pressures it has placed upon her in terms of raising our children Sam, Megan, and Madeleine, even while establishing herself as a successful printmaker.
On 19 June 1879, General William Tecumseh Sherman recalled his experiences of war to the graduating class of the Michigan Military Academy: ‘I’ve been where you are now and I know just how you feel. It’s entirely natural that there should beat in the breast of every one of you a hope and desire that some day you can use the skill you have acquired here. Suppress it! You don’t know the horrible aspects of war. I’ve been through two wars and I know. I’ve seen cities and homes in ashes. I’ve seen thousands of men lying on the ground, their dead faces looking up at the skies. I tell you, war is Hell!’ In declaiming against war at the end of the nineteenth century, Sherman unwittingly created a leitmotif which would become dominant in popular perceptions of industrial warfare in the twentieth century. Unbounded by the limits of human strength and endurance, mechanized war constituted a uniquely traumatic experience for soldiers, placing an almost insupportable physical and emotional load upon their senses. The noise of the guns, the speed and violence of projectiles, the simultaneous and multiple movement of soldiers, tanks, planes, and vehicles overloaded the capacities of human comprehension to inflict catastrophic physical and psychological harm. Not only had the battlefield become more deadly but, where combatants even up to the middle of the nineteenth century had once operated in close proximity to each other, the modern battlefield had also become an anonymous arena dominated by blind chance; a soldier might be killed randomly at any point by a shell or bullet fired by unseen and distant opponents who did not even know where their shots had fallen. Mutilation and death were ubiquitous, instantaneous, and apparently agentless.

The idea that war was indeed a hell began to crystallize as a central reaction in western culture to the First World War and was articulated by European writers, poets, artists, and composers in new and often shocking pieces. In one of the most important and troubling memoirs to emerge from the Great War, Ernst Jünger described the chaos of battle as a senseless ‘inferno’ propelling defenceless and powerless soldiers to their deaths. In order to communicate
this sense of transcendent horror, Ernst Jünger’s accounts of the First World
War are punctuated by graphic descriptions of the injuries inflicted on
the human body by modern weaponry. A scene following a shell-strike in
the midst of an advance is illustrative: ‘The rolling motion of the dark mass
[of injured and dying soldiers] in the bottom of the smoking and glowing
cauldron [the shell crater], like a hellish vision, for an instant tore open
the extreme abyss of terror.’ Jünger recalled a similar scene from a trench
following another artillery strike: ‘A figure stripped to the waist, with ripped-
open back leaned against the parapet. Another, with a triangular flap hanging
off the back of his skull, emitted short, high-pitched screams. This was the
home of the great god of Pain, and for the first time I look through a devilish
chink into the depths of his realm.’ Significantly, wounds did not seem to be
inflicted by human action but by an unseen satanic agent. Confronted daily by
these appalling scenes, Jünger memorably summarized the front line as
‘the red-hot chambers of dread’; like Sherman, Jünger seems to have found
himself in hell, although at the end of the novel, he affirms its existential
and political purpose. Erich Maria Remarque’s work All Quiet on the Western
Front is replete with such imagery and it too represents the Great War as hell,
without any prospect of redemption.

French memoirs from the First World War traverse similar terrain. Jules
Romain was equally dismayed by his experiences of combat where normal
standards of decency had been inverted. The entire front line was like an open
sewer in which human excreta mixed with the rotting corpses of a nearby
graveyard to produce a repellent odour; ‘the sewage was still fresh and living,
fresh too the graveyard and, in a sense, living too.’ Some bodies were never
properly interred.

At one point in the trench a hand stuck out, a think sheath of black and sticky flesh—
the colour of black flies—that barely hid the bone beneath projecting from a torn coat-
sleeve. The hand had been there during the battalion’s last stay in the sector, but then it
had been an ordinary hand and of quite a different colour: whitish, like a dead and
drooping flower.

Other French writers also demonstrated a similarly morbid interest in
recording what industrial weapons could do to the human body. Mutilation
is a recurrent theme of Barbusse’s narrative: ‘They [the dead] are pressed
against one another, each making a different gesture of death with his arms or
his legs. Some exhibit half-mouldy faces, their skin rusted or yellow with black
spots. Several have faces that have turned completely black, tarred, their lips
huge and swollen; Negro heads blown up like balloons. Between two bodies,
belonging to either one or the other, is a severed hand with a mass of filaments
emerging from the wrist. Others are shapeless, fouled by larvae with vague
pieces of equipment or fragments of bone.’
British writers were no less disgusted by the war and its grotesque effects. Edmund Blunden recorded seeing ‘a lance corporal reduced to gobbets of blackening flesh, the earth-wall spotted with blood, with flesh, an eye under the duckboard, the pulpy bone’, as a result of shell fire. Wyn Griffiths’s account of the First World War climaxes in his gruesome description of the corpses in Mametz Wood in 1916 during the Battle of the Somme: ‘Limbs and mutilated trunks and here and there a detached head, forming splashes of red against the green leaves, and, as an advertisement of the horror of our way of life and death, and of our crucifixion of youth, one tree held in its branches a leg, with its torn flesh hanging down over a spray of leaves.’ The juxtaposition of natural vegetation and mechanized destruction highlighted the obscenity of industrial warfare for Wyn Griffiths. Even the phlegmatic and disciplinarian medical officer of the Second Battalion, the Royal Welch Fusiliers, Captain John Dunn, was plainly troubled by some of the worst scenes he encountered. In his chronicle of the battalion, he describes (drawing on contributions from Siegfried Sassoon) the line the Fusiliers held in March 1917 near the Somme as a ‘dreadful place’, a ‘monstrous region of death and disaster’ which might have ‘enriched’ Dante, Milton, or Blake; ‘the World War had got our insignificant little unit in its mouth; we were there to be munched, maimed and liberated.’ Explicitly recalling one of Dante’s circles of Hell, Dunn recalled: ‘I can remember looking down, as I blundered and gasped my way along, and seeing a mask-like face floating on the surface of the flooded trench. The face had detached itself from its skull.’ Elsewhere, ‘I can remember two mud-clotted hands protruding from the wet ashen soil like the roots of a tree turned upside down.’ J. R. R. Tolkien’s description of the landscape of Mordor in The Lord of the Rings was drawn directly from his experiences of the Western Front and echoed Dunn’s experiences closely: ‘As the light grew a little he saw to his surprise that what from a distance had seemed wide and featureless flats were in fact all broken and tumbled. Indeed the whole surface of the plains of Gorgoroth was pocked with great holes, as if, while it was still a waste of soft mud, it had been smitten with a shower of bolts and huge slingstones. The largest of these holes were rimmed with ridges of broken rock, and broad fissures ran out from them in all directions.’

Hurrying forward again, Sam tripped, catching his foot in some old root or tussock. He fell and came heavily on his hands, which sank deep into sticky ooze, so that his face was brought close to the surface of the dark mere. There was a faint hiss, a noisome smell went up, the lights flickered and danced and swirled. For a moment the water below him looked like some window, glazed with grimy glass, through which he was
peering. Wrenching his hands out of the bog, he sprang back with a cry. ‘There are dead things, dead faces in the water’, he said with horror.16

For all these writers, industrial warfare with its mechanical desecration of the human body was barbarous. The body was ripped apart by a demonic power.

Yet, literary accounts of the First World War do not merely point to the obscenity of mutilation. Commentators interpreted this obliteration of the physical body as a symbol of the spiritual destruction of the human community. Indeed, in one of the most interesting passages of his book, Jünger contemplates this collapse of community at length. As the Germans retreated to the Siegfried Stellung in 1917, they were ordered to destroy every village, placing booby-traps wherever they could. Jünger found the scenes of vandalism disturbing. Indeed, he was not alone in this. Crown Prince Rupprecht opposed the order strongly on the grounds that it was damaging to the morale and discipline of his army.17

The scenes were reminiscent of a madhouse, and the effect of them was similar: half funny, half repellent. They were also, we could see right away, bad for the men’s morale and honour. Here, for the first time, I witnessed wanton destruction that I was later to see to excess; this is something that is unhealthily bound up with the economic thinking of our age, but it does more harm than good to the destroyer, and dishonours the soldier.18

Here, it is possible to see that, while Jünger was himself never a member of the Nazi party, his atavistic desire for a noble brotherhood in arms had resonances with the extreme right. More importantly, he specifically relates the barbarity of mechanized warfare to the economic philosophy of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with its concept of rational individualism. Industrial warfare is a product of industrial capitalism and reflects its social and historical origins. For Jünger, the First World War was dominated by a utilitarian principle in which strategic ends were achieved in the most efficient manner, corrupting the bonds between soldiers and defiling their human dignity.

Jünger saw the implication of this strategic logic for the human community clearly. In one of the last actions in which Jünger was involved as part of the final German offensives of the war in March 1918, Jünger describes the intensity of his feelings; ‘As we advanced we were in the grip of a berserk rage. The overwhelming desire to kill lent wings to my stride. Rage squeezed bitter tears from my eyes. The immense desire to destroy that overhung the battlefield precipitated a red mist in our brains. We called out sobbing and stammering fragments of sentences to one another, and an impartial observer might have concluded we were all ecstatically happy.’19 The description is significant. Although part of a regimental advance, Jünger describes the collapse of social relations in the German infantry. Jünger and his comrades were driven on by individual rage. Although they could not communicate with each other, they stampeded forward. Their actions were not so much collective
as the mere coincidence of individualized, bestial instincts. He recalls this battle earlier in his work: ‘It wasn’t until much later that I experienced the direct coming together, the climax of battle in the form of waves of attackers on an open field, which for decisive, murderous moments would break into the chaos and vacuity of the battlefield.’\textsuperscript{20} Paradoxically, despite Jünger’s numerous discussions of esprit de corps and comradeship, at this decisive moment in 1918 as the First World War reached its climax and the true reality of war was revealed, and all sense of community disappeared: ‘Every man ran forward for himself,’\textsuperscript{21} so that ‘in the midst of these masses that had risen up, one was still alone’.\textsuperscript{22} The German troops were no longer fully human; they were propelled by innate drives for survival and revenge. For Jünger, industrial war had dissolved the human community into a brutal herd of individuals. In this, the war was, for all these writers, as Sherman predicted, a hell.

While the Western Front retains a special place in European imagination, much of the literature about the Second World War conveys a similar message about war. Guy Sajer’s memoir of his service as an infantryman in the Gross Deutschland Division on the Eastern Front recurrently describes the conflict as horrific in a manner which is directly consistent with the work of both Jünger and Remarque. Following a withdrawal and an intense Russian bombardment during the Battle of Belgorod, Sajer describes how ‘we were unable to speak’: ‘Abandoned by a God in whom many of us believed, we lay prostrate and dazed in our demi-tomb.’\textsuperscript{23} Later a fellow soldier is amazed that Sajer has escaped ‘that inferno.’\textsuperscript{24} Interestingly, while the United States’ short participation at the end of the First World War, perhaps, ensured that popular and literary responses were muted in the 1920s, reactions to the war were very pronounced in American writing after the Second World War. Drawing on his experiences in the Pacific, Norman Mailer too emphasizes the incomprehensibility of combat illustrated by the random and callous mutilation of the human body:

The Japanese had been dead for a week and they had swollen to the dimensions of obese men with enormous legs and bellies, and buttocks which split their clothing. They had turned green and purple and the maggots festered in their wounds and covered their feet. Each maggot was about a half inch long and it looked like a slug except that it was the colour of a fish’s belly.\textsuperscript{25}

One of his characters notably summarizes the status to which the human has been reduced by war: ‘Goddam carrion, that’s all we are, men, goddam carrion.’\textsuperscript{26} James Jones’s work on the Pacific campaign echoes Mailer’s account. Perhaps the greatest piece of literature to emerge from the Second World War, Joseph Heller’s \textit{Catch-22}, also revolves around the theme of the senselessness of war. Although Heller’s novel is a far more encompassing satire of western society, he too draws upon the motif of bodily mutilation to illustrate war’s special horrors. The central scene of the novel which is gradually revealed in the course of the narrative to explain Yossarian’s