

**DEBORAH LEFF:** Good afternoon and welcome to the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum. I'm Deborah Leff, Director of the Library and Museum, and on behalf of myself and John Shattuck, the CEO of the Kennedy Library Foundation, it's a pleasure to have you here this afternoon for our Forum on *Writers on War*.

I'd like to thank the Kennedy Library Forum sponsors -- Fleet, the Lowell Institute, Boston Capital, WBUR, the Boston Globe and Boston.com.

With all that is going on in Iraq this days, I suspect it won't be long before we see the emergence of some remarkable books on the subject of war in Iraq. War is such a great subject. As Ernest Hemingway noted in a letter to F. Scott Fitzgerald, "War is the best subject of all. It groups the maximum of material and speeds up the action and brings out all kinds of stuff you have to wait a lifetime to get. What made *Three Soldiers* a swell book was the war. What made *Streets of Night* a lousy book was Boston."

I quote Hemingway not only because one of today's speakers will speak about him, but also because the Kennedy Library is honored to hold the archives of Ernest Hemingway, an outgrowth of the friendship between First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy and Ernest Hemingway's fourth wife Mary. If you want to see Ernest Hemingway's leather briefcase, or his ring made out of shrapnel from World War I injuries, or his letters to actress Marlene Dietrich, or his military medals, or the more than 300 drafts and redrafts and redrafts of his major novels, novels from A

*Farewell to Arms* to *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, come to the Kennedy Library and Museum.

You'll find on the table in the hall more information about the Hemingway archives and a pamphlet about the Friends of the Hemingway Collection, which I encourage you to join. We could really use your support.

The writings of Hemingway on war have recently been edited and published by his grandson, Sean Hemingway, who joins us today. Mr. Hemingway, who holds a doctorate in classical art and archeology from Bryn Mawr College, is the Associate Curator of the Department of Greek and Roman Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. His book, *Hemingway on War*, was recently published by Scribner's and includes Hemingway's writings on World War I, the Spanish Civil War and World War II.

The war in Vietnam sparked numerous novels, including what many consider to be the classic of that war, *Fields of Fire*. We are honored to have with us its author, James Webb, Jr., who also wrote *A Sense of Honor* and *Lost Soldiers*. Mr. Webb is a decorated Marine who served in Vietnam and was awarded the Navy Cross, the Silver Star Medal, two Bronze Star Medals and two Purple Hearts. He went on to serve as Secretary of the Navy and Assistant Secretary of Defense, and today is a screenwriter/producer, a journalist and a business consultant.

We are also greatly honored to have with us today the man who is generally acknowledged to be the nation's leading historian on war in literature, retired University of Pennsylvania professor Paul Fussell. His landmark book on World War I, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, won both the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award. In World War II, at the age of 21, Mr. Fussell led a rifle platoon in the 103rd Infantry Division and was severely wounded in France.

And moderating today's conversation is the Chair of Harvard University's Department of Comparative Literature, Susan Rubin Suleiman. Professor Suleiman is the C. Douglas Dillon Professor, and I have to say at the Kennedy Library C. Douglas Dillon, as a member of President Kennedy's Cabinet, holds a soft spot for us. She is the Dillon Professor of the Civilization of France and her current work is on history and memory, including the Holocaust.

After today's Forum, all of our participants will be available to sign their books in our Museum store. Professor Suleiman, I turn it over to you. Thank you.

**SUSAN RUBIN SULEIMAN:** Thank you, and thank you all for coming. The way these Forums work is that we have a conversation, and then all of you are invited to ask questions after that. I guess I'll just point to the microphones that are there, so that when you ask your question, you can be heard by everybody.

Let's start the conversation among us, and I thought I would begin by asking a question that everybody has ideas on, or at least I'm sure all the panelists do. Do you think in order to write well about war one has to have experienced it? Also, if that's the case, then, for example, Hemingway, he was in the First World War, he wrote *A Farewell to Arms*. He participated as a journalist and as a very involved witness in the Spanish Civil War, he wrote *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. He was also involved in writing about the Second World War, especially about D-Day, and then he wrote *Across the River and into the Trees*. So Hemingway is almost like the absolute example of you participate and then you write.

Is it as close as that, or is it enough to have experienced war in some way to write about any war; what do you all think? Paul?

**PAUL FUSSELL:** I think the question is hard to answer, because Hemingway was an extremely complex character, and had an amazing genius for imagining warfare. He was sort of in a war, but he was always a reporter. He never killed anybody in the war, thus building up a lifetime of phony guilt, if you like. He knew a great deal about war. In his case, it wasn't necessary for him to shoot anybody with a rifle, or to pull the cord on a Howitzer. You don't get many people like that. So I would say, in general, Hemingway excepted, you would have to find people who've fought in a war. James Jones is a good example, although he fought for about only two days.

**JAMES WEBB, JR.:** I have a little bit different reaction to your question, and as you were asking it I was going back to, first of all, the thought of what kind of writing? There are a lot of different ways to write. For instance, I just finished a book that we were talking about, about the history of the Scotch-Irish people. I have to go back to the Hadrian's Wall period; that's one type of writing, it's a different type of writing.

But what I found, and Hemingway was mentioned by Dr. Fussell, and when I was learning how to write, I was reading Hemingway and Steinbeck and Faulkner a lot. The thing that struck me about them, as I was attempting to write novels, is that their experiences were observed experiences. The power in their writing was through observation rather than, say, even academic study. Ernest Hemingway, I don't think, ever went to college. John Steinbeck did one semester at University of Colorado and got a C in English and won the Nobel Prize. Faulkner was essentially homeschooled in the Classics but never really went for formal education.

But in terms of fiction, the power of observation is really important, however you obtain that experience. And then when you get into the belly-wrenching fiction of war, about what it's like, it definitely makes a lot of difference if you've had to be in that situation.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** Did you want to talk about Hemingway, Sean?

**SEAN HEMINGWAY:** I would just add, I think Jim's comment is very interesting. Hemingway, as you were remarking, was in World War I as an ambulance driver, but in *A Farewell to Arms* he writes about the retreat at Caporetto, and soldiers who were there, who have read those passages even believed, well, that's the way it was. Yet, Hemingway wasn't there at Caporetto and was able to write very convincingly about it through considerable research as well as learning from his own experiences both in World War I before that and also later.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** I guess I had a slight ulterior motive in asking the question, because one of the things that struck me was -- Well, okay, I'll say it now and we can talk about it later. One of the things that struck me was that when you think of the great war literature, or literature about battle, there are very few women who have written it, right? So my first thought was, is it that women haven't experienced battle, at least historically. Now they are. And is that why, or is it a guy thing?

But we can talk about that in a minute. I wanted to ask another question first, which is, what is your favorite war novel? The reason I'm asking that is that I was struck by something that Paul Fussell wrote in his book *The Great War and Modern Memory*, that World War I was the war that ended in irony. It began in innocent excitement and ended in a terrible sense of disenchantment and irony. What I'm wondering is are the greatest war novels wars that celebrate heroism, or

are they in fact all anti-war novels, or even worse, ironic, very harsh, negative novels? I'm curious, what's your favorite war book?

**PROF. FUSSELL:** My favorite war book is very easy, and on this occasion it's a pleasure to answer the question. It's *A Farewell to Arms*. A superb thing. When I was teaching English to students, I always began with the first paragraph of that book. I would ask them to analyze the source of its beauty and its power. The book remains one of the masterpieces of irony, which otherwise appears only in British writing, somehow. So that's my favorite war book.

**MR. WEBB:** I would say *A Farewell to Arms* is certainly my favorite Hemingway book. The first page of *A Farewell to Arms* is almost a Cézanne painting, it's just so gloriously written. For me, I can't pick one because I think this type of writing, again, goes to different types of author, thought and messages. For instance, *A Farewell to Arms* certainly is one. *All Quiet on the Western Front*, I mean, gets into just the hopelessness that overtook soldiers after years and years of this sort of fighting; that is a beautifully written book. The first novel of any consequence that I read when I got back from Vietnam was *Once an Eagle* by Anton Myrer, which, really, in many ways is America's *War and Peace*. He starts in 1916 and in a notional way gets all the way to Vietnam. The unfortunate thing about that book was it came out as a Book of the Month selection right after Tet '68, when our country was just so exhausted by war that it never got the attention that it really deserved. I could probably name a couple of others, but those certainly are three.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** Do you have a favorite one, Sean?

**DR. HEMINGWAY:** *For Whom the Bell Tolls* would be my favorite. Although *A Farewell to Arms* is fantastic as well. In working on this book *Hemingway on War*, re-reading *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, it is such a powerful portrayal of war, the Spanish Civil War, portraying both the good and the bad of both sides. It captures the horrors that occur on both sides of the line, and yet it's a personal story of an individual within the war.

**MR. WEBB:** I cannot neglect *Killer Angels* by Shaara, which was written about the Battle of Gettysburg. When you're talking about translating experience, he was an Airborne soldier who was able to translate one set of experiences and really get inside the minds of both sides on the battlefield.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** There's also *The Red Badge of Courage*, right?

**DR. HEMINGWAY:** I would add that I believe Ernest Hemingway's favorite war book was *Her Privates We* by Frederic Manning.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** What about the idea that war novels are really anti-war novels? Do you buy that? What about you, Jim?

**MR. WEBB:** I'll give you an interesting observation. Clearly, after a popular war, the books that cut against the grain of prevailing orthodoxy were the first ones to come out, after World War II, for instance--

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** *The Naked and the Dead*.

**MR. WEBB:** *The Naked and the Dead*, and to a certain extent *From Here to Eternity*. When I was trying to sell *Fields of Fire*, it was rejected by 12 publishers, and finally the publisher, the editor that bought the book for Prentice-Hall, which was a very small trade house at the time, wrote me a letter and he said, "All great war novels are those that cut against the grain of prevailing orthodoxy," which is where I just got that term.

*Fields of Fire* is not a political book, but it attempts to retain the dignity of the people who went through the experience, and at that point, after the Vietnam War, that was something that was really, if not fresh, sort of unusual. Great war novels don't necessarily have to be anti-war, although they do have to get into the emotions of the people who go through war.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** And sort of depict the pain as well as the, sometimes, really, camaraderie, for example, is one of the things that I noticed, that men at war seem to establish a kind of a friendship, which is so strong, I guess, because they are exposed to danger together. So that's a positive side.

**PROF. FUSSELL:** I think to answer that question we have to add the question, which war? Because some wars are more writeable about and more awful than others. For example, before the Second World War there was nothing like booby traps. Booby traps: anti-personnel mines devised to explode exactly at the height of a man's crotch. These are 20th-century inventions, which do us all dishonor.

It's a very different matter writing about that kind of war than, say, the war rendered by Stendhal or by Tolstoy, et cetera, or even by wonderful writers about the American Civil War. What I'm saying is war gets worse as the years pass. Elements of sadism and black humor begin to enter, which were never there before. So it depends on which war you are talking about writing about.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** So I guess the question is, today, could we write a straightforward heroic war story. I think you would argue no, right? You would say after World War I it's not possible to write just a straightforward heroic war novel.

**PROF. FUSSELL:** It's possible. It's possible to write a book about heroism in the Second World War. I just wasn't the type to do that. So I wrote the other side. In my library there are many books about heroism in the Second World War. Not really any ground fighting, which is what I experienced, but the bombers and the fighters, and things like that.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** What about humor? We think of war writing, whether it's heroic, or whether it's grim, or celebrating friendship, and irony perhaps -- by the way, do you know *Voyage to the End of Night*, the Celine book? That's a French one, and it's probably the most negative book about war that you could possibly read; there's not one good thing in it, nothing, no heroism, nothing, nothing, nothing. It's just carnage.

But I was thinking more sort of humor, just laughing, whether as a correspondent or as an actual participant. Do you know of any examples?

**PROF. FUSSELL:** I think the late Joe Heller, one of my favorite people as well as one of my favorite authors. I was once on a program, sort of like this, with Joe and Bill Styron and others were there, people who had fought or were about to fight on the ground, and Joe fought in the air, and we were all very, very ironic and horrified by war, and so indicated. He said at one point, "I don't know what's wrong with you people. I loved the war. I enjoyed it no end. I was never happier than when I was in the bombers, bombing Germany from Italy, bombing Czechoslovakia from Italy." I suppose the answer is, it takes all types. I think being outrageously angry towards reality in the war is the most common experience. But there are plenty of exceptions, and then you meet them as I met Joe Heller.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** Which is sort of black humor, right? What about you, Jim or Sean?

**MR. WEBB:** As you were asking the question, I was actually thinking about *Catch-22* and wondering if a book like that could ever be written in today's age with so much mass communications and CNN coverage. With the immediacy of the event, could you ever really pull something like that off. I'd love to see someone be able to. It was funny, but it was also hugely ironic. Some of the things in *Catch-22* were -- he really was making a kind of message ... I'll tell you a funny story about *Catch-22*. When I was in Vietnam in a place called Go Noi Island, it was just a wasteland, and I was hating it; everybody was hating where we were. One of my fellow platoon commanders comes running across this perimeter holding a book, laughing. I'm going, what is this guy happy about? And he had *Catch-22*. He says, "Read this, read this." And they're in a bar and somebody's asking Yossarian who the enemy is, and Yossarian says, "The enemy is anyone who shoots at me, and anyone who sends me out to get shot at."

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** In other words, everybody.

**MR. WEBB:** If you can pull that off, it's probably the best way to get messages.

**DR. HEMINGWAY:** It's interesting that Ernest Hemingway didn't write a major novel about World War II after his experiences in World War II. The closest that he came to that was *Across the River and into the Trees*, and that has a lot of bittersweet moments, and it has some funny parts in it. One of the passages that I chose for *Hemingway on War*, the chain of command plays on the chain of

command in military code, and then the necessity to listen to your wife or your girlfriend in making a relationship work.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** Maybe it's also the style, because there was one where I was reading something from this book of yours the other day, and I was bursting out laughing, it was just so funny, where he says, "It's about chauffeurs in Madrid." As a correspondent, Hemingway, and I guess others were being driven around and he goes to all the different chauffeurs that he had, and except for the last one who was a really wonderful hero and so on, but the intermediate one, David, he says, "He swore terribly," and then he says, "But he had really only one real defect as a chauffeur; he didn't know how to drive a car." So there I was sitting, absolutely in stitches over this. But the way he turned it, the way he turned the phrase. I'm sure it wasn't that funny at the time since this guy was driving them around without knowing how to drive.

**PROF. FUSSELL:** There's certainly a way that if you'd been in combat, in ground combat sometime, the only appropriate response to it is black humor. And this is usually kept among the troops and never advertised elsewhere, never reaches civilianville. But it is the standard attitude of those who have fought a long time and have seen a great many horrors. There's no way to talk about it except invert the normal reaction totally and regard it as a form of bizarre comedy -- enacted by whom? We don't know. God maybe? The president? You have to pick somebody as the author of this comedy. But I think that's a way into writing

about warfare. It's one of the ways you might choose or might become sympathetic to if you wanted to write about war.

**DR. HEMINGWAY:** Hemingway's short story, "The Butterfly and the Tank," is an interesting example of a case of the human need for levity in a wartime situation. A man comes into a bar and he's squirting people with a squirt gun or a flit gun, and it's in the midst of the Spanish Civil War and people don't understand what he's doing. They tell him to stop and end up killing him in the bar. It turns out that he had cologne in the squirt gun and he was just trying to make a joke. It's a tragic story, but it involves the sort of human need for levity in times of oppressive war.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** Right, although as you say, the butterfly and the tank; when a butterfly meets a tank, it will probably have a bad end, right? Here's a general question: Do you think there's a real difference in genre? You mentioned types of war writing. Hemingway wrote this as fiction, right? But then he also wrote the one about the chauffeurs of Madrid; it was an article in sort of a first-person war correspondent essay that he published in *Collier's* or something. Why publish one thing -- and it's really the same thing, Madrid under siege during the Spanish Civil War. Do you think there's a difference between writing it as fiction and writing it as non-fiction? I think Jim also has written both fiction and non-fiction about war. Do you see a difference there in the way it's put together, or anything? Sean?

**DR. HEMINGWAY:** I think for Hemingway writing in fiction was an opportunity to make the story as good as it could possibly be. “The Butterfly and the Tank” is based on a true experience, and he still is able to improve on it. I think another interesting aspect, and I think Paul and Jim can speak better to this, is the problem with writing about the truth in war as fact and the issues of censorship at the time as well. It’s something you comment on in your recent book, the difficulties of being able to portray exactly what’s happening at the moment that it’s happening without political conflicts of interest.

**PROF. FUSSELL:** Yes, and it’s more complicated than that, because while you’re writing it, you have to think of the audience. Are they going to regard this as true writing? And there are various things you can do to make your writing sound true, or be true if you like, and you mentioned the paradox, sometimes fiction becomes absolute truth. I think there are people who read *A Farewell to Arms* who imagine that Hemingway was at the retreat from Caporetto because it was absolutely incredible. And he did it, I think, by talking to as many people as possible, reading as much as possible. In other words, there’s an element of what we might even call a scholarship in the whole thing. You have to study what sounds true, or what will be taken as a mode of truth, and which might be thought by a literary critic or a philosopher to be the truth, because the individual example is the exception. And putting them all together gives you the truth. But that’s very hard to do. About two people per generation; Hemingway was one of them.

**MR. WEBB:** I think it really depends on what your objective is and when you're writing. To follow on just briefly to what the professor said, any novelist who is writing about an event that has a historical context would do well to do a good bit of study about the historical surroundings for veracity. In my novel *The Emperor's General*, which is the very end of the World War II and the beginning of the Japanese occupation, I studied that off and on for 15 years, the story of Tomoyuki Yamashita, the Tiger of Malaya, probably the greatest Japanese general who was hung as a war criminal by General MacArthur in a kangaroo court. But in terms of novel versus non-fiction, what I was trying to do in *Fields of Fire* I could only have done in a novel, because the novel is essentially an escalating moral drama, and it has to be observed by a group of people, none of whom has exactly the same reaction morally or physically to what is going on. What you see is this group of people being confronted with, essentially -- I don't want to say the normal immoralities of a combat existence in a guerilla-type war, but a series of escalating events that test their conscience and their emotions. They're all young. The average trooper in my platoon company, when I was a platoon company commander, was probably 19 years old. So in order to do that right, it had to be a novel, because I had to be able to select events and to show the escalation, and then to design characters that were around the perimeter of each one of these events. And, in the end, what you have is what Sean was intimating when he said the truth of fiction. I can take you through that and make you comprehend something that otherwise you cannot.

Now, if you're going to write a different kind of an observation about a war or a historical event, these days particularly it's better to go non-fiction. With the advent of home movies and this sort of thing, people aren't reading novels as extensively as they were 20 years ago, but they seem to be very interested in non-fiction.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** You say the advent of home movies, that's a whole other topic, but okay, non-fiction. So you still have the importance of the eyewitness, or the war correspondent who was there and who sees things, let's say, as opposed to somebody who later looks back and writes a non-fiction study, or more of a historical research study. That would bring me then to my next question, which is, do you think there are great women writers on war and women war correspondents? Do you know of any?

**PROF. FUSSELL:** Absolutely.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** I know there aren't many women novelists who write about war. Are there? That's another question, too.

**DR. HEMINGWAY:** Martha Gelhorn, Ernest Hemingway's wife. Not how she would want to be described, as Ernest Hemingway's wife, but a tag that she often got is one of the great women war correspondents.

**PROF. FUSSELL:** I would agree, but she was constricted by journalistic conventions that were dominant when she was writing. Editors insisted that you have seen and were positioned at the place, that you've seen what you're writing about, and that you're willing to swear to that. Only now is that beginning to be -- with all these people getting fired for lying who work on newspapers, only now are people getting more subtle about that. You can piece together the truth in a fiction better than any accurate literal report could make it. And that is a problem. It's a problem faced by all non-fiction writers.

My book on the First World War, it really is not about the fiction of truth, it's about the truth of fiction. The material I was using was written by poets, very skillful poets, who were very careful to make the lines come out right, and so wanted to use only material which readers of poetry would respond to, and they wrote about the war using those terms. But it's amazingly literary. I call one of my chapters "Oh, What a Literary War." And I think that can apply to any war that we have become accustomed to believing we understand, to a degree, because we've read the books, and we've read the fictions, and we've read the actual reports, and so we've put it together with language. That's a question that constantly tugs at me. What's the relation between language and actuality, if any?

**MR. WEBB:** That's hardly a gender issue. As I was saying in the beginning, it's an issue of being able to observe and be able to make correct judgments about what you're seeing, and actually Georgianne Geyer, I think, is one of the great foreign correspondents of the past 20 or 30 years. She goes all over the world.

She looks at situations, she processes it, and she makes some pretty spectacular judgments in the same environment that Hemingway was in as a correspondent in World War II.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** In the latest issue of the *New Yorker* there's a wonderful story, I think we talked about it over lunch, by a woman named Kathy Gannon on Afghanistan, "On the Road from Kabul to Kandahar." She really is in a very dangerous place and writing about it in an absolutely gripping way, which sort of shows you all the complexities. So I think, right now, probably there are a number of women who are writing as war correspondents.

What about readers? Do you have any readers in mind? What sort of reader do you think Hemingway had in mind, Sean? Anybody? Men? Women? Is it a bad question?

**MR. WEBB:** No, I think it's a good question. When I write, I have a truth teller more than an audience. I've never tried to write toward an audience. What I do, though, for instance in *Fields of Fire*, I had my own personal feelings about the Vietnam War, which I still believe was a just war, I will still defend it. The book itself does not deal with the politics of the war. My truth teller, when I was writing that book, is the Lance Corporal who's the rifleman down there in the third fire team going to look at this book and say this is veracity, this is true, or is it something else. Every book that I write, I do have a truth teller in mind.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** But it's a person who fought.

**MR. WEBB:** But in another book it might be something else. I just finished this book, it's coming out this fall, called *Born Fighting*, which is about the Scotch-Irish people, the whole history of the Scotch-Irish people. It goes back to Hadrian's Wall and moves to today. It's Scotch-Irish people in America. And the truth tellers there are going to be the members of the culture. Do I make exaggerations or have I really nailed this in my research?

**PROF. FUSSELL:** I wanted to get back for a minute to the question of the kind of truth that's possible in war fiction. I had an experience about two weeks ago. Because I knew I was coming to this occasion, I read a short story of Hemingway's that I'd never read before and it instantly became one of my favorites. It's called "Black Ass at the Crossroads." It is very good. I was fascinated by the fact that he obviously wrote it during the Second World War, but it was never published. Perhaps you know the history of this. It was never published, partly because Hemingway got into considerable trouble playing soldier, playing infantry captain to a group of Resistance people that he gathered. And he got into a lot of trouble for this, because a correspondent is not supposed to lead troops, even if he does it well. This story is so realistic and so credible and so inexplicable in any other way than to believe that Hemingway was there, that it's about him and not somebody else, that he did not publish it during the war. It just remains there as a masterpiece. But, in essence, it's incriminating, because Hemingway got into considerable trouble for leading troops when he wasn't

supposed to be. But that fascinated me, because here is a story which pretends to be fiction, but it is true. And we know it's true because he didn't want to exhibit it and become his own prosecutor. Very interesting business. But I think it's a wonderful story as well, not least from the title, which is superbly bold and imaginative and hits it right there, "Black Ass." If you have a black ass, you are extremely guilty and unhappy about something you'd done, and you can't get it out of your mind. You've got a black ass. Brilliant.

**DR. HEMINGWAY:** To add to what you were asking about, about readership and also fact and fiction, it's interesting that Hemingway's journalism, beginning in the Spanish Civil War and even earlier, looking at the earlier journalism, but especially beginning in the Spanish Civil War, like the story you mentioned, "The Chauffeurs of Madrid," reads like a story, reads almost like a fictional story as opposed to a work of journalism. Hemingway was at the forefront of journalism, I think, at this time, and it's a trend that has continued in reportage today, even today, this human interest, this interest in the individual in the war. And I think in his journalism, I think he was hoping for a very wide readership, and he was hoping to get the message out of what was going on in the war to as many people as possible. I think he must have seen this kind of reportage, this storytelling reportage as a way of making his message even more accessible to people as opposed to just the battle statistics or other kinds of information.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** What about the readership?

**DR. HEMINGWAY:** So I think his readership, he wanted as many people as possible to read his fiction, but also the journalism. I don't think he was just writing for a specific kind of Hemingway reader.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** One thing is interesting, that even though in all these war stories there are tremendous battle scenes, and men at war, and just men together, so you would think it was for mainly a male audience, there are also love stories. Does every war story have to have a good love story? Like in *Fields of Fire* there's a love story, in *A Farewell to Arms*, famously in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. "The earth moved," I think, is the sentence. Would you think that would appeal to women? Or no, that appeals to men as well?

**PROF. FUSSELL:** I don't think it would have appealed to any one of Hemingway's women, because it's my understanding that he treated most of them as if they were enlisted men in an infantry company in which he was the commander. And at one point, one of them says, "Don't give me anymore orders." So I think he had a very special relationship with women.

But, in general, infantry war is so awful that men have to find pleasures of some kind; one of them is women, and this is one reason war is awful, at least in Europe, because the whole battleground is cleared of females entirely. You don't see a woman at all for months on end. And yet you see the places where you used to have pleasure with women -- Paris, Nice -- places like that, big cities, pleasure cities. And because you were in the business of killing and not risking sustaining

life, it was all very curious. But women were a very large part of the fantasies of the troops.

**MR. WEBB:** Like any novel, it depends on what you're trying to do, what you're trying to illuminate. For instance, of the books I mentioned that I thought were among the great war novels, the Shaara book on Gettysburg, there's no female characters; I don't think there are any at all in that book. *All Quiet*, it's been many, many years since I read it, but there were glimpses maybe of women back in the areas that they rotated through, but there was no real -- the females did not play a role. In *Fields of Fire*, what I was attempting to do was actually not only illuminate the existence there, but show what the stakes were. One of the untold stories of Vietnam, you and I were talking at lunch, there were more Marine Corps casualties in Vietnam than in World War II -- 103,000 killed or wounded. One of the untold stories was how many of these people volunteered to return to the combat zone when they could have left. The best way to illuminate that reality was to show that when Hodges, the character in *Fields of Fire*, returned, he really was giving up something that had become almost the central part of the other part of his life, to show the power of the decisions that he had to go through. And *Once an Eagle*, by the way, was great, 60 years of love and loss. So it's like any other novel; when male/female relationships are important, they're there, and when they're not, they're not.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** Right, but I guess maybe one of the things, since the emotions are so strong and people are aware they may die any day, maybe that

kind of encourages passion. Or not? *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, don't you think that's part of the --

**DR. HEMINGWAY:** Absolutely in the novel, but in terms of war itself, the battlefield historically has been dominated by males.

**PROF. FUSSELL:** Some of us who went through the Second World War and were beaten up by it, when talk in this country began about bringing women into the Army, of all things, I, together with others, hoped that they would be placed in infantry platoons and have to shoot people like other people. And that never happened. Somehow the old feminist myth that they were delicate figures, delicate bodies and so on, persisted. And that disappointed me terribly. There will be no female equality until they can lead infantry companies, in my view. And there no reason whatever why they can't do that.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** I don't know whether women fight in the Israeli army, good question, where they've been serving for a long time.

**MR. WEBB:** They have not in the past. They are trained in the different MOSes but have traditionally served as instructors rather than as fighters in the combat unit.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** Although there are casualties. In today's *Times*, there was that very heartbreaking page of letters by officers and privates, people in Iraq, who

wrote letters home and then were killed shortly thereafter. One of them was a woman private.

**MR. WEBB:** I was answering your question about the Israeli Army.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** Right, no, I'm just thinking out loud about this. I guess we'll soon be starting to open up the discussion, and I'll be interested to hear whether the women here read a lot of war novels. One of the other questions I had was, what about old wars never die? This question comes from the -- I think you said that, Paul, in something that I read, that the experience of war is so intense that it stays with you forever, and you will never get over it. I was wondering about it, both individually and then in terms of nations. Are we over the Vietnam War? How soon does a whole people get over a war? Or should we ever get over a war?

**PROF. FUSSELL:** I think it's easy for non-combatants to get over a war. It is the combatants you have to focus on. It was Audie Murphy, the kid from Texas, who was an infantry lieutenant in the Second World War, who once said memorably, "If you're a real soldier, you never get over the war." I don't want to be autobiographical, but--

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** Why not?

**PROF. FUSSELL:** I very seldom go to bed at night, even now, 60 years afterwards, without revising for my instruction and my expiation some scene in which I participated in the American Infantry in the Second World War. These things do not go away, because they are a mode of trauma, I think, unhealed. That's the way it has to be, and that's why you have to toughen up kids to become soldiers. Infantry training is largely a matter of making people go through embarrassing and awful and losing experiences successfully. And that's what you do in a war. Almost everything you see is disgusting, and almost everything you take part in is guilt making. And that's the way it is. And if you're going to win the war, that must take place. You gradually realize winning it is worth it. It's worth all of that.

**MR. WEBB:** There are no perfect solutions in a combat environment, just adding on to what the professor said. You never win all the way in your emotions. I have this theory about time. Time is this convenience that we all use in order to collectively measure the period. But I wrote in *Fields of Fire*, you could be sitting at a company perimeter and there would be a platoon out on control, and if they were in a fire fight, they just went through a year while you went through an afternoon. If you spend a year in combat, these young men and women in Iraq right now are being deployed for a year, that's an incredibly -- it's such an intense experience that maybe it's the equivalent of ten years for the people who have been back here. So it's a huge part of your life, which is the point I'm trying to make. You will continue to process it for the rest of your life.

In terms of nations, I think that when you have a war like Vietnam, or World War II, or the Civil War, where you truly have divisions that rend everyone, then it takes a long time for a nation to process that experience as well. I had two ancestors die in the Civil War and we still think about it and go to the battlefields, and all that sort of thing. The best thing that you can hope for as a nation is to assimilate the experience in a way that allows people to have their dignity and also to understand what happened.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** The Spanish Civil War is one case where, I think, in Spain it still isn't quite over. The memories of that and the divisions that it caused are not necessarily over. Do you think Hemingway ever got over his wars, Sean?

**DR. HEMINGWAY:** No. I think he would agree with what Jim and Paul have just said, and I think it's interesting that a number of his short stories deal with the issue of a soldier returning home after the war and dealing with these issues. "Soldier's Home" is one fantastic story about a soldier coming back from World War I, as early as World War I, and shortly after Hemingway was writing about it, and the difficulties of an American boy coming back to the Midwest.

**PROF. FUSSELL:** "Soldier's Home," one of his greatest stories. I love it.

**MR. WEBB:** "Now I Lay Me," the difficulties of going to sleep, thinking about combat.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** In a way, at the end of his life, do you think he almost was nostalgic for what the war had given him, or what wars he had seen had given him?

**DR. HEMINGWAY:** I don't think he was nostalgic about war. I'd like to read a brief passage; it's not from the very end of his life. Certainly, about the camaraderie of war, he had nostalgia for that, for sure, and then the people, the close bonds that you can make in war with people who you fought with and friendships that continue beyond the war. But with regards to war itself, I don't think he was nostalgic.

I'd like to read just a brief passage, because I think many people probably haven't heard it because it's from an introduction that he wrote to a book called *Treasury for the Free World*. It's comments that he made, and it's some of the last comments that we have from him about World War II, and it's after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

This is Ernest Hemingway talking about World War II after the advent of atomic warfare: "We have waged war in the most ferocious and ruthless way that has ever been waged. We waged it against fierce and ruthless enemies that it was necessary to destroy. Now we have destroyed one of our enemies and forced the capitulation of the other. For the moment, we are the strongest power in the world. It is very important that we do not become the most hated.

“We need to study and understand certain basic problems of our world as they were before Hiroshima to be able to continue intelligently to discover how some of them have changed and how they can be settled now that a new weapon has become a property of part of the world.

“We must study them more carefully than ever now and remember that no weapon has ever settled a moral problem. It can impose a solution, but it cannot guarantee it to be a just one. An aggressive war is the great crime against everything good in the world. A defensive war, which must necessarily turn aggressive at the earliest moment is the great countercrime.

“We never think that war, no matter how necessary, nor how justified is not a crime. Ask the infantry and the dead.”

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** I was struck by that. I wonder if we should end on that note here for the more formal part of the conversation and open up the discussion to the public. If anybody has questions, and we can continue, but I think probably many of you have questions. Would you like to take the mike?

**MR. WEBB:** I was laughing when you mentioned “Soldier’s Home.” When I decided that I wanted to write fiction, I was reading everything I could get my hands on by Hemingway. It’s so different between being an appreciator of literature and being a writer. I read “Soldier’s Home” and I looked at it and I said, that’s not that hard. I’m going to write that when I come home. And I sort of

wrote and I thought I had done Van Gogh, and about 30 minutes later I went and read it, and I'd done Stickman. Now I know this is really hard.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** Incidentally, people who never get over it, we never even talked about that, but maybe we will, people who lose part of their body. I think, there, I don't see how one can get over something like that. And we've been reading a lot about that recently, about people coming back from Iraq.

Okay, I see somebody there. Yes?

\_\_: Good afternoon.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** One request, which is to please keep your questions relatively short so that many people can ask them.

\_\_: Let me just preface with the fact that I was a 17 year old Marine during World War II, didn't see combat, and I was a 23 year old Second Lieutenant during the Korean War, and my military service ended in 1960 before the Vietnam War. I think my question is probably addressed to you, Ms. Suleiman, or to the organizers of this particular forum, which I've appreciated very much. I've read some of the books they have indicated they have written, or Hemingway's books, and so forth. But I'm just wondering, was there nobody who wrote about the Korean War? When we had Schlesinger, we had Michener, John Tolland, Isidor Stone, Fehrenbach, Clay Blair, all of them historians who wrote novels, and who can forget the *Bridges of Toko-Ri*. Could you possibly address that?

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** Or *The Bridge on the River Kwai*.

**MR. WEBB:** It's World War II.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** Sorry, shows you how much I know. Okay, Korean War.

**MR. WEBB:** I'm not an organizer, but I would say if you read my novel, *A Country Such as This*, I started it in 1951 and there is a good portion of it at the beginning that covers both the air side and the ground side in Korea. But I do take your point. I think the Fehrenbach book is an incredible book. People looking at the American military today ought to read that. I grew up on Michener, *Bridges of Toko-Ri*, *Sayonara*, even before he started writing his big encyclopedias.

**DR. HEMINGWAY:** I can just say that I think Ernest Hemingway, had his health continued to be good, probably would have written something about the Korean War. It's interesting, and it's unfortunate that they don't have any comments of his on the Korean War. Perhaps they'll come out of letters. There's a big letter project underway right now to publish and study all the letters that he's written. But we don't have anything. His health took a toll from being wounded in World War I, and then successive wounds in World War II, and then a plane crash in the early '50s. He wasn't able to go again to war.

\_\_\_: If nobody else has a question, I'd like to impart just one more bit of information. If you go to Amazon.com, or go to the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, you'll find over 1,000 books and articles written about the Korean War. One other point I'd like to make, there was a woman war correspondent during the Korean War, known as Maggie -- Marguerite Higgins. Thank you.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** Thank you. That was very informative. By the way, you could line up. You don't have to wait for one person to finish before you line up to ask a question. Yes?

\_\_\_: I have a question, and that is, can language compete with images? Is it harder today to write about war when the airwaves are ... we are blanketed with the most stark, horrendous images of war. Can language, can you engage the reader in the same way that these images that we see on television or on the screen can do?

**MR. WEBB:** I'd like to answer that, at least begin to answer it. I think there's a yes and there's a no. The yes is, when we're watching this stuff, we're the prisoners of the camera, and so we are the prisoners of where these people are sent in order to tell a story. And the great stories, still, are going to be told from the inside of people who have observed this, and I think there will be some really great stuff to come out of modern experiences as well.

The no, the difficulty today really is because of the change in mass media over the last 20 years. We are so inundated with choices that it's very difficult to get people to read. I can't get my kids to read. I can't even get them to read my books. [Laughter]

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** Oh, those are the last things they'd read.

**MR. WEBB:** There'll come a time; I hope that happens. But when you have a DVD in every home, it's the old story: read a novel or watch a movie, the movie wins.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** Even in that there's a difference. There's TV coverage, and then there are narrative films. We haven't even talked about that, some really great narrative films of war, which might do competition with novels, or that sometimes are based on novels.

**PROF. FUSSELL:** Can I add a footnote to the matter of the reporting of the ground warfare in the Second World War. Every infantry company that was actually fighting that war had in it one of the officers whose job was to censor the soldiers' letters that went out. He had in his pocket and he carried it through rain and mud a little rubber stamp that said "Cleared by Censor" and a stamp pad. And all those writings had to be cleared of nastiness.

So the result was the civilian audience for literature about the war never knew anything about it. They were getting a beautified version of it, full of heroism and the better human motives. And nothing really nasty came to the United States from the line in that war.

I gave a little paragraph called “To the Reader” at the end of my last book, which by the way is on sale outside, and there I said be very cautious, dear reader, of any account of combat in the Second World War that emanated from the line, because it is false. It has been cleaned up because otherwise it could never be published, could never be sent back to an American newspaper or magazine. And, alas, that includes some of the best war reporting of Ernest Hemingway. It’s a lot cleaner than the view he’s describing.

\_\_\_: Professor Fussell, you’ve written extensively about Siegfried Sassoon, who after World War I was probably the most anti-war of the World War I poets. And Hemingway, I think it would be fair to say, was not an apologist for war; he understood what it was. It was, Mr. Hemingway has just read. I wonder if you could say ...

**DR. HEMINGWAY:** ... people afterwards and during the war. Reading can be a way of learning about an experience that we haven't had ourselves. I think war is a subject that we all need to know about, and be educated about, and understand. It’s unfortunately an aspect of all of our lives.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** Jim, do you have any--

**MR. WEBB:** That's a really tough question. Maybe because I've been so intimately involved with the military since I was young, and I constantly read, it's a little difficult for me to understand what the average person in the country might be absorbing these days. But I would say one thing that's concerned me over the past several decades with mass media is that you get a veneer of understanding about what's going on when you have this immediacy, like in the Iraq situation. But at the same time, as I was saying with respect to the other question, you're sort of a prisoner of where the camera takes you. So on one level, there's a feeling that we fully understand what's going on because we turn on CNN and it's there all the time. But on another level, the type of understanding that we have is when something major occurs or when there's actual cameras there to see it. What we need to spend a lot more time on, in my opinion, is the reasons that we do certain things as a nation, whether those actions are particularly wise in terms of our relations with other nations and how we want to solve the problems we say we want to solve.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** So you think more public debate about political decisions?

**MR. WEBB:** I don't want to get political today, but I would say when you have what's called an elective war, when you really can sit back and decide whether you're going to do something, the reasons for doing it should be so strong that you're either looking at national survival or the international community coming to

you saying this absolutely needs to be done. That's a very high standard. It's met in the war against international terrorism; I do not believe it was met in the war in Iraq.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** That's why I think the passage that Sean read from Hemingway after the atom bomb was so powerful, where he says aggressive war is ... all war is a kind of crime, but aggressive war is always a crime. It's a very powerful statement.

\_\_\_: Professor, I have a question for you. You spoke about how every evening you relive your experiences before you retire for the evening. I'm wondering, as writers, did any of you delve into the personalities of admirals or generals who participate in many wars? How do they experience their lives? How do they go through with their lives as they go through these many ordeals?

**PROF. FUSSELL:** I think they are saved from serious emotion by the necessities of corporate organization, which is what their main attention is directed to. At the moment, I'm working on General Patton from the Second War, and asking the question, how did he get that way. By the end of the war, he was practically lunatic about the Red Menace, and so forth, and loving the Nazis. He turned to love them after killing them. Something happened to him, something snapped, and I'm trying to find out what there was in his prior experience, including his education, his reading. He was a very learned and intelligent reader, for one thing, which I'd never realized. He's a fine example of someone who spent his whole

life as a general, practically, and who stayed sane before the war by considering questions of organization and the experience of training, and things like that -- perfectly harmless, almost collegiate subjects. And then it the war itself that set him off, although he had been in the First World War, but only for about a couple of days.

**MR. WEBB:** I'd like to say something on that. I don't think that everyone who goes to war is shattered by it, and I think there are a lot of good reasons to fight, and that good leaders who've gone through this experience have historically floated to the top in this country, in the country's political process. In the book that I just wrote on the Scotch-Irish people, Andrew Jackson was an amazing general, and he fought continuously for about ten years.

If you believe in the validity of what you're doing, and if the people in your community and country validate the validity of what you're doing, then it gives you a strength of purpose. I think people like Eisenhower, and I could go through a whole string of individuals who at one level or another have had to make those decisions and have retained their strength and all the rest of it, are testimony to that.

I wrote this one book, *Emperor's General*, about MacArthur, and I spent probably ten years trying to understand the duality of Douglas MacArthur's personality and understand some of the decisions that he made. MacArthur was an extraordinarily vain man, but no one would ever question -- no one but the Marine Corps would

ever question -- his courage. The Marines did not particularly like MacArthur for a number of reasons. But, certainly, his courage in World War I was evident. At the same time, he had quirks that never would have allowed him to, say, hold high public office, but this is not someone who was decimated in any way by his war experiences.

\_\_\_: I had a question about style and writing about war. I guess my question is specifically focused on fiction writing. I think one can draw a pretty strong contrast between the more concise, muscular realism of Hemingway and maybe magic realism in the case of Tim O'Brien. I was wondering if you had any opinions about whether a particular style was more effective in writing about war in general, or in writing about specific wars, whether certain styles were more effective in handling the specific issues associated with World War I or Vietnam, or other wars.

**PROF. FUSSELL:** Again, here, Hemingway has to take the prize, I think, because he invented a style for writing about war, and I'd call that the fake sincere. It's very, very short sentences and no fancy language at all. You just give the impression of simplifying what you've seen so that everybody can understand it. The prose of *A Farewell to Arms* is a fine example. But he invented a style for writing about the war.

When you read stuff written in the Second World War, like, say, James Jones, one of my favorites, you find that they cannot escape the influence of Hemingway. He

set a style for talking about war in which you could do horror without really upsetting the reader. You could turn horror into a kind of easily accessible art, but undeniable art. He's one of the first people who found that formula, and then he passed it on to subsequent 20th-century writers, including Norman Mailer.

**MR. WEBB:** I think narrative style, again, depends on what the author's purpose is and in many ways depends on the war. In a lot of cases, in particular before the immediacy of today, the reader needed to understand the war, either the mechanics of it or, in some cases, in historical novels, really what was at play. So you get more of an external narrative style when you do that.

When I was writing *Fields of Fire*, what I wanted to do was to bring the reader inside the head and the eyes of individual people. When you're moving along a treeline and you get hit, you don't know that there's a battalion over here or a company over here in the way it's put out in a lot of war novels. All you know is what you're seeing from inside, which is something's happening over here, and you've got to figure it out. The Vietnam part of the novel begins with one man bleeding outside of a fighting hole, trying to crawl back from a listening post, and it ends with one guy staring up in the sky looking at MedEvac going away.

I would say probably what you're going to see in terms of effective literature in the more recent conflicts is a tendency toward interior monologue, people really looking intensely, trying to show you something you haven't picked up on CNN. At the same time, when you get historical novels and that sort of stuff, you're

going to end up with more of an external narrative because one of the purposes of that is to educate the reader as well.

**PROF. FUSSELL:** Could I ask another Hemingway question? When you were writing, did you ever have a sense that Hemingway's style was propelling what you were doing, or that you were echoing, or that you were using a secret that he had let out.

**MR. WEBB:** When I was learning to write, I read everything I could by Hemingway, by Faulkner and by Steinbeck, for three totally different reasons. Hemingway, as you said, reinvented the narrative style, and there's such a power in his descriptive phraseology. He liked to say that he liked to use prepositions, he liked to fix things. Faulkner, because he could really get inside the head of people in a way no one else could. And Steinbeck, because he was such a marvelous, although sometimes mawkish, storyteller. The three of them really had an impact on me as I reached the point where I developed my own narrative style.

\_\_\_: I'd like to go back to a previous question, if I may. Do you think the combat soldier returns to the civilian life as a better person, better able to contribute to society? In other words, you spoke of General Patton, you spoke of America's Caesar, but how about the average GI fighting soldier who returns to civilian life?

**PROF. FUSSELL:** Interesting question. I would say certain journalistic errors claiming that soldiers become later on brutal civilians is absolutely wrong.

Soldiers who return to civil life are instructed in the uses of order, understatement, behavior of all kinds, and I think they make the very best citizens.

I'm not saying it's quite worthwhile to have wars so you create a body of nice veterans, but the veterans I've had to do with are model citizens, and I think they might not be if they hadn't had the experience of very serious warfare.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** I don't think we can generalize. I think some people really are very deeply disturbed by what happens, and may end up in situations that are going to be very negative.

**PROF. FUSSELL:** It's certainly true, but others of them have turned into schoolteachers of distinction.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** Absolutely.

**MR. WEBB:** I think the American Indians like to say, even today, that they honor their warriors, not because they have killed, but because through a costly experience they gained wisdom and understood what courage was. There is a good bit of that, I think, in people who have not only have gone through hard ground combat, but who have lost portions of their lives, put their lives at risk in the service of their country, haven't been able to control where they're going to be or what they're going to do, and have had to process a lot of this stuff.

We did studies -- I was the Minority Counsel on the House Veterans Committee for four years back in the late '70s into the early '80s when the reputation of the Vietnam veterans was the baby-killer, drug-doer, et cetera, and we did a really exhaustive surveying that. It came out pretty much the other way around, that the people who had gone to Vietnam were less likely to be in jail. Drug issues were a wash, no difference between the rest of the generation; it was a drug-oriented generation as anyone who is a Baby Boomer in here knows. More likely to own a house, et cetera. But in terms of how you process this emotionally, other than citizenship, how you proceed with your life, it really depends on how your community and your country ratifies your experience, and that really does vary war by war. For the people who were in Vietnam, these were really serious problems.

I keep up with a lot of guys from my platoon and you reach a point in your life where you come back and you're going to go, "I'm going to get my job, I'm going to be a roofer," whatever it is, and then you reach a point in your life where you really do say, "This is who I am and I'm going to sit back and reflect." That's when the stuff from the war comes back to you and you start breaking it apart, as Professor Fussell said, you start looking at it piece by piece. I've had a number of people out of my rifle platoon who have had emotional difficulties.

**DR. HEMINGWAY:** There's a wonderful passage in *A Farewell to Arms* that speaks a little bit to this, and I just want to read it, it's just a couple sentences: "If people bring so much courage to this world, the world has to kill them to break

them, so of course it kills them. The world breaks everyone, and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break, it kills. It kills the very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these, you can be sure it will kill you too, but there will be no special hurry.”

This is in the context of the war novel, but it’s also a more general statement about life.

\_\_\_: Good evening, my name is Steven Goode and I'm a history teacher. I think the other gentleman provided an excellent segue for my question; I have a two-fold question. First, in both of your experiences in war, you brought them back to the United States, what do you think the African American experience was? Are they living ten years -- you mentioned it’s almost like living ten years -- that battle. What was your experience with the African American troops in either of the wars, any of the wars?

And the second question is, because of modern technology and bringing the war to your living room, starting with Vietnam, do you think it would have played a greater role in maybe ending war in the earlier wars? Do you feel the media played more of a role in stopping wars so that the general public that’s not experiencing that would have a greater cause to say “let’s end war”?

**PROF. FUSSELL:** I can try and answer the second question by asking a question. I think television is quite irrelevant, because it never shows you the

spectacle of a soldier with his head shot off and the reaction of his friends to that event. Until it does that, it cannot equal letter press in conveying something like the horror of war.

I missed the first question.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** The first question was, what was your experience, or what do you know about the African American experience of soldiers in World War II, or any war that you would like to discuss?

**PROF. FUSSELL:** I know quite a lot about it because I was in the midst of infantry units which, halfway through the war, had been decimated, and they'd been cut down to half their size. Here are all these black soldiers doing nothing but carrying weights from boots to trucks who could have been used as replacement soldiers. So many of them were taken behind the line. They were given infantry training and they did very well to the surprise and horror of a great many old fashioned people. That's all I knew about it.

It was discovered that the black units were wonderful as long as they were units. There was still no attempt to really integrate the service, but they fought well as units if they were led by a black officer.

**MR. WEBB:** I'll bring it up to the Vietnam era and a little bit beyond. I was fortunate, I grew up in the military. My family's from the American South. The

United States military, for all of its flaws and all of the accusations that were made during that period, was the first institution in this country that was racially integrated; it was racially integrated in 1948.

I grew up on the bases in a racially integrated environment. I was a boxer for eight years, so I was in a pretty much black dominated sport. There were very few problems when I was growing up. The same thing at the beginning of the Vietnam War. As the Vietnam War progressed, the issues that were playing out here inevitably played out also inside the military, and there was something of a sea change in race relations after Martin Luther King was killed. There was a tremendous amount of a different kind of radical self-consciousness among some elements of the African Americans in the military.

In my personal experience -- first of all, the issue of minority casualties -- I want to be fair here -- it's been overplayed. African Americans were 13.1% of the age group, 12.6% of the military, and 12.2% of the casualties. They contributed equally to their membership in society. In my unit, the units that I was in, I never had a racial incident. Out in the field, we used to say in the bush, almost all of these distinctions went away, other than sometimes two individuals, whether they were two whites or two blacks or a Hispanic, whatever, you'd get individual confrontations, but it was the most apolitical and racially neutral environment I've ever been in.

In terms of your second question about the power of media, I actually thought during Gulf War I that if that war had gone on for six months that the nation would have burnt out emotionally, because when the combat starts everybody turns on CNN and you just can't get away from it. I'm a little worried now that it's the other way around, quite frankly. I don't know how this is going to play out, I don't pretend to know, but it seems now we have sort of absorbed our daily measure of casualties almost the same that we did during Vietnam, although the casualty levels during Vietnam were so much higher; we were losing 200 to 400 people a week when I was in Vietnam. But I worry that it's sort of numbed us rather than made us more aware. I would hope it's the other way around.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** That's very interesting, actually, that maybe exposure, instead of creating indignation, just makes people numb.

\_\_\_: This question is for Mr. Webb. I'm assuming that you may know the Vietnam War memoir *Fortunate Son* by Lewis Puller, Jr., maybe even knew the author. The question is this: What did you think of that book? If you liked it, what did you like about it? If you didn't like it, what are your concerns about the book?

**MR. WEBB:** I did not read the book, but I did know Lew Puller very well. I had a great deal of regard for him; he was a gentle soul.

\_\_\_: I brought it up simply because it's a good example of somebody who lost both of his limbs to one of those landmines.

**MR. WEBB:** Actually, he was a legitimate quadruple amputee. He lost pieces of both hands as well. You can imagine the expectations in Lewis Puller as the son of the most famous Marine in history.

\_\_\_: Which is what the book is very much about. Anyway, just wondering what a Marine thought of it.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** What did you think of the book?

\_\_\_: I thought it was a great book and it depended very much, of course, on his relation to his father, but I wondered whether the book was dependent on older techniques of presentation. I was wondering what you thought of that since you're a Marine.

**MR. WEBB:** I'm sorry, I did not read the book.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** We have time for one more question. Do we have one more question?

\_\_\_: I don't know if this is a question or a comment, but it follows on some of the remarks that Mr. Webb has made about television. When I got back from Vietnam and watched television, I thought it was silly. I thought it bore no relationship whatsoever to my experience in ground combat. When I watch CNN today, or

Fox News, or any other channel, I get the impression that I'm missing 99% of what's going on. It seems probable to me that the American public believes something that isn't true. The American public may believe they know what it's like, but you can't get that on television. At least I've never seen it.

I don't mean to impugn the courage of some of the correspondents or their conscientiousness. I think their medium, however, filters out reality. At least, that was my experience when I watch the stuff.

**MR. WEBB:** Bravo to you. I was trying to say earlier that we are prisoners of the camera. It was more true when we were in Vietnam. We almost never saw media out where I was in Vietnam. The contact that we had was usually platoon company size contact, it wasn't something that interested the people in New York. I'll say, by the way, if people want to see ... there's one documentary that I would recommend that is really, really good about Vietnam; it's called *Face of War*. A British crew went in and spent 97 days with one rifle company, one Marine rifle company, and there's no narrative voiceover whatsoever. They let these people speak and experience, and it's really good. Other than that, I know of nothing. I would fully agree with what you said today, as I was attempting to say earlier, that we become the prisoners of where the camera goes.

**PROF. SULEIMAN:** I think that that just proves how important, as Paul Fussell was saying, how important writing is, because maybe we can get at greater truths

through writing. Thank you so much; all of you have contributed to that writing.  
And thank you to the audience for your participation. [Applause]

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