

HONORS 2013:02— Twentieth Century: “U.S. Combat Infantrymen in World War II”

Instructor: Frank A. Anselmo/Department of French Studies/Louisiana State University

Office: 401a Hodges Hall

Office Hours: TBA

e-mail: fanselm@lsu.edu; department phone: 578-6627; office phone: 578-6674

George C. Marshal, Chief of Staff of the United States Army, 1939-1945:

It is impossible for the Nations to compensate the services of a fighting man. There is no pay schedule that is high enough to buy the services of a single soldier during even a few minutes of the agony of combat, the physical miseries of the campaign, or of the extreme personal inconvenience of leaving his home to go out to the most unpleasant and dangerous spots on earth to serve his Nation.

“The Winning of the War in Europe and the Pacific: Biennial Report of the Chief of Staff of the United States Army, July 1, 1943, to June 30, 1945, to the Secretary of War,” p. 110.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The primary objective of this course will be the development of the basis for a better understanding of the experiences of the US combat infantryman of World War II. Unlike a typical World War II course that tends to focus on the major events and outcomes of the war and the heads of state and generals who directed these events, this course will focus instead on the common soldiers (privates, privates first class, corporals), NCOs (sergeants), and junior officers (lieutenants and captains) who risked their lives in the infantry squads, platoons, and companies that served on the front lines.

To achieve a better understanding of the combat experiences of these men, we will read a variety of literary and historical works produced by those who fought the war and experienced it first hand (such as Harry Brown, Norman Mailer, Kurt Vonnegut, E. B. Sledge, and Paul Fussell). We will also study a selection of unpublished accounts of the war: 1.) formerly classified military documents and records that were created by infantry regiments and companies involved in combat; 2.) personal letters that were written on the front lines during the war; and 3.) retrospective memoirs that were composed after the war.

SERVICE-LEARNING

While reading histories and literature about the war is certainly informative, this activity is limited to what is presented on the printed page and the reader’s imagination. Rather, to achieve a better appreciation and knowledge of the individuals

who contributed to the U.S. war effort is to talk to them. Students will thus have the opportunity to meet and interact with veterans of the war, thereby enriching their understanding of the experiences of the veterans of World War II.

However, since we are rapidly losing those who fought in, experienced, and survived the war, it is imperative now—more than ever before—that we collect and conserve as many of their stories as possible and make these accounts available for future generations who will want to learn the lessons of the men and women who experienced and won the largest international conflict that the world has ever seen.

This course is thus designed as a service-learning for students who are interested in collecting and preserving the individual stories of the men and women who fought in and experienced combat in the Second World War and, most important of all, who are willing to provide a service to the community by spending time with aged veterans of the war, learning about their experiences, and writing and preserving their stories.

To achieve these goals, students will be paired with a World War II veteran who presently resides in Baton Rouge, will regularly meet with this veteran over the course of the semester, and will interview the veteran about his (or her, in some cases) war experiences. Upon completion of the interview process, the student will then write an account of the veteran's experiences. This written account will be delivered to all the veterans at the end of the semester at a public reception for the students and veterans and their friends and family.

Furthermore, in order to ensure regular public access to the veterans' individual stories, we will work with two community partners on the LSU campus: 1.) the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History, which will conserve recorded portions of the interviews for public consultation; and 2.) the newly planned LSU Military Museum, which will create a temporary exhibit in November of 2008 from memorabilia collected from the interviewed veterans in effort to promote its eventual opening in the Memorial Tower in 2009.

REQUIRED READINGS FOR THIS COURSE

LITERATURE

Harry Brown, *A Walk in the Sun*.

Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead*.

Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughter-House Five*.

WARTTIME CORRESPONDANCE

Martha Gelhorn, *The Face of War*.

Ernie Pyle, *Brave Men*.

POST-WAR HISTORIES/CRITICAL STUDIES

Paul Fussell, *The Boys' Crusade*.

E.B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed. At Peleliu and Okinawa*.

UNPUBLISHED I: Memoirs and Personal Letters

Robert Barnhart, "Autobiography of Robert Milton Barnhart" (excerpts)

John Grant Rahill, letters

UNPUBLISHED II: Declassified Military Documents

45th Infantry Division/179th Infantry Regiment: War Journals, Maps, and Reports (1944)

RECOMMENDED READINGS FOR THIS COURSE

Stephen E. Ambrose. *Band of Brothers*.

-----. *Citizen Soldiers. The US Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany. June 7, 1944 - May 7, 1945*.

-----. *D-Day. June 6, 1944. The Climatic Battle of World War II*.

-----. *The Victors. Eisenhower and his Boys. The Men of World War II*.

James Bradley. *Flags of our Fathers*.

-----. *Fly Boys*.

John Ellis. *The Sharp End. The Fighting Man in World War II*.

Martin Gilbert. *The Second World War*.

Max Hastings. *Armageddon. The Battle for Germany, 1944-1945*.

Christina Jarvis. *The Male Body at War. American Masculinity during World War II*.

Lee Kennett. *G.I. The American Soldier in World War II*.

Robert S. Rush. *GI. The US Infantryman in World War II*.

GRADE DISTRIBUTION

•two papers: 20%

Over the course of the semester, students will write two eight-hundred- to one-thousand-word compositions. The first paper will be a critical analysis of one of the readings from the first half of the semester; the second paper will be a critical analysis of one the readings from the second half of the semester. The papers will be due on (date TBA).

- *mid-term and final exams: 20%*

The mid-term exam (date TBA) will be limited to the readings and class discussions from the first half of the semester. The final exam (date TBA) will be limited to the readings and class discussions of the second half of the semester.

- *National Institute of Health's Human Subjects Training: 5%*

Before interviewing the selected veteran, students will complete the NIH's Human Subjects Training tutorial, which is located on the internet at the following address: <http://cme.cancer.gov/clinicaltrials/learning/humanparticipant-protections.asp>. This free, web-based course is designed for those involved in conducting research involving human participants and presents information about the rights and welfare of human participants in research. Students will have to submit a copy of the certificate received at the end of the two-hour course on (date TBA).

- *a veteran's war story, first draft: 5%*

Each student will select one veteran from a list of veterans to be provided by the professor. Students will meet regularly with the veteran on an individual basis over the course of the semester to discuss the veteran's war experiences. From the information gathered at these interviews, the students will then write an account of the veteran's war experiences. All students will have to submit a completed rough draft of the veteran's war story on (date TBA).

- *a veteran's war story, final draft: 20%*

In addition to submitting the story to the professor, the student will present the work to the veteran at a ceremony to be held on the LSU campus at the end of the semester. There is no prescribed length to the story, but students are to keep in mind that this final project is intended primarily for the veteran—not the professor. An important component of the final evaluation of the story will thus be based on the professor's judgment of the presentability of the writing and research *to the veteran*.

- *reflections on the interview process: 15%*

At the end of the semester, students will submit a journal on the interview process. The student make entries in the journal as the interview progresses and will be expected to do the following in the individual entries: 1.) describe what happened during the interview process (what was accomplished, what did you learn, what puzzled you, how did you interact with your veteran, what decisions did you make about writing the accounts of the veteran, etc.); 2.) analyze how the course content, interview process, and the presentation of the veteran's story to the veteran are related and connected; 3.) apply the course material, interview process, and service experience to your personal life (goals, values, attitudes, beliefs, philosophy).

- *T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History and the LSU Military Museum: 10%*
Students will deliver two products to the classes community partners: 1.) a digitally recorded portion of their interviews (approximately 30 minutes, to be recorded at the last scheduled interview) to the T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History; 2.) a brief explanation of the donated war memorabilia and veteran who donated the item (approximately three to four paragraphs) to the LSU Military Museum for eventual creation of a display to promote the opening of the museum in the Memorial Tower in 2009.

- *preparation of readings/participation in class discussions: 5%*
All students are expected to come to class prepared and to participate in class discussions. The students' preparation and participation will be evaluated on a daily basis. After every fourth evaluation, grades will be submitted to the student so that appropriate changes (if necessary) can be made.

SPECIAL ACTIVITIES AND EVENTS OUTSIDE OF CLASS TIME

The following events and activities have been planned to enhance comprehension of the studied material and develop a greater appreciation of the experiences of the combat veterans. With the exception of the class ceremony at the end of the semester when the written accounts are returned to the veterans, attendance at these events is not mandatory because they have been scheduled outside of class time; nevertheless, attendance and participation in these events are strongly encouraged.

- date TBA: WWII movie night: *Casablanca*
- date TBA: WWII movie night: *The Sands of Iwo Jima*
- date TBA: WWII movie night: *To Hell and Back*
- date TBA: WWII movie night: *Saving Private Ryan*
- date TBA: WWII movie night: *The Thin Red Line*
- date TBA: Field Trip to World War II Museum in New Orleans
- date TBA: Closing Ceremony to Present Veterans with Written Accounts of War Experiences

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CALENDAR

1. Tuesday, January 15: introduction to course
2. Thursday, January 17: Harry Brown, *A Walk in the Sun*

3. Tuesday, January 22: Harry Brown, *A Walk in the Sun*
4. Thursday, January 24: interviewing veterans/Lilly Allen, School of Social Work; Martha Gelhorn, *The Face of War* (excerpts)
5. Tuesday, January 29: collecting oral histories/Jennifer Abraham, T. Harry Williams Center for Oral History; NIH's Human Subjects Training
6. Thursday, January 31: Ernie Pyle, *Brave Men*

Tuesday, February 5: Mardi Gras Holiday

7. Thursday, February 7: Ernie Pyle, *Brave Men*

8. Tuesday, February 12: Ernie Pyle, *Brave Men*
9. Thursday, February 14: Ernie Pyle, *Brave Men*

10. Tuesday, February 19: E. B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed. At Peleliu and Okinawa*
11. Thursday, February 21: E. B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed. At Peleliu and Okinawa*

12. Tuesday, February 26: E. B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed. At Peleliu and Okinawa*
13. Thursday, February 28: E. B. Sledge, *With the Old Breed. At Peleliu and Okinawa*

14. Tuesday, March 4: Mid-Term Exam
15. Thursday, March 6: John Grant Rahill: from the front lines—unpublished letters

16. Tuesday, March 11: Robert Milton Barnhart: recalling the war—unpublished memoirs
17. Thursday, March 13: Reading military maps, military journals, military reports

Tuesday, March 18: Spring Break

Thursday, March 20: Spring Break

18. Tuesday, March 25: Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead*
19. Thursday, March 27: Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead*

20. Tuesday, April 1: Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead*
21. Thursday, April 3: Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead*

22. Tuesday, April 8: Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead*
23. Thursday, April 10: Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead*
24. Tuesday, April 15: Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead*
25. Thursday, April 17: Norman Mailer, *The Naked and the Dead*
26. Tuesday, April 22: Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughter House Five*
27. Thursday, April 24: Kurt Vonnegut, *Slaughter House Five*
28. Tuesday, April 29: Paul Fussell, *The Boys' Crusade*
29. Thursday, May 1: Paul Fussell, *The Boys' Crusade*

FINAL EXAM

date TBA