



Acts of War: Behavior of Men in Battle

By Richard Holmes

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The reality of what it is to be a soldier, by Britain's foremost military historian. This ambitious, wide-ranging, exhaustively researched book is a compelling attempt to grasp the very nature of war. It takes us through the soldier's experience in its entirety - from the humiliation of basic training and the intense comradeship of army life, to the terror, isolation and exhaustion of battle. What does it feel like to be in the firing line? How does killing change a man? And what do the extreme conditions of war reveal about a man's basic instincts, his courage or his fear, his urge for self-preservation or self-sacrifice? Covering several centuries of warfare, and including the personal recollections of veterans from two World Wars, from Korea, Vietnam, the Falklands and the Arab-Israeli conflicts, Richard Holmes gives us a powerful picture of what motivates the soldier and enables him to maintain the struggle in conditions of extreme degradation and danger.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

In this useful and gripping study, an English military biographer examines the forces which operate upon fighting men in and out of battle. Holmes presents numerous well-organized anecdotes that range from Waterloo to the Falklands, often deliberately blurring the distinction between wars in order to show their common factors. Although the book is drawn exclusively from secondary sources, it contains a wealth of insights useful to professional students. His observations on the role of females in combat zones are timely, if unsurprising to most veterans. As a work of lay psychology, the book surpasses John Ellis's *The Sharp End* (LJ 2/15/81). Recommended to most public libraries. History Book Club main selection. Raymond L. Puffer, U.S. Air Force History Prog., Los Angeles

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Review

'... a powerful, thought-provoking picture of how the conditions of war affect a man. His sources are several centuries of warfare and the personal recollections of veterans of conflicts across the world. Holmes presents the results of his ambitious and exhaustive research in a very readable form, carefully balancing fact and emotion, detachment and compassion which adds considerable depth to the wisdom expressed.' ARMOUR (Nov/Dec '03) 'Mr Holmes makes a convincing case that the human being remains the central weapon of military conflict, technology notwithstanding. What emerges is a compelling and very human portrait of war.' THE ECONOMIST (21/2/04)

About the Author

Richard Holmes is Professor of Military and Security Studies at Cranfield University and the Royal Military College of Science. For many years he taught military history at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst before leaving for a spell of full-time military service. His books include *The Little Field Marshal: Sir John French*; *Firing Line*; *The Road to Sedan*; *Riding the Retreat*; *Redcoat*; and *Wellington: The Iron Duke*. He has presented several BBC TV series, including *War Walks* and *The Western Front*, and wrote the accompanying books. He enlisted into the Territorial Army in 1965 and rose to the rank of brigadier. He was the first reservist to hold the post of Director of Reserve Forces and Cadets in the Ministry of Defence, retiring in 2000.

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