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James Wright, *Those Who Have Borne the Battle: A History of America's Wars and Those Who Fought Them*. New York: Public Affairs, 2012. Pp. viii, 351. ISBN 978-1-61039-072-9.

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From its inception, the United States of America has had an ambivalent relationship with its military. Despite a general consensus that the country needs some sort of military system, the preference has been to keep it as small as possible, expanding its ranks in times of emergency through the use of militias or “citizen soldiers,” who resume their civilian lives once the crisis has passed. This durable idea has persisted from the era of Lexington, Concord, and Bunker Hill to the current adulation of the “Greatest Generation” and television commercials for the military touting GI Bill educational benefits or assuring would-be members of the Reserves or National Guard that they can serve their country and their communities at the same time.

The reality underlying the myth, of course, has always been a good deal more complicated, as militia forces proved to be inadequate even in the Revolution, and much larger armies were needed for later conflicts like the Civil War, the two World Wars, Korea, Vietnam, and even Iraq and Afghanistan. Troops have been thrown into action without adequate preparation, resulting in some very steep learning curves, however well American soldiers have adapted to circumstances. Along the way, professional military men, especially career officers, often grew frustrated with civilian oversight; this has sometimes caused major political crises. Caught in the middle have been the soldiers themselves, especially those actively engaged in combat, who have been expected to return to civilian life as if nothing had changed, despite their physical or psychological traumas and sense of alienation from all except other veterans.

Making sense of all this and tracing changes and continuities in the American military system and in the experiences of those who have served in it, is a daunting task, but historian and former Dartmouth College president James Wright is well equipped to tackle it. He volunteered for the Marine Corps straight out of high school in the late 1950s; after his service, he went to college and graduate school during the Vietnam era, following news accounts of the fighting and participating in the antiwar movement. This background has enabled him both to empathize with soldiers and to criticize the ways they have been abused and misunderstood by civilians, whether in government or society as a whole. During his academic career, he keenly observed the country's changeover to an all-volunteer military that has grown increasingly professional and technically specialized. In his retirement, he returned to his roots by making regular visits to military hospitals to talk with wounded veterans of the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He learned how poorly the public understood what these soldiers had endured and how different the realities of modern wars are from the idealized visions harking back to World War II and earlier. This disconnect inspired him to write *Those Who Have Borne the Battle*.

In a brief introductory chapter, Wright describes his own experiences as a means to define his topic. His next chapter treats relations between civilians and the military from the Revolution through World War I. His first example sets the tone: on 15 March 1783, a group of disgruntled Continental Army officers met and considered refusing the government's orders to disband until they were granted the pension benefits they had been promised. They were dissuaded from mutiny by George Washington himself, who told them to behave and go home and promised to do what he could for them. As unhappy as the professional military men were with the unfair treatment by their civilian masters, they nonetheless accepted civilian control—a pattern that has continued to the present.

This scenario also adumbrates a second trend, that of demobilizing the armed forces after each conflict and maintaining as small and inexpensive a peacetime military as possible. In each conflict from the War of 1812 through the Mexican War, the Civil War, the Spanish-American War, and World War I, the nation relied in varying degrees on soldiers recruited from civilian life, but also gradually expanded and professional-

ized the military and centralized the control of the recruitment and training of soldiers by shifting from state militias to federally controlled Guard and Reserve organizations.

Wright next considers how society as a whole has perceived and remembered its soldiers, again tracing significant changes in how civilians in and out of government viewed and treated veterans. He demonstrates that the Revolutionary ideal of the citizen-soldier militated against paying much attention to veterans or rewarding them for their service, since they had only done their patriotic duty, with no expectation of personal benefits. As the soldiers aged, however, attitudes softened, especially toward those who still suffered from their wartime injuries, and the government gradually provided benefits first to wounded veterans, then to all who had served for a significant time.

The War of 1812 and the Mexican War did not involve very large armies and, with little fanfare, (mostly) wounded veterans received some benefits, as did families of dead soldiers. The Civil War, which mobilized a much greater proportion of the population, left in its wake a large and better organized body of veterans, especially on the Union side. These men soon exercised considerable political clout, promoting benefit programs for veterans and public commemorations of their deeds. Confederate veterans, while not initially receiving federal support or recognition, were championed by private groups and gradually integrated into the larger veteran community; by the end of the century, they were better treated and more favorably regarded than black veterans on the Union side. The Spanish-American War and World War I both served to further enhance the image of the veteran and spurred the growth of veterans' organizations. Still, the federal government was reluctant to spend much on them and long resisted paying their promised "bonuses."

Wright devotes separate chapters to each of the three extended conflicts of the mid-twentieth century: World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. In the Second World War, he sees a logical extension of federalization and centralized control of the military, but also identifies something dramatically different. While the government once more had to improvise a large army, this time Roosevelt had begun that process even before Pearl Harbor by expanding arms industries, building up the Navy, mobilizing National Guard and Reserve units, and reinstating conscription. To pay for all this, the government both borrowed money and increased revenues by establishing a permanent withholding tax on wages. Even before the war ended, steps were taken to greatly increase support for returning veterans, including healthy ones, in response to the added political influence of veterans' organizations, whose ranks were swelling. The men who came home after this war were treated quite differently from General Washington's veterans, or even General Pershing's.

Here Wright also criticizes the popular designation of those who fought or otherwise served in World War II as the Greatest Generation. He notes that soldiers are soldiers and in all wars have behaved heroically and otherwise, whether in Normandy or Afghanistan, warning that "The debate over relative greatness is more than a historical parlor game, a word exercise. I would also suggest that this is a conversation with consequences.... [T]he way we interpret and remember war ... is about more than personal recollections; it is about the way societies and cultures think about their past and about their legacy, which can indeed have consequences for subsequent understandings, choices, and behavior" (131). He believes their deification places an unnecessary burden on World War II veterans and those who have come after them, distorting the reality of the experience of the war itself.

Korean War and Vietnam veterans were quite aware, as Wright demonstrates, of the shadow cast over them by their World War II predecessors. There was no Pearl Harbor to arouse popular support; indeed, neither the public nor the soldiers had much idea of what they were fighting for, nor were civilians asked to make the sorts of sacrifices they had made during the Second World War. Though the military after 1945 was larger than after 1918, it was still too small and poorly equipped; the conflicts in both Korea and Vietnam necessitated significant expansions of the draft and the military budget. At the same time, neither President Truman nor President Johnson called up many Guard or Reserve formations, fearing political repercussions; soldiers no longer served for the duration, but only for one-year stints overseas, as men were rotated in and out of units that remained in place. While this may have made the draft more palatable, it also eroded morale and unit cohesion, especially in the later stages of each conflict, as more and more experienced officers and noncoms became casualties or were rotated home or to the rear.

Veterans of Korea were seldom hailed as heroes. Most kept their experiences to themselves, and Korea wound up as the “forgotten war.” Vietnam vets, too, commonly encountered indifference and even outright hostility, whether from antiwar activists, who saw them as war criminals, or from those who considered them slackers, cowards, and drug addicts who had lost “their” war. This group of veterans did push back, however, and contributed to the development of programs to deal with the effects of PTSD and Agent Orange; they have made the public’s attitude toward veterans in general much more positive today than it was forty years ago.

Turning to Iraq and Afghanistan, Wright identifies several substantial differences from earlier wars, especially in terms of the experiences of the soldiers themselves. The creation of an all-volunteer military in the wake of Vietnam, he argues, significantly altered how the service branches met their manpower needs. Now, the Guard and Reserve units are essential; as conflicts dragged on and at times escalated, there were too few recruits to fill the ranks, and the same personnel had to be redeployed again and again. This not only damaged the mental and physical health of the soldiers and their families, but reinforced the isolation of the relatively small part of society that actually served from everyone else. Today’s professional American military is far removed, Wright points out, from that of the citizen-soldier prototype of earlier armies. It is also far more expensive, partly because warfare itself is more costly, but also because of benefits now seen as entitlements that present-day veterans will receive for a long time to come. While the public may view these men and women as “heroes,” it has far less appreciation of their experience than previous generations had for their soldiers’ sacrifices, when a much larger percentage of the male population served.

Wright’s intelligent and sensitive account of the transformation of the American military is valuable for its synthesis of a voluminous body of material into a coherent narrative accessible to audiences well beyond scholars of military history. Besides considering the causes of wars, the decisions that shaped them, and relations between the military and civilian sectors of society, Wright manages to address an array of hot-button issues without drubbing the reader with his own views. For instance, he dismisses claims that the Civil War was not primarily about slavery, but does not belabor the issue. He also calls attention to racism and discrimination in the North as well as the South. Indeed, he spotlights racial issues and the ethnic makeup of the armed forces throughout American history.

Wright sees many of the wars he surveys as the result of bad decisions by political and military leaders. That said, he sometimes understates his criticisms. For example, he shows some sympathy for Lyndon Johnson, who had inherited a mess in Vietnam that had been growing for some time, while observing that he worsened a bad situation by his own poor decisions. Later, he gives a similarly nuanced critique of the dubious rationale that President George W. Bush and his advisers gave for the Iraq War. Critics of Johnson or Bush might feel he has pulled his punches, but his restraint and careful use of evidence make his criticisms all the more compelling.

Those Who Have Borne the Battle is remarkable for its author’s thorough research and control of subject matter. Specialists may take issue with some of his generalizations about certain aspects of the wars he studies, but these tend to relate to general background rather than the specific issues of concern. What stands out above all else is Wright’s compassion for the soldiers themselves. While aware that those who have not served will never fully understand the military experience, he tries to narrow the gap between those who have borne the battle and those who have not. His efforts will benefit both sides.