

## History 50:512:384 Soldiers, War, and the Combat Experience in American History

Fall 2019  
Mondays, 6:00-8:50 PM  
Location: Rutgers, Camden County College  
Blackwood, Halpern Room 115

Instructor: Dr. Martin G. Clemis  
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 5:00-6:00 &  
9:00-10:00 PM, Madison 122  
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**Course Description:** This course explores what former Supreme Court justice and Civil War veteran Oliver Wendell Holmes once called the “incommunicable experience of war” – that is armed conflict as it was lived and remembered by the common soldier. It does so by examining five memoirs generated by veterans of American wars from the Revolution to Vietnam, and by contextualizing these works within the conflicts, societies, and larger historical currents that spawned them. The course will pay particular attention to the values, attitudes, and beliefs of American servicemen as they were called upon to serve the nation in a time of war. It will also examine the emotional and psychological impact of combat and the ways in which every day Americans interpreted and made sense of this unique and relatively rare experience as practitioners of war and specialists in armed violence.

**Assignments:** In order to receive a satisfactory grade in this course, students must complete the following assignments:

- 1. Attendance /Course Engagement:** This is a collaborative learning course. What this means is that the student is the primary focus of instruction, not the instructor. As a result, the course is not lecture-based but is founded on class discussion and dialogue among students and the instructor. Peer instruction, therefore, is a fundamental component of this course. Critique, debate, and discussion of assigned readings and additional outside material are vital to a healthy pedagogical environment. Moreover, they are an important part of your grade. Good attendance is also mandatory (you cannot participate in discussion or collaborate with your peers if you aren't here). Attendance is required and will be regularly taken. I am well aware that missing a class may happen occasionally, but regular absence will be noted and affect your class participation grade. As this class meets only one day per week, any student missing more than two classes will be in danger of failing.
- 2. Reflective Essays (3):** You are required to submit **three reflective essays** (1300-1800 words double-spaced) on any of memoirs assigned in class. These essays **must achieve the following**: 1) Address the nature of combat – describe the physical and emotional challenges / dangers that American soldiers faced and how they coped or failed to cope with the combat environment; 2) Discuss the soldiers’ perspective – the values, attitudes, and beliefs concerning life in the military, the wars they participated in, and the home front / American society; 3) Describe the physical and / or psychological impact of war and the combat experience on the subject. The reflective essays are due on the following dates: (#1) **October 7**, (#2) **November 4**, and (#3) **December 2**.

**3. Film Reviews (2)** – Students are required to write **two film reviews** (1300-1800 words double-spaced) on movies related to this class. Students can review any of the films shown in class or outside movies provided they are approved beforehand by the instructor. Film reviews should include the following: a) a brief synopsis of the film; b) a discussion of the primary characters and the challenges they faced; c) a discussion of how accurately and effectively this film portrays the combat experience during that conflict. Film Reviews are due on the following dates: (#1) **October 21** and (#2) **November 18**.

**Grading** – Grades will be based on the following percentages:

<b>Attendance / Course Engagement</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>Reflective Essays (3 x 15%)</b>	<b>45%</b>
<b>Film Reviews (2 x 15%)</b>	<b>30%</b>

**Reading list:**

- Allan R. Millett & Peter Maslowski. *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America*. New York: Free Press, 1984.
- James Kirby Martin, ed. *Ordinary Courage: The Revolutionary War Adventures of Joseph Plumb Martin*. New York: Brandywine Press, 1993.
- Robert Hunt Rhodes, ed. *All for the Union: The Civil War Diary and Letters of Elisha Hunt Rhodes*. New York: Orion Books, 1985.
- Elton Mackin. *Suddenly We Didn't Want to Die: Memoirs of a World War I Marine*. Novato, CA: Presidio, 1993.
- E.B. Sledge. *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa*. New York: Presidio Press, 2007.
- Frederick Downs. *The Killing Zone: My Life in the Vietnam War*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co. 2007.

**Course Schedule:** The dates listed below are tentative and may change as the semester progress. For assignments, check the Sakai and the assignment sheets themselves; Actual due dates for assignments will be listed there. Check this page often or contact your instructor for more information.

**Week 1** (Sep 9) – Introduction / Soldiering in American History

**Unit 1 – The American Revolution**

**Weeks 2-3** (Sep 16 / Sep 23)

Readings:

- Murray & Millett, pp. 51-87
- Ordinary Courage – Joseph Plumb Martin

## **Unit 2 – The Civil War**

**Weeks 4-6** (Sep 30 / Oct 7 / Oct 14)

Readings:

- Murray & Millett, pp. 162-247
- All for the Union – Elisha Hunt Rhodes

## **Unit 3 – World War I**

**Weeks 7-8** (Oct 21 / Oct 28)

Readings:

- Murray & Millett, pp. 346-379
- Suddenly We Didn't Want to Die – Elton Mackin

## **Unit 4 – World War II**

**Weeks 9-11** (Nov 4 / Nov 11 / Nov 18)

Readings:

- Murray & Millett, pp. 413-493
- With the Old Breed – Eugene Sledge

## **Unit 5 – The Vietnam War / Wrap Up: War and Soldering in American History**

**Weeks 12-14** (Nov 25 / Dec 2 / Dec 9)

Readings:

- Murray & Millett, pp. 570-606
- The Killing Zone – Frederick Downs

**ACADEMIC INTEGRITY STATEMENT:** Academic integrity is essential to the success of the educational enterprise and breaches of academic integrity constitute serious offenses against the academic community. Violations of academic integrity include but are not limited to cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, denying others access to information or material, and facilitating others' violations of academic integrity. The instructor assumes students will familiarize themselves with the policies and information posted by Rutgers at <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/> at the earliest opportunity.

**DISABILITY SERVICES STATEMENT:** Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, abides by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 508 of the Disabilities Act of 1998, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments of 2008. These mandate that reasonable accommodations be provided for qualified students with disabilities and accessibility of online information. If you have a disability and may require some type of instructional and/or examination accommodation, please contact the instructor early in the semester so that he can provide or facilitate in providing accommodations you may need. If you

have not already done so, you will need to register with the Office of Disability Services, the designated office on campus to provide services and administer exams with accommodations for students with disabilities. The Rutgers-Camden Office of Disability Services can be contacted by phone at 856-225-6442 or on the web at <http://learn.camden.rutgers.edu/disability-services>. The instructor looks forward to talking with you soon to learn how he may be helpful in enhancing your academic success in this course.