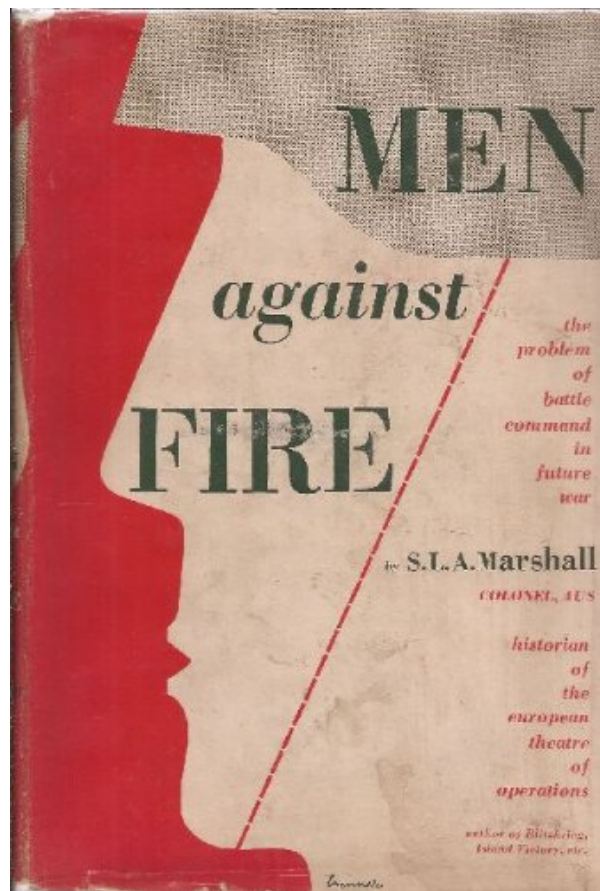
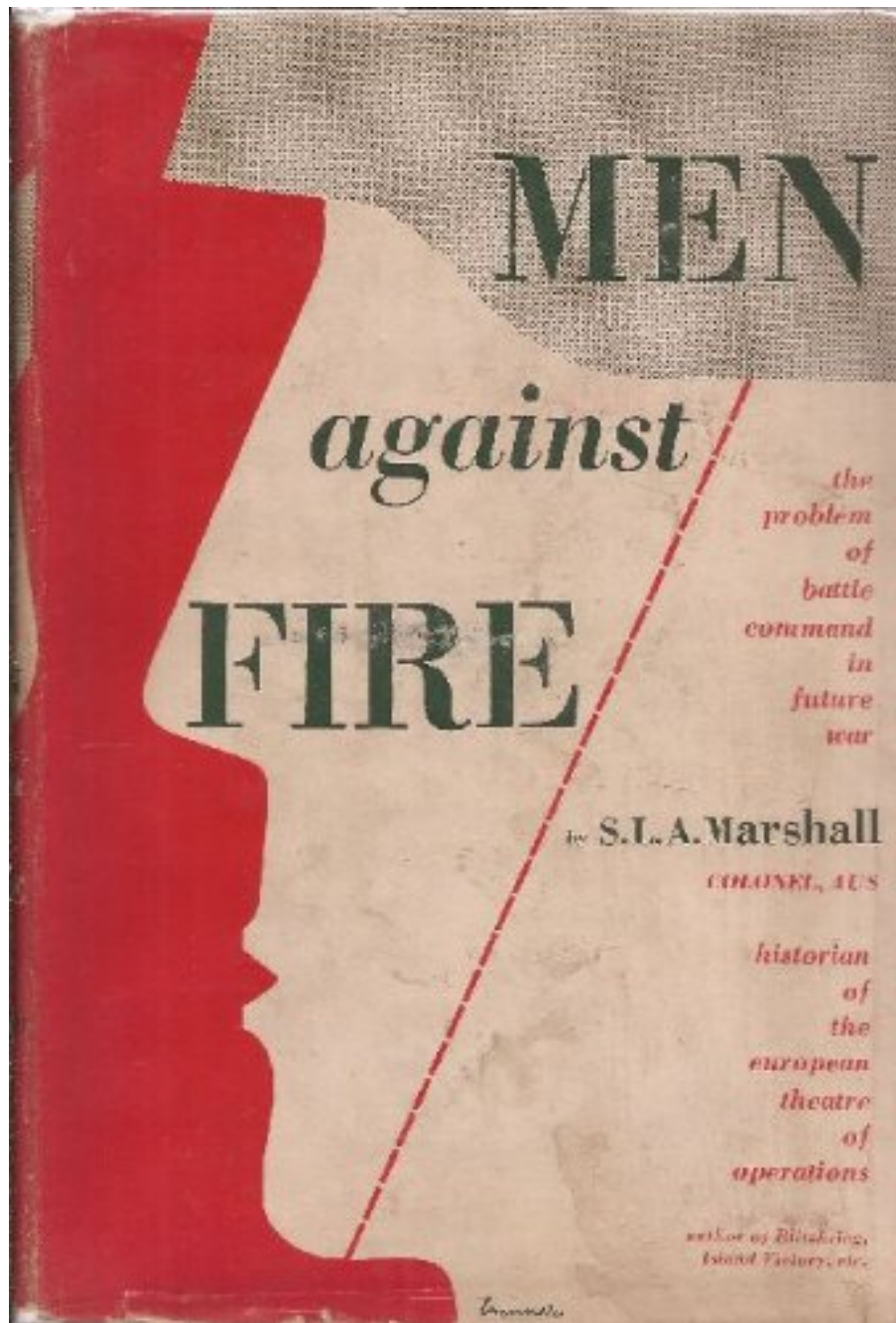


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Very Interesting

By Tom Munro

This is quite an interesting book. It was written by a American Officer who served in Europe and the Pacific as a combat officer in the Second World War. For some reason he researched the fire level of American troops. That is the number of Americans who used their weapons in combat. He did this by speaking to individual soldiers after engagements. He found out the rather startling fact that only 25% of troops fired their weapons. The 25% included all who fired their weapons even if they fired them only once. He found that soldiers who had more responsibility, say those who had been allocated machine guns or anti tank weapons were more inclined to fire and those least inclined to fire were rifle men.

The author discusses these findings in some depth in the military context. His approach is aimed at working out strategies to ensure that in a future combat soldiers will use their weapons more efficiently. However he discusses the issue of why soldiers don't use their weapons at some length. He finds that one of the main reasons is the socialization that people have had in American society and how they are affected by the taboos against killing and violence. He suggests that the failure to shoot was unrelated to cowardice as many of the soldiers who did not shoot were in other respects brave and willing to place themselves in danger.

The author discusses a number of ways of overcoming what he saw as the problem. He was of the view that the major problem relates to the nature of modern battle. In previous wars soldiers have tended to be bunched and close to NCO's or Officers. With the advent of modern weapons most soldiers are isolated from command and their fellows. He noted that both German and Japanese soldiers tended to talk amongst themselves almost constantly in combat situations were as Americans did not. He formed the view that conversation was positive in a number of ways. It allowed individual soldiers to know that there were others around and it also created feelings of obligation and support. The tactic of silence on the other hand meant that soldiers became isolated unaware if others were around and fell quickly into despair. In fact the key seems to be the group dynamics of the soldiers unit. Training cannot turn normal people into cold blooded killers but it can build up a sense of belonging and this will lead to individual soldiers fighting to protect their buddies. This is complex and involves the relation between soldiers and also the relations between officers and those they command. The author suggests that during operations soldiers should be told the locations of the positions they fight over and to some extent their importance. While not suggesting jingoism appeals to their role and duty are important.

During the Second World War military training had been on a fairly old model. That is by repetition to create an automatic reflex of obedience. This method is ancient and derived from the time of Frederick the Great. It was designed to ensure fast fire rates when armies used muskets and stood shoulder to shoulder in battle. The crux of this book is that soldiers trained by this method failed when they were separated from their officers

and fellows. It suggests that training should involve high standards of discipline but it should aim at training individual soldiers in such a way that they can cope with taking on individual responsibility.

The book is quite short and it is a very interesting book to read on a number of levels. The first is that it dispels a number of myths about the nature of man. The second is that it is a fascinating study of small scale warfare. One of the more interesting books I have read in some time.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Five Stars

By kenneth workman
as promised

8 of 10 people found the following review helpful.

Missing the target

By A Customer

The reviewers who confuse the will to fight, destroy, kill, maim the target, your enemy (him/her) miss the point. If you can't hit an area or point target why shoot? It is not necessary to "see" an enemy, "battle drills" teach instinctive, reflex, effective (accurate) fire instantly when attacked. But, even area fire must be accurate (in the area) to be effective. It is accepted doctrine to fire at a window, or base of a tree etc. if that is where the enemy is or is likely to be. The criticism of Marine known distance training vs. "train-fire" (a pre-vietnam term) totally misses the point that you must master your weapon before you move to advanced or combat firing. I speak from the experience of a national match target shooter, marine infantry leader in combat, and review of british, french, and german small arms doctrine as well as training. The totally blind "hosing" of automatic M16(or any other weapon) fire over paddy dikes or around the corner of buildings achieves no effect on the enemy if it isn't hitting where it is intended. Marshall repeatedly points out the fact that men he interviewed felt detached and uninvolved. In many cases they were physically exhausted. Implicit in this "men against fire", and "the soldiers load..." are a number of factors concerning motivation, ferocity and esprit that Marshall only partly addresses. Although he does identify some of the negative influences. In particular his subjects were the US Army and its soldiers, understandable as that was his service and his charter. In particular he points out that direction to fire from leaders was absent. In virtually every case the PFCs, Corporals, Sergeants etc. were not actively leading, directing the rifleman that Marshall interviewed. A fuller understanding of the overall problem would be gained if, at a minimum, one also read "This Kind of War" about Korea. Trying to extrapolate one dreadful incident such as "Blackhawk Down" into a conclusion concerning all small arms marksmanship training/tactics does a dis-service to the actual causes of that disaster and fails to do justice to the seriousness of that particular problem. A very definitive study of the problem of weapons types, firing and effectiveness was done by the British after the failed commando raid on Tobruk in WWII. In essence everyone fired but the weapons mix was wrong. Gaining "fire-superiority" by fighting as a team remains the crux of the problem. The army structure Marshall studied was the squad not the smaller more cohesive fire team or german assault groups of WWI and WWII. On all three of the occasions that I have read men against fire, at various stages of my life, one principal conclusion I have retained is that the conclusions and recommendations lack force and are general. The value of the book is in the documentation of the incidents and the settings and outcome. The conclusions all involve military principals that pre-date gun powder. The goal remains that of insuring the fervent, unwavering belief in the heart/mind of the soldier that it is the enemy who must suffer, be maimed and whose destiny is to die and be destroyed.

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