



War is not answer to these conflicts

http://blog.al.com/press-register-commentary/2011/08/post_425.html

Recently, in discussing war in general, I observed World War I (and one might add, our Civil War) as a reminder of the futility and frustration in its essence: long forgotten as a cause, horrendous casualties and the irrational “stumbling into the abyss.” WWII had some of the same, yet seemed necessary in view of the tyrants of Germany and Japan. And those who fought in them, remember.

John Toland called his memory of WWI “No Man’s Land” since the battles back and forth were in the main — north, middle and south in France. Typical were the battles along the Somme River and environs.

To John Keegan, the Somme battle in 1916 was the “end of the age of vital optimism in British life that has never recovered.” For France it was the meat-grinder of Verdun that year where German Falkenhayn had vision of “bleeding the French soldier ... white.” Nearly a million fought each other at both and lost near a half-million. Erich Maria Remarque (*All Quiet on the Western Front*) asked, “What kind of nation will they make of us tomorrow, these exhausted creatures, emptied of blood, emptied of thought, crushed by superhuman fatigue?” Remarque, a German soldier, told his story — essentially a German infantry squad, through Paul Baumer, but served in the war unlike Stephen Crane whose “Red Badge of Courage” took the young soldier to war with songs and flags flowing, who fought, retreated and often clutched the earth, in fear, as though in motherly arms.

Like Crane’s youth (Henry Fleming) and Remarque’s (Baumer) I, also a teenager, landed in the battle area, circa D+10 days, an armored replacement on the battered beach, called Omaha, Normandy, France — so young to go to war. Fleming, a Union soldier, feared he might run; he did when the cry came to “fall back,” and felt shame and remorse — an example of the “psychology of fear” portrayed by Crane. Enduring nearly four years of war, Remarque’s Baumer tells his story as an antiwar argument of trial, error, emotional horror and the added tragedy of the defeat and armistice, humiliation of Versailles and future consequences so true.

As the bridgehead expanded, June 1944, I joined my outfit, Fox Company, 113th Cavalry along with three other replacements for those lost in their first skirmish.

Baumer may have been speaking for us when he ruminated about peace and armistice: “lust for life, desire for home, the blood itself, the intoxication of escaping.” Unlike his war, ours became a war of movement from Normandy to the Elbe, meeting the Russians and the total victory over Germany.

Baumer fell in October 1918, the last of his unit, and we looked at our platoon of lost dead and wounded. Irony revealed that three of us in one tank survived: Chris Brocka, John “Fat” Olen and Don “Hoagy” Carmichael, each now a sergeant and tank commander.

War is a paradox, often seemingly jumped into regardless of the consequences, too, ignoring the need to declare it or leave it in a vacuum, which exacerbates the problem.

WWI's armistice set forth the rationale for WWII only 20 years later. Spawned by the Cold War, Korea and Vietnam set the adversarial tone of the United States and Russia, with no finality. Gulf Wars were the product of ideology, religion and influence and their residue resonates in Iran, Afghanistan and the tumultuous choice of Arab spring or winter of discontent. Huntington warned of "wars of civilizations" and in our troubled economic times, strategic trauma this potential must be addressed and resolved, hopefully without a world war, between the ideology of Islam vs. a Western culture of unadulterated freedoms and an understanding of the threat to the world politic and survival.

Stop current conflicts, talk, resolve, or who knows what the future holds.

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