

and time has proved Jarrell right. We hear the characteristic tone again at the end of his great essay on Robert Lowell, “From the Kingdom of Necessity”: “One or two of these poems, I think, will be read as long as men remember English.” This was in 1947! Lowell had a long, tortuous path ahead as a poet, but Jarrell was already making shrewd judgments, predicting developments in Lowell’s work that would become obvious only a decade or so later.

Admirers of Jarrell will want to know more about the conditions under which he wrote, but little help will come their way from Mary von Schrader Jarrell, his widow. Her *Remembering Randall* consists of nine essays, none of which seems especially shrewd or perceptive, although each has moments of interest or charm. Mary and Randall met at the Rocky Mountain Writers’ Conference, where he was on the faculty and she was a student. The teacher-student relationship seem never to have quite been put behind them, and Mary’s obvious adoration retains a slightly immature feel. She obliquely describes Jarrell’s sad descent into depression, as if (understandably) she cannot quite look at the terrible thing directly. She maintains that a bad review in the *New York Times* provoked Randall to slice his wrists, but that his death seven months later, when he was struck down by a car in Chapel Hill,

North Carolina, was an accident.

In the end, the criticism is what matters. For contemporary poets, Jarrell has tossed out bones still worth chewing on, as in “On Modernism,” where he puts the situation of the poet in the latter half of the 20th century quite nakedly: “It is the end of the line. Poets can go back and repeat the ride; they can settle in attractive, atavistic colonies along the railroad; they can repudiate the whole system, à la Yvor Winters, for some neoclassical donkey caravan of their own. But Modernism As We Knew It—the most successful and influential body of poetry of this century—is dead.”

Poets are left, as it were, stranded. Jarrell believed that, and this doubtless added to his despair. But his essays are so full of life, so rippled with perceptions, shafts of acute vision, neatly framed contrasts, and witty formulations, that one cannot but hope his death was genuinely an accident. The man in the essays—that familiar voice—does not sound like someone who would kill himself; he appears wry and full of wisdom, a model of sanity. *No Other Book* comes at a good time to remind us of who he was and what he gave us. It should grace every serious reader’s bookshelf.

> JAY PARINI, a poet and novelist, teaches at Middlebury College. His recent books include *Benjamin’s Crossing* (1996), *House of Days* (1998), and *Robert Frost: A Life* (1999).

Laying Down Arms

THE SOUL OF BATTLE:

*From Ancient Times to the Present Day,
How Three Great Liberators Vanquished Tyranny.*

By Victor Davis Hanson. Free Press.

480 pp. \$30

by Andrew J. Bacevich

This is a book about citizen armies, military genius, and wars of liberation. It posits a specifically democratic tradition of martial greatness—of mighty armies raised out of seemingly unlikely material, entrusted

to the command of eccentrics, and embarking “on a moral trek into the heart of slavery.” Called upon to fight not for glory or conquest but for freedom, citizen-soldiers become fierce, implacable warriors, a

“democratic militia” that marches deep into enemy territory to vanquish evil. Having accomplished their liberating mission, these warriors put aside their arms and hasten to resume their peacetime pursuits. Yet in doing so they impart a residue of “civic militarism” to the rest of society. Their sacrifices rekindle a spirit of civic vitality. The righteousness of the cause for which they fought spurs a democratic renewal that persists long after these “armies of a season” have dispersed.



The proponent of this provocative thesis, Victor Davis Hanson, is a distinguished historian of the ancient world who teaches at California State University, Fresno, and lives on (and works) his family’s farm in the San Joaquin Valley. Hanson is also, not incidentally, an agrarian. Indeed, that outlook, with its sturdy faith in the virtue of the common folk, its distaste for the urban, industrialized world, and its antipathy to privilege, pervades the work, imbuing it with originality and passion.

Hanson builds his argument for a democratic way of war on three cases. Beginning with Greece in the fourth century B.C., he recounts the story of Epaminondas, whose rugged Theban infantrymen invaded Sparta, crushed its army, and freed the Helots from subjugation. Next, he turns to William Tecumseh Sherman’s Army of the West, whose spectacular “march to the sea” in 1864 doomed the Confederacy and sealed the demise of slavery. Finally, he examines the campaigns of General George S. Patton’s Third U.S. Army, sweeping across France and through Germany to destroy Hitler’s Reich and liberate the prisoners of Nazi death camps.

In Hanson’s telling, these campaigns are all of a piece. Each pitted an army of yeomen, inspired by deep-seated convictions, against a self-proclaimed elite: hoplites against Spartan regulars, midwestern farm boys against the planter aristocracy, conscript GIs against Aryan “supermen.” Each army fought under a military misfit of fierce disposition and unappreciated humanity. Epa-

minondas, Sherman, and Patton, according to Hanson, all understood that the humane way to wage war is to end it quickly and decisively. Each believed that doing so required not slaughter but maneuver. Determined to spare his own men, each avoided head-on collisions with the enemy’s army, instead (and over the objections of timid superiors) moving on the enemy rear and thrusting deep into his homeland. Victory in each instance expanded the realm of freedom so that the military campaign itself became a ringing affirmation of democracy.

The author works hard to make the facts fit his thesis, but not altogether successfully. To portray Sherman’s westerners as decisive, he minimizes the contributions of Ulysses S. Grant and of the Army of the Potomac. Yet from 1861 all the way to 1865, the Army of the Potomac did most of the fighting and dying. Sherman could tear through Georgia and the Carolinas only because Grant had fixed the main Confederate army in Virginia and was relentlessly grinding it down. Nor did Sherman see his march as a purposeful act of liberation. His voluminous wartime correspondence suggests a commander less intent on ringing in the day of jubilee than on compelling recalcitrant rebels to submit to federal authority, thereby restoring the Union. The fate of African Americans was at best a secondary consideration.

In emphasizing the achievements of Patton’s army, similarly, Hanson is dismissive of the other formations, American and allied, that played a hand in liberating Europe. The

Third Army alone could no more have defeated the Wehrmacht than Sherman's westerners could have singlehandedly defeated the Confederacy. To highlight the genius of Patton himself, Hanson does a hatchet job on Omar Bradley, admittedly not one of history's Great Captains, but a competent officer and decent man. In Hanson's hands, Bradley becomes a cautious, unimaginative hack, consumed with dislike and envy of his flamboyant subordinate. Dwight D. Eisenhower fares only slightly better. Such, to be sure, were the views that Patton himself harbored, but to adopt them uncritically is to render an unbalanced portrait of the high command in the European theater. Finally, to imagine that Patton viewed his mission chiefly in moral terms, with the liberation of death camps his central purpose, is to engage in myth making, imposing our present-day consciousness of the Holocaust onto an earlier era. However fashionable it may have become to pretend otherwise—indeed, however much we may wish it had been otherwise—American soldiers fought not to save European Jewry or any other victims of Nazism, but simply to finish the job and go home.

Such reservations notwithstanding, *The Soul of Battle* remains a compelling book, suffused with the author's deep faith in democracy. Growing out of that faith are several expectations: that when the people choose war they should do so for reasons that rise above the sordid calculations of kings or princes; that an army of citizen-soldiers should be an expression of democracy itself, differing in spirit and behavior from mercenaries animated by visions of empire or expectations of plunder; that democratic armies should give rise to a humane style of generalship that restores peace without needless slaughter; that the outcome of wars undertaken by democracies ought to be redemptive.

We might argue as to whether the armies of Epaminondas, Sherman, and Patton truly lived up to such expectations. But surely Hanson is correct that there attaches to the destruction of militarism, slavery, and totalitarianism by democratic armies a grandeur that compels lasting admiration. Indeed, jux-

taposed with the perplexing military history of our own time—Iraq left under the thumb of Saddam Hussein, Somalia abandoned, Rwanda ignored, Kosovo ravaged by Serb predators, Serbia by NATO bombs—the grandeur of those achievements becomes all the more evident.

Perhaps Hanson's three cases spread across two millennia are too few in number to qualify as much of a tradition. Indeed, other cases—in the American experience alone, the Indian campaigns, the war with Mexico, the Philippine insurrection, and Vietnam—suggest that the democratic way of war all too often resembles war waged by nations to whom democracy is an alien concept. Ultimately, the nature of war at least as much as the nature of society determines the behavior of fighting men and their generals.

Does an appreciation for the enduring nature of war (and for the iron laws of politics) absolve democracies of any obligation to attempt to transcend its bleak imperatives? With his unbounded confidence in the people, Hanson emphatically answers no. He insists that the people can bend war to serve the interests of freedom. Certainly he is correct in suggesting that any democracy that gives up the effort to do so, that becomes cynical and craven in its use of military power, sullies itself and imperils its own existence.

Disguised as a work of scholarship, *The Soul of Battle* is in fact a timely and bracing polemic. Its true purpose is to indict the democracies of our own day, the United States foremost among them, for fabricating a new military tradition that is paltry, mean spirited, timorous—and explicitly designed not to engage the passions of the people. Victor Davis Hanson summons those sharing his faith in democracy to restore the connection between that faith and our military policies, so that the purposes for which democratic nations employ power and the way they fight reflect the will of the people. For citizens of the democracy that has arrogated to itself the role of world's only superpower, that message demands thoughtful consideration.

> ANDREW J. BACEVICH directs the Center for International Relations at Boston University.