

HI 336

Total War: 1914-1945

Professor: Cathal J. Nolan

The course explores the social, ideological, and military connections of the two great wars of the first half of the 20th century: World War I and World War II. Intimate links that join the two world wars are detailed, from turn of the century ideas about imperialism and the balance of power, to social, economic, and political changes attendant on internal reorganization by the major powers so they might wage global war. Operational military history is examined, including use of comparable weapons, tactics, doctrine, and technology, and how and why each war was fought and lost or won. Shared causes are examined, notably German and other dissatisfaction with the existing international order, competitive and militant nationalism, conflicting imperial ideologies and ambitions, and the strong solvent of unresolved territorial issues.

Administrative information

Office hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays 2:00-3:00 pm. Thursday 11:00-12:00 in B-13, 725 Commonwealth Avenue. Phone: (617) 353-1165 e-mail: cnolan@bu.edu **Email is best method of contact.**

Course materials are available on the Blackboard Learn page, where I have uploaded several dozen historical maps specific to the course. You can download, print out, and bring these to class. **Study the maps.** For your information, also uploaded are videos, music, and photographs.

Required Readings:

The course moves broadly chronologically. Keep ahead (not just even) with readings. Lectures will be enriched if you **do readings in advance**. I will call upon you from time-to-time, so be prepared. Work out for yourself how lectures match up to readings (rough guide below) and to weekly topics. All books are available at Barnes & Noble at BU. *Feel free to order direct from Amazon, use Kindle or e-book version.*

Kershaw - *To Hell and Back: Europe 1914-1949*, (Peng Rand/Viking), ISBN 9780143109921

Nolan - *Allure of Battle* (Oxford) ISBN 978-0195383782

Eugene Sledge - *With the Old Breed On Peleliu and Okinawa*, 07 ISBN 9780891419198

Willy P. Reese - *Stranger to Myself*, **PDF** version on the course site.

Grading:

*	Book review:	20%	Date: (4-5 pages maximum): February 23, in class
*	Research paper	40%	Date: (12 pages minimum-15 pages maximum): April 13th
*	Final exam	30%	Date: TBA by the University. I do not set the date.
*	Participation	10%	Includes mandatory attendance at one guest lecture

You lose a full letter grade for poor attendance and FAIL if attendance falls below a minimum threshold. You are also expected to join in active discussions and/or answer Qs about readings when asked.

Plagiarism: Consult the Dept of History Writing Guide: http://www.bu.edu/history/writing_guide.html

Readings and Discussions

Weeks 1 & 2: The Great Crisis and First Two Years of War

Why did the "long peace" of the 19th century come to a catastrophic end in 1914? Postwar historians generally concentrated on the immediate prewar diplomatic crisis in Europe, or perceived flaws in the "balance of power" states system, or supposedly inherently aggressive political and social systems that made certain states more bellicose than others. Thereafter, close investigation of World War I was mostly

swept away by pressures for research into the causes and course of the still greater catastrophe of World War II, and yet again by investigation of the origins of the Cold War. More recently, historians interested in “war and society” returned to examination of protracted social, intellectual, cultural, and imperial crises they believe underlay the Great War and the even deeper crisis of the first half of the 20th century.

Nolan, *Allure of Battle* Chapters 10 and 11
Kershaw, *Hell and Back*, pp.1-50

Weeks 3 & 4: Overcoming the Trenches and Shifting War Aims

'Ausflug nach Paris!' 'Au Berlin!' 'Victory by Christmas!' Such were the illusions, eagerness and excitement with which Old Europe plunged itself and the whole world into the greatest war humanity ever suffered through, until Europe started another world war 25 years later. In the first two weeks of August 1914, millions of men entrained for the front. What they met by September was not storybook glory, but mass death amidst barbed wire, bayonets, grenades, artillery barrages, machine gun nests, shell-holes, and troglodyte life in muddy trenches that stretched 475 miles in the west and over 800 miles along the eastern front (and more, in the rocky Alps from 1915). What changes did stalemate bring to mass military culture and fighting doctrine, political and social organization of the home front? What caused the unexpected operational calamity and ever-deepening strategic frustration of trench warfare? Were war planners and generals “stupid” and incapable of learning? Were deeper factors at work?

Nolan, *Allure of Battle* Chapter 12

Weeks 5 & 6: Winning the War and Losing the Peace

How did Germany try to win the war in 1917-1918? Why did it succeed in the east but fail in the west, the opposite of the German experience from 1939-1944? How did the Allies win the war in 1918? During the interregnum between world wars, diplomats tinkered with mechanisms of the League of Nations and the (vastly over-studied) Versailles Treaty. Meanwhile, professional militaries studied the Great War looking for lessons on how to fight the next one. What did they learn about planning, mobilization, and tactics? Did all militaries draw the same conclusions? What role did national military cultures play in forging divergent views of operational and strategic “lessons” of modern warfare? What conclusions were drawn about social, economic, and moral mobilization of civilians for mass industrial war? What did the West want? What did Stalin want? What did Hitler, Mussolini and Japan want? Were the differences reconcilable?

Kershaw, *Hell and Back*, pp.51-196
Nolan, *Allure of Battle* Chapter 13 (to p.420)

Weeks 7 & 8: Toward Total War

Did a world war really start in China in 1937, or not until Poland in 1939? Or even later? What links existed between ongoing wars in Asia and Europe before December 1941? Did World War II start as a total war? If not, what drove the change? To what degree were early German victories due to professional skill (and “lessons learned”), and to what degree due to “fortunes of war” and the disarray of enemies? Was caution and limited violence on the Western Front during 1939-1940 the norm only broken later, in 1941? Or were elements of the new ways of making total war already on exhibit from September 1939?

Nolan, *Allure of Battle* Chapter 13 (pp.420-441), and Chapter 15
Kershaw, *Hell and Back*, pp.197-345

Weeks 9 & 10: True Total War

What was the connection between Axis war-fighting doctrine and Nazi and other fascist propagation of atrocity and genocide? How did the Allies respond? How wide were the war-fighting and doctrinal gaps among the major combatant states and empires, at first?

Nolan, Allure of Battle Chapter 14
Kershaw, Hell and Back, pp.346-469

Week 11 Extreme Total War

Which powers practiced total war most completely over the second half of World War II? Did any restraint remain? What does the experience mean for the idea of a law of nations, a law of war, for the prospect of civilization? What were the real sources of the general trajectory to total war? Were they ideology, technology, industrial and organizational prowess, or some things more basic, such as hate and vanity? How were the Axis states actually defeated? How did the Allies define victory? Would *you* do it all again?

Eugene Sledge, *With the Old Breed*. Read whole book.
Nolan, Allure of Battle Chapter 16

Weeks 12 & 13: End Game

Can we speak legitimately of a new "30 Years' War" of the 20th century, or were the causes of World War I and World War II distinct and discrete? What were the major consequences of so much violence? How was the great crisis of the first half of the 20th century finally resolved? Whose ideas really triumphed in the postwar international order? Were the territorial and ethnic issues that helped cause the world wars resolved by reason along the lines of Wilsonian principles such as self-determination, or by raw *force majeure*, including forcible relocation of peoples to fit new borders and political facts?

Nolan, Allure of Battle Conclusion
Kershaw, Hell and Back, Out of the Ashes