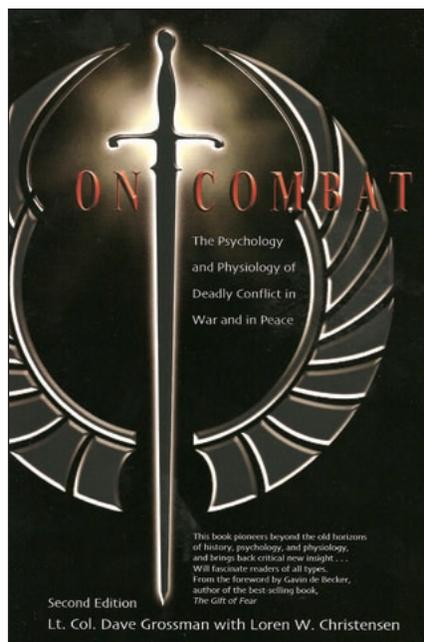
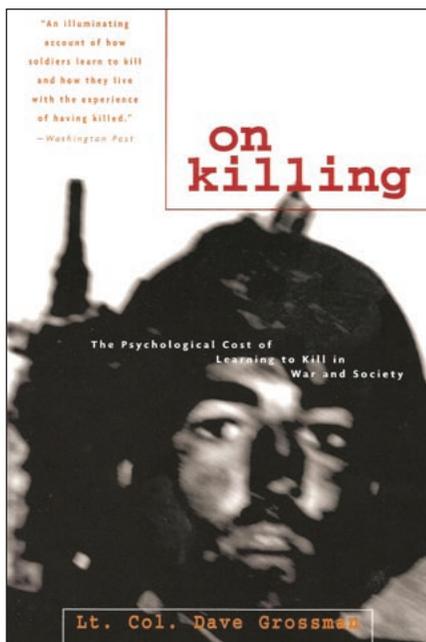


S.L.A. MARSHALL REVISITED...?



one's own species is also a key factor in human combat. Brigadier General SLA Marshall first observed this during his work as the Official US Historian of the European Theater of Operations in World War II. Based on his post-combat interviews, Marshall concluded in his book, (*Men Against Fire*, 1946, 1978), that only 15 to 20 percent of the individual riflemen in World War II fired their weapons at an exposed enemy soldier. Key weapons, such as a flame thrower, usually fired. Crew served weapons, such as a machine gun, almost always fired. And firing would increase greatly if a nearby leader demanded that the soldier fire. But, when left to their own devices, the great majority of individual combatants throughout history appear to have been unable or unwilling to kill.

There's hope a great man's memory may outlive his life half a year.

– William Shakespeare *Hamlet*.

I appreciate Mr. Engen's kind words about aspects of my work and research in his review of my *On Killing* and *On Combat* in *Canadian Military Journal*, Vol. 9, No. 2. However, it appears that his primary concern is that Brigadier General S.L.A. Marshall's work concerning non-firing behaviour in soldiers during the Second World War has been discredited, and, therefore, anything based upon Marshall's work is equally discredited. This is, indeed, a worthy topic for scholarly consideration.

However, in reference to Marshall's research, I would ask the reader to keep an open mind. The definitive US military source on Marshall is the US TRADOC (Training and Doctrine Command) Historical Monograph entitled, *SLAM The Influence of SLA Marshall on the United States Army*, by Major F.D.G. Williams. This document gives a well-rounded insight into Marshall, and it generally supports him as a scholar. Indeed, the author claims to have seen the rough copies of S.L.A. Marshall's field surveys, which others claim do not exist. Permit me to include here an extract from my entry on "Aggression and Violence," as published in *The Oxford Companion to American Military History*:

One major modern revelation in the field of military psychology is the observation that this resistance to killing

Marshall's findings have been somewhat controversial. Faced with scholarly concern about a researcher's methodology and conclusions, the scientific method involves replicating the research. In Marshall's case, every available, parallel, scholarly study validates his basic findings. Ardant du Picq's surveys of French officers in the 1860s and his observations on ancient battles (Battle Studies, 1946), Keegan's and Holmes' numerous accounts of ineffectual firing throughout history (Soldiers, 1985), Richard Holmes' assessment of Argentine firing rates in the Falklands War (Acts of War, 1985), Paddy Griffith's data on the extraordinarily low killing rate among Napoleonic and American Civil War regiments (Battle Tactics of the American Civil War, 1989), the British Army's laser re-enactments of historical battles, the FBI's studies of non-firing rates among law enforcement officers in the 1950s and 1960s, and countless other individual and anecdotal observations, all confirm Marshall's fundamental conclusion that man is not, by nature, a killer. Indeed, from a psychological perspective, the history of warfare can be viewed as a series of successively more effective tactical and mechanical mechanisms to enable or force combatants to overcome their resistance to killing.

By 1946, the US Army had accepted Marshall's conclusions, and the Human Resources Research Office of the US Army subsequently pioneered a revolution in combat training which eventually replaced firing at 'bulls eye' targets with deeply ingrained 'conditioning' using realistic, man-shaped 'pop-up' targets that fall

when hit. Psychologists know that this kind of powerful 'operant conditioning' is the only technique which will reliably influence the primitive, mid-brain processing of a frightened human being. Fire drills condition terrified school children to respond properly during a fire. Conditioning in flight simulators enables frightened pilots to respond reflexively to emergency situations. And similar application and perfection of basic conditioning techniques increased the rate of fire to approximately 55 percent in Korea and around 95 percent in Vietnam.

Equally high rates of fire resulting from modern conditioning techniques can be seen in Holmes' observation of British firing rates in the Falklands, and FBI data on law enforcement firing rates since the nationwide introduction of modern conditioning techniques in the late-1960s.

At the end of the Second World War, when our armed forces consisted of a very high ratio of veterans, when our generals, officers, and NCOs had led us through one of the most horrendous wars in history, at *this* time S.L.A. Marshall's work was universally accepted. In Korea and Vietnam, Marshall was treated with deepest respect by the men in war, and was asked repeatedly to visit, to study, and to train.

Were *all* these military leaders wrong? Did Marshall fool *all* of them, and, today, somehow, a few individuals have discovered 'The Truth?' It was only in the 1980s, after Marshall was dead, that a handful of individuals began an attack campaign. None of these people (to my knowledge) still has works in print. In the great realm of ideas, the anti-Marshall camp appears to be 'out of print.'

On Killing, on the other hand, is on the USMC Commandant's Required Reading List, and is being used as required reading at the FBI Academy, DEA Academy, West Point, the USAF Academy, and Peace Studies programs and other courses in many colleges. In the realms of criminal justice, psychology, sociology, and peace studies programs, the possible existence of an innate resistance to killing, in most healthy citizens, is widely accepted. A few historians disagree, and I would respectfully submit that they may be operating outside their area of expertise. I can't help but wonder if S.L.A. Marshall's true sins were 1) to author numerous popular historical books, while 2) also failing to acquire a Ph.D. in history. Either one of these realities would be guaranteed to draw the fiery pens of academia, and the combination appears to be deadly – but only after the target is safely dead and gone. Marshall's methodology may not meet rigorous modern standards, but that does not mean he lied. He has been accused of claiming a battlefield commission during the First World War, while he was actually an OCS graduate. But he could well have

been assigned in an officer's position prior to the training. And he claimed to have been in combat with an infantry unit, when actually he was assigned to an engineer battalion; but his unit may have been attached to a line infantry unit.

Perhaps all the combatants, leaders, and veterans of the Second World War, Korea, and Vietnam were wrong about Marshall, or perhaps the handful of men in recent years who have attacked him are wrong. Let us hope our life's work gets a better hearing when we are dead and gone.

Basically, all S.L.A. Marshall was saying was that some of our warriors (military and police) do not shoot in combat, and more realistic targets will raise the firing rate. Marshall was the pioneer whose research and writing caused us to change from 'bulls eye' targets to realistic combat simulations, and who can argue with that? We can disagree as to how much of an advantage it gives us, or exactly how much of an increase in the firing rate this kind of training has created, but, today, no one wants to go back to shooting at 'bulls eye' targets. And every time you shoot at a silhouette, a photo-realistic target, or a video training simulator, you should take a moment to remember and thank S.L.A. Marshall.

Today, the body of scientific data supporting realistic training is so powerful that there is a US Federal Circuit Court decision that states that law enforcement firearms training *must* incorporate realistic training, to include stress, decision-making, and 'shoot-don't-shoot' training. (*Oklahoma v. Tuttle*, 1984, 10th Federal Circuit Court.) Law enforcement trainers now teach that an agency is not in compliance with legal standards if it fires at anything other than a clear, realistic depiction of a deadly force threat. Again, we have S.L.A. Marshall to thank for that.

Finally, as to Mr. Engen's finding of high Second World War firing rates among Canadian units, I would say that this is entirely possible. I would refer the reader to David Lee's excellent book, *Up Close and Personal*, in which the author finds supporting evidence for low firing rates in many units during the Second World War, *but* the author also identifies units that pioneered realistic marksmanship training and were thus able to achieve much higher firing rates in battle.

Lieutenant Colonel (ret'd) Dave Grossman is a former US Army Ranger and military psychologist. His books, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, and its sequel, *On Combat: The Psychology and Physiology of Deadly Conflict in War and in Peace*, have established his reputation as an international expert in the human elements of warfare.