

5-5-2016

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Joseph Berg

Loyola Marymount University, josephpberg@gmail.com

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De iniustitia belli:

Violence Against Civilians in the Thirty Years War

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements of the University Honors Program
of Loyola Marymount University

by

Joseph Berg

May 5, 2016

The Thirty Years War is one of the great pivotal occurrences for the social and political makeup of Europe and especially the so-called “German-speaking lands.” The hegemonic power of the Hapsburg Empire in Europe was forever broken by the financial and human toll of the war, as well as by the loss of the Lowlands. The role of European superpower was assumed by newly ascendant France, which had prospered greatly at the expense of the Hapsburg Empire through the expert political maneuvering of Cardinal Richelieu among the diverse forces opposing the Holy Roman Emperor. Borders were redrawn in the wake of the war, notably to reflect France’s annexation of Alsace-Lorraine, an act with enduring consequences for centuries to come. The various German states, always variably independent in the heyday of the Holy Roman Empire, now existed as literally hundreds of disparate sovereignties. All this at the price of a war which remains a scar on German national memory even into the modern day.¹

In the historiography of the Thirty Years War, there is a marked tendency to focus on the horror of war, on the conflict’s raw destructiveness. The evidence of the desolation is staggering; thirty years of fighting, sieges, plundering, plague, and instability left the area we today call Germany with possibly a third of its population dead from starvation and disease, crops ravaged, entire villages and towns obliterated, and a defunct economy. These facts stand as the lasting legacy of the war. Accepting them at face value, however, only leads to even greater confusion and misunderstanding of conflict at this time.

Upon noting the widespread devastation of the Thirty Years War, many are quick to attribute it to excessive barbarity and cruelty on the part of the combatants. As a religious war, at

¹ David Lederer, “The Myth of the All-Destructive War: Afterthoughts on German Suffering, 1618-1648,” *German History* 29, no. 3 (September 2011): 381.

least in its origins, it is easy to read the history of the war as a story of grudges set free upon a helpless population more concerned with cash and crops than with creed. Certainly many documents remaining from the era frame military successes and defeats in religious terms, and especially events of violence suffered. Further investigation, however, suggests an explanation for the violence perpetrated beyond religious fanaticism. Such fanaticism can be found if one searches for it, but appears to have been the exception rather than the rule. The war was devastating not because of a special vindictiveness in the soldiery, nor through failures of discipline, but because of the nature of occupation in warfare at the time.

The Traditional View

Ever since its happening, the Thirty Years War has been treated as the paradigm of inhuman violence with respect to civilians — at least up until the wars of the twentieth century. Take for instance the truly horrific Sack of Magdeburg. More than a century after its occurrence the great German poet Friedrich Schiller immortalized the razing of the maiden city in his *Geschichte des Dreyßigjährigen Kriegs (History of the Thirty Years War)*.² This event was historicized even in its direct aftermath as an act of unsurpassed barbarity, and continues to be

² German historian Hans Medick quotes Schiller as recording that Tilly created “a scene of slaughter... to depict which history has no words and poetry has no paintbrush.” Hans Medick, “Historical Event and Contemporary Experience: The Capture and Destruction of Magdeburg in 1631,” trans. Pamela Selwyn, *History Workshop Journal* 52 (Autumn 2001), 42.

interpreted in this way by some to this day.³ The tendency has been to wallow in the real violence of the war rather than to consider it in light of the material and social circumstances of the war.

These two views, the emotional and the rational, cannot exist independent of each other.

Emphasis on one at the expense of the other paints an unrealistic picture of the war as either one long, fully willed injustice or a clearly reasoned, justly executed calculation.

Such horrors as the Sack of Magdeburg, unwarranted violence perpetrated on such a scale and with such intent, are scarcely to be believed. In fact, they should be critically evaluated.

Were mass rape and torture for its own sake historical happenings, or exaggerations and additions of later commentators? Disgusting crimes undeniably occurred in the progress of the war, but the evidence of contemporary accounts suggests that these were real but isolated events, reflective of the extremes to be found in war rather than of its regular conduct. As in wars today and throughout history, crimes and violence beyond the contemporary accepted standards of warfare constituted especially heinous exceptions rather than the norm for military behavior. From whence comes, then, this notion of the Thirty Years War as the exemplar of lawlessness against civilians?

17th Century Standards of Military Conduct

Let us consider first the standards of military conduct for the day. The armies engaged in the Thirty Years War existed between two eras of military reform. The sixteenth century had produced a class of proud, highly trained professional soldiers, adept with firearms and field

³ Ibid. Medick devotes great attention to the perception of the siege and Sack of Magdeburg in its immediate aftermath.

tactics, men well-paid for their elite skill set. In the century following the Thirty Years War, by virtue of their bureaucracies the absolute-monarchical nation-states of the eighteenth century raised and operated vast forces composed of men drilled and standardized into rigid, disciplined units. In terms of quality the forces fighting the Thirty Years War lived up to neither.⁴ Armies were constantly levying troops from the general populace, a necessary practice in any extended conflict which always takes a heavy toll on an army's overall quality.⁵ The precision and professionalism of the previous age had dwindled and deteriorated without yet giving way to the uniform forces of the next century. The standards of military conduct for the seventeenth century reflected this.

On the one hand, the understanding of what was permissible action in war remained from the theorists of the sixteenth century. Notable among these was the Spanish monk Francisco de Vitoria, a theologian cum jurist active in the 1520s and 1530s at the university of Salamanca whose writings and lectures on law, politics, and war influenced European thought into the

⁴ Cf. Ronald G. Asch, "'Wo der soldat hinkömbt, da ist alles sein': Military Violence and Atrocities in the Thirty Years War Re-examined," *German History* 18, no. 3 (July 2000), 306-307. This is a general statement; Asch exempts Spanish forces coming out of the Lowlands from this criticism. However, the professional Spanish armies saw little action compared to the large and varied mercenary forces operated by most parties in this conflict.

⁵ Geoff Mortimer, *Eyewitness Accounts of the Thirty Years War* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002), 29.

seventeenth century.⁶ In his discourse *On the Law of War*, de Vitoria carefully parses not only the defining characteristics of just war but also acceptable Christian conduct with respect to the enemy, enemy civilians, and enemy property. Christian religious language aside, many of de Vitoria's general standards find counterparts in the human rights standards of the twenty-first century: the innocent should not be harmed unless absolutely unavoidable, an affront or attack should be answered with proportionate force, and resources may be seized or destroyed to keep the enemy from using them for warlike purposes.⁷ However, as lofty—even constraining—as de Vitoria's standards may seem, he makes several concessions in practice to the varied circumstances of war in reality, particularly where booty and enemy civilians⁸ are concerned.

⁶ Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrence, introduction to *Political Writings*, ed. Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrence (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), xiii-xvii.

⁷ Francisco de Vitoria, *Political Writings*, 314-327.

⁸ De Vitoria's standards designate enemy civilians and their possessions as fair targets due to their being, politically speaking, extensions of the person of the offending monarch. While this permission set a precedent for acceptable attacks against civilians, it was not generally cited as the justification for looting; this was instead chalked up to supplying needs and soldiers' right to remuneration for their service. For that matter, the category "enemy civilians" is particularly difficult to define in the Thirty Years War. Both sides laid claims to the same territories, seeing themselves simultaneously as liberating angels and the righteous wrath of God. While many troops were imported from various corners of the Empire or foreign lands, many others were native Germans. Moreover, as shall be later elaborated upon, socially the Thirty Years War made soldiers and peasants as classes natural enemies.

De Vitoria concedes that because the goods of the innocent populace in the land of the enemy might be used against an army with just cause, it is within the purview of the soldiers of a just army to plunder these innocents for their own security. Moreover, de Vitoria permits that, in a case of war to gain just redress for some injury, whether between nations or in case of a monarch avenging an attack on some part of his constituency, compensation and satisfaction may be taken from the technically innocent populace of the enemy. Just as they and their possessions are the offending party's responsibility and under his protection, so are they his property from which recompense may be drawn.⁹ Booty taken for this purpose is supposed to be proportionate to the magnitude of the initial offense, but this immediately opens a vast grey area of interpretation. Likewise, protection of innocent life, though often reiterated as an imperative, becomes difficult to practice and harder to inspire. Finally, de Vitoria concludes that it is natural law that "to the victor belong the spoils."¹⁰

In the Thirty Years War in particular it was understood that soldiers were entitled to various kinds of booty and supplies from the locales they occupied, both from the standards of conduct set out by de Vitoria and because large quantities of the war's combatants were mercenaries.¹¹ Even more than the ostensible causes for fighting, it was vital at the ground level

⁹ Ibid., 317-18.

¹⁰ Ibid., 324.

¹¹ Peter H. Wilson, *The Thirty Years War: Europe's Tragedy* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 2009), 827-828. Wilson discusses specifically what is meant by the term "mercenary" in the context of the Thirty Years War; he interprets the word to mean not so much "hireling" as "serving the highest bidder."

that the conduct of war be profitable. The imperial generalissimo Albrecht von Wallenstein famously contrived a political and tactical strategy for what was from his perspective a self-financing war that would make his personal fortune.¹² He embraced the prospect of supplying an army as much as possible simply with the resources of the land. In a similar vein, access to German wealth was an allure to external allies of the Protestant party, whether in the form of riches promised in return for assistance — riches which would somehow be collected from the regions — or in whatever could be reaped from the war-torn landscape.¹³ It is important also to remember the historical model of tax and tribute collection: the requirements of a higher authority would be accrued by lower agents, with a surplus that formed their profit; this model was repeated with each new link in the chain. This system also worked in reverse: as a given shipment of supplies was delivered, some cut of the haul would be kept by the carriers, then a bit more by the officers, and yet more by the quartermasters, leaving the general soldiery perpetually undersupplied.¹⁴ This only exacerbated the provisioning problem.

¹² C.V. Wedgwood, *The Thirty Years War* (London: Lowe & Brydone (Printers) Ltd., 1956), 170-173. Dame Cicely Veronica Wedgewood published the first edition of her history in 1938, when Europe found itself on the brink of the Second World War — a parallel to the state of agitation leading up to 1618 which she does not fail to note.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 94, 170-173, 186, 187, 231-232, 249; also John Theibault, “The Rhetoric of Death and Destruction in the Thirty Years War,” *Journal of Social History* 27, no. 2 (Winter 1993), 277.

¹⁴ Geoff Mortimer, *Eyewitness Accounts of the Thirty Years War 1618-1648* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2002),

Logistics are also important in considering the scale of the war. The vast majority of the fighting and military movements of the Thirty Years War were confined to the area of the Holy Roman Empire represented by modern Germany. For centuries, the regional economies of this area had supported the local population and, occasionally, armies for limited periods of time. In the Thirty Years War, however, these areas were subjected to decades of unrelenting occupation. Army succeeded army in the cycle of victory and loss that quickly consumed all the surplus these lands had to offer, followed by all of their necessities.¹⁵ For the most part the peasants of these communities did not concern themselves with whether the army currently in residence in their village was technically “on their side”; all soldiers were enemies. They consumed their food and commandeered their livestock, worsening the shortages brought about by the ravages of war. The filthy conditions of camp life carried disease with the movements of the armies. Soldiers were prone to fighting among each other and with locals, and not infrequently pursued and assaulted local women. None of these factors recommended soldiers to civilians’ good graces.

Grounds for Violence

The related issues of provisioning and booty bring us to the thorny topic of the peasant/soldier relationship in the Thirty Years War. For civilians on both sides of the war, enemy troops were naturally just that — the enemy, a threat to life, limb, and livelihood to be feared when powerful and spurned when possible. However, beyond this entirely explicable fear, civilians felt threatened by the forces of their own side, and not without cause. As troops were shunted and stationed among villages and regions, the local lords allotted to these communities the duties of

¹⁵ Cf. Theibault, “Rhetoric of Death,” 280.

provisioning and housing the troops from their own crops and possessions.¹⁶ Such a state of forced generosity, little better than occupation, was rarely if ever considered a boon by the communities supporting the army. In 1623, the Treffurt district of Thuringia in central Germany appealed to both the regional lord and to the Catholic field marshal Tilly for a lessening of their provisioning obligations to the imperial garrison; the people of Treffurt pleaded that their land could not support both them and the army.¹⁷ As the war wore on, it became more and more difficult for these regional communities to provide for armies; their surpluses had long ago been exhausted by provisioning, conquest, and personal needs for survival, soon followed by their supplies for regular needs and even the barest necessities. In 1639 the people of the village of Rambach near Mainz beseeched their landowner not to hold them responsible for provisioning troops. In their letter of supplication they catalogued the resources of the entire village: two cows, one plow, one oxen [sic]¹⁸; no sheep, horses, or pigs remained. The scribe responsible for this report eloquently closes by saying that “a whole wagon with yoke could be put together in an emergency but we would not trust it to last one mile with just half a load.”¹⁹

In the day-to-day lives of peasants, whether the soldiers among them were ostensibly fighting for or against them, they were still eating up the supplies and riches of the land. Moreover, as has been proved and reproved by soldiers the world over for millennia, the conduct of billeted soldiers among the peasants housing them was often violent and lawless, not at all

¹⁶ Ibid., 276-277.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Presumably one yoke of oxen, i.e. a pair of animals.

¹⁹ Ibid., 282.

reflective of their role as these peasants' defenders. Despite the fact that many soldiers had been originally drawn from the peasantry, the experiences of campaigning had initiated them irrevocably into a new society where they would spend literally years immersed in a world very distinct from that of their upbringing. Civilians held soldiers as a class in very low esteem socially, both on account of their deeds on campaign and more broadly because of what they saw as an ungrounded, irresponsible lifestyle, moving from place to place and living from one round of plunder to the next. Considering the impact a military force could have on the area in which it was billeted, let alone on a region and populace with any semblance of loyalty to the enemy, it is easy to appreciate the fear and malice that peasants as a class harbored against soldiers. They did not fail to make their sentiments clear when possible, both among each other and to local soldiers.

In particular relations between local women and soldiers were discouraged as much as possible, largely in an attempt to maintain civil order and preserve standards of decent sexual conduct. Examples from Konstanz, Memmingen, and Württemberg in the latter half of the seventeenth century show some of the civil measures undertaken to discourage such interactions. In Konstanz in 1674, women who "latched" onto soldiers were legally banished from the town.²⁰ Seemingly friendly associations with soldiers could earn a woman severe censure from the civic authorities at best, and potentially severe public reproach and ostracism. The daughter of one Adam Böhler in Konstanz in 1696 was gaoled and investigated on multiple occasions under

²⁰ Ulinka Rublack, "Wench and Maiden: Women, War and the Pictorial Function of the Feminine in German Cities in the Early Modern Period," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 44 (Autumn 1997), 11.

suspicion of fornication, merely on the testimony of neighbors.²¹ In 1697 Barbara Blenzig of Petershausen in the Dachau region of Bavaria was forced to leave her hometown pregnant and destitute when the soldier who had promised to marry her was transferred away, leaving her at the mercy of the civic inquest who mercilessly informed her that soldiers were not permitted to marry without the permission of their garrison commanders.²²

These measures placed excessive responsibility on the shoulders of women who had found themselves involved with soldiers — sometimes voluntarily, often by force and trickery; such laws were unjust, but sought in desperation to combat a situation in which no legal force could be exerted over the soldiers themselves.²³ Though these efforts affected soldiers' lives only indirectly, there was no question of them being the ultimate targets of the civil authorities' discrimination. Many civilians would readily lash out at soldiers, given the opportunity. As much as soldiers possessed strength in weapons and able bodies, civilians still owned the food and clothing that soldiers needed for survival, and they were not particularly inclined to generosity. In October of 1642, the commander of the Swedish garrison stationed at Olmütz in Moravia (modern-day Czech Republic) had to authorize some violence, and threaten more, in order to

²¹ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

²² *Ibid.*, 18.

²³ *Ibid.*, 12; specifically, Rublack cites a Württemberg city ordinance regarding marriage that owns soldiers as “special cases not tied to any order like other subjects.” Conveniently, the stigma against victims that was inherent to these measures absolved the municipality of any responsibility to financially support soldiers' bastards.

make sure that the citizenry would sufficiently provision his men for the winter.²⁴ Colonel Robert Monro, commander of a Scottish unit operating for the Protestant side during the war, recorded in his campaign history a large-scale civilian attack on a surrendering imperial garrison; this attack was apparently retribution for the garrison forcing them to construct fortifications for the previous winter.²⁵ Soldiers did not fail to notice their standing in peasants' eyes, and this colored their interpretation of unwillingness to share food and clothing. Perceiving themselves spurned and even abused, soldiers were quick to use violence to assert their strength and social standing in claiming what they felt was their due.

Finally, it is important to consider soldiers' mindset with regard to the nature of local civilians' enemy status. Wayne Lee provides a lens through which to consider military violence against civilians in his book *Barbarians and Brothers*. Lee examines restraint and cruelty as enacted by Anglo-American soldiers across the period 1500-1850, based on their understandings of their enemies either as savages who merited no restraint or as brethren to be reassimilated after the conflict — or punished for betrayal.²⁶ A similar analysis may be applied to violence off the battlefield in the Thirty Years War.

At the strategic level, Emperor Ferdinand II and Tilly had clear agendas which included both reconciling separated Christians and punishing heretics; King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden campaigned for the protection of the Protestants' claims to self-determination. At the

²⁴ Asch, "Military Violence and Atrocities," 301-302.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 300-301.

²⁶ Wayne Lee, *Barbarians and Brothers: Anglo-American Warfare, 1500-1865* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 8-11.

operational level, however, these ideological goals had little to do with how soldiers dealt with peasants; the previous examples citing peasant experiences at the hands of soldiers show that to soldiers, all peasants were simply a different kind from themselves. In a very real way all peasants were to soldiers “barbarians,” to borrow Lee’s terminology: people whose culture differed fundamentally from that of the soldiers. For Lee, in the Anglo-American world of conflict in the forms of civil and Indian wars, this cultural difference lies in differing “grammars of violence” by which combatants communicate their goals and standards.²⁷ In the Thirty Years War, it is safe to carry this definition a step further. More than having a different set of meanings for violence, the peasants whom soldiers encountered did not know their way of life, with all of its pains and homelessness and exhilarations and codes. They were civilians, to whom military life and its standards were entirely foreign. No matter how much privation and fear influenced their relationships with soldiers, their fundamental inability to understand the soldiers’ way of life underlay their interactions, and vice versa. Neither rebels nor brothers in the eyes of soldiers,

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

peasants' relative "barbarity" dictated that fear and force were the only languages they would readily understand.²⁸

Sources

To analyze military violence against civilians in the Thirty Years War, it is imperative to find documents that reliably speak to the perspectives and experiences of the soldiers and peasants involved. Eyewitness accounts are particularly valuable for their insights into the world in which they were written, despite the accusations of subjectivity sometimes leveled against them; such departures from fact may be ever more valuable than a rote record of happenings in

²⁸ Ibid., 214, 226-229. Lee emphasizes the importance of cultural differences real and imagined in understanding the mindsets of Anglo-American soldiers, and the same holds true for the Thirty Years War: soldiers and peasants had little in common, but even more importantly they thought of themselves as entirely different creatures. John Clavell's film *The Last Valley* (1971), based on the novel of the same title by J.B. Pick (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1959), illustrates very well the distinct worlds of the peasant and the soldier. In both the film and the book the primary character, a burgher caught between the peasant populace of an untouched village and a force of mercenaries, points out that "a soldier has no past and no future" (Pick, *The Last Valley*, 13). Similarly, Simone Weil writes that, enamored of power and caught in the cycle of exercising that power for destruction that brings only destruction, the soldier belongs to "a different race from the race of the living" (Simone Weil, "The Iliad, or the Poem of Force," trans. Mary McCarthy, *Chicago Review* 18 no. 2 (1965), 21). The peaceful world has no place for men whose world is war.

such an analysis, for they provide a direct window into the minds of the authors. A great variety of people touched by the war have left behind their memories and interpretations of it. Some soldiers, like the above-mentioned Scottish colonel Robert Monro, kept personal records of their doings on campaign; similarly, the educated members of individual settlements (often clerics or holders of local office) not infrequently kept records of the fortunes of their hometowns through the progress of the war. Others wrote their accounts years after peace was declared in 1648. This last category includes the source examined most closely here: Grimmelshausen's novel *Simplicius Simplicissimus*.

The life of Hans Jacob Christoffel von Grimmelshausen is only vaguely known; despite the considerable stock of written work that he created, the biographical material that remains is spotty and sufficient only to provide a general sketch of his life trajectory without consistent specifics.²⁹ He was born in 1621 or 1622 in the province of Hesse near Hanau. His hometown Gelnhausen was sacked by imperial troops during his youth. He was caught up in the war, eventually becoming a musketeer and a clerk serving Catholic forces. In fact, his military career broadly resembles that of his best known literary protagonist, Simplicius. After the war's end in 1648, he married and worked as steward to one of his former military commanders, and later as an innkeeper. Throughout his life he hovered between the noble and common classes, knowing both well but belonging to neither. Over the course of his broad career he gained notable

²⁹ What biographical information is detailed here is taken from Alan Menhennet's work *Grimmelshausen the Storyteller: A Study of the "Simplician" Novels* (Columbia, South Carolina: Camden House, 1997), 3-6. Menhennet attributes this lack of information to the social and political state of the German lands through the Thirty Years War and its aftermath.

experience with literature as he moved in educated circles. In the last decade of his life (1667-1676) he published a number of works on themes of philosophy, morality, and allegory, including those concerning *Simplicius*.

Simplicius Simplicissimus, his first work, describes the experience of life in the war through the eyes of a rural German boy turned soldier. Plunder, death, rape, mischief, and mayhem characterize the military life Grimmelshausen depicts. *Simplicius* is a young farmer's boy whose fortune is by turns made and destroyed by the passage of the Thirty Years War. While many aspects of this story are fanciful and fantastic, it features descriptions of life in the midst of the war which only a survivor could provide. As the years of war pass, *Simplicius*' home is destroyed by "foraging" soldiers; he lives in military camps and eventually becomes a soldier himself. Grimmelshausen describes both the soldier's and the peasant's experience of life in the war, having experienced both in his own life.

Simplicius Simplicissimus belongs to the rich tradition of "war novels," comparable with the works of Tim O'Brien or Bao Ninh in relevance as an historical source. While the tale he tells cannot be considered a strictly factual narrative, his descriptions of living conditions, violence, poverty, and even contemporary views on religion and politics are entirely credible. Most crucially he creates an accurate *sense* of the war. Here we cross the border between what veteran novelist Tim O'Brien calls "happening truth" and "story truth"³⁰ — the two are equally "true," but one deals in strictly historical events where the other handles other levels of reality. When held up against contemporary soldiers' diaries, for instance, Grimmelshausen's portrayal of camp

³⁰ Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried* (New York: Broadway Books, 1990), 71, 83-4.

life as unsanitary, meagerly supplied, and inhabited by all manner of non-military folk is entirely accurate.

Stylistically, Grimmelshausen writes as something of a Baroque moralist. As Alan Menhennet comments on Grimmelshausen's writing and style in *Simplicius*, he notes the author's emphasis on the dualities and changeability of the world.³¹ Grimmelshausen also shows us the varieties of human sin and vice — not with the gratuity of a dime novel, but in order to evoke revulsion, satire, and the psychological peace of a more grounded and moral lifestyle.³² These issues of changeability and human depravity were fresh in the Baroque mind in the wake of the Thirty Years War, and Grimmelshausen was particularly well acquainted with these phenomena as a survivor of the war. In fact, this vein of Baroque literature can be logically interpreted as a result of the horrors seen in the war, in part at least. Menhennet argues that Grimmelshausen's use of *Simplicius* to convey morality and satire does not annul the book's quality as a narrative, just as its status as a fictional narrative does not annul its quality as a source of insight into life amid the turmoil of the Thirty Years War. Grimmelshausen's moralizing is his attempt at dissuading others from the mistakes he has made.

Grimmelshausen's narrative richly illustrates life in the Thirty Years War, including interactions between soldiers and peasants. Taken together, two passages from *Simplicius Simplicissimus* show both the brutal logic behind soldiers' raids on peasants and the deep animosity between the two groups. The first instance features a band of foraging soldiers laying

³¹ Cf. Menhennet, *Grimmelshausen the Storyteller*, 66-68.

³² *Ibid.*, 75-77.

waste to Simplicius' home farm; the second sees a band of villagers tormenting a soldier whom they caught alone on a raid.

In the opening pages of *Simplicius*, forming in fact the introduction to the life of the title character, Grimmelshausen describes soldiers wrecking a farm, slaughtering livestock, and raping the women of the settlement.³³ The young, naïve Simplicius, failing initially to comprehend the danger and tragedy of the scene befalling his household, describes in observant detail:

...Each one [of the soldiers] started his own business which indicated nothing but ruin and destruction. While some started to slaughter, cook and fry [the animals], ...others again took linen, clothing and other goods, making them into bundles... what they did not want was broken up and destroyed. Some stabbed their swords through hay and straw as if they had not enough pigs to stab. Some shook the feathers out of the beds and filled the ticks with ham and dried meat... Bedsteads, tables, chairs and benches were burned... Our maid had been treated in the stable in such a way that she could not leave it any more... They bound the farm-hand and laid him on the earth, put a clamp of wood in his mouth, and emptied a milking churn full of horrid dung water into his belly.³⁴

Just hearing of such deeds may turn one's stomach, and indeed this catalogue of violence includes abuses beyond the general mission orders of foraging — but perhaps not so many as might be expected. The commandeering of animals, foodstuffs, and household goods was entirely within the purview of soldiers sent out to obtain supplies for themselves. Additional destruction and torture, while not immediately necessary to the mission of collecting food and clothing, served as a show of force for obtaining information. Soldiers were rarely paid on time or all they were promised; instead, they were permitted to collect what spoils they could on

³³ Grimmelshausen, Hans Jakob Christoffel von, *Simplicius Simplicissimus*, trans. John Calder (London: John Calder, 1982), 18-22.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

campaign for personal gain. In this same passage, the narrator Simplicius goes on to describe how his father surrenders to the soldiers surprising quantities of gold and jewels under comparatively little pressure. In his naïveté Simplicius opines that the soldiers' leniency is in keeping with the man's station as head of the house, but this appears in the vein of Grimmelshausen's sense of sardonic humor; having seen the abuse inflicted on the rest of his household, the man is quick to surrender his riches, and the soldiers understand that they will derive more pleasure from his money than his suffering. No such consideration is due the farmhand, whom they see as simply another object to be destroyed.³⁵

The wanton torture and destruction that figure so blatantly in this farm raid must also be understood as a continuation of the cycle of hatred and violence between peasants and soldiers. We have already noted peasants' attitude towards soldiers in general; a second example from *Simplicius Simplicissimus* reveals the depth of peasant disdain and willingness to retaliate in violence as the opportunity presented itself. Within a few chapters of the preceding incident, the roles of persecutor and victim are starkly reversed when a band of peasants mutilate and bury alive the sole survivor of a foraging party which they had captured the day before.³⁶

³⁵ This opens another category of violence, one that defies most measurement: destruction simply for its own sake. In *The Things They Carried* O'Brien observes that, through the experience of the war, he had "turned mean inside" (O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*, 200). Weil also discusses such violence, perpetrated out of the "despair that drives [the soldier] on toward death, on the one hand, and slaughter on the other" (Weil, "Poem of Force," 21).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 39-41.

The [soldiers]... dug up what the peasants had left behind... Soon they reached a barrel, broke it open, and found a man in there who had neither ears or nose but still lived. As soon as he had recovered a little and recognized some of the troop he told how on the previous day some of their regiment had gone out to forage and the peasants had taken six of them prisoner. Of these they had shot five dead hardly an hour ago; they had to stand one behind the other, and as the bullet after piercing through five bodies did not reach him, the sixth one, they had cut off his nose and ears, after forcing him to lick [their posteriors].³⁷

This passage stands for itself. The peasants' successful repelling of a foraging party on the day before this event was a successful and entirely sympathetic effort to protect their possessions and lives. Even the taking of prisoners has a place under these circumstances; these prisoners could have conceivably been bargained back to their regiment. But instead, finding themselves in the position of advantage, the peasants demeaned, tormented, and executed their prisoners. This is unadulterated, vindictive payback without any tactical utility. However, considering the treatment which they expected at the hands of these foragers, their response in kind is explicable if not defensible. And, as violence faithfully breeds violence, this retaliation continues a chain:

³⁷ Ibid., 39. A translation error in the Calder edition of *Simplicius* says that the soldier was forced to lick "the behinds of the five dead peasants." Compared with the 1993 Camden House edition and with the German text as presented by *Der Spiegel's* "Projekt Gutenberg," it is apparent that the surviving soldier was forced to lick the behinds of his five captors. It is also questionable whether one bullet could conceivably pierce five bodies; such a feat would be uncertain performed with modern firearms. This may be an instance of fictional license. To evaluate the feasibility of the action described here would require exact knowledge of the firearm involved and a full ballistics report. This incident is best read as a demonstration of the creative cruelty war brings out in humanity.

As he was bemoaning his misery another troop of soldiers entered the wood on foot who had come across these peasants, made five prisoner and shot dead the rest... Now one should have seen the spectacle of how the peasants were tortured and tormented. Some wanted to shoot them in their first rage but others said: 'No, let us torture these reckless beasts thoroughly and give them what they deserve.' And so the peasants received such hard thrashings with the muskets that they had to vomit blood...³⁸

Grimmelshausen depicts well these moments of indulged passion and violence. To be sure, he describes also the calmer intervals of life in the midst of the Thirty Years War; these are moments of dirtiness, of exhaustion, and of pondering reality and existential questions awakened by the desolation and depravity that characterize the landscape. However, as a novelist, Grimmelshausen tells his story in an exciting manner. *Simplicius* is not untruthful, but it emphasizes the dramatic. In fact, much of war and occupation are dull subjects better addressed by diaries and memoirs than by works meant to entertain, no matter how accurate. By looking at surviving personal accounts written during the war, one may achieve a sense of the day-to-day life in army camps and occupied civilian settlements. The conditions of soldiers' and peasants' daily existences in turn shed light on the factors that contributed to military violence against civilians and to the general devastation of the war.

The Englishman Sir James Turner served among the Swedish forces operating in the Holy Roman Empire between 1632 and 1639; he records the regular conduct of war and military life as he observed it there.³⁹ His descriptions of soldiers' living conditions are nothing short of

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 40. The physical and psychological torment of the peasants continues for an entire page; a complete catalogue of the tortures used would be extraneous here.

³⁹ Mortimer, *Eyewitness Accounts*, 28. It is worth noting here that the Swedes are often considered some of the best-prepared, disciplined, and effective troops who saw action in the Thirty Years War, and even they are described here as pitifully provisioned.

abysmal. Regarding pay, a notoriously inconsistent luxury, Turner comments that “if you will consider how their wages are paid, I suppose, you will rather think them Voluntaries [than mercenaries], at least very generous, for doing the greatest part of their service for nothing.”⁴⁰ As far as supplies are concerned, Turner estimates that a common soldier might possess “a couple of Shirts, a pair of Stockins, and a pair of Shoos in his Knapsack, (and how many Souldiers have all these?).”⁴¹ Though in theory food rations were determined at a reasonable amount, in reality there was often barely enough to meet the needs of men on the march. A day’s allotment of bread might have to last a man a week of marching.⁴² Supplies were not perpetually inadequate, but they were highly unpredictable.

Conditions in camp could be just as bad. Another Englishman, Thomas Raymond, recounts from his service in the Thirty Years War the variability of sleeping accommodations in a military camp.⁴³ Raymond counted as sufficient bedding “part of an old tent... stuffed with straw, my pillow layd upon boughs... my cloak being the coverlett... and in this leagur pretty free from lice” — and these were his sleeping quarters during a period of “a full plenty of all provisions.” When the army was on the march, soldiers were at the mercy of the elements. Raymond’s account of making camp over the course of three days’ hard march sees him bedding down exhausted, cold and wet:

⁴⁰ Ibid., 30.

⁴¹ Ibid. All typographical errors are original to the text.

⁴² Ibid., 32.

⁴³ Ibid., 28. Raymond served 1633-34 in the Low Countries and on the German border. He was a younger son of noble family, and campaigned as a regular pikeman.

[W]e were end of day very wet, and came soe and late to our quarters, lying 2 night *sub dis*, haveing only the panopie of heaven to cover us. . . . I had nothing to keepe me from the cold wett ground but a little bundle of wett dryed flax, which by chance I litt on. And soe with my bootes full of water and wrapt up in my wett cloake, I lay as round as a hedgehog, and at peep of day looked like a drowned ratt.⁴⁴

Compared to such norms, being billeted among well-supplied townfolk would seem a potentially paradisiacal alternative. The soldier-diarist Peter Hagendorf was over the course of his twenty-five year military career hosted by a brewer, a tavern-keeper, and a wine-merchant among other similarly well-apportioned hosts, sometimes for months at a stretch. With him came his wife and children, common companions for many soldiers despite regulations that attempted to control and limit camp followers.⁴⁵ Such conditions of comfort did indeed find their way into soldiers' lives, but as unpredictable exceptions. As noted above, civilians were often less than willing hosts. The degree of destitution that could assail soldiers on the march combined with the variability of their fortunes made soldiers supreme opportunists. One week food would be abundant, and the next it would be scarce. They did not know whether they would live to see the next season, or perhaps even the next day.

Camp followers comprised another pressure on soldiers to acquire provisions and riches whenever the opportunity presented itself. Though most soldiers were legally prohibited from marrying,⁴⁶ many had families legal and illegitimate which accompanied the armies. Merchants, prostitutes, and servants regularly followed in the baggage train. All of these hangers-on provided their services to the army, cooking, cleaning, repairing, and even keeping households to

⁴⁴ Ibid., 33. All typographical errors are original to the text.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 28, 32-33.

⁴⁶ Cf. Rublack, "Wench and Maiden," 12, 17.

the degree possible. These greatly swelled the numbers and needs of an army. Turner estimates that an army of five thousand horse and nine thousand foot would require two hundred twenty wagons for the sutlers in their baggage train. Additionally, large numbers of boys would attend even the common soldiers as servants; one boy would serve two soldiers, bringing their numbers perhaps as high as an additional fifty percent of the army's actual fighting force. Turner derisively names these urchins "the very Vermine of an Army."⁴⁷ All of these needed feeding and would often participate in plundering. Some, like Robert Monro, would establish their families in relatively safe stations away from the fighting, but these still needed money to survive.⁴⁸ Given soldiers' overall state of life, it should come as no surprise that they would take what they could from people they already considered fundamentally different from and naturally opposed to themselves.

Finally, in considering military violence against civilians, we come to the civilian side of the story. Soldiers' accounts speak to the motivations and contributing factors behind violence off the battlefield, but not as much to the impact of soldiers' violent acts. A better sense of this is achieved by a reading of civilian sources. When reading these victim accounts, it is important to keep in mind the writing style of the time. As mentioned in the context of the literary style of *Grimmelshausen*, the conventional style of the early modern period was particularly dramatic.

⁴⁷ Mortimer, *Eyewitness Accounts*, 33.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 33-34. Asch also attributes to camp followers part of the cause for soldiers' widespread looting beyond the strict needs of feeding fighting men (Asch, "Military Violence and Atrocities," 304-305. In *Grimmelshausen's Simplicius* also the title character marries and leaves his family in Lippstadt while he ventures on across the war-torn landscape.

Many of the surviving civilian accounts of suffering in the war were in fact compiled as supplications of villages and provincial regions to their regional lords, a genre which by its nature necessarily used a particularly plaintive language. Other sources, like those of soldiers, include personal memoirs and regional chronicles. Unlike the propaganda works created at this time for mass consumption, these more private writings strive to bear out an interpretation of the war which is first and foremost real. Ironically, it is in civilian accounts that, in addition to accounts of abuse, we find descriptions of the oft-forgotten complementary side of military violence, namely, its absence.

The aforementioned category of supplicating reports is the first that shall be treated here. The report quoted above cataloguing the resources of Rambach is an excerpt from such a letter. These were official documents written with the express purpose of lightening a village or region's responsibility to billet and supply troops stationed among them; such a reprieve would be achieved by painting the authors' destitution in such a way that it would stand out from among the plights of their neighbors, so naturally such reports are persuasively bleak. This said, in substance these sources are dependably objective, for any claims they made could be verified by the landowner before he decided to grant a reprieve.⁴⁹

Above all, these supplications bemoan their writers' loss of resources to the armies as the war dragged on for three decades. The constant commandeering of food and livestock, combined with the destruction of battle and the passage of disease, "ruined to the ground" many villages.⁵⁰ However, emphasis is placed on the fact that soldiers continue to extract food and supplies that

⁴⁹ Theibault, "Rhetoric of Death," 274-275.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 280.

the peasants could not afford to give rather than on tales of rape and torture. When a village or region could not pay its quota of food or wages, the soldiers would take from the peasants' belongings what they considered was rightfully theirs.⁵¹ It is important to note that this process of supplying is condoned by de Vitoria, and that even the seizing of "pay" by plunder, in its own rough logic, was a sort of forcible collection under the terms of an established contract. To be sure, such actions were certainly sufficient to devastate regions. Lorenz Ludolf, a village pastor in Hesse-Kassel, wrote in 1642 of his native Reichensachsen that "whoever has not himself seen and lived through such circumstances cannot believe what I note here."⁵² Still, these supplications describe their treatment at the hands of soldiers as the consuming destruction of war rather than as acts of special malice.

Special malice seems to have more often belonged to the realm of siege; the nature of siege warfare was conducive to this. It is the siege and subsequent sack of Magdeburg in 1631 that is cited more than any other single event as the defining moment of wanton violence in the Thirty Years War. Strategically located on the river Elbe, the longtime Protestant stronghold of Magdeburg was attacked and finally taken by imperial forces under Tilly and his lieutenant Pappenheim. "There was such a thunder and crack of muskets, incendiary mortars and great cannon that no-one could either see or hear," remembers Jürgen Ackermann, one of Pappenheim's captains.⁵³ Once the imperial troops breached the wall, a fire erupted which completed the destruction of the city. It remains unclear to this day how exactly the fire began;

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid., 271.

⁵³ Mortimer, *Eyewitness Accounts*, 67.

what is known is that the pillaging of the city was brutal. Wholesale havoc reigned supreme for days. Six soldiers raped a twelve-year-old girl in the courtyard of the city cathedral before the eyes of the Premonstratensian monks of that church.⁵⁴ Tilly himself tried to protect those innocents whom he could; with the help of the monks around six hundred civilians were preserved in the cathedral. Most of the city's inhabitants, however, fell to the flames and the sword.

The sack was a general scene of frenzy. Together with the fire, the sack effectively wiped Magdeburg from the face of the earth for the better part of a century.⁵⁵ Within days the Sack of Magdeburg achieved legendary notoriety. Prince Christian II of Anhalt-Bernburg, a Protestant ruler allied with the Emperor who was able to observe the siege and sack from his castle a few miles away, wrote that the fall of Magdeburg brought to mind images of the biblically foretold destruction of Jerusalem.⁵⁶ The event's reputation also spread abroad, so that in 1649 Cromwell's savagery at Drogheda and Wexford was compared to the deeds wrought upon Magdeburg.⁵⁷ In Pick's novel *The Last Valley*, a veteran of the attack summarizes the event thus: "I killed God at Magdeburg... We laid Magdeburg flat, killed men, women and children, and burnt the lot. I don't forget it."⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Wilson, *The Thirty Years War*, 469.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 467-471; Wedgwood, *The Thirty Years War*, 286-290. These passages summarize the circumstances, execution, and aftermath of the siege.

⁵⁶ Medick, "Historical Event and Contemporary Experience," 29-30.

⁵⁷ Wilson, *The Thirty Years War*, 470.

⁵⁸ Pick, *The Last Valley*, 45.

Sacks were a regular part of warfare at this time. In his discourse on military conduct in the English Civil War, Lee describes the precarious politics surrounding siege warfare. The commander of a besieged city was faced with a difficult decision: give up the city or resist in hope of outside relief. In case of surrender, it was accepted that no harm would befall the surrendering force; prisoners would be exchanged and terms would be agreed upon through negotiation.⁵⁹ The danger lay in the strategic loss of the city. If, however, the commander of the besieged garrison elected to hold out, he gambled that he would be relieved before the enemy broke through. If the besiegers should prevail, no terms would be offered, and the pent-up tension and anger of the besiegers would be unleashed. At Magdeburg, the garrison commander Falkenberg was pressured by the people of the city to surrender to the imperial troops, but he continued to defy Tilly's threats at the orders of King Gustavus Adolphus — with disastrous results.⁶⁰ Just as Lee's analysis suggests, when the imperial troops finally broke through on May 20th, they were eager to let loose their store of wrath upon the population responsible for their protracted hardships in the besieging camp.

We return to personal accounts to learn of civilians' experiences at the hands of soldiers on regular occupational and garrison duties. In contrast to siege warfare, a standing military presence was not a destructive free-for-all; occupations and garrisons took a heavy toll on their host regions, but with the goal of keeping them under relatively peaceful control rather than punishing resistance. The civilians who recorded their experiences hosting military units rarely have anything positive to say about the experience, but neither do they record systemic atrocities.

⁵⁹ Lee, *Barbarians and Brothers*, 16, 37, 77-78.

⁶⁰ Wedgwood, *The Thirty Years War*, 286.

As in the supplicant letters, civilian diaries lament most of all the toll taken on personal and community resources. Following the departure of a particular garrison, a town baker called Stampfer complains: “I had given the soldiers 417 Reichstaler in cash alone. I am also sure that the food and drink they had cost as much again, as I had to feed 18 people for several weeks, real soldier riff-raff.”⁶¹

Clearly Stampfer’s affection for his recently departed guests is less than overflowing. However, he makes no mention of threats to his person or pilfering of possessions — more than could be said by other, less fortunate civilians. A Naumburg tax official named Maul was robbed on various occasions by troops billeted in his town, usually at sword- or gunpoint.⁶² Churches and clerics were special targets for both sides; differences of religion could be cited as justifying excuses to take valuable vestments and vessels as booty, or to hold traditionally inviolate persons for ransom. In a village around the area of Leipzig the Protestant pastor Freund lost between the years 1631 and 1637 roughly 5,000 Reichstaler.⁶³ In one attack on Ingolstadt, the Swedish army held for ransom those clerics from the neighboring monastery who had sought refuge in the castle; when these returned to their monastery, they found that it had been “totally despoiled.”⁶⁴

There were of course exceptions to this pattern of opportunistic abuse. One noteworthy example is the experience of the nuns of the Frauenwörth convent near Bamberg. When in 1633 the city fell to Swedish forces, the sisters feared the worst for themselves and their house, but,

⁶¹ Mortimer, *Eyewitness Accounts*, 85.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 89.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 85-86.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

when the Swedish soldiers arrived, they took only food and livestock and left the nuns unharmed. Throughout the period of occupation, the sisters were treated with consideration quite contrary to the reports that had come to the convent of other occupations. Junius, one of the sisters at Frauenwörth, records that they were often visited peacefully and pleasantly by Swedish officers. No attempt was ever made upon the persons of nuns, or to break up the religious life of the convent; sometimes the Swedes even brought gifts of money.⁶⁵ Such peaceful relations between the occupiers and the occupied could indeed happen, but such a degree of tranquility as at Frauenwörth was certainly exceptional. This example, and its predecessors, are meant to illustrate the wide range of treatments civilians experienced at the hands of conquerors. Also, at this juncture, it would be negligent to forget the cases of civilian women referenced earlier. Many women endured at the hands of garrisoned soldiers harassment, assault, and rape. In the eyes of soldiers, civilians were not so much a charge to be protected as a separate species to be cooperated with as necessary and taken advantage of when convenient.

Conclusion

The cultural impact of the horrors of the Thirty Years War is not to be underestimated. Its outcome shaped European politics for the next century; it also influenced European thought. It was in 1625, in the midst of the Thirty Years War, that the Dutchman Hugo Grotius wrote his landmark work *The Law of War and Peace*, a treatise that replaced de Vitoria's *On the Law of War* as the defining guidelines for conduct in war. As a witness of the effects of the Thirty Years

⁶⁵ Ibid. 102-105. Throughout the war the Swedes acquired a reputation for being well-disciplined even in victory.

War, Grotius strove to create a rule of conflict which would somehow mitigate the destruction inherent to warfare as he knew it.⁶⁶ In his introduction to *The Law of War and Peace*, Grotius discounts de Vitoria for too much intermingling divine law with civil and martial affairs. In his own work Grotius tried to codify a code of standards for war independent of theology, in the hopes of reducing the ideological element which he believed made war especially vicious.⁶⁷ Grotius may have had some success at mitigating atrocity in his day: purportedly Gustavus Adolphus held Grotius' work in high esteem; perhaps Grotius is partially responsible for the Swedish army's comparatively good discipline with regard to noncombatants.⁶⁸

The Thirty Years War earned its reputation as a horror. Plague, famine, and siege were common experiences for civilians at the hands of the soldiers who ate and burned their way across the German-speaking lands. However, it would be unfair to read the story of the Thirty Years War as merely one of a chain of abuses. Keeping in mind the legal theories of de Vitoria, commandeering the life essentials of innocent civilians and even sacks after siege were accepted facts of war. These actions were horrible and destructive but permitted, in this way similar to how strategic bombing raids of the Second World War were permitted to destroy civilian

⁶⁶ Renée Jeffery, *Hugo Grotius in International Thought* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 27.

⁶⁷ Hugo Grotius, *On the Laws of War and Peace*, trans. Francis W. Kelsey (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1925), 22; Jeffery, *Grotius in International Thought*, 27.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

populations by targeting centers of military production in urban areas.⁶⁹ This does not account for the looting that occurred outside of direct orders to resupply from the surrounding countryside, but the impelling influence of soldiers' own poverty and estrangement from peaceful, civilized life should not be confused for the consuming ideological malice that is sometimes cited.

It must be remembered that, throughout this study, the goal has been to discern the nature and motivation of violence against civilians in the main. There is a darker side of the human person that has not been accounted for, nor do these analyses endeavor to do so. This final category of violence is perhaps the most difficult to understand and therefore the most frightening. Some violent acts had no apparent end to them except the suffering of the victims; some of the abuses described by Grimmelshausen in the raid on Simplicius' home fall into this category. Such acts are held up as characterizations of the brutality of the Thirty Years War, and while it would be an exaggeration to claim them as commonplace, they certainly occurred — this is known not simply from the vivid accounts of the victims, but from chillingly similar instances which crop up in wars throughout history. Even among American soldiers in the twentieth century can instances of this senseless sadism be found. In what is supposed to be one of the

⁶⁹ It should be noted that, in addition to conceiving of such strategic bombing for military gains, there was also a strong desire to bomb civilians to destroy the enemy's morale and for revenge on the enemy population, particularly in the minds of British policymakers. The parallel drawn here is meant to illustrate the accepted legality of attacking civilians for the sake of furthering the war effort.

most enlightened periods of human history, among men from a society with a comparatively clear code of innate dignity, Tim O'Brien saw men inflict torment for its own sake.⁷⁰

In addition to the evidence of literary sources, there is also a visual source for such sadism in the Thirty Years War in the work of Jacques Callot. Callot was born in Lorraine in 1592 and created a series of etchings entitled *The Miseries of War*, several of which highlight the violence of civilian/soldier contact in the context of plundering. In the bottom righthand corner of the etching "Plundering and Burning a Village" (Appendix A), soldiers pursue a child with drawn swords as their comrades loot, burn, and rape their way through the town. Its companion piece "The Peasants Avenge Themselves" (Appendix B) features farmers hacking at soldiers with scythes while the latter are restrained and defenseless.⁷¹

In such cases as these, while a great deal of psychological analysis could parse out the precise causes, there is a more general explanation which is as accurate as it is succinct: war and violence change people. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and its astounding variety of symptoms is a ready example of this phenomenon; the experience of war mutilates not only physically, but can transform previous habits of gentility, moderation, and joy into abuse, addictions, and depression unto suicide. It is also the case that war warps senses of propriety and right and wrong. In her analysis of violence Simone Weil explains this change very clearly. The use of

⁷⁰ O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*, 78-80. This example is the systematic dismemberment of a baby water buffalo with rounds from an assault rifle. Consider also stories from World War II of Japanese practices on American prisoners and bodies, and vice versa.

⁷¹ Daniel Howard (Editor), *Callot's Etchings: 338 Prints* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1974), plates 262 and 263.

force by one human being on another reduces the victim to a “stone,” a thing without any claim to mercy or forgiveness. A “moment of impatience” is sufficient grounds for killing, for the rush of violence annuls the consideration required for justice or prudence to be enacted.

Simultaneously, force bewitches and enslaves its users, instilling in them both a firm belief in infinite personal license and a despairing need to destroy, for destruction is the only apparent avenue of deliverance from the meaninglessness of the horrors surrounding them.⁷² Tim

O’Brien’s description of this change is more visceral but every bit as accurate: “Something had gone wrong... I’d turned mean inside. Even a little cruel at times... I was capable of evil.”⁷³

When pondering destruction in war, especially destruction beyond the accepted purview of the battlefield, it is good to remember Thucydides’ words on the degenerative impact of conflict upon the human person:

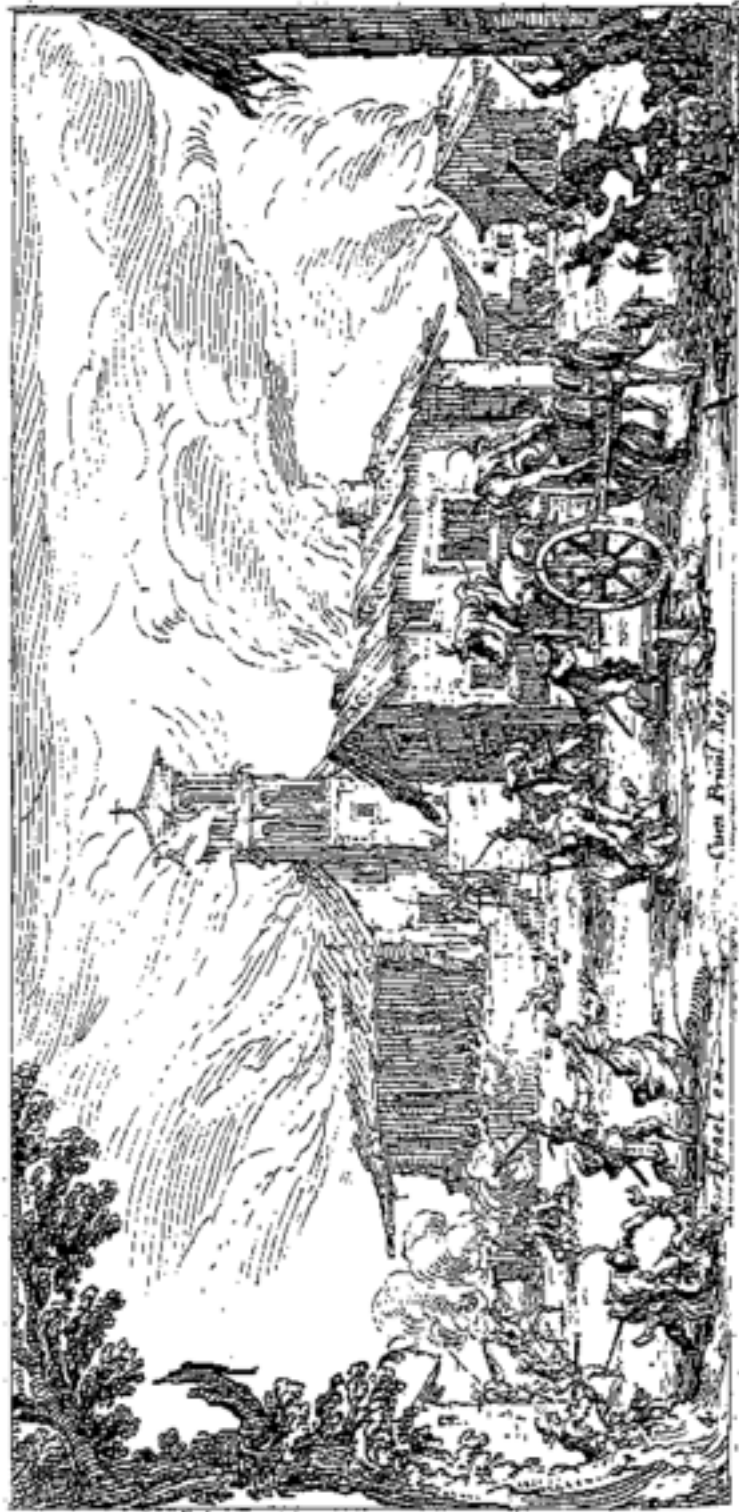
“War is a violent teacher. It brings people down to the level of their circumstances.”⁷⁴

⁷² Weil, “Poem of Force,” 7-9, 13, 14-17,

⁷³ Tim O’Brien, *The Things They Carried*, 200.

⁷⁴ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War, Volume II: Books 3 and 4*, trans. C.F. Smith, Loeb Classical Library 109 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920), 143. The rendering used above is an alternative translation of the Greek text which better bears out the sense of war’s degrading impact.

Appendix A⁷⁵



262 Plundering and Burning a Village.

⁷⁵ Howard (Editor), *Callot's Etchings: 338 Prints*, 262.

Appendix B⁷⁶



263 The Peasants Avenge Themselves.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 263.

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