Unit Description

This unit takes as its starting point, Joanne Bourke’s recent book _An Intimate History of Killing_. Bourke claims that soldiers fight because of a visceral enjoyment of face-to-face combat. This is certainly one explanation for the soldier’s decision to remain in the front line. But other factors play a role too: training, fear, ideology, and the importance of ‘primary groups’. Students will be encouraged to reflect upon the similarities and differences between various groups of soldiers: conscripts, volunteer armies, mercenaries, and so on. What are the differences between male and female soldiers? How can we explain the phenomena of desertion and trauma? And what about the involvement of soldiers in mass killing of civilians – do such perpetrators have a distinctive motivation for their actions? And what, if anything, distinguishes historical contributions to these debates from those written by psychologists, military analysts, journalists, and the soldiers themselves?

Contact Hours and Mode of Teaching:
1 hour intro to unit + 5 x 2 hour seminars

Methods of Assessment:
1 x 24 hour take home exam (100%)

Essential Reading –

Special edition of the _Journal of Contemporary History_ on combat motivation, April 2006.
Joanna Bourke, _An Intimate History of Killing_ (1999)
Christopher Browning, _Ordinary Men_ (1992)
John Keegan, _The Face of Battle_ (1983)
SLA Marshall, _Men Against Fire_ (1947)

Further Information

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