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TWO FACES OF WARTIME EXPERIENCE: COLLECTIVE MEMORIES AND VETERANS' APPRAISALS IN LATER LIFE

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Why should we care about the subjective experience of aging veterans? Evidence suggests that veterans' recall (or reconstructions) of their military experiences may be more important than their actual experiences in predicting the health and well-being outcomes of their service. Coming to terms with wartime service—whether one was exposed to danger, participated in combat, or had other roles and responsibilities—is both an individual and a public health issue. Prior wartime eras are also part of the larger collective memory of nations and the people in them, and they continue to affect perspectives on peace, democracy, and defense.

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In this chapter, we use data from four longitudinal studies to examine veterans' appraisals of military service and collective memories of war from the vantage point of later life. We probe their recollections of World War II and, to a lesser degree, the Korean War. Although much knowledge of aging is based on these cohorts, which were heavily marked by war, little attention has been paid to the long-term outcomes of their military experiences, and even less to subjective aspects of service.

COLLECTIVE MEMORIES OF WARTIME EXPERIENCE

Collective memories reflect the shared experiences of people who live in a specific historical time and place (Halbwachs, 1980). Periodic outbreaks of war across the 20th century have shaped the collective memories of populations. In the case of wartime experience, social rituals sustain collective memories. For example, the Fourth U.S. Marine Division, which fought on Iwo Jima, holds public assemblies to pay tribute to the unit's fallen comrades and share memories and emotions. Veterans' days, commemorations on anniversary dates, and the erection of national monuments also keep these experiences alive for younger generations.

Especially during epochs of rapid change, a birth cohort (a collection of people born the same year) is thought to be "distinctly marked by the [life] stage it occupies" when it encounters social change, such as war (Ryder, 1965, p. 846). People of the same age during a historical period often have a "common consciousness" or understanding of the period and its influence on them (Mannheim, 1928/1997). Experiences within cohorts, however, are likely differentiated by gender, social class, and other aspects of an individual's life history. Nonetheless, collective memories define the past in ways that have profound social and psychological implications for the present and future, such as our understanding of global and local conflicts, military intervention, and peace. And for veterans, personal memories are entangled with how they appraise their wartime experiences as they age.

VETERANS' APPRAISALS OF WARTIME EXPERIENCES

Veterans' recall of their wartime experiences determines their meaning and importance. Appraisal is part of the recollection process. To paraphrase W. I. Thomas's (with D. S. Thomas; Thomas & Thomas, 1928, p. 571) famous dictum: If veterans recall situations as real, they are real in their consequences. This suggests that behaviors can be guided more by individuals' percep-

tions of situations than by their “objective” circumstances. Present recollections represent constructions of the past, of what is cherished, harbored, or remembered.

Appraisal processes have long been central components of models of stress, adaptation, and coping (e.g., Aldwin, 2007). The severity of demands in an individual’s environment, coupled with the availability of resources for coping with those demands, influences whether and how a person deems a situation to be stressful. For example, veterans’ experiences varied significantly by the timing, duration, location, rank of service, and whether they saw combat. Furthermore, whether an adverse situation results in adverse outcomes depends on the effectiveness of an individual’s coping strategies. For example, members of the armed forces are trained to experience combat and can access formal services and informal support networks. These factors could minimize negative appraisals and facilitate coping.

Veterans’ recall and appraisal of service matters for how they adapt to life afterward. Recent findings have suggested that it may not be military experiences themselves that determine health and well-being as much as how veterans assess them (Settersten, Day, Elder, & Waldinger, 2012). For example, more positive assessments are related to greater resilience and better emotional health outcomes later in life and can mediate the relationship between service experiences and these outcomes. Optimism and positive appraisals can be seen as expressions of human agency (Hitlin & Elder, 2007), and appraisals of earlier or current life events affect future goals and expectations (Schafer, Ferraro, & Mustillo, 2011).

Although appraisals of military experiences are remarkably stable across as many as 40 years (Settersten et al., 2012), they can be further shaped by how often and with whom veterans revisit these experiences. The process of actively sharing war-related experiences with family members and former service mates may reinforce the centrality of service in the identities and personal life stories of veterans and family members, whether as points of pride or difficulty.

Veterans’ appraisals of wartime service therefore determine how service is integrated into their lives and the potential effects it might have—or be perceived as having—with the passing of time. We draw on four longitudinal studies that contain similar questionnaire items and assemble a comprehensive portrait of both general and specific appraisals of military service from World War II– and Korean War–era veterans. These items have their origin in Glen Elder’s 1985 retrospective life history survey of participants in the Berkeley Growth and Guidance Studies and the Oakland Growth Study. They were subsequently included in a 1988 survey of the Harvard Study of Adult Development (the Grant Study) and a 1990 survey of the VA Normative Aging Study. Data from these four studies are not only historically

concurrent but also reflect different samples of veterans from the World War II and Korean War eras, which were similar in the nature of warfare, selection into service, and GI provisions, but distinct from the eras thereafter. As such, we have a unique opportunity to compare the perspectives of a diverse set of veterans. Unfortunately, there are no comparable data for assessing Vietnam veterans, who are now close to the ages of these veterans when they reported on their experiences.

GOALS

First, we are interested in understanding how veterans recalled and appraised their wartime service in both broad and specific terms:

1. Broadly, we ask how aging veterans evaluate earlier military experiences within the context of their lives. We examine evaluations of service as (a) the best period, (b) the worst period, (c) one of the most influential periods, and (d) a turning point in life, as well as (e) whether service was more of an advantage than a disadvantage, and (f) its lifetime costs and benefits.
2. Specifically, we ask how aging veterans evaluate their military experiences with respect to a range of desirable experiences (e.g., making lifelong friends, facilitating independence, achieving self-discipline and dependability, finding direction and purpose in life) and undesirable experiences (e.g., delaying careers, disrupting marriage, being lonely for loved ones, losing friends and health).

We examine how both types of appraisals (broad and specific) differ by four objective aspects of service: age at service, length of service, whether the veteran saw combat, and where the veteran served (Europe, Pacific, or stateside). In addition, we examine how appraisals differ by the presence of meaningful service-related relationships and communication, such as whether they keep in touch with service mates, are members of veteran organizations, or talk often with spouses about military experience. Social relationships offer an outlet for processing service experiences, and military organizations serve as a symbol of the veteran's sustained identity and engagement with service and as a unifying representation of veterans to the general public.

Second, for two of the studies (Berkeley and Oakland), we have the opportunity to explore collective memories of wartime by incorporating the memories of nonveterans, including women. A question asks respondents to report on any "vivid memories" of personal experience on the home front or war front.

THE STUDIES

VA Normative Aging Study

The Boston Veterans Administration Outpatient Clinic initiated the Normative Aging Study (NAS) in 1961 to examine aging processes in healthy men (Bossé, Ekerdt, & Silbert, 1984). Over 6,000 volunteers were recruited from the Boston area and screened between 1961 and 1970, and 2,280 men meeting stringent health requirements were ultimately enrolled. Although the sample covers a wide age range from men born between 1884 and 1945, the majority were born between 1915 and 1934 (89% were ages 30–59 years at study entry; Spiro, Schnurr, & Aldwin, 1994). Over 95% of NAS men were veterans, with the majority having served during wartime (ranging from World War I to Vietnam, but most in World War II or Korea).

Our analyses are based on respondents to a 1990 mail survey on military service (response rate, 83%) when men were between the ages of 43 and 91. Of the 444 completed surveys, 1,009 men were veterans and served either in World War II and/or the Korean War. The majority (59%) enlisted; a third were drafted. Nearly half (47%) served in the army and about a third (31%) in the navy. Well more than half (62%) ended service as noncommissioned officers or officers.

Harvard Study of Adult Development

This study began with 268 undergraduate men chosen from the Harvard College graduation classes of 1940 to 1944 (Vaillant, 1977) for their mental and physical fitness on the basis of deans' evaluations (Heath, 1945). Their birth years ranged from 1915 to 1924, but 71% were born between 1920 and 1922. Study members were examined in their sophomore year by an interdisciplinary team of internists, psychiatrists, psychologists, and anthropologists. In 1946, an extensive questionnaire was sent to all 224 surviving men who served in the military, which was followed by an in-depth interview (Monks, 1957). Major follow-ups occurred in early adulthood, midlife, and late life.

Our analyses are based on the initial 1946 questionnaire, as well as a 1988 questionnaire with retrospective accounts of military experiences, when most (71%) were between the ages of 66 and 68 years. We examine reports from 145 veterans who responded to the 1988 survey. All men served in World War II, and 29% served in the Korean War or between World War II and Korea. Forty percent (40%) enlisted and 16% were drafted, but a high proportion entered through ROTC, Reserves, or other routes (44%). Half served in the navy, and a third served in the army. Half served in the Pacific.

Berkeley Guidance and Growth Study

Researchers at the Institute on Human Development at the University of California, Berkeley, sampled every third birth for 18 months during 1928 to 1929 and collected annual data throughout childhood and adolescence (see Eichorn, Clausen, Haan, Honzik, & Mussen, 1981). In 1985, after three major adulthood follow-ups, the male participants and the husbands of female participants were sent a questionnaire about military experiences.

Our analyses are based on 103 male veterans (two females were excluded). About half (52%) enlisted and a third (35%) were drafted. Nearly half of the Berkeley men (48%) served in the army and 21% in the navy. Given their younger age, only 39% of the Berkeley men served at the end of World War II; 40% of these men were in the Pacific, and another 40% were stateside. Of the Berkeley men, 53% served in Korea.

Oakland Growth Study

Participants from the Oakland Growth Study were born during 1920 to 1921 and were followed through the 1930s and adulthood with the same frequency as the Berkeley sample (see Eichorn et al., 1981). Our analyses are based on 61 male veterans (five female veterans were excluded). More than half (57%) enlisted and a quarter (26%) were drafted. Given that the Oakland men were older than the Berkeley men, 95% served during World War II, most (59%) in the Pacific.

Reports on World War II memories were also obtained from the Berkeley and Oakland studies on 158 nonveteran women and 145 male veterans who responded to a question on vivid memories of personal experience on the home front and war front.

For all four of these studies, we draw on data from a common historical time (1985–1990) and from common ages in the lives of these veterans (from their late 50s to late 60s). Information on veterans' service experiences for the four studies can be found in Table 1.1.

FINDINGS

Veterans' Broad Evaluations of Military Service in the Context of Their Lives

Table 1.2 displays participants' reflections on military service in the context of the life course. Overall, participants' evaluations were fairly positive across studies. Veterans' endorsements of service as the "best time of their

TABLE 1.1
Descriptive Statistics of Veterans' Service Experiences

Indicator	NAS (N = 1,009) 1990	Grant (N = 145) 1988	Berkeley (N = 103) 1985	Oakland (N = 61) 1985
Age at survey, <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	67.4 (5.9)	67.5 (1.6)	58.3 (3.4)	64.9 (2.3)
Age at service, <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	21.2 (4.3)	22.2 (1.6)	21.8 (3.0)	22.8 (2.4)
Branch of service, %				
Army	47.0	33.6	47.5	34.4
Navy	31.1	50.3	21.4	39.3
Coast Guard	2.5	0.7	2.9	4.9
Marines	6.9	1.4	6.8	3.3
Air Force	17.9	14.0	17.5	13.1
Length of service, <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	2.9 (1.5)	3.3 (1.3)	3.3 (4.2)	4.0 (3.9)
3 years or less, %	74	66	82	55
4–10 years, %	25	33	15	41
11–30 years, %	0	1	2	3
Service location, %				
Stateside	28	25	42	18
Europe	28	25	16	16
Pacific	44	50	40	59
Combat exposure, %	34	47	28	62
Keep in touch with service mates ^a	29	54	31	53
Active member of military organization, ^b %	48	22	28	41
Talk with spouse about service, %	59 ^c	38 ^d	27 ^d	43 ^d

Note. NAS = Normative Aging Study.

^aQuestion was phrased, "Are there any friends from your service days that you keep in touch with on a regular basis?" We combined "yes" responses for "casual" and "close" friendships and created a dichotomous variable (1 "yes," 0 "no"). ^bExamples included Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, or National Guard.

^cFor NAS, the original items were scaled 0 (*not applicable*), 1 (*never*), 2 (*used to but stopped*), 3 (*occasionally*), and 4 (*frequently*). To make data comparable, items have been dichotomized with 0–2 = 0 (*never*) and 3–4 = 1 (*ever*). ^dFor Grant, Berkeley, and Oakland, the original items were scaled 1 (*often*), 2 (*seldom*), and 3 (*never*). To make data comparable, items have been dichotomized with 2–3 = 0 (*never*) and 1 = 1 (*ever*).

lives" and "more of an advantage" were consistently above 5.5 on a 10-point scale. Similarly, in each study, about half or more (48%–67%) said that the benefits of service were greater than the costs.

However, the fact that these overall evaluations are positively skewed should not lead us to overlook the realities that there were also explicitly negative evaluations and that military experience can be a double-edged sword, at once a best and worst time. Within studies, sizable percentages saw service as one of the worst periods of their lives (with 17%–30% of men in the upper third of the distribution). Indeed, average endorsements of the "worst period" item were only slightly lower than average endorsements of the "best period" item. In addition, between 33% and 53% said the costs were greater than or equal to the benefits.

TABLE 1.2
Reflections on Military Service in the Context of the Life Course

Indicator	NAS (<i>N</i> = 1,009) 1990	Grant (<i>N</i> = 145) 1988	Berkeley (<i>N</i> = 103) 1985	Oakland (<i>N</i> = 61) 1985
"Military service was one of the best periods of my life," <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>) ^a	5.5 (2.1)	6.1 (2.2)	5.9 (2.5)	5.9 (2.3)
High agreement (≥ 7), %	52	49	42	44
Low agreement (≤ 3), %	8	15	8	9
"Military service was one of the worst periods of my life," <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>) ^b	4.6 (2.0)	4.7 (2.3)	5.1 (2.5)	5.0 (2.4)
High agreement (≥ 7), %	29	17	22	23
Low agreement (≤ 3), %	13	35	30	34
"Military service was one of the most influential events of my life," <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>) ^c	5.6 (2.5)	—	5.0 (2.5)	6.0 (2.4)
High agreement (≥ 7), %	57	—	31	39
Low agreement (≤ 3), %	13	—	37	18
"Military service was more of an advantage than a disadvantage," <i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>) ^d	5.6 (3.1)	7.5 (2.0)	6.9 (2.2)	7.3 (2.2)
High agreement (≥ 7), %	62	71	63	69
Low agreement (≤ 3), %	20	4	9	8
"Military service was a turning point ^e in my life," %				
No	—	34	39	39
Yes	—	66	54	54
Lifetime costs and benefits of wartime experience, ^f %				
"Costs are greater"	—	9	12	12
"About equal"	—	24	35	41
"Benefits are greater"	—	67	50	48

Note. NAS = Normative Aging Study.

^aRated on a scale from 1 (*worst*) to 10 (*best*). ^bRated on a scale from 1 (*best*) to 10 (*worst*). ^cRated on a scale from 1 (*least influential*) to 10 (*most influential*). ^dRated on a scale from 1 (*definite disadvantage*) to 10 (*definite advantage*). ^eA "turning point" is a time when "life events can change the direction and quality of our lives." ^fQuestion was phrased, "How would you weigh the lifetime costs and benefits of your wartime experiences?"

In each study, at least half of the veterans said that military service was a turning point—an experience that changed the direction and quality of their life. Similarly, in judging whether service was among the most influential events in shaping who they would eventually become, veterans' average endorsements were between 5 and 6 on a 10-point scale. Unfortunately, these items do not reveal whether the nature of the turning point or influence was positive or negative. It is likely to be both. Either way, for many of these men, service stood out as a significant life event. And yet, it is surprising that many

men nonetheless said that service was not a turning point (34%–39%) or not a very influential event in terms of the person they became (13%–37% were in the bottom third of responses).

In comparing studies, it is clear that the Harvard men had more positive evaluations. Remember, however, that these men served exclusively in World War II and were less exposed to the brutalities of war: They held higher rank and were not likely to see combat, whereas most of the Oakland men served in the Pacific, which tended to be the most violent theatre. In contrast, the Berkeley men were almost entirely Korean-era veterans, though some were involved at the end of World War II and called back into Korea. Entering service at an older age was generally associated with more negative appraisals across all four studies, whereas serving for an extended period of time was linked to more positive appraisals of war-related experiences. (Because of space limitations, analyses are not shown but are available on request.)

Veterans' Specific Evaluations of Service: Desirable and Undesirable Experiences

Table 1.3 provides the percentages of men who reported particular desirable and undesirable experiences related to military service. In the Grant, Berkeley, and Oakland studies, veterans simply indicated whether they had the experience. In NAS, the format was altered such that veterans indicated *how much* they had the experience. We grouped *somewhat* and *a lot* into “yes,” and *not at all* and *a little* into “no.” One item (“appreciate peace more”) was not available in the Berkeley and Oakland studies, resulting in 13 rather than 14 desirable items.

Consistent with the findings on the broader appraisals, a comparison of the top and bottom halves of Table 1.3 reveals that reports of desirable experiences were far more frequent than undesirable experiences. One can also see that the NAS veterans generally had much higher reports of desirable experiences, though this may reflect the difference in response format.

Four desirable experiences were cited by at least half of the men in each study: (a) acquiring a broader perspective on life and the world, (b) coping with adversity, (c) becoming self-disciplined and dependable, and (d) gaining independence. Two other desirable experiences were mentioned by just under half of men: learning cooperation and teamwork, and having rewarding memories. And yet, the average number of desirable experiences ranged from only 4.9 to 5.9 for the NAS, Berkeley, and Oakland studies; it was much higher for the Grant Study, at 9.7. Most men therefore did not see more than a handful of desirable experiences, the bulk of which were captured in the six experiences just noted. Entering the military at older ages, experiencing combat, keeping in touch with service mates, and talking with one's spouse

TABLE 1.3
Reported Desirable and Undesirable
Experiences of Military Service

Indicator	NAS ^a (N = 1,009) 1990	Grant (N = 145) 1988	Berkeley (N = 103) 1985	Oakland (N = 61) 1985
<i>Desirable experiences, %</i>				
Broader perspective	75	75	67	70
Coping with adversity	78	53	48	73
Self-discipline, dependability	81	50	60	74
Independence	79	54	69	58
Lifelong friends	26	31	22	36
Education	54	34	3	25
Value life more	76	26	25	36
Feel positive about self	79	39	34	44
Proud to be an American	84	24	31	48
Clearer direction and purpose	65	28	27	27
Better job skills and options	47	26	26	12
Rewarding memories	68	46	42	48
Learning cooperation, teamwork	75	47	50	58
Appreciate peace more	83	41	—	—
<i>Undesirable experiences, %</i>				
Separation from loved ones	46	36	35	57
Disrupted my life	29	36	40	48
Delayed career behind age mates	26	38	35	46
Waste of time, boredom	11	37	28	31
Economic problems for family	12	6	9	12
Lonely for my family	19	20	13	37
Combat anxiety, apprehensions	11	16	13	24
Hurt my marriage	2	2	0	2
Misery, discomfort	14	13	25	24
Loss of friends	11	14	16	2
Lost my good health	6	5	3	2
Drinking problems	4	1	4	5
Bad memories or nightmares	7	2	12	9
Death or destruction	15	10	12	27
Count of desirable experiences ^b , M (SD)	9.7 (3.9)	5.6 (3.2)	4.9 (3.1)	5.9 (3.4)
Count of undesirable experiences ^c , M (SD)	2.1 (2.3)	2.3 (1.9)	2.8 (1.9)	3.5 (2.1)

Note. NAS = Normative Aging Study.

^aFor NAS, the original items were scaled 0 (*not at all*), 1 (*a little*), 2 (*somewhat*), and 3 (*a lot*). To make data comparable, items have been dichotomized such that 2–3 = 1 (*yes*) and 0–1 = 0 (*no*). ^bBased on the 13 common items (excludes “appreciate peace more”). ^cBased on the 14 items listed.

about service were associated with reporting desirable experiences (analyses available on request).

In contrast, for undesirable experiences, none of the items was mentioned by at least half of veterans in any of the studies. Across the board, the item most often endorsed—by at least 35%—was “separation from loved ones” (from 35% to 57%). This was followed by “disrupted my life,” which was endorsed by at least about 30% (from 29% to 48%), and “delayed career, behind age mates,” which was endorsed by at least 25% of veterans (from 26% to 46%). We also find significant endorsements of “waste of time, boredom” (from 28% to 37%) in the Grant, Berkeley, and Oakland studies. The remaining negative experiences were infrequently mentioned. The average number of undesirable experiences was two or three (ranging from two to four).

Significant correlations between the positive and negative items, however, suggest that those who cited positive experiences were also likely to cite negative experiences (Oakland, $r = .30$; Berkeley, $r = .26$; Grant, $r = .27$; in NAS, the corresponding figure, while significant, is only $.07$). So, although the profiles were largely positive, dark sides of service were in many men found alongside the bright sides. In contrast to reports of desirable experiences, none of the objective measures of service or communication with family members or peers consistently predicted the reporting of negative experiences (analyses available on request). This is probably because it is more difficult to acknowledge and discuss negative experiences.

Vivid Memories of the Home Front and War Front

Using the Berkeley and Oakland studies, we are able to gain insight into larger, collective memories of war. In the 1985 follow-up, both women and men were asked to think back to World War II and respond to the question “Does any vivid memory of personal experience on the home front and war front stand out?” Two thirds replied with one or more memories that fit four themes: (a) mobilization experiences on the home front, (b) loss, (c) separation, and (d) direct participation in military action, which we describe next.

But first, how can it be that nearly a third of men and women claimed no vivid recollection of their wartime experiences? Because members of these cohorts were adolescents or adults during the war, they should remember something about it. Research has shown that people are especially likely to recall memories from the second and third decades of life (Glück & Bluck, 2007)—the so-called reminiscence bump. However, for a variety of reasons, memories of major collective events—wartime or otherwise—may not always be vivid or even accessible to those who experienced them (Corning & Schuman, 2015). The same is true of personal life events, especially sad, traumatic, and involuntary memories (Berntsen & Rubin, 2002). In our case,

the war may have simply lost its significance in light of more recent events or the passage of time. As one veteran explained, "It is something in the past and is no longer relevant—we live for the future." For others, memories of war may be so painful that they are repressed or difficult to recollect. As another veteran recounted, he does not talk about the war because he does "not wish to dwell on [a] sad, terrifying part of my young life."

What differentiates those who have vivid memories from those who do not? Exposure to wartime trauma represents a likely source of vivid memories of the war. This trauma may have been experienced as exposure to combat or as the loss of a close friend or family member. Loss was a common experience. Approximately 12% of the men and women reported the loss of a family member in World War II. Many more reported the loss of friends—nearly three out of five men and two out of five women. However, loss of family or friends is no more common among adults who had vivid war memories than among those who reported no such memories. At least in these samples, personal loss during World War II was not predictive of notable wartime memories.

Exposure to combat did identify men who have vivid memories of war. Among men who served in World War II, nine out of 10 veterans of heavy combat reported such memories. This compares with 58% of all other veterans, the noncombatants as well as those with exposure to light combat. For veterans of heavy combat, memories of war may be made more salient by attending military reunions, where they relive experiences with former service mates. When memories are shared, the distant past becomes relevant to present concerns.

The most common memory (mentioned by 47% of those who had memories) portrayed some aspect of *home-front mobilization*, such as blackouts, scrap drives, rationing, and the feeling of togetherness. One woman recalled, "test for blackouts, air raid warning tests, rationing, scrap metal drives, buying war stamps and bonds, everyone pulling and working together for the good of the country. Felt strong patriotism . . ." Forty-seven percent (47%) of those who said they had memories of World War II mentioned these types of experiences. Of course, because the Bay Area was a hub of wartime mobilization and industry, Berkeley and Oakland subjects felt the daily presence of war in their lives.

A quarter (26%) of those with memories of World War II recalled the *loss of a significant relationship*, either family member or friend. One woman observed, "My brother was an army pilot and was killed in the South Pacific in 1944. I can still relive that time vividly. My mother perhaps suffered most, but it was an extremely painful time for our family." A former Marine with service in the South Pacific recalled the enduring sorrow of "losing close friends, the ease of dying and killing, the first landing and [his] first wound." Another woman reported "losing [former] classmates to death,

producing a vivid memory of fear and sadness,” and still another noted “the loss of childhood companions.”

A major impact of war mobilization was *separation from loved ones*: husbands from wives, parents from children. Nineteen percent (19%) of those who reported memories recalled separation from family and friends; this recollection was almost exclusively concentrated among women, who were most often the ones “left behind.” One third reported painful separations that lasted several years. One woman said, “My husband was gone overseas for four years—it was hard to bring up our son alone.” A woman who was an expectant bride when her husband left for overseas remembered that it was a “God-send to have my parents around me as it was a long two and a half years.”

Seventeen percent (17%) of those who reported memories recalled *participation in the war*, but these memories were common among older men. Veterans of heavy combat were most likely to recall participation. One veteran remembered “being fired upon as open targets and the feeling that there was nowhere to hide,” and another “the terror of being forced, against one’s free will, to kill or be killed.” Still another observed that his most vivid memory was “giving a Purple Heart to a soldier who had just lost both arms and both legs and had a torn hole in his intestines, and then later visiting him several times before he was transferred to the U.S.”

DISCUSSION

There are few systematic investigations of how veterans appraise their military service, or of collective memories of wartime, and how they might matter for aging. We assembled data from four different samples of World War II and Korean War veterans, which contained the same items and were gathered at roughly the same historical time (1985–1990) and ages (from their late 50s to late 60s). For two of the studies (Berkeley and Oakland), we also examined responses to a question posed to both veterans and nonveterans about vivid home-front and war-front memories.

Over and over again, we found two simultaneous and seemingly oppositional faces of war experience—one positive and even transformative, the other painful and even traumatic. As veterans in later life reflected on service within the context of lives, many endorsed it as a best time and one that brought advantages and benefits. And yet, many also endorsed it as a worst period, emphasizing the significant costs carried in the body and psyche. Both bright and dark sides of military service exist within individual veterans.

Deeper insights into these two faces of war were obtained by examining a range of specific desirable and undesirable experiences. Here, the picture

was more skewed in a positive direction, particularly for those who entered at younger ages and served longer. The more negative reports from those who served at older ages were not surprising, given that careers and families were already established, and they were more likely to leave behind spouses and children. The fact that those who served longer had more positive reports was at first surprising, but for these veterans, military life seemed to be even more central to their identities because of their longer personal and institutional investments. Additionally, the process of actively sharing war-related experiences with spouses and former service mates likely reinforced the centrality of service in the identities and life stories of veterans and family members.

Most veterans reported developing a broader perspective on their lives and on the world, learning to cope with adversity, becoming self-disciplined and dependable, and gaining independence. This is consistent with notions of stress-related growth. Few of the other positive items were widely endorsed.

Only four negative items were endorsed by sizable percentages of veterans: separation from loved ones, disruption to life plans and progress, delayed careers, and feeling as if time had been wasted. The stronger profile of positive reports was surprising because, in these samples, sizable proportions of veterans served in the more violent Pacific theatre and saw combat (28%–62%); they were likely to have fired a weapon or been fired on, to have killed someone, and to have been exposed to dead and wounded Americans and enemies. These men were generally successful in their lives and, presumably, at dealing with the negative effects of combat.

Another possible explanation for the fact that negative reports were relatively infrequent could relate to the fact that data were gathered up to 4 decades after the experience, thus reflecting a long-term perspective of survivors rather than a short-term perspective of an entire population. For example, Elder and Clipp (1988a, 1988b) showed that veterans who were involved in heavy combat were at great risk for emotional and behavioral problems shortly after the war. In the long run, however, they appeared to be more resilient and less helpless compared with men who saw no or light combat. Thus, appraisals for men with heavy combat exposure may become more positive over time through the reevaluation and integration of war-related experience into their broader life trajectory. This tendency to see an experience in more positive terms as with greater distance from it would seem typical of all veterans, not only those who saw combat (but perhaps especially so for them). It would also likely be heightened in middle and later life, as individuals are inclined to look back on their lives and make meaning of the past. Research on the long-term outcomes of service demands an exploration of a spectrum of possible positive effects, not just negative effects (for illustrations, see Spiro, Settersten, & Aldwin, 2016).

In examining women's and men's "vivid memories" of the home front and war front during World War II, we again unearthed two very different experiences. For some, the war meant engagement in a popular national venture much bigger than oneself. For others, the war meant the trauma of permanently broken ties, repeated separations, and a tragically dismembered social world. For this question, however, the women and men who remembered the positive aspects of war generally failed to report memories of negative aspects.

This one-sided nature of recollection was reinforced by the fact that nearly a third of the men and women claimed no vivid memories of wartime experiences. And for the two thirds who did, memories were sometimes extraordinarily painful. The most common memories related to aspects of home-front mobilization. But difficult memories of personal loss and separation were present for many. Memories of direct participation in war were also common. Not surprisingly, these differences reflect life stage differences: Oakland men, who were older and served mostly in World War II, were more likely to recall participation, whereas Berkeley subjects, who were adolescent boys and girls during wartime, were more likely to remember contributing to the war effort at home. Women, in contrast, were more likely to recall war losses and separation, as they were the ones left behind and coping with the potential loss of husbands, brothers, and fathers.

Memories of wartime losses have implications for contemporary understandings of peace, war, and national defense (see also Chapter 6, this volume). Remembered losses of family members or friends could foster activities among survivors meant to preserve the meaning of their sacrifices. Examples include political vigilance regarding national priorities on military strength and defense, along with efforts to ensure remembrance through memorial times, places, and structures. As Halbwachs (1980) put it, "to forget a period of one's life is to lose contact with those who then surrounded us" (p. 30).

Memories of loss also highlight the tragic waste of lives in war. Remembering the human costs of war can reinforce a dedication to disarmament and world peace. Memories of fallen soldiers and family members, and other sacrifices made on both battle sites and home fronts, become part of historical and family narratives passed down across generations through social exchanges. For example, 85% of the men in the Berkeley and Oakland studies reported that their fathers, uncles, brothers, and cousins had served in the military, which made families a key context for acknowledging and processing military experiences.

The special climate of World War II, in particular, may have led men to provide more positive reports. World War II veterans returned home as heroes and resumed or built their lives in a vibrant economy and with generous GI benefits (indeed, a majority of veterans in these studies reported using GI benefits for education [42%–72%] and housing [40%–70%]). These

factors, too, reinforce the American master narrative about the essential role that these veterans played in ensuring the safety and vitality of the United States and the world during the last century (Settersten, 2006), thereby keeping appraisals elevated. And unlike many other countries, the United States, apart from Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, was largely devoid of physical evidence of wartime battles and devastation. Halfway around the globe in either direction, soldiers in the Pacific and European theaters of war returned to ravaged cities and landscapes, and to constant reminders of the war's toll on human lives. In these circumstances, it may have been easier for American veterans to appraise their experiences and outcomes more positively.

CONCLUSION

We turned our attention to subjective aspects of military service because research has suggested that it may not be objective experiences that matter in shaping aging outcomes as much as how veterans assess their experiences. Coming to terms with wartime service—whether one was exposed to danger, in combat, or had other roles and responsibilities—is a developmental issue in its own right, one that potentially brings protections and risks, depending on how it is understood. For our purposes, W. I. Thomas's famous aphorism becomes, "If veterans *remember* past events and experiences as real, they are real in their consequences." Appraisals are part of the recollection process, and how individuals—and societies—interpret the past has profound social and psychological implications for the present and future.

We should keep in mind that World War II and Korean War veterans may have been in a relatively favorable situation compared with veterans of Vietnam and more current conflicts because of high public endorsement and pride in service, as well as positive reception, economic opportunity, and GI benefits on their return. Our findings also highlight the influence of social privilege on more positive wartime evaluations, as Grant men, especially, were relatively sheltered from adverse experiences. More recent generations may face less rosy prospects because of the controversial nature of military intervention, as well as targeted recruitment and high representation of soldiers from underprivileged socioeconomic backgrounds.

Thus, major data collection efforts related to veterans' aging should pay greater attention to gathering subjective perspectives on military experience. Because more positive later life appraisals are associated with membership in veteran organizations and talking with spouses and service mates, veteran organizations might prioritize opportunities that encourage veterans to share their experiences and facilitate continued contact among service mates. This offers an important avenue for interventions to improve the health and social

integration of veterans. Because past wars continue to influence the politics of peace today, and because current conflicts will influence the politics of peace in the future, we must continue to probe the long-term outcomes of war for human lives and societies.

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