AMERICA'S VICTORY OVER SPAIN IN 1898 WAS FOLLOWED BY A MURDEROUS THREE-YEAR WAR AGAINST PHILIPPINE INDEPENDENCE (PICTURED).

WHY MEN LOVE WAR

The reasons and causes—territory, ideology, WMDs—may change with the times, but our lust for it is eternal.

BY EVAN THOMAS

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THEODORE ROOSEVELT WANTED A war, and almost any war would do. In 1886, when he was a 27-year-old gentleman rancher in the Dakota Territory, he proposed raising "some companies of horse riflemen out here in the event of trouble with Mexico." He wrote his friend Congressman Henry Cabot Lodge: "Will you telegraph me at once if war becomes inevitable?" In 1889, while agitating for military "preparedness," he wrote British diplomat Cecil Spring-Rice: "Frankly, I don't know if I should be sorry to see a bit of a spar with Germany; the burning of New York and a few other seacoast cities would be a good object lesson on the need of an adequate system of coastal defenses." Roosevelt loved hyperbole, but he was apparently serious. He wrote Spring-Rice, "While we would have to take some awful blows at first, I think in the end we would worry the Kaiser a little." A few years later, in 1894, he wrote a family friend, Bob Ferguson, that he longed for "a general national buccaneering expedition to drive the Spanish out of Cuba, the English out of Canada."

TOO MANY JOURNALISTS, INCLUDING ME, CAUGHT WAR FEVER BETWEEN 9/11 AND THE 2003 INVASION OF IRAQ.

In my new book, *The War Lovers,* I tell this story—of Roosevelt, and of how we became involved in the Spanish-American War—as a way of understanding the ancient pull of the battlefield. I was, in part, trying to understand my own attitude on the Iraq War. As a NEWSWEEK journalist writing about that conflict (from a safe distance), I had initially been hawkish, then regretful as the costs mounted. The war may, in some muddled way, achieve some of its objectives, but it is clear that too many journalists, including me, caught at least a mild dose of war fever between 9/11 and the 2003 invasion of Iraq. I looked to the past to come to terms with those impulses.

Now we're almost a decade into "the Long War," as some call our engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan and the ongoing struggle with Islamic extremism. A kind of war weariness has set in. To most people the fighting seems far off and, in a way, easy to ignore. Not coincidentally, perhaps, a recent spate of books and movies has arrived seeking to make graphic and realistic the true experience of war, most notably the Oscar-winning film *The Hurt Locker* and *War,* the Sebastian Junger volume of war reportage we excerpted in the previous article. These are cautionary tales that seek to make us understand and remember. They may for a time dampen the age-old atavistic lust for war, though war fever, I believe, never really goes away. It is too fundamental to the male psyche.

Roosevelt was a true war lover. Whether he was trying to compensate for his beloved father, who bought a draft substitute in the Civil War, or because, as he often wrote, he feared that the Anglo-Saxon "race" was becoming "overcivilized" and weak, Roosevelt wanted to test himself in the crucible of battle. He got his wish on July 1, 1898, charging up Kettle and San Juan hills with his Rough Riders in Cuba. ("Did I tell you that I killed a Spaniard with my own hand?"

MORE THAN 175,000 U.S. AND ALLIED TROOPS LANDED ON THE NORMANDY COAST ON JUNE 6, 1944: D-DAY

A MORTAR COMPANY SHELLS THE GERMANS IN ITALY, 1944; TRAINING IN GEORGIA, 1943; ATOP THE FIERCELY CONTESTED HILL "OLD BALDY" IN KOREA, 1952.

Roosevelt exclaimed in a letter to Lodge.) That seemed to satisfy his war lust, for a time. As president, TR preferred to "talk softly but carry a big stick." Still, in 1917, overweight and increasingly infirm at 58, the former president of the United States volunteered to raise a division to fight in France. (Not wanting to make Roosevelt a hero or a martyr, President Woodrow Wilson declined.)

Roosevelt was an extreme case. But how many men, over how many millennia, have wanted to know how they would do in combat? Would they be brave and fight? Or would they cringe and run? War has been, for almost all peoples and all times, the purest test of manhood. It is a thrilling addiction and a wretched curse—"a force that gives us meaning," as former *New York Times* war correspondent Chris Hedges has written—and the ruination of peoples and nations.

Men and (now increasingly) women fight wars for all sorts of reasons, sometimes out of nobility or at least necessity. We think of the "Good War," World War II, whose warriors are fast dying off now, honored in their passing. But before the Good War was the Great War, as it was known at the time. The outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 was greeted with something like euphoria by the young men who flocked to the colors. British schoolmates and teammates formed "Pals Battalions," and sometimes advanced on German positions while passing a soccer ball. They were slaughtered. At the Battle of the Somme in 1916, roughly 20,000 British soldiers perished in a single day.

"Every war is ironic because every war is worse than expected," wrote Paul Fussell in *The Great War and Modern Memory*. "The Somme affair, destined to be known as the Great F--k Up, was the largest engagement fought since the beginning of civilization." There have been larger and deadlier battles since, though, as war has become at once more modern and more primitive; the armed conflicts increasingly involved civilians, not just soldiers.

And yet, somehow, we forget. A collective amnesia afflicts young men who wish to live up to their fathers, and old men who missed war as young men. In the 1890s, not just Roosevelt but a good slice of his countrymen were possessed by a hunger for war. Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr., later perhaps the greatest of U.S. Supreme Court justices, put on his Civil War uniform and lectured young Harvard students that war was "divine," not to be missed. The U.S. president, William McKinley, who had seen the dead stacked up at Antietam as a Civil War soldier, tried to resist the rush to battle. But he was swept aside by hawks like Roosevelt and William Randolph Hearst, the newspaper publisher who would claim, with some exaggeration, that he personally caused the Spanish-American War with his sensationalist crusading.

"It was a splendid little war," John Hay, the U.S. ambassador to Britain, wrote Roosevelt in August 1898. The Americans had driven the Spanish from Cuba. But another, unexpected conflict was just starting in the Philippines, halfway around the world. The U.S. Navy had defeated a Spanish fleet

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: BETTMANN—CORBIS; HULTON DEUTSCH COLLECTION-CORBIS; BETTMANN—CORBIS

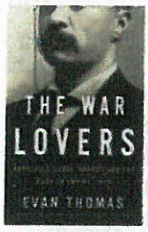
at Manila Bay, and now the Americans were unintentional occupiers of a country that President McKinley said he could barely find on a map. The fighting in the Philippines dragged on for four more years and cost 4,000 men, roughly the same number we have lost so far in Iraq. There were atrocities on both sides in the long-forgotten counterinsurgency against the Filipinos, and for the first time Americans used an interrogation method called waterboarding.

WAR FEVER, I BELIEVE, NEVER REALLY GOES AWAY. IT IS TOO FUNDAMENTAL TO THE MALE PSYCHE.

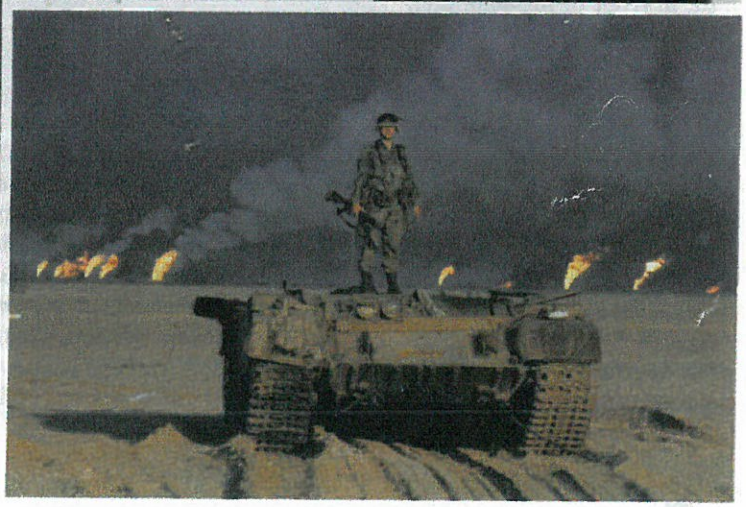
My own appreciation of war, while particular to my generation, is an uncomfortably familiar history lesson in war and remembrance—or forgetting. I graduated from college in 1973, too late for Vietnam and in any case shielded by a high number in the national draft lottery. I was, like almost all my peers, opposed to the war and glad to miss it. Yet as time went on I felt increasingly uneasy about the realization that my type had been able largely to avoid the war, while less well-educated and poorer young men were drafted and killed. (In Memorial Church at Harvard, one can read the names of 234 students and faculty who died fighting in World War II, which cost 405,399 American lives, and 22 who perished in Vietnam, where 59,000 Americans died.)

For a long time, it seemed, we wanted to forget about Vietnam, to turn away from its cost and futility. But watching the movie *Forrest Gump* in 1994, I had a flash of recognition. The unlikely hero was Gump, unself-conscious in his Army dress uniform with combat medals at a peace rally on the Washington Mall. The villains were the scruffy antiwar protesters (Gump got the girl). It was apparent to me that the national mood was changing; Hollywood certainly could sense it. We were over Vietnam—and ready for the next war.

The Gulf War of 1991 was, curiously, not sufficiently bloody to be glorious—fought and won in less than 100 hours at the cost of fewer than 300 Americans (half of those the result of noncombat accidents). It was quickly overlooked. As the 1990s went on, there was a feeling that we hadn't finished the job of getting rid of Saddam Hussein—I know I felt it. But since 9/11, with the prolonged wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, we've now had our fill of fighting. We're back to the phase where movies and memoirs capture war's darker side. War should not be mythologized, but it should be remembered. "It is well that war is so terrible," Gen. Robert E. Lee once observed, "lest we grow too fond of it." □



BY EVAN THOMAS
A new book on the Rough Riders and yellow journalism at the end of the Gilded Age.



EVACUATING A WOUNDED SOLDIER AT HILL 248, VIETNAM, 1966; FORDING A RIVER OUTSIDE SAIGON, 1969; THE AFTERMATH OF OPERATION DESERT STORM, 1991.

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BY JESSICA RAMIREZ