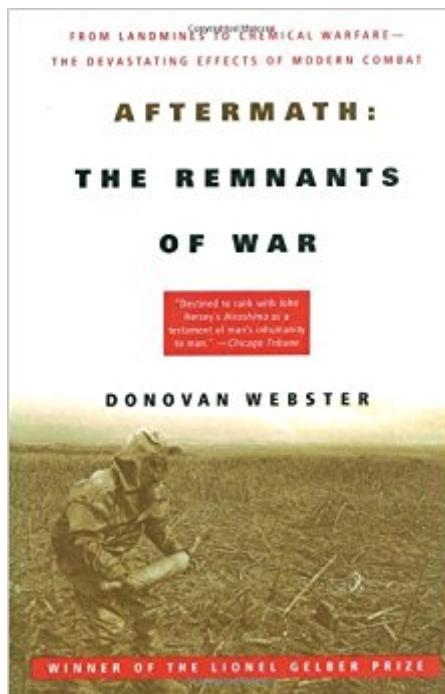


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Aftermath: The Remnants Of War: From Landmines To Chemical Warfare--The Devastating Effects Of Modern Combat



Synopsis

In riveting and revelatory detail, *Aftermath* documents the ways in which wars have transformed the terrain of the battlefield into landscapes of memory and enduring terror: in France, where millions of acres of farmland are cordoned off to all but a corps of demolition experts responsible for the undetonated bombs and mines of World War I that are now rising up in fields, gardens, and backyards; in a sixty-square-mile area outside Stalingrad that was a cauldron of destruction in 1941 and is today an endless field of bones; in the Nevada deserts, where America waged a hidden nuclear war against itself in the 1950's, the results of which are only now becoming apparent; in Vietnam, where a nation's effort to remove the physical detritus of war has created psychological and genetic devastation; in Kuwait, where terrifyingly sophisticated warfare was followed by the Sisyphean task of making an uninhabitable desert capable of sustaining life. *Aftermath* excavates our century's darkest history, revealing that the destruction of the past remains deeply, inextricably embedded in the present.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The substance of this book has been covered by other reviewers. This intriguing generalist's work documents the author's on-site investigation of the lethal persistence of modern weapons dating from the First World War. Beyond this, Webster has communicated to American readers what happens after a modern war is fought on your soil. Webster's writing style is pleasing and readily accessible by any reader, and in one chapter he builds on his very well-written and moving piece on Verdun which ran in *Smithsonian* some time ago. The reason that this reviewer has not accorded

a "five star rating" is simple: this work leaves the expert hungry for more. Webster is an intelligent and articulate man who could easily expand on this work. Overlooking a number of essentially editorial errors (such as Tiger and Panther tanks rolling across France in 1940), one wishes that Webster had further developed his theme of the violation of the social compact through the use of persistent agents and explosives. The work as written should be read by any historian who is serious about the study of modern war. Beyond any one overarching theme, Webster has uncovered the answers-- or at least more evidence-- to a number of "mysteries" of military history. Webster's compelling chapter on the fate of the German Sixth Army at Stalingrad may answer the question of what happened to many of the 250,000 Axis soldiers who "disappeared" on the Russian steppe in 1942-1943: those who did not perish in Soviet camps were literally left to rot where they fell. This unpalatable but now evident conclusion is borne out by the author's visits to the "bone fields" around the sites of the German military airfields and evacuation sites at Pitomnik and Gumrak.

This is not your typical history book. After all, the author makes it his quest to find out what remains of some of history's bloodiest conflicts. He visits Verdun and is allowed to see sections of France that are uninhabitable more than 100 years since the conflict started. He visits places where people are prohibited to walk because of munitions and the unearthed remains of the fallen. He visits the Ossuary of Verdun and humbly witnesses the devastation brought upon the degradation of human spirit in the war. I am particularly grateful for the information he provides in this section of the book. It truly shows the hellacious nature of the conflict and the results of man's inhumanity to man. The author then travels to Stalingrad with a guide who can tell you where units of both Russian and German armies camped at the height of the battle. In an astonishing moment the guide stops and informs the author that he found the artifacts and remains of Italian and Romanian units in this area assigned to the German 6th army. These units were annihilated, some historians even use the word vanished, to describe what happened to them in the soul crushing Soviet counter attack. And in many places the land cannot be used again as the munitions found there are still dangerous. Those who do continue to farm stack bones high as the Earth slowly reveals its history. The book continues to Vietnam to the place where one of my great mentors served: Khe Sanh. His descriptions of land that was once part of a French plantation are vivid. We are gone. But Khe Sanh is still there. They live it every day. At this point, I'll let you find out where the author goes next. You might be quite surprised by some of the locations.

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