

ABSTRACT
MEN AGAINST FIRE: 40 YEARS LATER

Charles E. White
U.S. Army Infantry Center, Fort Benning

For over 40 years, S.L.A. Marshall has exercised an extraordinary influence on the United States Army. Supposedly, he witnessed a wider range of battle than any other man of his time. For this reason, many considered him an authority on warfare, and America's most distinguished military historian.

Throughout the Second World War, Marshall claimed to have interviewed thousands of American soldiers. Information from these interviews supposedly formed the basis of his book, *Men Against Fire*, in which Marshall concluded that most American infantrymen refused to fire at the enemy.

Many combat infantrymen disagree. They claim that Marshall was never present during combat. He arrived after the battle to interview survivors. The critics also argue that there is a plethora of evidence that contradicts much of what Marshall wrote.

Who then do we believe? By training and experience, S.L.A. Marshall was a journalist, not a historian. He had no systematic approach to collecting evidence, nor did he carefully weigh his findings. Usually, he came to his conclusions first, then marshalled his evidence to support his ideas. Moreover, Marshall's convictions were based, not on scholarship, but his own military experience. In all of his writings, he portrayed himself as a warrior. This was his way of establishing credibility.

A check of official Army records reveals that Marshall was no warrior. He never served a day under fire. If the foundation of his convictions was personal experience, how valid then are Marshall's assertions in *Men Against Fire*? We know that his techniques were seriously flawed, and that his data is unreliable. We must therefore conclude that S.L.A. Marshall perpetrated what appears to be the greatest lie ever told about the American soldier in battle.