

Veterans Book Group Syllabus – Spring 2018

Prepared by Wayne Karlin

Dates: First Friday of the month, February to June, 2018

This Spring we will be reading and discussing selections that will allow us to explore the way war (or its causes or aftermaths) can be depicted realistically and multi-dimensionally through a variety of literary styles and techniques including speculative fiction, fiction, memoir, and non-fiction: what Tim O'Brien calls "happening-truth" and "story-truth."

1. *Kindred*, a novel by Octavia Butler, utilizes the speculative, imaginary device of time travel to give a realistic view of what it was like to be an enslaved person on the Eastern Shore of Maryland in the 1820's to the 1840's.
2. *Cold Mountain*, a novel by Charles Frazier, imagines the journey of an actual ancestor of the author, who deserted the Confederate Army during the Civil War. The story depicts his journey away from the war through the patterns of a much earlier journey, that of Homer's *Odyssey*—itself a story of a soldier trying to come home.
3. *Goodbye Darkness: A Memoir of the Pacific War* by William Manchester recounts the author's own experience in World War II, but also broadens to give a larger, though still very personalized, view of the island battles in the Pacific.
4. *The Frozen Hours*, a novel by Jeff Shaara utilizes the author's unique technique of fictionalizing war history—in this case the Korean War in 1950-51, especially the fighting around the Chosin Reservoir—by going into the individual points of view of both high-ranking commanders and ordinary Marines and soldiers, as they initiate and carry out the actual battles that took place.
5. *Matterhorn*, a novel by Karl Marlantes, took the author, a former Marine lieutenant and Navy Cross winner over 35 years to write (or at least to get published). It is a fictionalized account of the USMC operations in 1969 along the so-called Demilitarized Zone separating North and South Vietnam in which the author fought: a vicious jungle campaign that was more like the battles fought in the Pacific in World War II than the guerilla war most people think of when they picture the Vietnam War.
6. *Hue, 1968: A Turning Point in the American War in Vietnam*, by Mark Bowden, is one of the newest non-fiction works about that war; it utilizes the techniques of journalism, including interviews with combatants and non-combatants from all sides of the seminal battle for the city of Hue during the Tet Offensive of 1968.