



The Deserters: A Hidden History of World War II

Charles Glass

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“Powerful and often startling...*The Deserters* offers a provokingly fresh angle on this most studied of conflicts.” -- *The Boston Globe*

A groundbreaking history of ordinary soldiers struggling on the front lines, *The Deserters* offers a completely new perspective on the Second World War. Charles Glass—renowned journalist and author of the critically acclaimed *Americans in Paris: Life and Death Under Nazi Occupation*—delves deep into army archives, personal diaries, court-martial records, and self-published memoirs to produce this dramatic and heartbreaking portrait of men overlooked by their commanders and ignored by history.

Surveying the 150,000 American and British soldiers known to have deserted in the European Theater, *The Deserters: A Hidden History of World War II* tells the life stories of three soldiers who abandoned their posts in France, Italy, and Africa. Their deeds form the backbone of Glass’s arresting portrait of soldiers pushed to the breaking point, a sweeping reexamination of the conditions for ordinary soldiers.

With the grace and pace of a novel, *The Deserters* moves beyond the false extremes of courage and cowardice to reveal the true experience of the frontline soldier. Glass shares the story of men like Private Alfred Whitehead, a Tennessee farm boy who earned Silver and Bronze Stars for bravery in Normandy—yet became a gangster in liberated Paris, robbing Allied supply depots along with ordinary citizens. Here also is the story of British men like Private John Bain, who deserted three times but never fled from combat—and who endured battles in North Africa and northern France before German machine guns cut his legs from under him. The heart of *The Deserters* resides with men like Private Steve Weiss, an idealistic teenage volunteer from Brooklyn who forced his father—a disillusioned First World War veteran—to sign his enlistment papers because he was not yet eighteen. On the Anzio beachhead and in the Ardennes forest, as an infantryman with the 36th Division and as an accidental partisan in the French Resistance, Weiss lost his illusions about the nobility of conflict and the infallibility of American commanders.

Far from the bright picture found in propaganda and nostalgia, the Second World War was a grim and brutal affair, a long and lonely effort that has never been fully reported—to the detriment of those who served and the danger of those nurtured on false tales today. Revealing the true costs of conflict on those forced to fight, *The Deserters* is an elegant and unforgettable story of ordinary men desperately struggling in extraordinary times.

The Deserters: A Hidden History of World War II Details

Date : Published June 13th 2013 by Penguin Press HC, The (first published March 28th 2013)

ISBN : 9781594204289

Author : Charles Glass

Format : Hardcover 400 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, War, World War II, Military Fiction

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Jim says

There is a quote in this book that is worth thinking about: "Each man, no matter how strong mentally and physically, has his limits beyond which the strongest will cannot drive him." That's from "Psychology for the Fighting Man," quoted in this book.

This story is about "the hidden side of World War II," the side that was not shown in the movies or comics or many books. It's about the 150,000 British and American soldiers who deserted their posts in WWII, almost all in the so-called ETO (European Theater of Operations, including North Africa). Men reached their breaking points for whatever reason

Glass focuses on three very different men who made the same decision - to desert in wartime. One, a Britisher, walked away after a battle in North Africa and ended up in a military prison in the hands of sadistic guards (men who had not seen combat themselves). Another, a farmboy from Tennessee, had fought bravely in combat in France, but left the Army and became a gangster in liberated Paris, robbing Allied supply depots as well as ordinary citizens. The third was the most interesting, a teenager from Brooklyn who was with the 36th Division (the Texas Division) in Italy and then Southern France. What he considered poor leadership endangering the lives of himself and others forced him to his decision to go over the hill. He figured he had contributed enough while so many men were in the rear areas safe from combat...

All in all, a well-told story that needs to be told, showing the real costs of war on those who fought...

Caroline says

Much has been written about the deserters of the First World War, the lack of understanding of shell shock, the executions at dawn and the campaigns for posthumous recognition and pardons; but far far less has been written about the deserters of the Second World War. Perhaps because we think of the trenches of Flanders as a particularly unique and horrifying form of warfare, the life of the fighting man in World War Two is somehow seen, in comparison, as 'not as bad'. As if war was ever something you could compare and contrast.

Many hundreds of men were executed for desertion between 1914-1918 - in the later war, just one. One poor unfortunate American private, Eddie Slovik. Men were executed for innumerable other crimes, but not desertion. This is not to say that desertion was not a problem in WW2 - as Glass points out, figures were probably even higher; and court-martial boards and military psychiatrists, whilst better informed, were not necessary any more sympathetic. After the horrors and shame of WW1 the public on the homefront simply would not have accepted execution as a punishment, and WW2 was a political war as much as it was a military and strategic one.

So this is an important book, and a welcome addition to a gap in WW2 studies. That said, anyone looking, as I was, for a general overview of desertion across the armies of both Axis and Allied powers, an investigation into the causes, impetus, apprehension, punishment, incarceration, legacy, had better keep looking. This is more an extended biography of a handful of three particular deserters, two American, one British, than anything else, and I don't think any of these men are especially representative. I was a little disappointed at the lack of this broad overview, but this is still an excellent book - moving and deeply humane.

Lois says

Professional burnout is such a common phenomenon these days in the contemporary workplace that undue chastisement for anyone afflicted with it would most likely be abhorred as being indicative of a sign of lack of empathy and true leadership in those who head up the organizations concerned. Why, then, should the enlisted during wartime, who are subjected to the constant psychological and physical battery of ongoing bombardment of the senses, be expected to endure life-threatening dangers with no, or scant, desire to leave the combat zone?

To lack compassion and understanding for a person caught up in such a situation (of which they, more often than not, knew and understood little before becoming immersed in it) shows the highest disregard for human rights. Yet, what deserters were exposed to during World War II was recrimination of the harshest kind, with many receiving prolonged jail sentences, if not execution by means of firing squad.

In *The Deserters: A Hidden History of World War II*, the intrepid journalist, Charles Glass, takes up the cudgels on behalf of those who, until now, have had far too little attention paid to them in the literature relating to the Second World War—that is, the deserters. In order to overcome the negativity and neglect to which such individuals have, in the past, been subject, Glass explores the individual histories of three men that show, not primarily what others have deemed to be their cowardice at deserting their posts, but rather their multidimensionality as fully fleshed characters in their own right.

The reasons for their desertion are examined in detail, so that readers can relate to them both in terms of their personal histories, and in terms of the wider arena of war. The biographical approach that Glass has taken, and which is based on research that led him “from archives to libraries, from court-martial records to old V-mail letters, from fading documents to myriad academic studies” has enabled the author to present a lively and vivid account of both the context in which these three individuals served, and of their own inner workings at the height of conflict and beyond.

It is as though we are encountering these figures at first-hand, and not through the condemnatory lens of officialdom, in whose light they have so often been cast before. Yet Glass does not present a picture of the three Privates, Alfred Whitehead, John Bain, and Steve Weiss, through rose-colored spectacles either. He shows them, warts and all, in full three-dimensional perspective, down to the criminal pursuits of Private Alfred Whitehead in postliberation Paris. Although some of their actions were a great deal more commendable than were others, with, for instance, the same Private having earned both Silver and Bronze stars for bravery prior to his desertion, Glass gives a well-rounded portrayal of each of the three leading protagonists in this highly laudable and clearly well-researched account.

The Deserters: A Hidden History of World War II is a powerful and cogent argument for the objective assessment of those who have previously been seen, by some, as contemptible excuses for manhood. For a valid and rational understanding of what World War II did to the average male psyche, this volume deserves to be read.

Jim says

A look at the reality of what it cost to win the Second World War. This book uses the stories of three soldiers, one British and two American, who ran afoul of the system's treatment of those soldiers who deserted as a reaction to "battle fatigue" (PTSD). Along the way you will learn about the incompetence of the medical evaluation of these men and the cruelty of the military justice system. If you wish to have a well informed, well rounded understanding of WWII, then I can't urge you strongly enough to read this book. Well researched and engagingly written.

Tom Johnson says

excellent journalism. Important subject that has been neglected. WWII, the "Good War". 50,000,000 Dead; "good war" is an oxymoron. At the end of the book, Glass makes the statement, "to write of desertion by the "greatest generation" was a taboo." Of course, it's not that simple. Until you walk in a man's combat boots, best not to judge.

The Deserters: A Hidden History of World War II – Charles Glass / published 2013 / 318 pages of text plus 44 pages of notes

From the Introduction: 150,000 troops of U.S., British, and Commonwealth nations deserted during WWII. Deserters supplied the black market in Naples, Rome, and Paris; contributing to critical material shortages at the front. They were also responsible for much of the violence against the civilian populations; specifically, theft, rape, and murder.

As background to the 77th, during the First World War the Division was comprised of mostly immigrants. The 77th sustained 2,000 killed and 9,000 wounded. They had to fight for the "privilege" of having their Victory Parade in New York, which was home for many of them, 30% were Jewish. Only through high pressure applied by New York politicians were the Division troops allowed their Victory Parade. The official Manual of Instruction for Medical Advisory Boards in 1917 stated that, "the foreign-born, especially the Jews are more apt to malingering than the native born." The aristocratic President Wilson acted the same as any common Know Nothing in his disparagement of the immigrant. He held a special contempt for black soldiers.

1918, June to November 11th was the main combat period for the American Expeditionary Force. (My grandfather was amongst the troops. Other than the fact that he had served as a sniper, I know very little about his service. A hard worker and a hard drinker, he was a bane in my mom's life. Most everyone is gone now.) The British and French troops spent 4 years in the trenches.

Glass presents the stories of three soldiers who had deserted. Through their stories mitigating circumstances are brought to bear.

Several themes emerge. One of injustice; for instance, 14 members of the Rice football team were rejected for military service. This treatment of the nation's favored sons was not atypical.

Our combat officers were often less than stellar. As I had earlier stated the text needs to be read. For me, the book proved difficult to summarize. Nothing, like the statement about our officers, is that simple. The more one digs for background the more complicated it gets.

If this was just a matter of the past it would be of less importance. Obviously, we have continually ran into the same faults and errors during every “war” and “police action” we have engaged in. And now look where we are at, we have one of two major political parties thinking that treason is just jim-dandy. It’s enough to make a person physically ill.

Fair treatment for immigrants in our all-volunteer armed forces today – anyone care to answer?

A short and to-the-point article from March 22, 2006 http://www.slate.com/articles/news_an... The extended tours of duty during the Iraq War are nothing new. During WWII only 10% of the 7.7 million troops in Europe ever experienced heavy combat. Some would be left at the front for over a year. The human nervous system can only take so much. It’s in the book, it varies by the individual, it is an injustice.

The “replacement soldier”: General George C Marshall’s plan of convenience undermined morale; the group loyalty of combat units evaporated. My dad was exposed to this diabolical scheme. Because you were the new guy, the guy without a friend, any hazardous duty was automatically yours. Sometimes you would be purposely abandoned. Dad was drafted and entered the war as a stateside motor pool instructor but once the end of the Third Reich was in sight all the Army schools were shut down and he was made an MP in the ruined, chaotic landscape of Germany. He survived his tour but lived through some nerve-wracking nights.

The numbers: U.S. Army – 7.7 million troops minus 3.2 million of the best who were placed in the Army’s air force – subtracting the support troops left some 750,000 frontline troops who remained at the front with no respite. The only way to escape was by death, incapacitating injury, capture, or desertion.

Treason in northern France – racketeering by AWOL troops in league with the black market caused critical shortages to the Allied war effort. Petrol looting stopped Patton’s tanks. The Army had to post guards on its supply trains thereby using up even more of the already scarce manpower.

On pages 264-268 the rank injustice of the U.S. Army judicial system is evidenced by the discrimination against the black troops. The firing squad was reserved for military crimes such as falling asleep while on guard duty; crimes such as murder & rape were punished by hanging. Of the 80 men executed by hanging during WWII, 55 were black. This number is way out of proportion to the makeup by race of the army. 8.5% of the U.S. Army was black yet they accounted for 79% of all capital crimes? Not only was this measurement of “justice” mismanaged but the very act of hanging was not carried out professionally. The condemned men were tortured to death by strangulation; 15 minutes or more by a half-wit Texan who volunteered for the job of hangman because of his purported expertise. He probably was an expert – at torture. The first-hand account was provided by Steve Weiss, a trooper who was forced to assist. Weiss was one of the three deserters whose personal account is related by Glass. (This write-up is probably coming off as half-witted. Please read the book as anything I contribute is a garbled farce compared to Glass’s writing.)

Page 270, “Treating combat exhaustion through courts-martial was proving to be a failure...” We are a nation of supercilious assholes whose first reaction to most any problem is to reach for a cudgel. Onward - Christian soldier!

I will probably order this book. <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Walking-Woun...> Vernon Scannell is John Vernon Bain, one of the three deserters profiled by Glass. Bain went on to become a poet of some renown.

Alfred T. Whitehead is the remaining deserter. He trained at Camp McCoy, Wisconsin (we just had a family reunion at the Camp McCoy Pine View Campgrounds) and is buried at Coon Prairie Cemetery in Westby, Wisconsin; again, not far from where I sit. Whitehead had been in combat continuously from D-Day through

30 December 1944, and had earned the Silver Star, two bronze stars, Combat Infantry Badge and Distinguished Unit Citation.

So much pathos in all three of the stories.

Jeremy says

I thought that this book would have been a more broad series of tales and exploits of dozens of deserters from all of the armies involved in the war. However, this book followed just a few soldiers from the time they entered the army until their deaths many decades after the war. It was still a pretty good read and I learned quite a bit about desertion in the war. I was astounded by the sheer number of soldiers who deserted and how many of them resorted to pilfering allied supplies and selling them on the black market. I was absolutely astounded by the number of supplies that they stole. Supplies that had a direct effect on the war effort. A sobering read for any World War II enthusiast. Another aspect of this book that still rings true today is the armed force's and general public's complete lack of understanding for people who suffer from mental trauma and stress. We still struggle with this as a society and probably will continue to do so for many years to come.

Fredrick Danysh says

During World War II the USA and Britain had over 15,000 deserters between them. The US rarely executed theirs with Private Eddie Kovacs being the exception. The author tells the stories of the deserters using three soldiers as case studies telling of their lives and military careers. An usually untied area of the war.

Evan says

I could have sworn William S. Burroughs was dead, but, evidently, the publishing industry has revived him, pumped him up with electricity and narcotics, and somewhere along the line decided that they loved his cut-up technique, hired him as their master editor, and let him have at every historical book being published today, because here he is again playing pick-up sticks with a narrative and reassembling it all into a random order. At first it looks OK because it's printed all sharp on clean white paper...but then you try to read it...

So here we go again. Here's yet another book on a little-covered topic that is much overdue, that is well-researched and even well written and often very fascinating in its revelations; filled with all the ingredients of a great read, and yet, somehow, it turns a potentially flavorful tapas meal into a bologna sandwich.

So, while reading it, this is what I was doing:

"Oh, that's very interesting...hmmm...fascinating...wow, really? didn't know that...uh, uh, uhm...What? End of chapter? No, don't stop. Wait...where am I again? Oh, he's gone back to one of the other guys...again. ...Wait, which guy is this now? Was this the Scotsman? Or was he Irish? Wait, there are two guys with Irish ancestry, but one is American and one isn't. Oh, here's Whitehead..which one was he? The Tennessee guy or the New York guy? Wasn't he about four chapters back? I can't remember. Did he have the dad who was also a deserter, or was that the other guy's dad? I can't remember...that was way back at the beginning of the book... Oh, wait, now he's flashing back to the guy's childhood again... What now? He's gone forward in time

with Bain to the prison camp, but never told me how he got there... Oh wait, he's telling me that in the next chapter...Why? Why didn't he do it in order? I...I...I'm fricking lost!"

But then, the narcotics kick in and Burroughs says, "Fuck it all...", shirking his editorial duties and stumbling over to flop onto the couch to start tripping. All of a sudden the book becomes more or less wholly linear somewhere between a third to halfway in, but then it becomes primarily the story of one soldier, Weiss, chapter after chapter, and the other guys are more or less gone. Bain, the Scotsman poet, disappears entirely until the end of the book, and Whitehead goes AWOL (pun intended) until the latter sections as well.

I'm torn about the book. I wanted to literally go AWOL from it numerous times, but there were too many interesting things in it once you separated the pyrite and the mud from the actual gold therein.

What's cool about the book is that it's not your dad's or grandad's World War II book. It sheds light on the "underbelly," as it were, of the "last good war." Not every blonde Johnny flashed a smile and grabbed a gun. No. 150,000 Yanks and Brits actually said, "Fuck no, we won't go," either before or during deployment. Who knew? And nobody knew it at the time because the propaganda/morale enterprise required that it be suppressed from the body politic of the soldiery and the citizenry. That's why only one guy in the entirety of the US-Brit alliance (Private Slovik) was executed for desertion. It was a balancing act of playing down the problem while incentivizing loyalty. The psychological stresses of war and the differing motivations for desertion -- as well as the unique challenges of how to round-up, house, feed, punish, and discharge such men, along with how to suppress the extent of the problem -- are just some of the issues the book addresses. Author Charles Glass does not judge these men, and in fact shows great empathy while trying to analyze their plight.

As a factual expose, the book is often very good, and yet, its lengthy expository passages of troop movements and battles seem to deviate greatly from the book's ostensible concern about desertion. At times, it seems like any other war book -- interesting as such -- but not terribly original. There's also a stab at some nebulous thesis about cross-generational deserters, dads from World War I and their sons in World War II doing same -- but it never gels into anything cohesive. The book finds itself in the odd and seemingly contradictory position of trying to do too much but somehow doing too little.

My favorite thing in the book was its description of the physical and psychological torments in a British military prison camp in Egypt during the North African desert war campaign. The idea of the camp was to make life worse than being in battle, and it seems to have worked. Many men given a chance of leaving the camp or fighting again chose the latter. I could have read the whole book happily if it had stayed here and jettisoned the rest. But, alas.

So, on the positive side, the book dishes up a valuable balancing view of the war. World War II wasn't just "Ken Burns' (***)insert pandering flag-waving documentary title here(***)", sponsored by Chrysler", or Tom Brokaw's "The Gosh-darndest greatest generation who might spend their last living dimes on my fawning suck-up book(s)", or John "I got outta military service 'cause I was too big a star" Wayne; it was also a helluva lot of shit that flew under the radar of the vertically integrated propaganda machine. One of these was the existence of mafia-linked criminal gangs of deserters who ran sometimes brutal black-market theft rings...operating like vultures and following the armies while taking medical and other supplies needed by their ostensible (former) comrades-in-arms. (Graham Greene must have been listening...)

Apart from the organizational issues of the book, my main problems with it are best summarized in this snippet from a Goodreads review by user, "Caroline":
<https://www.goodreads.com/review/show...>

"So this is an important book, and a welcome addition to a gap in WW2 studies. That said, anyone looking, as I was, for a general overview of desertion across the armies of both Axis and Allied powers, an investigation into the causes, impetus, apprehension, punishment, incarceration, legacy, had better keep looking. This is more an extended biography of a handful of three particular deserters, two American, one British, than anything else, and I don't think any of these men are especially representative. I was a little disappointed at the lack of this broad overview, but this is still an excellent book ..."

Yes, really, the book is 95 percent about three guys, and I agree with Caroline that I don't think the circumstances of their cases make them representative. Actually, this should have been titled, *The Story of Steven Weiss*, because almost half of the book focuses on his war experiences.

The question is: what are you looking for in a book about an under-covered subject? A very detailed account of the experiences of a handful of guys, serving as a microcosm for a topic that affected thousands (which is this book's approach), or a book that takes a broader view of the subject without all the biographical and battle details of a few people? Frankly, I would prefer a broader view. Having said that, I realize the importance of individual memoirs and oral histories, especially as the people involved are almost all gone. This book is a start, but just that: a start.

I'm not blaming author Glass wholly for the book's schizophrenia; I take partial blame and split the difference since it triggered schizophrenia in me perhaps. Or maybe I just lack patience in my old age.

Whomever the real deserter is here, I sentence them to 10 lashes in the hot box with this book.

(KevinR@Ky)

Chris Pramas says

This is a terrific book on topic rarely covered in WW2 histories. It uses the stories of three men--two American and one British--as a lens to examine desertion and a host of related topics: battle fatigue, military justice, battlefield psychology, and leadership. It also highlights how truly terrible the American system was for combat infantrymen and their replacements. Basically, the Americans put the burden of the fighting on a relatively small number of divisions. Whereas other countries (and America in other wars) would rotate units off the front line to recuperate and incorporate replacements, the US army had a system that put replacement soldiers into a general pool and then assigned them to units on an ad hoc basis while the units were still in combat. Instead of going into battle with a group of men they knew and had trained with, the replacements were dumped into units where they knew no one. Many were killed within days of arriving, sometimes before their new officers even learned their names. It is no surprise that veterans reached a breaking point after too many consecutive days in combat, and that replacements deserted after being cast adrift with no support network. If you are interested in WW2 at all, I totally recommend *The Deserters*.

Michael says

Well, this was one of those books for me where 3 stars seems too low but 4 stars is too high. I found the title to be somewhat misleading - it was one of those books I just grabbed off the library shelf on the way out the door without knowing anything about it other than what was on the front cover. Anyway, I was expecting

much more of a macro-level examination of the subject, perhaps some analysis of whether there were any distinctions to be made in terms of desertions among the armies of the allies (and/or over the course of the war) with regard to causes, military justice, efforts to apprehend and either punish or rehabilitate those who "went over the hill", etc. This book, however, doesn't for the most part concern itself with those larger questions, or at least doesn't approach them in any systematic way. Instead the book primarily (and by primarily I mean 90% or more) focuses on just three individual soldiers, each of which at one time or another deserts (at least once if not multiple times). Glass writes well and his portrayal of these soldiers' experiences is often moving and maddening, but I wouldn't characterize this type of book as "a hidden history of World War II." Title quibbles notwithstanding, I did enjoy the book for the most part. My main objection (and why I rounded down as opposed to up) has to do with Alfred Whitehead, one of the three soldiers presented in the book. Glass relies heavily on Whitehead's memoir in terms of his research but it becomes pretty clear early on that we are dealing with an very unreliable source. And by "unreliable source" I don't just mean there are contradictions between Whitehead's account and other members of his unit, the military record, dates and times, etc., I mean that Glass himself believes many parts of Whitehead's story are highly dubious and probably untrue. Consequently, its value to the reader/armchair historian is questionable at best and it is unclear why Whitehead featured so heavily in the book.

Michele Weiner says

This book was perfect preparation for the return of Bowe Bergdahl. It explained what happened to make men desert their units and how the US government handled these men. Only one man was executed in WWII for desertion, and he should not have been. In the process of explaining things from the point of view of the deserter, the reader gets a good picture of the mistakes made in strategy that used up its men instead of attempting to give them some rest to recover from the hyper alert status of active duty on the line. I was also impressed with the coverage of the enormous difficulty the US had in keeping its supplies from thieves foreign and domestic. Every deserter is the same in that he has reached his limit. Each is different in the way he handles it. The army was implicated in the rate of desertion, and it was well-known that units with more desertions were badly lead. All in all, a good portrait of the underside of the good war.

Hans says

Since it is easy to glorify and embellish combat it is always useful to get a balanced perspective and hear the other side. The side that often is silent, untold and full of deep seated anguish and pain. Charles Glass does a decent job following the lives of three average G.I.'s who were classified as "deserters" and explores their stories as well as the larger story of all the many hundreds of thousands of deserters during WW II. Desertion is usually something most people would see in black and white but the author shows how nuanced these stories really were and how the American and British Military tried to cope and understand the phenomenon. The reasons for desertion are so varied and numerous that there is a wide spectrum with one of the most common causes being purely psychological, the near-catastrophic mental and spiritual break down and fatigue of the common Infantry soldier. The author does a great job breaking down just how much of the burden of war was placed upon the shoulders of so few men who were over-worked, under supplied, under fed and under-appreciated. The infantry Soldier was thrown into the fight again and again with little respite. This was especially true of certain divisions who saw almost incessant action like the 36th Division.

The most disturbing part of the book is how some of the people who were classified as deserters never

should have been. They were combat veterans with numerous medals and acts of valor and self-sacrifice. But when they had reached their breaking point they just wanted to be re-assigned and the unempathetic rear echelons Soldiers who knew nothing of the mental and emotional exhaustion of combat refused to let them.

Cynthia says

I've always heard World War II vets referred to as gung ho dedicated soldiers. This look at WWII shatters some of those myths not just about the men who fought this war but about all soldiers in all wars. PTSD, Soldiers Heart, Shell Shock are all terms used to designate the damage killing and the fear of being killed does to people. This is what is at the heart of Glass's book, human beings who understandably abhor bloodshed. It's assumed that if a woman can get pregnant and give birth she'll naturally know how to mother just as giving a man a gun and a cause should make him a killer for a prescribed time and a for a designated period. Obviously this isn't true in all cases.

"Deserters" follows a few individuals both British and American from their home town origins to their war service with eye to understanding what they went through and why they reacted as they did. It doesn't glorify them, it makes them human and it makes their actions comprehensible. Glass relies on their diaries and poetry as well as fellow soldiers' accounts. There aren't any big names just common GI's but their stories are compelling. Along the way you'll learn lots of inside information about the war and what it felt like physically and mentally.

Randall Smith says

The Greatest Generation? Well, not exactly. Before reading this book, I was not aware that 150,000 American and British soldiers deserted in the European Theater. Or that 38,000 American officers and men were court-martialed for seeking to avoid hazardous duty by dishonorable means. From 1944 to 1946, Allied deserters ran the black market economies of Naples, Rome and Paris. They plundered Allied supply convoys at gunpoint, deprived Patton of gasoline on his drive to Germany, and left their comrades at the front short of food, blankets, ammunition and other vital supplies. In Italy, deserters drove trucks of looted Allied equipment for the Mafia. One deserter in Paris led a gang that robbed, extorted and murdered French citizens. Rampaging American deserters raped and robbed at will. Racketeering American deserters hijacked trucks on highways (once getting an army safe with \$133,000 in it) and fought gun battles with French police. Hunting down deserters became a major operation for the American military police during the advance in Europe.

Not all deserters were so notorious, however, Private Wayne Powers deserted, hid in a French farm house, fell in love with a French farm girl, had five children with her, and wasn't found by the M.P.s until 1958! He was then tried and sentenced to ten years hard labor. But the outpouring of letters in his support allowed him to be released, at which point, he finally married the mother of his five children and quickly had a sixth.

In many ways it's a sad book, but perhaps it's one that can offer a more balanced view to the hagiographic books written about the men who fought in *The Good War*.

Mike Gabor says

The author tells the story of three deserters during WW II. They are Pvt. Alfred Whitehead, and Pvt. Steven Weiss, from the U.S. Army and Pvt. John Bain from the British Army.

The three deserted not so much from cowardice but rather from battle fatigue. Weiss and Whitehead were actually highly decorated and Bain was later wounded in France. It is an interesting look into what made these three soldiers run. It was also interesting to see how their comrades judged them after they returned. A very thoughtful book on a subject not much discussed.
