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THE WAGES OF WAR

When America's

Soldiers Came Home

From Valley Forge to Vietnam

By Richard Severo and Lewis Milford

Simon and Schuster, 495 pp. \$21.95

By Elmo Zumwalt Jr.

IN THE acknowledgements

that come at the end of their

book, *The Wages of War*, au-

thors Richard Severo and

Lewis Milford concede that while "deter-

mined to put the experience of the Vietnam

veterans in the perspective it deserves, it

was not our original intent to assume the

burden of researching ten postwar periods

and more than two hundred years of Amer-

ican history"

"I was relieved when I read this admission

because I had judged that the quality and

scholarship within the first 22 chapters was

of a lower order than that of the last five

contained in "Part Eight: The Vietnam War

and the Agent Orange Affair."

That is not to say that the first 22 chap-

...ing with our first nine wars are not worth reading. They present a vivid, factual picture of the gross disregard for our veterans after each of those nine wars, with the exception of World War II. The evidence that the authors present of the neglect of our veterans in those eight wars is impressive and depressing:

"For most soldiers, there were no homecoming parades, no flags flying nor bands playing, no smiles from many of the civilians whose fortunes had waxed with their liberties. . . . The veterans returned to a curious, chromatic world of indifference and even outright hostility . . ."

" . . . the Government soon forgot that thousands came home with diseases and fevers . . . illnesses that would kill them if left untreated. And nobody paid much attention to the plight of veterans down on their luck."

"These quotes, which sound very much as though they represent the nation's recently rediscovered conscience about our Vietnam War veterans, deal, in fact, with the post-Revolutionary War and post-Mexican War treatment of U.S. veterans.

"Those of us who served in World War II, who observed and participated in the benefits awarded to veterans, and who later ascended to high command during the Vietnam War, were perhaps lulled into expectations that Congress would provide adequately for

the men we commanded in that war. I wish that the information provided here concerning the traditional postwar treatment of veterans had been written and read by all of us 20 years earlier. Perhaps then we would have taken time from our preoccupation with the war to persuade the federal government to provide as wisely for Vietnam veterans as it did for veterans of the 1941-45 war.

Despite the author's extensive research concerning America's earlier wars, some of their conclusions seem to me to be more sweeping than their data justify. For example, they charge that the Army, in response to critics after the Korean War, connived at maligning captured GIs for being soft on communism and giving in to brainwashing. They conclude: "It was clearly important that Americans continue to trust the civilian authority that got the nation into the war and the generals who had run it; they had to be told categorically that the wrongs committed by U.S. soldiers reflected badly not just on the Army and on the Government, but on the totality of American society. The Army's weakness was everybody's weakness, the Army believed."

In all of my discussions over the years with Army officers, I have never heard one who believed that U.S. soldiers in the Korean War were generally unsatisfactory or that the Army blamed anyone, let alone so-

ciety for producing poor soldiers. Rather,

there has always been a general recognition that the vast majority of soldiers in that army fought courageously.

"IN MY judgment, in the last five chapters, the authors do a magnificent job of researching the gross mistreatment of the Vietnam veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange. This is an area to which I have devoted considerable study. Their conclusions concerning the insensitivity of most of those in the Veterans Administration and the Center for Disease Control who dealt with this issue and the actual deceitfulness and falsifications of some key officials are well done.

"It should be noted, however, that this book was completed before Secretary of Veterans Affairs Edward Derwinski's recent breath-of-fresh air announcement that he will not appeal the federal court decision that requires his department to review again the thousands of Agent Orange-related cases which his predecessors had decided erroneously against veterans.

"The Wages of War should be required reading for all government employees dealing with the Agent Orange issue and is strongly recommended to all veterans."

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Adm. Elmo Zumwalt Jr. was chief of naval operations from 1970 to 1974. He is the au-

Author of "On Watch" and the co-author of "My
Father, My Son."

END OF STORY