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THE REITH LECTURES 2018: THE MARK OF CAIN

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Reith Lecturer: Margaret MacMillan

Lecture 2

Anita Anand: Hello and welcome to the University of York for the second of this year's Reith Lectures by the historian Margaret MacMillan. Now in this series, called *The Mark of Cain*, Margaret's been examining the complex relationship that we as humans have with war – the impact that it has on us personally and on our culture. And she began by asking if war is an essential part of being human. Now we're going to take look at something a little closer – the individual who fights: making sense of the warrior. So please do give a very warm welcome the Reith Lecturer for 2018 , Professor Margaret MacMillan...

(AUDIENCE APPLAUSE)

MARGARET MACMILLAN: In March 1461, as I probably don't need to tell people who live here in York, the Battle of Towton was fought just about ten miles south east of here – possibly the largest and bloodiest battle ever fought on British soil. More than five ... 50,000 soldiers, they think, from the Houses of York and Lancaster fought for hours in a snowstorm on Palm Sunday.

At first the Lancastrians outnumbered the Yorkists and that tempted the Lancastrians out of their defences to attack. There were hours of hand-to-hand combat and then the Duke of Norfolk arrived with men to bolster the Yorkists. The Lancastrians broke and that's always a dangerous moment in a battle. They fled; they trampled each other; they drowned in rivers which were said

to “run red with blood for days”. It is possible, but we’ll never know of course for sure, that 28,000 people died on the battlefield. The whole population of the United Kingdom was under three million.

And although the victory of York left most people at the time thinking that the war was over and that order and stability had been restored, what we now call The Wars of the Roses had only just started, and it would only end in 1485 with The Battle of Bosworth. That war, or those series of wars as it should properly be called, brought big changes to English society. It helped to foster the appearance of strong central government and the subjugation of powerful local magnates.

In my first lecture, I looked at that deep intertwined relationship between war and society, about how wars have brought social and political change and how in turn changes in societies have often produced or affected wars. And I also looked – and it’s paradoxical, but there is much that is paradoxical about war – about how war can bring benefits along with destruction, how war can bring advances in science. The development of penicillin, for example, really became possible with the Second World War when it was decided it was now important to invest in it.

War has also brought strong, stable government, which in the long run has enabled people to get about their lives to trade, to live, to flourish, and so I’m going to be examining some of these paradoxes of war. And I want to look also at ourselves. All of us here and in wider societies, I think, and I certainly speak for myself, have very complicated attitudes towards war. We are attracted sometimes by war: we find it glamorous, we find it exciting. And of course we’re also repulsed by war: we find it appalling, we find it wasteful; we wonder why humanity does not have other ways of settling its differences.

We may deny that war has an appeal, but I think if you go to any bookshop, if you look at children’s books, if you look at videogames, if you look at the sorts of movies that people want to watch, you will find many that see war as something exciting and something glamorous. Some of you have probably seen the movie *Dunkirk*, which does show the destruction, but it also shows something of the glamour and the bravery of war – how people do things that perhaps we wouldn’t think are possible in peacetime. And perhaps – I certainly do – we sometimes wonder if we could do what some of those military in the past and the present have done. Could we show the same courage? Would we be willing to accept the possibility of death for a cause or for our fellow soldiers or our fellow sailors?

What I want to do today is look at those who fight and start asking why do men, and less often women, fight? And perhaps I’ll start with the women because it’s been true through history that probably 99 per cent or 99.9 per cent of those who fight have been men. It is men who have been the warriors. Now why should this be so? And there are a number of explanations. There is the biological explanation. I’m not giving you any answers, I’m just going to tell you what the explanations are, because these are still debates among biologists and others, you would say they’re almost battles between different theories. Biology, are there gender differences? Are men for various reasons more likely to want to fight, are they more likely to be aggressive? I tend to reject such fundamentalist types of explanations. We have those who say women are more peaceful, that if women ran the world it would be a more peaceful place. And my answer to that

is very short: think of Margaret Thatcher. (*audience laughter*) I can answer it longer if you like. (*audience laughter*)

It is also possible that patriarchy and misogyny down through the ages have simply relegated women to roles that have been seen for various reasons as less important or roles centred more in the household. There have of course been examples of women warriors in history. There is the legend of the Amazons, but that probably is just a legend, and there are certainly examples of women who have gone off, usually disguising themselves as men, and fought, but they have been rare and we tend to remember them because they are rare.

(5.16) But there's evidence more recently that when women have to fight, they will fight and they can fight as effectively as men. There's a wonderful book which some of you may have read by Svetlana Alexievich who won the Nobel Prize for Literature a few years ago, and her book *The Unwomanly Face of War*, as it is known in English, looks at Soviet women and the sorts of things that Soviet women did in the Second World War. Many of them volunteered and they ended up not doing just the sorts of roles that you would think women might be delegated to do - not just medical, not just support, not just secretarial. They became pilots, combat pilots; they drove tanks into combat; they manned artillery in combat; they became snipers. They're quite funny about it. They said, "At first the male officers didn't know how to deal with us." One of them said the male commander of her anti-aircraft artillery regiment said, "We can't have women here. Military affairs have always been done by men. From time immemorial that has been men's work." He said, "How can women carry the shells? They're quite heavy. How can we have women sitting in the same dugout as men? Women have to sit for hours at controls on heavy metal on metal seats and that's not good for girls", he said. "Where", finally he said, "would they wash and dry their hair?" But they became comrades of these men and in the end the officer had to recognise that they were very much as participants as the men were. As one of the women said, "We walked a hard path together."

Now those women joined up because their homeland was threatened. They all said that they felt they had no choice; it was invaded by the Germans and they simply felt they had no choice but to go to war. And that I think is one of the explanations - but again there are many different explanations - one of the explanations as to why people fight. They sometimes feel they have no choice. They sometimes feel that they have to defend something - their home, their loved ones, their small piece of land, their possessions. Whatever it is - the government, the ideology they think is important - they sometimes feel that they have no choice. Again one of the paradoxes of war - that it's very often the things that you want to live for that are worth dying for.

But people fight, like nations, for other sorts of reasons. They fight for gain, they fight because they want to get something out of it, they certainly fight for ideology - and I would include religion in that ideology as much as I would include politics - or they can fight out of a range of emotions: some people fight out of pride, some people fight because they don't want to have to back down. Some people would rather die than be dishonoured.

What does run through their testimony - and I've been reading a lot of testimonies from people who have fought, both men and women - is that when they do fight, they feel they have to become somehow different; they may start out as peaceful civilians, but they seem to find

themselves in another world and they have to adapt to that world. And war is another world. In many ways it inverts the natural or what we think is the natural order of things. We find it right and necessary in war to destroy, to blow up buildings, bridges or railways, to murder and hurt others. What is grotesque in peacetime – making fun of death or making jokes about corpses – is funny in war. What is intolerable in peacetime – dirt, lice, bad food, boredom, things that are uncomfortable – becomes part of life in war.

And in a curious way there can be a sort of exhilaration - and this again gets back to what I say about our complicated reactions to war - there can be sort of an exhilaration in just the sheer destruction. Let me give you just one or two examples.

On August 6th 1945 a Japanese lecturer called Ogura Toyofumi was heading in to where he worked, which was Hiroshima. He suddenly was on the outskirts. He saw a giant flash and then he was transfixed by a giant swirling cloud. He said later there was no adequate way to describe it. He said the unsophisticated concepts and fantasies dreamed up by the ancients were useless to describe this “horrible pageant of clouds and lights, staged in the firmament”. He kept walking towards the city. Instead of drawing back from this terrifying spectacle, he was drawn to it. And the only explanation I can think of is that he was somehow drawn to see the sheer scale of the destruction. He later on described it as “the greatest of its kind man had ever experienced”. And I do think there is awe inspiring in the sheer destruction of war. This is not to say that we want this to happen, but it is something that we can be transfixed by.

I'll give you one more example (and there are many). A young British artillery officer, no particular literary talent, nothing special, wrote to his mother in July 1917 about going through Ypres, which was almost totally destroyed by the First World War, at night. And he passed the Cloth Hall - and you had to be careful, you could stop on one side of the square and then you had to run across because there were snipers and artillery shells about - and he looked at the Cloth Hall and he said, ‘I’ve heard of the Taj Mahal by moonlight, but for me it could never be so impressive as this ruin. The stones and the masonry gleamed snowy white and the massive tower stood there, raising its jagged turrets against the dark sky like some huge iceberg’. He then dashed across the square and just had time to notice the body of someone who hadn’t made the trip, who lay crumpled by a lamp post.

And so war does invert the natural order of things and people extraordinarily do adapt to it and even find beauty into it. But what other reasons do people have for going to war apart from feeling they must? Well for some people it’s an escape. In the 18th century, if you were a British convicted felon you were given the choice sometimes of going to jail or being executed – you could be executed for very little – or joining the army, and people sometimes took the choice of joining the army which wasn’t that much better than going to jail and probably not that much better than being executed.

It was also an escape for many people down through history, as it may still be today, from poverty. It’s no accident that many of the mercenaries from around Europe – the Swiss guards at the Vatican, for example, or the Scots or the Poles who fought around Europe – came from very poor parts. It was a way out to join an army.

War gave some people a chance to rise socially, a chance for loot, a chance to get ahead. Most of those people of course didn't gain much by going to war, but war provided opportunities. And war – and this is true throughout the past and it's certainly been true in recent times – war for some people was an escape from boredom, and they found peace boring. In 1914 the German poet Stefan George talked about the “cowardly years of trash and triviality” and about how he really longed for a good war.

Marinetti, the great Italian futurist, said “War cleans society. It's exciting, it does something to us”. And I think a lot of people who fight do feel an escape from boredom, but they also see it as some sort of test. Young men I think often want to test themselves to see whether or not they can do the sorts of things that perhaps their fathers or their grandfathers fought.

And for some people – and that may be true of those who want to test themselves – war is noble and it's also a type of life at its most intense. The British poet Julian Grenfell wrote a series of letters to his mother from the Western Front. I'll just quote one of them because it gives you a sense of what he's talking about. He said, ‘It is the best fun. I have never, never felt so well or so happy or enjoyed anything so much. It just suits me.’ He said, ‘I hope it goes on. I hope it goes on for a nice long time. Pig sticking will be the only tolerable pursuit after this or one will die of sheer ennui.’ He said, ‘It's a bit odd at first shooting someone else,’ but he said – and I'll quote again – ‘very soon it gets like shooting a crocodile only more amusing because he shoots back at you.’ He came from a class and from a time when it was expected that young men like him would fight. And I think cultural factors are often very important in fighting. You do get cultures in which young men again mostly are brought up to be soldiers.

I had a friend, I have a friend still who's a Canadian diplomat and Canadian diplomats tend to be like Canada - very moderate, we believe in peace, we believe in peacekeeping – but he came from one of those old Prussian Junker families, that particular class where the young men were expected to go into government service, either the army or the civil service, and they were brought up to be brave, to sacrifice themselves to do their duties.

Manfred, my friend, grew up on the family estate in East Prussia during the Second World War and I said to him, “Do you remember much about it?” And he said, “Oh yeah.” He said “I remember sitting there with my grandmother who was terrifying. We had to call her Excellence. We had to sit very straight at the table.” He said, “There were two or three little boy cousins, including me, and she made us every so often switch our knives and forks from one hand to the other because she said” – and remember these were four year old boys, she said, “When you grow up, you're going to be soldiers and you'll probably lose an arm and so you have to know how to eat politely.” (*audience laughter*)

But that says to me something about culture, about how culture can be so strong. And we can think of other cultures like this. I mean we think of Sparta where the Spartan mothers apparently said to their sons as they went off to fight, “Either bring back your shields or come back carried on them. We don't want to see you in any other way.” Or think of the Middle Ages with the cult of chivalry, and so you do get societies in which military values and the expectation that young men will fight are very, very strong indeed. And you get examples of such military values pervading ordinary civilian societies. Think of the 19th century with all those little school

children in uniforms. Think of how many heads of state wore military uniform. Think of things like the boy scouts, which now I'm sure are not dedicated to producing good little soldiers for king and country but certainly were when they were first established.

But such values can change; not all societies are condemned forever to be caught in a web of military values. Think of the Swedes. I mean we think of the Swedes now today as making expeditions to Ikea, assembling furniture quietly, not getting cross at it. (*audience laughter*) We think of them going to the woods and picking berries. I mean they are a peaceful people. If you lived in the 17th century, you would not want a Swedish army anywhere near you. They were notorious. They were a byword for viciousness, for evil, for sacking. When they sacked cities, they dug up, they opened the tombs so they could get the rings off the fingers of the corpses and they were known throughout the Thirty Years' War as some of the most vicious and dangerous soldiers around. But I do think cultural values can be important.

Now there was a very important shift in our attitudes towards soldiers that, certainly in Europe, happened at the end of the 18th century. In the 18th century ordinary soldiers – the officers were different because they did tend to come from the upper classes – ordinary soldiers were seen as the scum of society. If you went marching through English countryside, you were not welcome. Pubs would have signs saying 'no dogs, no beggars, no soldiers' and they were seen as people who were really unwelcome in society.

What began to change that was the French Revolution. From the French Revolution onwards if you had a part in choosing your own government you also had an obligation to it; you were expected to come to its defence. And so government was something that you owed something to. It would look after you, but you in turn had to look after this, after the government.

And what this did was mean that soldiers were motivated in a different sort of way and it became very apparent when the first French Revolutionary armies went out that they were somehow different sorts of soldiers. They horrified the more traditional armies. When the Prussians and the Austrians tried to invade France in 1792 and put down the French Revolution, they found the French soldiers didn't fight in the proper way. They didn't march out in disciplined columns, they didn't wait for any orders; they just rushed across the fields shouting and firing their guns and singing *The Marseillaise*. One Prussian officer said they were like "savage beasts foaming at the mouth like cannibals". He said, "They hurled themselves at top speed upon soldiers who don't have those passions." These were not fighting in the proper way, but what it meant was that they were very, very effective because they would charge at things which they shouldn't charge at, they would attack when they shouldn't attack and they often won.

Goethe, the German poet, who was there in 1792 when the French made one of these extraordinary attacks, said "From this place and from this day forth commences a new era in the world's history" and he was right. You got now citizen soldiers motivated in a different sort of way who were prepared to fight and die for their country.

It meant, among other things, you could order them to do things that you couldn't order the old style soldiers to do. You could also, interestingly enough, march them at night because they wouldn't try and run away. You didn't have to have guards around their camps to prevent them

from trying to desert. And so what we got was a new type of relationship, a new type of soldier, and sadly what we also got in the 19th century was a huge industrial and technological revolution which meant that not only did we have lots of new soldiers with lots of motivation; we now – and I say we, European and Western society – had very effective ways of killing them. We became much, much better at killing people. The guns became better, the ranges became longer, the artillery became better. It became possible to put huge armies into the field. The First World War, we know there were millions of men put into the field. It also became possible to kill people on a huge scale.

In the American Civil War, just to give you one example of what was beginning to happen, 600,000 died in that civil war. The total US population was only 31 million. That's a very, very high proportion of your population. The First World War, possibly 9 million men died. We will never know for sure, but this is killing on an industrial scale. But the killing on an industrial scale was partly possible because we do have other sorts of soldiers.

Well we look at the First World War of course and we look at other wars and we think how could they do it? How could they keep doing it for so long, how could they put up with the privation?

Well what makes a warrior? I think I've already mentioned some of the things: it's the motivation, why you want to fight; it's the notion that those at home expect it of you. I think there are also personal reasons – motives of honour and shame. Quite often what comes out in the accounts of battles is young soldiers saying, "I don't want to disgrace myself. I want to show that I can actually stick it out." And this is important. We often do extraordinary things because we don't want to be shamed.

It's not true that all soldiers of course rush into battle with great enthusiasm – they never have done and they never will. It's always been the role of officers to force them into battle, if necessary to shoot them or to run them through with swords if they don't want to appear to go. And that has not changed: officers in the First World War were often forcing their soldiers into battle.

What also armies have done and the military generally have done is give their men – again mainly men – drink or drugs to encourage them to fight. I've read the account by an Italian soldier who was on the Austrian Front in World War One who said, "As the Austrians attacked us" - and the Austrians were up higher in the mountains, the Italians were in a dreadful position to defend themselves - he said, "As the Austrians came down the hill, the wave of brandy that came in front of them was almost unbearable." (*audience laughter*) But I think they all did this and again in this memoir this particular Austrian soldier talks about how his officers just drank the whole time. It was a way of getting your courage up.

There are also those of course who just fight because war is a profession. I talked earlier on about the mercenaries from places like Switzerland, the people who worked for contractors and who saw it simply as a job and quite often, if they weren't paid, they'd go on strike. There was a famous saying in the Italian wars of the 15th and 16th century: "pas d'argent, pas de Suisse" – no money, no Swiss. They wouldn't fight if the money wasn't there and they would sometimes stop in the middle of a battle and say "Sorry, we haven't been paid, we're sitting down. You know we

would like to be paid.” They’d sometimes switch sides. They’d say, “No we’ve had a better offer from the other side. You know you owe us some money, we haven’t had anything. Okay we’re going over to the other side.” So you do get all sorts of complicated motives for war.

You also I think get people who enjoy it and this is again something we’re uncomfortable with. You get people who like the experience of war, they like fighting. There’s a chilling memoir by Ernst Junger, a German soldier who survived the First World War, called *Storm of Steel*, and he loved it, he enjoyed it. He liked killing other people. He liked the excitement, he liked the tension.

Let me read to you from a young British soldier who was fighting in the First World War and it gives you a sense of the enjoyment. He was a transport officer, which sounds easy. It wasn’t. Being a transport officer was very, very dangerous because you were taking carts with mules and donkeys up to the frontlines, often under shellfire, often having to go out in the open to get the supplies up there. You’d go at night sometimes. He once went through Armentieres at night, again deserted like Ypres was because it was ruined, and he said how exciting. He said it was exciting to be on a horse at all – on a horse in the dark street of this deserted foreign town – instead of at just this time setting out with one’s mother to go to evening service in Glasgow. He was wounded badly in the face, this young officer, and invalided home, and he wrote to his parents. He said, ‘I am more disgusted than I can say. I was getting on so well and enjoying the work and everything’. Well he survived the war and he later on became Lord Reith of the BBC. (*audience laughter*)

So how do you get people – again to go back to my question – how do you get people to do it? And of course it’s training, it’s discipline. That’s one of the reasons why armies do so much drill. It is to get you prepared to do things automatically, so that you simply obey orders. It’s probably like training for a sport: you learn the moves, they become automatic, and you learn how to accept discipline. Discipline is one of the most important things in an army. Accepting the possibility of death, accepting the possibility of loss is one of the key things that makes an armed force succeed or not. But again there’s always with war there is this delicate balance between training people to kill and keeping that killing under control.

Let me give you a quotation which I think will help to illustrate this. In October 1943 – and I’ll tell you who it is at the end – an officer spoke to a group of his men on the Eastern Front. He said – and he was trying to encourage them – he said, “Most of you will know what it is like when a hundred corpses lie together, when there are five hundred or when there are a thousand; and to have seen this through, and apart from the exceptional cases of human weakness to have remained decent, has made us heard and is a page of glory never mentioned and never to be mentioned.” Now the German officer was Heinrich Himmler and he was talking to SS officers in occupied Poland and he was talking about the extermination of the Jews. So military discipline is something that we can admire when it is directed to a purpose we approve of, but it can so easily tip over into the sorts of atrocities that we have seen in the Second World War and also seen in Germany, also saw in the case of the Germans. And that is another face of war which we always have to deal with – that soldiers can lose control, that they can be directed to evil ends. Officers can fail to prevent their soldiers from doing evil or they can actively encourage them to do it.

The town of Magdeburg was sacked in Germany during the Thirty Years' War and, out of some I think 25,000 people who'd been in it when the siege began, there were something like 450 left at the end and people still talk in Germany about that sack. And in the United States people still talk about Wounded Knee. Certainly Native Americans do. The Chinese still talk about the Japanese sack of Nanjing and we still remember, if we are North American, what happened at My Lai.

And so war is a complex of emotions. Hard for us to understand. I think we keep making that effort to understand it. Can we really understand what it's like to be a soldier, what it's like to be in battle? We read the memoirs, we read what we can, we try to understand it. It's very difficult. And of course history will impose order on what was not orderly. History will talk about battles, they'll talk about battle plans, it'll talk about strategy. Generals will say this – I always meant it to turn out that way. But when you read accounts of battles – and I think these are probably closer to the truth – it's muddle and confusion and nobody quite knows what's going to happen. One of the best descriptions I think is Pierre wandering round the battlefield of Borodino in *War and Peace*. He doesn't know what's happening, nobody knows what's happening, but somehow at the end it looks like the Russians have won and the French have lost.

A few things I think stand out for me about the descriptions of battle and I think... I think I'm getting some sense of what it must be like. One thing that being in combat does is slow down our understanding of time and space, so often night becomes the safe time and day is the dangerous time because you can be seen by the enemy. Small obstacles become absolutely important. I mean you think of the Western Front again. If you go to some of the what are called ridges in Flanders or the North of France, they're not that big. They're probably about as high as this lecture theatre but they were absolutely crucial in the fighting. You could be killed getting them, and many thousands were, and you could be killed from them. I read a wonderful description by a Canadian artist who went to the battlefields of the North of France to sketch them in the summer of 1919 and he said he saw a shell hole which was filled with helmets and cans of food and guns and he said all now totally useless but a year ago it would have been absolutely crucial.

What also happens of course is the seasons change. Winter can be an enemy - it was to the Germans when they invaded Russia - but it was a friend to the Russians, and so how you see the seasons depends very much on how you see the war.

What also seems to happen in war – and again this comes out in a lot of the accounts – is somehow very small objects become very important. I don't know how many of you have read ...there's a wonderful novel by Tim O'Brien called *The Things They Carried* and he lists the things they carried: this is a platoon on patrol in Vietnam in a very dangerous time. And they carry everything. They carry weapons, they carry chewing gum, they carry needles and threads, they carry patches in case they get wounded. One of them carries letters from a woman he would like to think as a girlfriend and he knows that she really is not. These little things that they carry become very, very important. Important in war and then suddenly the war is over and they're no longer important.

What comes out again in the accounts is the fear of death. They're afraid of death, they're afraid of being mutilated. They're afraid of their own deaths and they're afraid of those who of course

they're close to. They deal with death often in a way which strikes us as callous: they simply accept it and they move on. It doesn't mean they don't feel it very deeply.

George MacDonald Fraser who wrote a memoir of his fighting in Burma and one of the small unit was killed and they all mourned him. Nobody said a word, they didn't talk about him, but that night they shared out his possessions. And Fraser said he was a bit shocked by this at first because why would they simply sit down and take his boots, take his knife. And he realised they were each taking something of his and it was their way of remembering him. They didn't talk about him, but they missed him.

And there are also the jokes. I think the jokes help them get through – the jokes about others, the people on the other side. What does come out, I think interestingly, is that they don't hate often the enemy. They simply see the enemy as someone they have to deal with; it's a job to be done. They sometimes feel sorry for the enemy because the enemy is going through, they know, something the same as them. It's often the people at home who hate the enemies more.

And I think perhaps one thing that comes out really strongly to me is how important the comradeship is and this seems to be the thing that motivates the military more than anything else when they're actually in battle – that you don't want to let down the people you know. You forget about the abstractions like king, country, religion, Christianity, Islam, whatever you thought you were fighting for, and what you're really fighting for is the people standing next to you, which is something the Ancient Greeks knew when they put their shields on their left hands and they overlapped the shield so that they were all protected. It was looking after each other that was extremely important.

Finally – and again it's a bit like the beauty that sometimes people see in destruction – there are those who remember the sheer exhilaration of being in combat. Again I'll just quote from George MacDonald Fraser who said "I felt continuous" And this was ... he's talking of a very short episode, he said it lasted for about 20 minutes, when they attacked a strongly held position strongly held by Japanese. He said, "It was a continuous nervous excitement shot through with occasional flashes of rage, terror, elation, relief and amazement." And when you talk to people who have been in combat, you will find that they say you never feel anything quite as intensely as you do in those moments. I suppose the closest we come in civilian life is to going off ski jumps, which I haven't done very often, or riding fast motorcycles, but it's the intensity of experience and very, very hard to communicate.

I'll go back to Svetlana Alexievich as I finish. And she talked to one Russian woman soldier and she said, "Did you like this book?" and the woman said, "No, no, not it. It doesn't come off. I start talking myself. That's also not it. Not as frightening and not as beautiful. Do you know how beautiful morning at war can be, before combat? You look and you know this may be your last. The earth is so beautiful and the air and the dear sun." And it's very difficult to get that over, especially for those (of us) who've never felt like it. And of course what happens is soldiers have to become civilians again if they survive the war. Perhaps they forget, perhaps they feel nostalgia for the comradeship and the simplicity in a curious way of war, and that is a paradox.

So what I want to talk about in my next lecture is that side of it: the civilians. How do we think about war? How do we support war? How do we try and discourage war? Because, like it or not, we are affected by war. Our worlds have been affected by war, our histories have been affected by war, our literature has been affected by war. But today, I've wanted to look at the warrior, these extraordinary people who have had experiences which perhaps some of us will never know but we keep on trying to find out what they're like. Thank you very much.

AUDIENCE APPLAUSE

Q&A REITH LECTURE 2: YORK

(32.50) ANITA ANAND: Margaret, an absolutely fascinating lecture. There was a time when it was kings and queens who sent warriors into battle, and then it became politicians, and you have that phrase, you know 'the donkeys leading the lions'.

MARGARET MACMILLAN: Yeah.

ANITA ANAND: Is there a difference between a leader or a politician who has served in the army and their attitude to war and one who has not?

MARGARET MACMILLAN: If I were being unkind, which I never am (*audience laughter*), I'd be tempted to say that those who haven't served in the army are often keener on war than those who have, who haven't served in the military.

I mean I think politicians who have been in the armed forces, like General Eisenhower for example or Winston Churchill, know the costs of war and I think they think twice about wanting to inflict those costs on anyone, and I think it's often people who haven't fought who say oh yeah let's go in and really you know attack full force.

I think people who've actually had experience of combat have a great respect for it and they understand war gets out of control. You know you start a war or you start an invasion, you don't know where it's going to go.

ANITA ANAND: Let's take a question over here.

CANDY DAUSSE: Candy Dausse and I work for a veterans' charity. Many of the soldiers of the First World War went on to be the leaders of the Second World War. To what extent do you think their experiences in the First World War shaped and influenced the Second World War?

MARGARET MACMILLAN: I think it's very interesting how we remember the First World War. I think we remember it today differently from people at the time. And in the 1920s a lot of the soldiers from the First World War really thought that they had fought in a war that was just. They thought that Britain had won a victory – I'm talking now about British soldiers – and they didn't look at the war in the same way as we look at it: as something that was futile and wasteful. So I think there's been a very interesting shift in how we look at it.

But I do think what the public and politicians drew from the First World War is that certainly in Britain, but not in all countries that participated, we can never again fight a war like that. And if you look at the Second World War, they were very, very careful with soldiers' lives; they really were not prepared to take those sort of losses again. In any case, the technology had changed so that civilians were as much in danger in the Second World War or sometimes even more than soldiers were or airmen were or naval people were.

ANITA ANAND: One of the things that maybe those of us who don't serve in the military would have drawn breath – because we don't hear it very often – is the excitement coming from someone like Julian Grenfell who says “I will never be this excited again unless I'm doing pig sticking” or whatever it was that he was ...

MARGARET MACMILLAN: Yeah.

ANITA ANAND: Let's talk to some real warriors about the ... you know what it's like. Don't all ... don't all look at the floor. Do you recognise that description of being really excited about going to war?

NICKYMEADE: I'm Nicki Meade. I've been in the army for 21 years, I'm a warrant officer, and I see the sort of pleasant side of it: by going on operation, you do feel like you're doing something for your country, which is I suppose the glorified side. But I do have a question in regards to what you talked about earlier about the warrior and the female warrior. We have now allowed females into close combat in the British Army and I'm wondering if you think that's going to now increase our female popularity in the services; that we'll continue that ... we continue to serve and that our percentages are greater for the forces?

MARGARET MACMILLAN: I find this very interesting because initially when women were let into the armed forces they tended to remain in support roles. I know the Israeli Army always made a great thing about having men and women in uniform together, but if you actually looked at what the men were doing and the women were doing, it was usually quite different. And so bringing women into combat - which I believe the Americans have done as well - I think is really interesting, and it's presumably it's like, it seems to me, like having women firefighters: you know it will change the perception of women. I mean the perception used to be that women are too weak – they can't do this, they can't go through the obstacle courses, they ... you know they ... - and this is clearly showing that it isn't. So I think it will change. And I think people like you will show younger women that there are careers that they can have and there are things they can do and they will not just end up doing particular jobs in the military; they will now have a range of jobs open to them.

ANITA ANAND: Can I just ask a supplementary of you because when I said to people that this is what we were talking about today somebody said, “Come off it, you know women are not as strong as men. They're not as tall as men, they're not as big and they're not as tough as men”. Are we ... Is it political correctness gone mad in the army was what the questioner was ...

NICKY MEADE: I think we hold our own in lots of ways. Physically we're not as strong as men to carry as much weight, but we certainly are proving that we're getting stronger and stronger, I think, as we change as a society in general. But the other thing for me is I'm a mother of two children – recently, a 7 month old, and I've got an 8 year old. Motherhood is one of the greatest pulls on female soldiers and our commitment to our job. We go on operations and switch off from being a mother and become a soldier - so uniform on, you forget what your other role is - and it's very difficult for women who join up to put those two aside. And from my perspective it's even ... You know I was in Iraq in 2003 and, having anthrax jabs, I was told "This could affect your fertility" and instantly... I didn't want to have a child at that point, but it certainly made me question what I was doing and what my job would then maybe take away my options from motherhood. So it does make us question what our future holds when we do go to war, like I did in 2003. So it's always for us a question of whether it's a career, it's a job or it's a commitment, a selfless commitment to our country.

ANITA ANAND: Can I hear from one of the other warriors before we come to you. I know you're very patiently waiting. Why do you fight? Why did you join up?

(38.24) JASON LAWER: I'm Jason Lawer. I'm an officer. I joined the army as a private soldier and worked my way through the ranks to become an officer. Why did I join up? To a degree, a sense of an adventure, I'd suggest - something different, different challenges that you can get offered in the military; the chance to see you know different parts of the world and see those parts of the world in real rawness, you know at grassroots level. It's not like going on a package holiday. You know when you're in Afghanistan and you're living amongst the locals, or some other country, you get to see that country firsthand, I think. Those were the sort of things that motivated me.

ANITA ANAND: But there's a difference between that and a lot of people who kind of like the same sort of idea and would go on a holiday or a tour because you might have to fight.

JASON LAWER: It's an interesting thing about sort of people fearing death and everything like that. I think whenever I've been away, you never think it's going to be you.

ANITA ANAND: *(to Margaret MacMillan)* That sort of reflects what you were saying as well, doesn't it?

MARGARET MACMILLAN: Yes. I mean I'm very interested in what you say because I've heard this from other people who ... who've been in combat and you don't think it's going to be ... And there's ... there's the story, isn't there, of the soldier in the First World War who carried a bullet in his pocket and they said, "Why do you always carry a bullet in your pocket?" and they said "Because I was told there was a bullet with my name on it and I've got it here." *(audience laughter)* But I mean I think you must have to, otherwise you couldn't do your job if you were always thinking about what might happen to you, I suppose.

JASON LAWER: Just ask a question. With the advancement in technology, do you think the traits of a warrior still hold true as we remove ourselves farther from what is the battlefield?

MARGARET MACMILLAN: Well I think war is moving in two directions. I think there are still going to be low level wars. I mean you think of the number of civil wars in the world at the moment that go on and on with no clear end in sight and I think the misery to civilians and those fighting is still going to be great. So I think we're going to continue to see war which actually involves people on the ground fighting each other, but between the great powers what we're more likely to see now I think - and certainly they're investing heavily in it - is high tech war: killer robots, drones, new types of warfare which will not require human beings in the same way, in the same capacities.

It's said that you know the next generation of fighter planes won't have pilots; they will not be needed any longer. But we'll still need I think the qualities that make good soldiers - the discipline, the commitment, the selflessness, the willingness to work with others - so that I can't see how a military can operate without those qualities whatever it is actually doing and whatever weapons it's actually using.

ANITA ANAND: And if you heard the last lecture, the first lecture, we heard from a pilot who said "If you think I'm not connected to what I'm doing, you're wrong". Let's take the question on the blue microphone.

JESSICA MEYER: Jessica Meyer, School History, University of Leeds. You've talked a lot about the motivation of individuals to fight and I think you've touched on my question a little bit, but I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit more about systems of conscription and compulsion that emerged after the French Revolution as part of the idea of the citizen soldier?

MARGARET MACMILLAN: No I'm glad you asked that actually because I think conscription is very interesting. I mean it was compulsion. I mean the French Revolution had the levee en masse - everyone is henceforth conscripted, all young men, and women will sit at home and make bandages and children will help out as they can and old people help out as they can.

What I think it did was make a very interesting link in society that governments that were going to conscript people realised they had to a) know more about who they were conscripting - they had to be able to define who was a citizen and who wasn't - and that's when in the 19th century you began to get actual definitions of citizenship and introduction of identity cards and beginnings of sort of bureaucratisation of what it is to be a citizen; but they also realised that if they were going to conscript people, they were going to have to treat them better because they weren't going to fight well, and one of the impetuses behind getting rid of serfdom in Prussia and then later on in Russia was to try and produce willing soldiers who would willingly be conscripted and who would fight for a limited or be in the armed forces for a limited amount of time. In the old days in Russia you were pressed into the army for 25 years and the reforms were meant to draw, bring Russia much closer to the rest of Europe.

Also feeling that if you want to conscript your people, you've got to offer them something in return. You've got to educate them better. Also they make better soldiers if they're better educated, or better pilots or whatever they're going to be, but you have to give them better healthcare. And so curiously, I think, the whole notion of conscription begins to elaborate and develop ideas of who is actually a citizen and identity, but also pushes certain types of social

change and certain types of social reforms. Now it may be done for the wrong reasons, but I do think there's a very interesting development in the 19th century.

ANITA ANAND: Sir..

MARK ROBINSON: My name's Mark Robinson. I'm a PhD student in international relations at Durham University, but I'm an ex-senior military officer, Airforce. I certainly am not an ex-warrior. I think to use the term 'warrior' is somehow misleading, certainly from my experience of people in the British Armed Forces.

ANITA ANAND: What would you prefer to be called?

MARK ROBINSON: Well I mean I was a professional Airforce officer. I'd been trained to do certain tasks. I took the Queen's shilling; I did what I was told while I was in the Airforce; I went on operations; I was very proud to serve alongside men and women who were also professionals. The term 'warrior' to me just ... it just doesn't sit right with my experience of being in the British Armed Forces.

MARGARET MACMILLAN: I know what you're talking about, but it does seem to me that, whether you're looking at Achilles or Hector or Napoleon or you, there is something you're doing that's different from the rest of us, and that is you are doing something which may require you to give your lives. And I think that's what I'm trying to get at. It's not just an ordinary job. There's something different about it. And I think that's why civilians like me do look at you and think you are in some way doing something that we can't comprehend and perhaps couldn't do.

MARK ROBINSON: No, I mean I agree with that. You know I was in operations, we were in support of operations where you were taking life, you know, but they were operations of professional Army, Navy and Airforce, operating under rules of engagement, arguably for Queen and country. It was a job. It was a special job and we were trained. And, as you say, you practiced all the time what you then took out in operations, so we didn't do anything different other than the fact we were now dropping live weapons and munitions from our training.

ANITA ANAND: But did you think about what was happening at the other end of that?

MARK ROBINSON: Well certainly, but again - I don't know what the serving officers and personnel down there think - you're trained to do a role. You're professional ...

ANITA ANAND: Right, yeah.

MARK ROBINSON: ... and that ... that was more or less how ... how I saw it.

ANITA ANAND: Very grateful. Thank you very much. Let's take a question here.

ISLA McCLELLAN: My name's Isla McClellan and I'm a history student at GCSE, and I've very strong opinions that women are just as strong as men and I wondered what your opinion was on how women have impacted and changed war and how they will in the future?

MARGARET MACMILLAN: Well we've impacted in a variety of ways and yes I agree with you. And strength isn't everything, is it? Endurance matters, agility matters, all sorts of things matter. But I think the way women have been involved in war up to the present has tended to be either as those supporting it - women have often encouraged men to go off and fight; women have sometimes been the excuse for why ... why people fight: men have said we must fight to defend our women from the enemy; women have sometimes opposed war - I mean a number of notable women have been pacifists and opposing war; and women have increasingly in the modern world substituted for men who have gone off to war in the First World War and there's been a lot of attention paid to that. A lot of the jobs that men had been doing had to be filled by women and the same t... was true in the Second World War.

So I think you know we've had an involvement - like the whole of society, we've been involved in war, we've been impacted by war and we've participated in different ways in war - but now, as the comment down here was pointing out, women are now actually doing more of the fighting. And that really will be a change, I think. It will bring about changes in societal attitudes much as women becoming involved in politics has helped to bring about changes. But these changes don't always happen quickly and you may have noticed sometimes there's a little bit of resistance to them.

ANITA ANAND: Let's take a question from up here.

PAULINE TATE: Hello, my name's Pauline Tate. I live in Lincoln and I'm retired and my question follows on quite nicely from the question that's just been asked. It's been mentioned several times that we now have female warriors right in the frontline in all of the armed forces in the UK. Do you think the qualities that make an effective male warrior are the same qualities that an effective female warrior brings to the game or are they actually different?

ANITA ANAND: Thank you.

MARGARET MACMILLAN: That was such a good question. This is not weaseling out, but it's probably too soon to tell. And again it gets back to a deeper and a still unresolved argument about whether men and women really are different in the ways they approach things. You know do they have different emotional intelligence? Do they have different ways of thinking? Can men concentrate on one thing while women can deal with a number of things at once? I don't know and I think ... as far as I know, the jury is still out on this. We don't know whether it's societal, cultural or biological or a mixture of all three.

But what I would *think* is that what you need if women are going to be in the armed forces, as they are, but if they're going to be in combat roles, they're going to have to be subject to the same discipline and the same expectations as men, otherwise it's just not going to work. That doesn't mean that women may not fill particular roles in the military better. I mean there was one study that was done at Fort Bragg I think in the United States, which said women were much better at night scouting - they were capable of standing still for much longer and they could be very sneaky (*audience laughter*) - whereas men would sort of go blundering through or cough or get bored. And I don't know if this is true, but you know there may be certain types of roles that

women are more fitted for, but I think it would be very difficult to argue that until we get much more evidence.

ANITA ANAND: Question over here.

TONI BERRY: Major Toni Berry, I'm a current serving officer in the British Army. There's two parts to the ... the sort of question/statement. Is the first tour that I did of Iraq, I was put in a situation serving with an infantry battalion where I may have had to pull the trigger and take a life and, because of all the training I'd had and all the discipline and my team around me who I'd worked with, I absolutely had no hesitation that if called upon at that point I would have done it because of what we were out there trying to do. The second part is sort of related to the young lady studying history for GCSE. My last tour of Afghanistan, I had the absolute privilege of going out there to train the female ANA officers, which was a brand new concept for females serving in the Afghan National Army, and they were horrendously proud to try and make change in their own country and try and advance their country despite what they were up against in that country and I think that for females in war is a absolutely huge leap forward.

MARGARET MACMILLAN: Yeah, thank you. I mean I think.. I'm very interested in what you say about the discipline because I don't see how... In a way I suppose the analogy is like people who train for a sport or train for dancers – you ... automatic memory takes over and you simply learn to do it – and you can't have an army in which people or armed forces in which people say wait a minute, I'm not sure I really feel like doing that today. But I worry about the young women in Afghanistan because given the current political situation.. I mean there was a story which you must have seen as well about the first Afghan woman pilot in the Afghan Airforce who I think is leaving the country because she's been so badly treated and the backlash from the sort of male dominated, it's still a very male dominated society and the backlash has been so appalling and she's been accused of being, you know, women who do this must be immoral. I think it is very, very hard always on women who are path breakers because they will get called all sorts of things.

There are a number of cases of this in history. I mean even these Russian women, these Soviet women who went off to fight for their country, you know sometimes they were 15 and 16 years old, you know, and they went through the most ...you can imagine the conditions fighting against the Germans on the Eastern Front. It was dreadful. And some of them when they came back to their towns and villages were told, often by other women who hadn't gone to war, "Oh you just went off to the front because you wanted to meet men". You know... the ways in which women can be accused of being unnatural or something wrong with them if they get involved. And I think it just ... it will change, but sometimes, as I said, change does take rather long.

NICK MORGAN: My name's Nick Morgan. You referred earlier that the warrior is somehow different from the rest of us in a sense, but obviously at the times of mass participation ... my father was a pilot for the RAF during the Second World War and was a pacifist by inclination, but felt it was a time of crisis in a sense. He had very strong views that the regular soldiers as they start to take back over at the end of the war, he felt very uncomfortable with. So I just wonder if the motivations are really quite different between different sets of people in terms of becoming a soldier?

MARGARET MACMILLAN: Yeah, I think you're absolutely right. I mean I think the people like my friend of German origin who grew up in a family where it was expected the young men would become soldiers, I mean rather like the Anglo Irish you know landed gentry who ... a lot of whom became army officers, it was just expected of them and I do think you get different cultures. And one of the things that was a challenge I think for governments in the modern age was to take civilians who had no intention of becoming part of the military and turn them into the military, and I think that's one of the reasons why armies developed and later on the other branches developed uniforms and they put the soldiers in barracks – because it isolated them from society. And that's why the training period was seen as so important - you know that ... I read one memoir the other day who said you know 'I was part of Kitchener's first 100,000. Why were we training for three months? We all grumbled, we all complained, but at the end of three months we were different.' And so what governments have had to learn is how to deal with civilians who may not have the slightest intention of becoming part of the military and how to turn them into the military. The other side of that of course is what you do with people who've been in the military and how you help them readjust to civilian society, and some people adjust easily but it's not always easy as we know.

ANITA ANAND: We've got time maybe for two short questions. So let's go over here, first of all.

ALICE SOUTHERN I'm Alice Southern, I'm the Head of History at Sharples School in Bolton. You mentioned at the beginning about the impact that warriors had on medicine, so development of penicillin. I was wondering what other changes in society you think war has helped to advance or sped up, so like the votes for women, for example?

MARGARET MACMILLAN: Well you mentioned a very good one: votes for women. I mean even before the First World War had ended women aged 30 and over in Britain were given the vote and it was very much a result of their participation in the war effort. But certainly in science and technology. Now some of these things might have happened anyway, but war tends to short circuit things. You know things that are too expensive in peacetime, like the production of penicillin on a large scale - it was discovered in 1928, wasn't fully developed until after 1939 - it suddenly becomes possible. Development of the jet engine happens as a result of the Second World War. Nuclear power, well.. nuclear bombs also happens as a result of the Second World War. So war does bring technological change. It also brings social change. It brings changes to the position of women. It ushered in in this country the welfare state. It was seen as absolutely crucial that the British public, which had suffered and contributed so much to the war effort in the Second World War, should have a better life after the war. And so war can - paradoxically again, we wouldn't choose to do it this way – bring benefits to society.

ANITA ANAND: And the last question.

ROSIE: I'm Rosie. I've just finished my history degree at the University of Leeds. I was just wondering if you could comment a bit on the modern like marketing, for want of a better word, campaign to like get people to kind of sign up to war and kind of the class race and like gender dynamics of those like ... specifically like the television adverts because sometimes you watch

them and you feel like there's a certain target market, and is there a problem with that or is it just adhering to what we think we should be pitching to and the sorts of people that do have these ideal qualities or is it just about like privilege or a lack thereof?

ANITA ANAND: Yeah and I don't know whether Margaret you're aware, but there was a great deal of controversy over the most recent set of recruitment adverts saying that they were a bit too touchy-feely and didn't actually mention that you might have to fight anybody. *(audience laughter)*

MARGARET MACMILLAN: No, I haven't seen them – perhaps because I'm not of the age that is thinking about a particular career in the military. *(audience laughter)* But I do remember this about 20 years ago. I mean there was a similar campaign which showed tropical islands and people scuba diving and sitting and drinking drinks with little umbrellas in them. Just at the end we realised it was a recruiting thing for the British Armed Forces and you thought you know they might mention that there's another side.

Well I think there's a danger in this. I mean there was a famous case, which we were all transfixed by in Canada, of an American deserter who came up during the Iraq invasion/occupation to Canada, and when he was asked why he was deserting and wanted asylum in Canada, he said "Well when I joined the US military, I didn't think I'd have to fight." *(audience laughter)* You know I do think the military should be had for misleading advertising.

ANITA ANAND: Unfortunately that is all that we have time for. I know there are so many more questions that people wanted to ask.

The next time you're going to hear from Margaret, we are going to be in Beirut and Margaret's going to be looking at the impact of war on civilians, on noncombatants. If you absolutely can't wait till then for more Reith goodies, you can come to the Radio 4 website at any time and go to the Reith pages because we have films, archive, pictures, a whole ... lots and lots of interesting things.

But thank you so much to such an interesting and such an engaged audience here at the Ron Cooke Hub at the University of York and please join with me in thanking our Reith lecturer: Professor Margaret MacMillan.

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