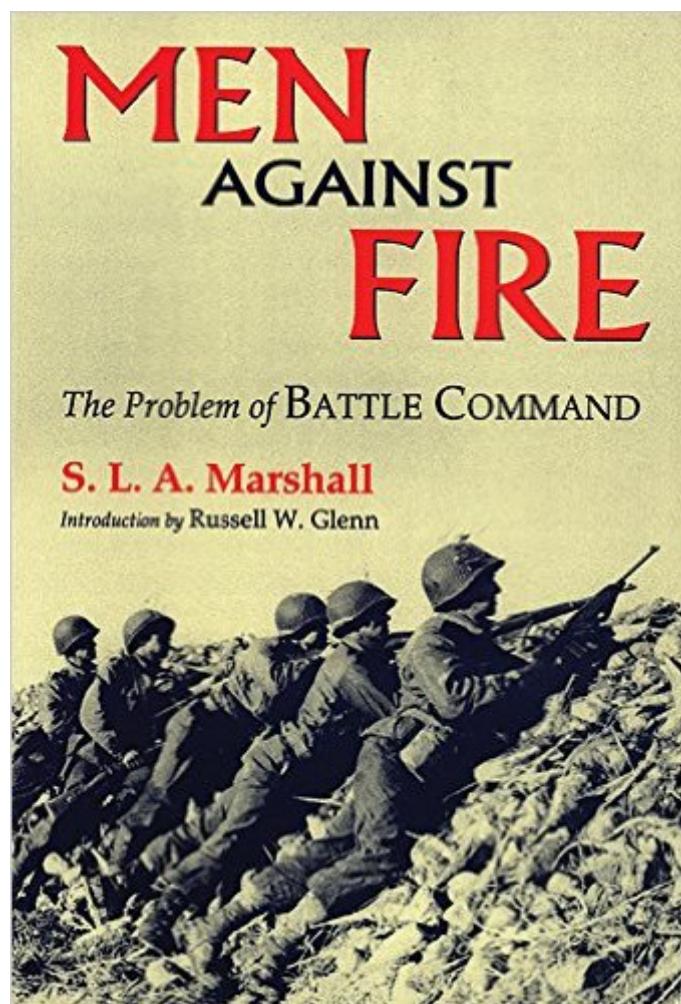


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# Men Against Fire: The Problem Of Battle Command



## **Synopsis**

S.L.A. "Slam" Marshall was a veteran of World War I and a combat historian during World War II. He startled the military and civilian world in 1947 by announcing that, in an average infantry company, no more than one in four soldiers actually fired their weapons while in contact with the enemy. His contention was based on interviews he conducted immediately after combat in both the European and Pacific theaters of World War II. To remedy the gunfire imbalance he proposed changes to infantry training designed to ensure that American soldiers in future wars brought more fire upon the enemy. His studies during the Korean War showed that the ratio of fire and more than doubled since World War II.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

First published in 1947, S.L.A. Marshall's "Men Against Fire" argues that in spite of long-range nuclear weapons, the next war of nations will not be a push-button war. Rather, individuals engaging each other on the battlefield will again provide the mainstay of a total war even more destructive than World War II. Obviously, Marshall did not foresee the advent of limited wars in Korea and Vietnam just around the corner. Nevertheless, Marshall poses some thought provoking questions of Americans in combat. In a highly controversial claim based on questionable research, Marshall concludes that in World War II, only one-in-four soldiers fired his rifle in combat. Marshall claims to have "personally" conducted mass interviews with approximately 400 infantry companies in the Central Pacific and European Theaters immediately following important battles (If you are doing the Arithmetic, approx. 200 men per company x 400 companies, you're getting the idea!). Not

one platoon, company, or battalion commander, argues Marshall, was aware that only twenty-five percent of soldiers engaged in combat fired their weapons. As a result of his findings, Marshall then campaigned for the need of new training methods for infantry soldiers. He stressed, this individual training should be based on long-term psychological camaraderie, not the quick turnover replacement system that was utilized during World War II. Marshall's un-refuted claims (until recently) have influenced a generation of military historians including T.R. Fehrenbach and Russell F. Weigley. Marshall is quick to point out that the alleged seventy-five percent of those who did not shoot were not shirkers or meanderers. These men were on the front line with their assigned units and often performed other essential tasks relating to combat duty.

During World War II, S.L.A. Marshall was busily engaged in recording the history of the war and had developed a method of capturing data from soldiers within a short time of the conclusion of various battles. As he was doing this, he started realizing that there was a problem with our infantry and the way they were fighting the war. He pulled his thoughts together into this book and excerpts of it were also published as a series of essays that appeared in the "Infantry Journal" in 1947. The problem that he identified was that U.S. Infantry forces were not fighting as coherently as they should have been and consequently were either not winning battles fast enough, or were defeated unnecessarily. While he called the book "Men Against Fire" the much better title for it is the subtitle of "the Problem of Battle Command." This book is really a call for action on how to train American infantrymen to fight the battle. The book starts out with Marshall's thoughts on why Infantry are the important elements of the Army at this time and likely to be so in the future as well. To put this in context, these words were written in the 1946 and 1947 when many military theorists were supposing that the Nuclear age had ushered in an era where Armies are no longer needed as sending over some bombers or missiles armed with nuclear warheads will finish things off. It is quite interesting to read his thoughts in 2012 as the U.S. is still engaged in Afghanistan and the U.S. Army is just completing a transition from a heavy mechanized force to one that is heavily Infantry-based! What is particularly interesting is that his arguments still resonate and were proven correct in many of the conflicts that took place in the intervening 65 years!

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