



SMALL WARS

JOURNAL

What Do Video Games Say About the American Experience with War?

By [*Peter J. Munson*](#)

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In an [essay at *The Atlantic*](#), Michael Vlahos, a Naval War College professor, argues that the state-waged long war has brought a hint of defeat and self-destruction to popular culture - particularly Modern Warfare 3. Many may roll their eyes at the linkage, but the essay is smart, short, and if nothing else, brings some pretty unfamiliar references (Zouave regiments, Prussian pickelhaube, a late Roman adoption of Gothic trousers) to *The Atlantic's* entertainment page. I highly recommend clicking through to his reference on "[The Culture of Defeat](#)." An excerpt from Vlahos' essay follows. [Read it all here](#).

Like German *Stoßtruppen* remade in fire, our warrior-heroes find identity and realization in the firefight. Battle itself is meaning; battle is pure; battle becomes the only reality—and as it was for Junger, compared to the venality and corruption and aimlessness of modern life, its destruction is cleansing.

MW3 reveals how this long war reaches back to seize us in ways we can only sense. ...

[Young gamers] are connecting at the gut level. Yet it is there that allegiances are made. They do not want to be Muslim *Ghazi*, but they do want to be American *Ghazi*. They want to fight like *Ghazi* and if necessary, die like *Ghazi*. In their deepest dreams, think Beowulf. Think berserker.

These dreams mean something. Something the Washington political realm might yet wish to see before it is too late. This world might wish to reflect on how a war fought solely by and for government and its military has placed our larger national identity at risk. In the original *Call of Duty*, players relived an American way of war now forgotten: where people and their government fought as one for sacred goals like freedom and democracy. *MW3* shows us what the U.S. government's long war has brought: instead of straight-up defeat, a more corrosive loss of self.

About the Author



Peter J. Munson

Peter J. Munson is a Marine officer, author, and Middle East specialist. He is the author of *War, Welfare, and Democracy: Rethinking America's Quest for the End of History* (Potomac, 2013) and *Iraq in Transition: The Legacy of Dictatorship and the Prospects for Democracy* (Potomac, 2009) and . A frequent contributor to multiple journals and blogs, including **his own**, he was also the Editor of the Small Wars Journal from January 2012 to June 2013. You can follow his Twitter feed **@peterjmunson** and find his LinkedIn profile **here**. He is leaving the Marine Corps in summer 2013.

Available online at : <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/what-do-video-games-say-about-the-american-experience-with-war>

Links:

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- {3} <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2003/nov/29/history.highereducation1>
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