



Aftermath: The Remnants of War: From Landmines to Chemical Warfare--The Devastating Effects of Modern Combat

By Donovan Webster

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In riveting and revelatory detail, **Aftermath** documents the ways in which wars have transformed the terrain of the battlefield into landscapes of memory and enduring terror: in France, where millions of acres of farmland are cordoned off to all but a corps of demolition experts responsible for the undetonated bombs and mines of World War I that are now rising up in fields, gardens, and backyards; in a sixty-square-mile area outside Stalingrad that was a cauldron of destruction in 1941 and is today an endless field of bones; in the Nevada deserts, where America waged a hidden nuclear war against itself in the 1950's, the results of which are only now becoming apparent; in Vietnam, where a nation's effort to remove the physical detritus of war has created psychological and genetic devastation; in Kuwait, where terrifyingly sophisticated warfare was followed by the Sisyphean task of making an uninhabitable desert capable of sustaining life.

Aftermath excavates our century's darkest history, revealing that the destruction of the past remains deeply, inextricably embedded in the present.

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- Sales Rank: #434528 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Vintage
- Published on: 1998-05-12
- Released on: 1998-05-12
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.00" h x .60" w x 5.20" l, .90 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 288 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Donovan Webster, a former editor at *Outside* magazine, has written an eyewitness account of the impossible tasks involved with removing armaments that continue to kill after war has ceased. Between 110 and 120 million land mines are planted in the soil of more than 64 countries. The exponential numbers point to the staggering difficulties *Aftermath* details: each year more than 5 million new land mines are laid, and only 100,000 are cleared; a new mine costs \$3, but removing one costs between \$200 and \$1,000. In Angola, there are more than 15 million mines, two for every citizen. Webster traces the deadly legacy from the French battlefields of World War I to Vietnam and the Persian Gulf, describing the work of sappers in a compelling story that brings to light the horrifying legacy of warfare.

From Publishers Weekly

War scars land as well as people. That is the truth that Webster, a former senior editor of *Outside* magazine, explores in his evocative first book, expanded from an article he wrote for the *Smithsonian* magazine. Webster proceeds by examining the physical legacies of 20th-century conflict. In France, the legacy consists of unexploded shells and bombs?12 million of them at Verdun alone. At Stalingrad, there are the bones of 300,000 German dead. In Nevada, Webster surveys the results of a decade of open-air nuclear testing, and of disposal sites poisoned for the next 12,000 years by stored nuclear waste. Vietnam, devastated by high explosive and chemical defoliants, continues to pay war's price in mutilated adults and malformed children. The author finds that the deserts of Kuwait are sown with seven million land mines left behind by the armies of Desert Storm and that, in Utah, the U.S. seeks to destroy chemical agents no less toxic for being obsolete. Webster tours these sites himself, personalizing his narrative. He describes their origins and introduces the people who seek to mitigate their effects. More than many academic analyses, this finely written work provides a compelling story of what humanity is willing to do to its world?and itself?in the name of national interest.

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From Library Journal

In 1991, 36 French farmers died when their machinery hit unexploded shells left over from wars going back to the Franco-Prussian War of 1870. Journalist Webster's fascinating book explores a subject that is only now being considered: What happens to all the bombs, mines, and other killing materials after the treaties have been signed and the war has stopped? In chapters covering France, Russia (around Volgograd, formerly Stalingrad), Vietnam, Kuwait, the atomic test sites in Nevada, and the stockpiles of chemical weapons stored in the salt flats of Utah, Webster presents the historical background and then interviews the people who seek to live amid these silent but still very much alive artifacts from war. His work is intriguing yet sobering and smoothly written. The reader comes to the chilling conclusion, especially with our nuclear weapons gathering dust in their silos, that radioactivity lasts a very long time and that wars, rumors of wars, and the detritus of wars are with us always. Recommended for all collections.?Edward Goedeken, Iowa State Univ. Lib., Ames

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

William Hoover:

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Harold McDonough:

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