



# No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War 1

*Eric J. Leed*

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## **No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War 1** Eric J. Leed

Based on the firsthand accounts of German, French, British, and American front-line soldiers, No Man's Land examines how the first modern, industrialized war transformed the character of the men who participated in it. Ancient myths about war eroded in the trenches, where the relentless monotony and impotence of the soldier's life was interrupted only by unpredictable moments of annihilation. Professor Leed looks at how the traumatic experience of combat itself and the wholesale shattering of the conventions and ethical codes of normal social life turned ordinary civilians into 'liminal men', men living beyond the limits of the accepted and the expected. He uses the concept of liminality to illuminate the central features of the war experience: the separation from 'home': the experience of pollution, death, comradeship, and 'the uncanny': and the ambivalence of returning veterans about civilian society. In a final chapter Professor Leed assesses the long-term political impact of the front experience. He finds that the end of hostilities did not mean the end of the war experience as much as the beginning of a process by which that experience was framed, institutionalized, celebrated and relived in political action as well as in fiction.

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