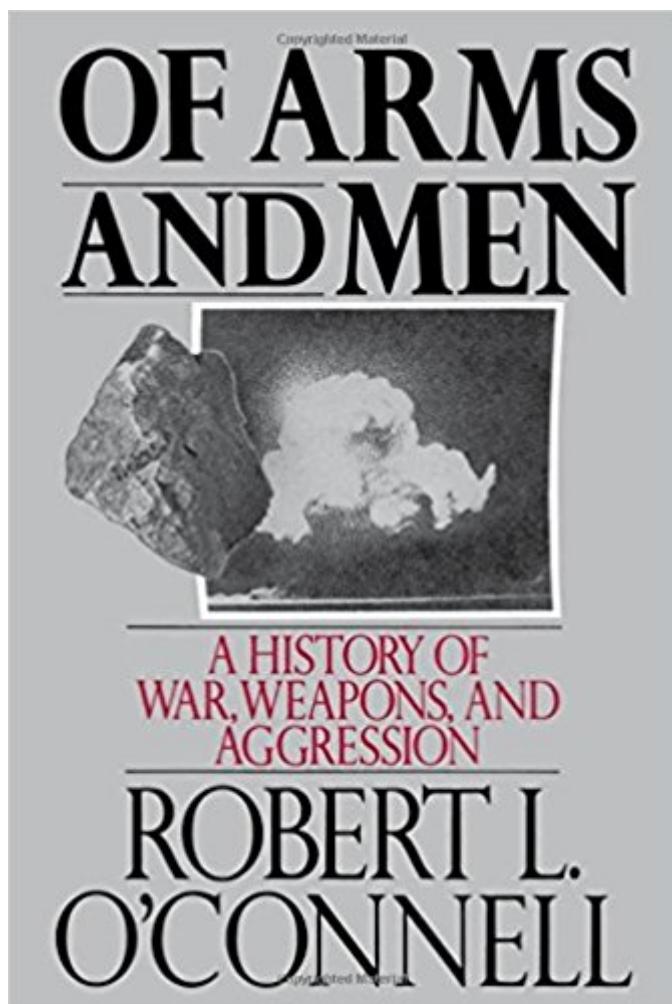


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# Of Arms And Men: A History Of War, Weapons, And Aggression



## Synopsis

The appearance of the crossbow on the European battle field in A.D. 1100 as the weapon of choice for shooting down knights threatened the status quo of medieval chivalric fighting techniques. By 1139 the Church had intervened, outlawing the use of the crossbow among Christians. With this edict, arms control was born. As Robert L. O'Connell reveals in this vividly written history of weapons in Western culture, that first attempt at an arms control measure characterizes the complex and often paradoxical relationship between men and arms throughout the centuries. In a sweeping narrative that ranges from prehistoric times to the nuclear age, O'Connell demonstrates how social and economic conditions determine the types of weapons and the tactics used in warfare and how, in turn, innovations in weapons technology often undercut social values. He describes, for instance, how the invention of the gun required a redefinition of courage from aggressive ferocity to calmness under fire; and how the machine gun in World War I so overthrew traditional notions of combat that Lord Kitchener exclaimed, "This isn't war!" The technology unleashed during the Great War radically altered our perceptions of ourselves, as these new weapons made human qualities almost irrelevant in combat. With the invention of the atomic bomb, humanity itself became subservient to the weapons it had produced. *Of Arms and Men* brilliantly integrates the evolution of politics, weapons, strategy, and tactics into a coherent narrative, one spiced with striking portraits of men in combat and penetrating insights into why men go to war.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

O'Connell traces the relationship between man and armaments up to the present nuclear standoff, paying particular attention to the influence of weapons on military, political and social systems. By the mid-16th century, according to the author, virtually every possibility of chemical-energy warfare had at least been thought of, although "it would require a century-and-a-half cycle of war and a mountain of maimed flesh to reveal fully, in its grim magnificence, what they had truly wrought." Analyzing the effect on Western man's view of himself brought about by the First World War (with its chilling revelation that military power had become uncontrollable), he makes the startling assertion that World War II, having arisen directly from that conflict, "has little independent meaning." With the introduction of wholesale warfare against noncombatants, O'Connell, an analyst at the U.S. Army Intelligence Agency, notes, the present century bears witness to "one more strand in the cord that could strangle war as a viable instrument of policy and establish the paradoxical logic of deterrence as the central reference point in international affairs." Copyright 1988 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"THIS BOOK WILL read with pleasure by specialists and military history buffs alike....No one can accuse O'Connell of ever boring his reader....O'Connell's comments are always stimulating....a most interesting and thoughtful book."--L.H. Gann, *The International History Review*"O'Connell, a man with impressive credentials as a defense analyst, disarmament negotiator, and historian, has produced a challenging, interdisciplinary study of the historical relationship between culture, weapons technology, and warfare."--Booklist"Full of fresh and sometimes provocative interpretations, couched in a stimulating writing style which laypersons as well as scholars will appreciate."--Library Journal"Brilliant general history, focusing on man as a tool-making social predator. Particularly good on intelligence, communications, and decision-making in the electronic and nuclear age."--Theodore Ropp, *Duke University*"O'Connell's judicious study of the evolution of arms from sticks and stones to death-dealing rifles, machine guns, and cannons, and, finally, to nuclear weapons demonstrates that weaponry, however destructive, has neither prevented wars nor encouraged restraint in its employment."--Norman A. Graebner, *University of Virginia*"Stimulating....A lucid and well-written account of how weapons and warfare have changed over the millennia."--Richard Eder, *Los Angeles Times Book Review*"[A] welcome addition...The particular insight which distinguishes Mr. O'Connell's work from others is his examination of human belligerence from a perspective normally reserved for anthropologists and biologists."--Naval War College Review"Most readable. Adaptable to either a history of a Western culture class."--R.T. Paytan, *West Washington University*

One of the best books on the history and psychology of warfare and arms I have read, and I have done a bit of research on the subject. Goes from prehistoric times to modern warfare explaining the evolution of weapons and the attitudes behind their development and use.

High priced required reading

Dense and if you can plow thru you're at MA possibly Phd level here.

great value

The development of weapons has preceded the development of towns, kingdoms, and civilization! Very readable and very insightful.. One of the best and important books to read and to digest

Very readable, very interesting book. I liked that the author had theories but made the reader aware of opposing theories and the evidence for them. As I read this I enjoyed comparing his history of arms and statements about their effectiveness with the ideas assumed by authors of historical fiction I had enjoyed.

This book was published in 1989, during the final phases of the Cold War. In it, author Robert L. O'Connell looks at the history of Western man's relationship to weapons. As the author goes through the military history of the West, from ancient Sumer to the invention of the nuclear weapon, he shows that warfare has swung like a pendulum between two poles. At one end is the Homeric view of war, wherein it is cloaked in rules and traditions which moderate and "humanize" it. At the other end is the interspecific hunt view of war, wherein rules are jettisoned and brutality reaches extremes. In the author's view, beginning with the American Civil War and becoming obvious with World War I, the advance of military technology has made weaponry so lethal that the idea of a moderate war has become an oxymoron. Also, with the advent of nuclear weapons, war has entered a final stage where it only can be a ruthless genocide of noncombatants.

"We live on the edge of destruction. But, reading this book some sixteen years after its initial publication, I can't help but find that the author's terminal diagnosis for war was premature. Nuclear weapons have

receded into the background as weapons of war, while new forms of warfare have arisen in the form of transnational terrorism employing weapons designed to cause mass casualties. Plus, at least for national players on the world stage, moderation, in the form of rules of engagement, weapons use and prisoner treatment is now demanded by worldwide public opinion. So, am I saying that this is a worthless, out-of-date book? In fact, I am not! Up until the final chapter, this is a fascinating and quite enlightening book. Plus, I must say that I found it to be quite a stimulating read. So, if you want to read a book that is a fascinatingly different look at military history, then this book is for you. I highly recommend it!

The first 20 or so pages did not rivet me, so the book sat on the shelf for years. However this Memorial Day I picked it up again, and the depth-of-analysis beginning on page 61 I found very cool. A bow is not a bow ! Of course I've never fired anything but a fiberglass techno-marvel - what was the draw-weight of an English Longbow, why did it have to be long, what was the effective range ? The author has a nice feel for details-that-matter, and there is no "padded" feel - at least after page 61, the author shows good taste in concisely providing not-commonly-known insights, sticking those footnotes-I'll-never-follow-up-on after page 310 so they don't clutter the main text. The world has changed since 1990, but you knew that - these principles-from-ancient-times, maybe you DIDN'T !

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