

Excerpt from *The Last and Greatest Battle: Finding the Will, Commitment, and Strategy to End Military Suicides* by John Bateson

At the conclusion of World War II, U.S. Army Brigadier General S. L. A. Marshall interviewed thousands of soldiers and learned a surprising fact: Only 15 to 20 percent fired their weapons in combat. Even when they had the chance, most soldiers didn't fire, or if they did fire they deliberately aimed high or to the side.

"The average and normal healthy individual," Marshall determined, "has such an inner and usually unrealized resistance toward killing a fellow man that he will not of his own volition take life if it is possible to turn away from that responsibility. . . . At the vital point, he becomes a conscientious objector."⁵⁵

This reluctance to shoot a fellow human being was even more surprising since the Japanese, in particular, were demonized by military brass and U.S. propaganda as being a lower form of life, on the order of animals rather than people (this thinking, in part, contributed to the mass internment of Japanese American civilians during the war). Even though soldiers knew that enemy bullets were responsible for the deaths of their comrades, 80 to 85 percent of U.S. troops resisted pulling the trigger.

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Question: Explain why do you think soldiers resisted “pulling the trigger” during the various battles they took part in? What does the *Christmas Truce* tell us about human nature?

