Battle Exhortation: The Rhetoric of Combat Leadership, by Keith Yellin, University of South Carolina Press, 2011, 191 pp.

In the rhetorical field, there's an exigency for exhortation in warfare. Keith Yellin's *Battle Exhortation: The Rhetoric of Combat Leadership* provides a valuable and necessary entry to fill this rhetorical vacancy. This void is the center of the introduction, where Yellin lists myriad reasons for a lack of study. From insufficient awareness to deficient military interest, there's little motivation to examine symbolic encouragement between comrades. A former Marine Corps officer and PhD communication student at Iowa, Yellin finds the shortage of battle exhortation study elusive, but important. His aim is clear, writing "This book integrates rhetoric and combat in pursuit of two primary objectives: to understand battle exhortation (an intellectual goal) and to offer insight for improving it (a practical, especially military goal)" (4). Throughout the book, he skillfully weaves a perusal of battle exhortation and downward encouragement.

In his first chapter, Bracing for Combat, Yellin cites numerous military commanders and their successes. This establishes the presence, need for, and literary summarization of battle exhortation. After indicating the importance of such elements, the chapter pivots to a defining exemplar: Martinea in 418 B.C.E. The allied force, composed of Argives, Athenians, and Mantineans, face the Spartans. Each group receives some form of battle exhortation. Allied commanders address their men while the Spartans "are reassured by one another's voices, their pipes, and almost certainly by the sound of their collective, measured step. Thus the source of battle exhortation is neither limited to commanders or the spoken word" (25). From this, Yellin makes the distinction that battle exhortation has auditory dimensions. Importantly, he concludes sound can nullify fearful noise by mitigating apprehension. Finally, Yellin arrives to the matter of direction. Battle exhortation can travel downward (commander to troop), upward (troop to commander), laterally (troop to troop), interactively (commander to troop, then troop to commander), or as a starburst (all at once) (36-42). For the remainder of the book, Yellin focuses on downward battle exhortation, the most easily recognized version of battle exhortation (36). To finish the chapter, he provides a definition of battle exhortation, "Battle exhortation is symbolic action, especially audible, most traditionally verbal, designed to brace troops for the psychological demands of combat" (43).

Although battle exhortation isn't a topic of major study, it's prominent within our culture. Chapter two, Indoctrination, shifts to how we are conditioned to expect and recognize battle exhortation and its characteristics. Yellin brings literary and cinematic examples to the forefront, citing Plutarch's Spartan mother, *Henry V*, *Patton*, and *Stripes*. Plutarch's Spartan mother asked her son to live up to the reputation of his brother, to have each Spartan hoplite match one another, and for them to fight until death (50-53). *Henry V*, one of Shakespeare's most famous plays, is about fighting for brothers and reputation. In the play, Henry V moves audiences with the final eight lines of the Agincourt address. With this, Yellin conveys that Shakespeare teaches to fight for fraternal love rather than reputation. Alternatively, *Patton* ignores the subtlety of the first two examples. The general's opening speech in the film is blunt, just like the real man. True to Patton, the film commits to his own inspirational, brash ethos. As Yellin puts it: "a more polite idiom rings hollow … only determined 'sons of bitches' driven by a master SOB are likely to prevail" (69). In his last example of the chapter, Yellin moves to *Stripes*. The subject of the parody isn't just the armed forces, but battle exhortation. Murray's character acts as commander, enacting battle exhortation throughout the movie. From the mutt speech to the marching scene, the film is littered with the practice (73, 76). In his conclusion, he abridges each element of the

chapter. In *Henry V* and Plutarch's Spartan mother, fraternity and reputation are appreciated. *Patton* allows audiences to appreciate the central role of the commander. Parodies like *Stripes* fulfill the realization that battle exhortation is embedded into our socialization (77).

In the third chapter, Yellin investigates tensions between commanders and troops in battle exhortation. Each tension correlates to a historical example. Firstly, he mentions the tension of reputation management. Yellin says, "for reputation's sake, troops want to be asked to do much, but not too much" (79). This balance was poorly struck by George Washington in the American Revolution. In impersonalized approach, he asked for unrealistic, demanding behavior of his men. Secondly, there's managing the tension of distance. Delving into presence, Yellin suggests there's a balance to be struck between policing and absence. Stonewall Jackson fell victim to an abundance of identification, overly intervening in immediate circumstance (91-92). Major General John Pope was distant from his forces in the Civil War, eliminating any inspirational capabilities. Teddy Roosevelt is exemplary in this tension; he knew when to intervene and when to reel back. Thirdly, there's tension in violence. The 54th Massachusetts is explored here. Despite their vigor and bloodlust as an all-black regiment in the Civil War, they maintained structured violence. Finally, there is the tension of love. Regarding Caesar and his Tenth Legion, Yellin says, "Caesar strikes a balance that is both sternly mission-oriented and in the end kindhearted. Neither abused nor pampered, the men love him" (108).

Tensions are influenced by the commander and inherent to the position. However, there's still the environment and audience's effect on discourse. That's the topic of the fourth chapter, Evolutions. It starts with Eisenhower. The general energized his audience at D-Day, like a millennium of leaders preparing for their battles, despite modernization. General Matthew Ridgway learned the importance of battle exhortation due to the growing question of "why are we here" (115, 119). Yellin, after progressing through World War II and Korea, takes us to Vietnam. This was a poor backdrop for battle exhortation. This is partly due to the environment, partly due to the lesser exhortative abilities of General William Westmoreland (120). Comparing General Schwarzkopf's address with Frank's in two separate Iraq wars, his is better distributed, polished, and considers an audience of a different world (135). In continuation with audience, each combat arm is addressed differently. Yellin writes, "the audience and its brand of combat seem to be the driving influences on the discourse rather than the individual commanders" (142). The ground troops receive the most combative exhortation, the pilots the most cautious, and the sailors the most informative. The battlefield commander must be a ready speaker but be aware of the environment and audience (143).

Keith Yellin's *Battle Exhortation: The Rhetoric of Combat Leadership* draws attention to an area of rhetorical discourse that severely needed it. Battle exhortation is far too important a topic to be ignored. In his conclusion, he calls for continued proliferation in study of battle exhortation. Whether it is focused on the nonmilitary application of battle exhortation, good and evil uses of the skill, global battle exhortation, the many other directions of encouragement, or something else, there is a hunger for further inquiry on this topic. It seems Yellin has opened the door for other academics to contribute to the growth of an exciting new region of rhetoric, and they should run through it.

Sam Watson
Baylor University
sam_watson1@baylor.edu