A new book on wartime profit-making with a title like "Warhogs" might suggest yet another entry for the "merchants of death" school on the relationship between private enterprise and the military in America. The notion that the relation is inherently corrupt, and the idea that the main beneficiaries of war are contractors, bankers, and market capitalism, have been widely shared among Americans at least since the Pequot wars of the 1630s when profiteering gunsmiths scandalized New England (pp. 16-17). During the twentieth-century that perspective assumed an even more sinister hue. Not only did merchants of death profit from war, they instigated it at every opportunity. From the "Warhogs" of World War II to the shadowy figures dominating the 1990s worlds of Oliver Stone and The X-Files, Americans have been more than willing to imagine the worst about those engaged in war business.

Stuart Brandes' title, however, is tongue-in-cheek. Warhogs traces profiteering and efforts to control it through America's various wars from the colonial period to the end of World War Two. The author shows how exaggerated were common assumptions and constant charges of graft and malfeasance in military supply. He also shows how basic such suspicions have been to popular republicanism in America and how that ideology has continuously shaped national policy on the business of war. Brandes wants to contribute to what he calls the "New Military History" which, he asserts, offsets ideology and conspiracy-mindedness by concentrating "less opprobriously on understanding civil-military relations" (p. 357).

Brandes points to the British Army's economic impact on early America in helping foment militant republicanism and the American Revolution. Because "the Royal Army dripped with corruption" (p. 38), professional standing armies came to mean patronage, collusion, autocracy and oppression. The equation formed an essential component of traditional anti-government and anti-big-business ideology in America. It survived the War of Independence, despite all George Washington's efforts to minimize corruption in the Continental Army. Apart from during the War of 1812, when "left-handed traders" from New England and New York dealt with Canadian enemies, and during the
Civil War, when members of a "shoddyocracy" seemed in control of Union Army procurement, minimal hostility for those who dealt in war material through the 1800s reflected the relative unimportance of the military in nineteenth-century society and economy. Turn-of-the-century U.S. imperialism, and especially World War One, revived the critique. During the interwar period, Bryanite "neo-Jeffersonians" laid the regulatory parameters of military contracting and defense-industry profits for World War Two and into the contemporary period.

Brandes cites numerous instances of stupendous greed and unconscionable profiteering, but debunks much more than he confirms and always balances real corruption and conflict of interest with overall fair-dealing and dedicated patriotism among businessmen. He points to the inevitable confusion of rapid war mobilization, the administrative complexity of determining reasonable costs and profits, and the ever-growing need for greater and more intimate cooperation between the military and its suppliers as the technology of warfare became more complex. Warhogs is particularly strong on war-profit politics during World War One and through Senator Gerald P. Nye's investigation of the munitions industry in 1934-35. Readers might want to compare Brandes' dismissal of the Nye Committee's methods as "eerily close to the methods of Senator Joseph R. McCarthy" and the Nye Report as "pure demagoguery" with Matthew Ware Coulter's recent study. Nevertheless, Brandes credits the Nye Committee and the Vinson-Trammell Act of 1934 for the general success of excess-profit taxation and renegotiated contracts during World War Two.

Warhogs is engaging and even-handed and based on impressive research in both primary and secondary sources. Brandes nicely traces the war-profit controversy in popular media and literature as well as fiction and cinema. The book closes with a chapter entitled "War Profits and Cold War Culture" that is actually about how World War Two profits were perceived during the immediate post-war years. Brandes does not discuss defense-industry profits since the Cold War began, how they were regulated, or the degree to which their legitimacy was problematic for Americans. Some readers might feel left hanging. What happened to the neo-Jeffersonian critique of profiteering and of the military-industrial complex during the long and expensive Cold War?

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