

The Gift of War

Traveling in a convoy along Highway One, which was actually just a half-assed dirt road, and not really a highway at all, we passed the usual small villages, with "mommasan" and the kids running out and yelling, "Maline, maline, yu buy, yu buy!"

They'd hold up everything from bottles of "fake" Jack Daniels, to bricks of "Mary Jane" (marijuana) and half-dollar sized balls of hash. Hell, it was just like the farmer's market back Stateside in the 60's. I must say that parts of Vietnam were as beautiful as any place featured in travel magazines. It was just a shitty place to fight a war.

We had just come off a major operation, and were filthy, hungry, tired, pissed off and generally in poor spirits. Besides, bouncin' around in the back of an open truck bed, covered with dust for hours, didn't help our attitude much either. And of course we were all "locked and loaded," just in case old momma-san decided to toss a little free treat our way. That is, a home-made satchel charge, compliments of her husband, Charlie.

For some reason and I don't know why, or could have cared less at the time, we pulled into a civilian gravel yard. It looked like any typical materials handling business you'd see in this country. But it wasn't in this country; it was in the land of the Little People.

Anyway, the convoy stopped and after a few minutes, this dumb-ass civilian walks up to our truck, walks around to the tailgate, and for no reason I could figure, says, "Man, all you guys are a bunch of stupid assholes!" Way wrong thing to say to a bunch of pissed off combat-hardened Marines!

In one single motion, our safeties clicked off and all of the loaded M-14s were pointing at this shit bird! Our compassionate and sympathetic reply was, "Fuck you, cock sucker!" "Let's do this lump of shit!" and one Marine yells out, "I've got his ears!" (you know, as in make a nice ear-necklace for mom back home).

Well, this son-of-a-bitch turned as white as a ghost! And as he was takin' a dump in his nice, clean khaki shorts, with his arms stretched straight up in the air, he yells back, "Don't shoot! Don't shoot! I didn't mean it! Don't you guys know who owns this gravel yard?" Since I was riding closest to the tailgate and had the "cleanest" shot at him, I said "No asshole, who?" He nervously replied, "I-t, it'-s LBJ!" (That was our wonderful President at the time). Another Marine called out, "Who gives a fuck, let's cut off his dick anyway!"

Well, I could see that this civvie had been taught a quick lesson in Marine Corps diplomacy, and being the highest rank in the truck (corporal E-4), I called off the "junk yard dogs." As we all clicked our safeties back on, and the "necklace-maker" twirled his K-Bar with a smile on his face, the "I-just-shit-myself" civilian went on to explain more about how we were all being "fucked for the bucks" by our "My Fellow Americans" leader. When our new civilian buddy (?) was on about his tenth apology, the trucks started their engines, and we pulled away, watching the gravel yard disappear in the dust. We were on our way back to base, with a little more "intel" than any of us wanted to know.

Besides the usual, well thought out and intellectual Marine comments, like "Fuck me," and "No fuckin' shit," we all just kinda stared at each other, pretty much in silence all the way back to our vacation resort.

My best guess is, that civilian was so afraid of dying on the spot, that he did in fact tell us the truth. But you be the judge of that. I've never cared for most cake-eatin' politicians anyway, so I tend to believe that there was at least "some" amount of truth in that civilian's story. Don't really know for sure. A while back I heard a good definition for politics. Poly means "many", and ticks are "blood suckers." Seems to fit a lot of them in my simple way of thinkin.

"So what's the point of all this?" you ask. It's just that in that moment, in that truck, in the middle of a war, I had a "wake up call." If it was completely true or not, doesn't matter. And I think that many of you young Warriors may have had that same uneasy feeling that I had years ago. It might make you feel a little helpless, a bit uncertain, and maybe even pissed off.

You volunteered to fight to defend this country, just like I did. Your brothers, and now sisters, either have been, are, or could be body-bagged just like mine were. And deep down, you know that in at least some small way, that civilian in the gravel yard was right. You may be "fucked for the bucks."

So how in the hell can you feel better about any of this? How can you get past feeling that you were "Right On" in doing the honorable thing, and yet were betrayed while doing it? Well, my friends and fellow Warriors, your asshole may be a little sore, but it probably wasn't the "Green Weenie" (military) that did the deed on this one, it usually isn't. It's just a few greedy bastards in powerful positions after a whole bunch of money. But what you decide on this issue is up to you.

It doesn't make me feel "warm and tingly" to know that where I once stood guard duty (on our rest break) at China Beach in Vietnam, there are now (from what I hear) American hotels and restaurants. It was the same in Korea, and I'd imagine when the dust settles in Afghanistan and Iraq, it'll be about the same. Who knows, maybe they won't let the infidels sell fried chicken, or "Happy Meals." In the long run, it seems that this issue is something that all of us Vets just have to deal with, besides everything else.

For you Young Veterans, there are a few things that you can take away from your experiences in these new wars. Just like us Old Timers did back in Korea and Vietnam. Consider this: You're fighting for your fellow Warriors, because you've chosen to be a Warrior. Just that simple. And you "Know" and "Feel" things now, you couldn't possibly have known or felt unless you were in a war. As an example, I fought for my fellow Marines, the Marine Corps, and the principles of Honor that I believed in, even if others "didn't" believe in them. My reasons, my justifications, my disappointments, became a very personal matter, only to be understood by other Warriors who shared in the same experiences, the same theaters of battle.

I have always loved this country, just not some of the people running it. And in all fairness, there still are some real good politicians around, if they just don't get sniped before they have a chance to do something useful for our Nation.

So each of you is gonna' have to decide what makes sense to you, what makes you feel good about the "Whys?" And rest assured, you will figure it out. You Youngins are a lot smarter than this

Old Marine was, and it won't take you so long, if you haven't already done it. But remember, if along in the figurin', you start to hatin', remember that "hate only makes you miserable." So don't hate anyone, "just feel better when they're not around."

Alright then, besides the "wake up call" and the "whys?", while you're sittin' around on your ass eatin' MREs (Meals Ready to Excrete), let's consider some of the other "Gifts" you've received from war.

First and foremost, you have truly learned the "Meaning of Honor." That will stay with you for the rest of your life. Those who do not live by a Code of Truth and Honor are dishonorable. That's just the way I see it, black and white. And you may have to exercise a little patience, because sometimes it takes awhile to express this in your life, according to the high standards it demands from us all. So don't be too quick to judge, because everyone may not be as far along as you are, but still on the way. And especially, don't judge yourself. Everyone makes mistakes and has a bad day. If you can, just don't make the same mistake twice.

You now know the meaning of "True Friendship." That is to say, a bond of loyalty and trust that goes beyond words. And that will be your standard for every relationship you ever have.

Your "strength of character" and willingness to sacrifice for others has been tested, and proven you worthy to be called a Warrior, in the most intense and extreme conditions the battlefield has to offer. This has taught you your limits and abilities in any situation you will ever confront.

And my friends, you have come to know the "Nobility of the Human Spirit." It has been said that, "when conditions are at their very worst, human beings are at their very best." And you have seen firsthand, the very best and the very worst that humanity has to offer. This understanding will serve you as a guide, that you do not judge others for their weakness, and help those without your level of strength.

You have painfully come to know the "Frailty of Life," how delicate is the line between the living and the dead. This knowing makes all life precious, to be taken only as a last resort, never without just cause, and protected at all cost.

You have also learned the value of "Living Each Moment" of every day, "Taking Nothing for Granted", and cherishing each and every experience of Joy that comes your way.

You have learned to believe that "And this too Shall Pass", when at times you feel you are pressed beyond your limits, and conditions seem physically and mentally unbearable. But you also know that any situation can always get worse, therefore you are content that it's not as bad as it could be.

With all of your abilities you prepare for battle, and yet pray to God that battle never comes. And through this, you learn to "Be Forever Vigilant", and yet forever grateful for the quiet moment, for the peace that comes unexpectedly, passes too quickly, yet does not go unnoticed.

These, my Brothers and Sisters, are the Gifts of War. Gifts that have indeed come at a very high price. And yet, would you now really choose to give them up, to go back to a time before you held

this "Knowing?" Would you now truly choose to become that person "you were", or live the life you once led? I don't. And once you get through a bit of work, I doubt that you will either.

I'm gonna let you in on a little secret. Don't know if you caught it earlier in your reading. You ready? Here it is: Once you Know, you can never not know again. Think about it.

So then, cherish your gifts of War and your gifts of Life, plan your new future, and get on with living it. The choice is "Yours". Choose "Wisely."

You can take off your body armor now, lay your weapon down (within reach), and open up a cool one. You've earned it. And "You've made it through!" The last section of this book is in friendly territory.

So Enjoy!

From: "*The Warriors Guide to Insanity*" By Sgt. PTSD Brandi, U.S.M.C. Never Retired?
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