

What Happens to These Old Warriors?

After his last battle has been fought, his final tear shed, and the last goodbyes have been spoken, a warrior retires from the battlefield. On the surface the war is over for these splendid men and their labors and sacrifices are etched on the very souls of their brothers to never be forgotten.

Together these warriors have tiptoed along the precipice of Hell and leaned over the slippery edge to spit into the Devil's eye time after time yet they still stand. These men faced hardship and adversity that mocked the margins of possibility. They knocked on Death's door again and again as they prayed he was not home.

All questions about their courage, character, and loyalty have been answered. They have engaged in the unthinkable, seen the indescribable and endured the unendurable and most of it will remain inside the brotherhood. It has to be this way and after all, what is done is done.

In a way these men have cheated Death. For many, parts of their hearts and souls have already died so Death will find little profit in an old warrior. Brotherhood becomes their salvation and survival their redemption. The love, loyalty and respect they earned from their brothers is unwavering and without end.

Warriors go home to resume their former lives quietly but proudly knowing they have done their duty like warriors before. The grace of God has brought peace to their valley for now and they will seize it. The irony and sometimes the tragedy is warriors over the ages have paid a tremendous price to create a protected civilization in which many of them sometimes feel out of place or different.

Once warriors have crossed over to the netherworld of armed conflict it can be difficult to find their way back. Yesterday they held the power over life and death and they knew the men to their left and right would die for them if need be. Today they are expected to look presentable, act like a gentleman and settle differences by using words and smiles. Once they swam in deep and treacherous waters and now they stroll through morning dew.

Let there be no doubt of the existence of two worlds and most warriors have been baptized in both, once in the "blood of the lamb" and again in the "bloody waters of Hell's tide". For a warrior the line between the two worlds is thin and the path they must now walk is narrow and sometimes perilous.

A warrior has two hearts, two minds and two memories. One of each belongs to the warrior inside him and the other belongs to his existence as a "civilized" man. These parts are not compatible or interchangeable and the stress of keeping them in sync can govern the remainder of a warrior's life. If he fails to maintain harmony and these parts become intermingled, turmoil and conflict are as certain as tomorrow's sun. A warrior can find himself fighting a secondary war within the civilized world and it is not hard for him to find an enemy. The enemy lies within and he is experienced, formidable and relentless.

For the rest of their lives these men will reconcile the warrior inside them with the world in which they now reside. They will strive to live in peace among those who do not always understand them and they will do their best to meet the expectations of polite society. They will gather with other warriors as often as possible in hopes of preserving their sanity and to reinforce their brotherhood.

Within their hearts God's peace stands at ease alongside the warrior that will always reside there. Each tries to not disturb the other for fear of the consequences. They now understand there might be no final peace for a true warrior until he leaves this earthly world. A warrior is forever and part of him will forever be at war. After all, that is what makes him a warrior and that is his destiny.