

The Warrior's Code of Honor

As a combat veteran wounded in one of America's wars, I offer to speak for those who cannot. Were the mouths of my fallen combat friends not stopped with dust, they would testify that life revolves around honor.

In war it is understood that you give your word of honor to do your duty to stand and fight instead of running away and deserting your friends.

When you keep your word despite desperately desiring to flee the screaming hell all around, you earn honor.

Earning honor under fire changes who you are. The blast furnace of battle burns away impurities encrusting your soul. The white-hot forge of combat hammers you into a hardened, purified warrior willing to die rather than break your word to friends – your honor.

Combat is scary but exciting.

- You never feel so alive as when being shot at without result.
- You never feel so triumphant as when shooting back – *with* result.
- You never feel love so pure as that burned into your heart by friends willing to die to keep their word to you.
- And they do.

The biggest sadness of your life is to see friends falling. The biggest surprise of your life is to survive the war.

Although still alive on the outside, you are dead inside – shot thru the heart with nonsensical guilt for living while friends died.

The biggest lie of your life torments you that you could have done something more, different, to save them.

Their faces are the tombstones in your weeping eyes, their souls shine the true camaraderie you search for the rest of your life but never find.

You live a different world now. You always will.

- Your world is about waking up night after night screaming, back in battle.
- Your world is about your best friend bleeding to death in your arms, howling in pain for you to kill him.
- Your world is about shooting so many enemies the gun turns red and jams, letting the enemy grab you.
- Your world is about struggling hand-to-hand for one more breath of life.

You never speak of your world. Those who have seen combat do not talk about it. Those who talk about it have not seen combat.

You come home but a grim ghost of he who so lightheartedly went off to war. But home no longer exists. That world shattered like a mirror the first time you were shot at. The splintering glass of everything you knew fell at your feet, revealing what was standing behind it – grinning death – *and you are face to face, nose to nose with it!*

The shock was so great that the boy you were died of fright. He was replaced by a stranger who slipped into your body, a MAN from the Warrior's World.

In that savage place, you give your word of honor to dance with death instead of running away from it. This suicidal waltz is known as: "doing your duty."

You did your duty, survived the dance, and returned home. But not all of you came back to the civilian world. Your heart and mind are still in the Warrior's World, far beyond the Sun. They will *always* be in the Warrior's World. They will never leave, they are buried there.

In that hallowed home of honor, life is about keeping your word. People in the civilian world, however, have no idea that life is about keeping your word. They think life is about ballgames, backyards, barbecues, babies and business. The distance between the two worlds is as far as Mars from Earth. This is why, when you come home, you feel like an outsider, a visitor from another planet. You are.

Friends try to bridge the gaping gap. It is useless. They may as well look up at the sky and try to talk to a Martian as talk to you. Words fall like bricks between you.

Serving with Warriors who died proving their word has made prewar friends seem too un-tested to be trusted – thus they are now mere acquaintances.

The hard truth is that earning honor under fire changes you so much that you return a stranger in your own home town, an alien visitor from a different world, alone in a crowd.

The only time you are not alone is when with another combat veteran.

- Only *he* understands that keeping your word, your honor, whilst standing face to face with death gives meaning and purpose to life.
- Only *he* understands that your terrifying – but *thrilling* – dance with death has made your old world of backyards, barbecues and ballgames seem deadly dull.
- Only *he* understands that your way of being due to combat damaged emotions is not unusual, but the usual and you are OK.

A common consequence of combat is adrenaline addiction. Many combat veterans – including this writer – feel that war was the high point of our lives, and emotionally, life has been downhill ever since. This is because we came home adrenaline junkies. We got that way doing our duty in combat situations such as:

- Crouching in a foxhole waiting for attacking enemy soldiers to get close enough for you to start shooting;
- Hugging the ground, waiting for the signal to leap up and attack the enemy;
- Sneaking along on a combat patrol out in no man's land, seeking a gunfight;
- Suddenly realizing that you are walking in the middle of a mine field.

Circumstances like these skyrocket your feelings of aliveness far above and beyond civilian life:

- Never have you felt so terrified – yet so thrilled;
- Never have you seen sky so blue, grass so green, breathed air so sweet, etc.; because dancing with death makes you feel stratospheric aliveness.

This unforgettable experience of being sky-high on adrenaline is why you come home basically “thrill-crazy” – that is: crazy for thrills. But do you know that you are an adrenaline junky? No you do not, because being wacked-out on it 24/7, day after day, month after month, becomes the “new normal.” You do not think anything is wrong with being constantly high as a kite on adrenaline because it is not un-usual but the usual – the common everyday condition of combat.

Then you come home where the addictive, euphoric rush of aliveness / adrenaline hardly ever happens in the normal course of events. You miss being sky-high on it and find normal boring. You hunger for your “fix” of thrills/danger like an addict hungers for his “fix” of heroin. So what often happens? “Quick, pass me the motorcycle” and/or fast car, thrill-driving, drag race, speedboat, airplane, parachute, extreme sport, rock climbing, big game hunt, fist fight, knife fight, gun fight, etc.

Another reason Warriors may find the rush of adrenaline attractive is because it lets them feel *something* rather than *nothing*. The dirty little secret no one talks about is that many combat veterans come home unable to feel their feelings. It works like this.

In battle, it is understood that you give your word of honor to not let your fear stop you from doing your duty. To keep your word, you must numb up/shut down your fear. But the numb-up/shut-down mechanism does not work like a tight, narrow rifle shot; it works like a broad, spreading shot gun blast. Thus when you numb up your fear, you numb up virtually all other feelings as well.

The more combat, the more fear you must “not feel.” You may get so numbed up/shut down inside that you cannot feel much of anything. You become an emotionally dead man walking, feeling virtually nothing for nobody (if you let yourself be stopped in the flow of fighting by feelings of grief for fallen friends you may join them). This condition is known as “battle-hardened,” meaning that you can feel hard feelings like hate and anger, but not soft, tender feelings (which is bad news for loved ones).

The reason that the rush of adrenaline, alcohol, drugs, dangerous life style, etc. is so attractive is because you get to feel *something*, which is a step up from the awful deadness of feeling *nothing*.

Although you walk thru life alone, you are not lonely. You have a constant companion from combat – Death. It stands close behind, a little to the left. Death whispers in your ear; “Nothing matters outside my touch, and I have not touched you...YET!”

Death never leaves you – it is your best friend, your most trusted advisor, your wisest teacher.

- Death teaches you that every day above ground is a fine day.
- Death teaches you to feel fortunate on good days, and bad days --well, they do not exist.
- Death teaches you that each day of life is sufficient unto itself.
- Death teaches you that you can postpone its touch by earning serenity.

Serenity is earned by a lot of prayer and acceptance. Acceptance is taking one step out of denial and accepting/allowing your repressed painful combat memories, and repressed coming home disappointments to be re-lived/suffered thru/shared with other combat vets – and thus de-fused.

Each time you accomplish this dreaded but necessary act of courage / desperation:

- The pain gets less than the time before;

- More tormenting combat demons hiding in the darkness of your gut are thrown out into the healing sunlight of awareness, thereby disappearing them;
- The less bedeviling combat demons, the more serenity earned.

Serenity is, regretfully, rather an indistinct quality, but it is experienced as an immense feeling of fulfillment/satisfaction deep down inside; from having demonstrated to be a fact that you did your duty under fire no matter what cost, thereby proving that you are a Warrior, a Man of Honor and from being grateful to Higher Power/your Creator for sparing you. It is an iron law of nature that such serenity lengthens life span to the max.

Down thru the dusty centuries it has always been thus. It always will be, for what is seared into a man's soul who stands face to face with death never changes.

Signed,

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Dedicated to absent friends in unmarked graves