

1-3 Death Before Dishonor

Incoming! Corpsman Up! Doc! Corpsman Up!

Machine guns firing wide open, barrels red-hot, and shell casings falling like rain from the chopper cannons above. You're under full attack, and the enemy outnumbered you eight to one.

Your M-4 is hot, and you pray for "no jam!" as you slam in another magazine. A mortar round explodes less than twenty feet away; and even through sand bags, the concussion shakes your body. Recoiling from the impact, you continue to breathe and squeeze, making every round count.

You haven't had a shower in forty five days, nothing but the same damn MREs and few resupplies, but none of that matters now. You're living full throttle in the purest Warrior standard of Honor! Adrenaline's pumpin', you're alive, and looking death straight in the eyes!

Suddenly the mortars stop, the enemy is beaten back. "Cease Fire" rings out from your squad leader as the choppers pass overhead, firing one last barrage of rockets into the hillside. A few Marines continue to fire at what have now become phantoms among the trees.

"Cease fucking fire you shit heads!" The Sarge yells out again! "You get to kill these sons' a bitches tomorrow!"

All is quiet except for the ringing in your ears and the moaning of the blood soaked wounded. Doc sticks 'em with morphine... one lies still. You look over... Johnson and McCormick glance back, wide-eyed with bare-teeth smiles, lighting a cig, their hands still shaking from the adrenaline.

"Damn it, I love these assholes," you think, while checking your weapon and reaching for your own smoke.

A short time passes. A body bag lies next to the

chopper pad along with several men and one woman waiting for the Med Evac Chopper. Marines are kneeling and standing by the wounded. Several are in tears over the loss of their beloved Friend. All are comforting their fellow wounded Warriors with jokes and encouragement. “You’re getting out of this fuckin’ shit hole! But don’t worry needle-dick, as soon as you heal up, your green ass’ll be right back here.” And, “As soon as you dust off, shit bird, I’m getting those good MREs you’ve been hidin’! Those Baby Wipes, too!”

Murmuring, “The fight is over for now, but God, I feel ripped apart inside!”

Your soul has been pierced again, your head is spinning, your thoughts are making no sense. “I was just talking to Baker before the attack, and now he’s gone. He’ll be on that chopper home now... family waiting for all that’s left of their Hero... my Brother, my Friend. This shit is fucked!”

Slinging your M-4, “He died with Honor,” you whisper, tears running down your cheeks. “Damn it! He died with HONOR!” you yell out!

The standard definition of Honor is respect. But the *Warrior’s Code of Honor* goes much deeper. To us, it means to Die for what you believe in. And more importantly, it means to Die for Those *who* you Believe in; your Brother, your Sister suffering the atrocities of war. These are the brethren walking side by side with you into battle.

They as you have lost touch with their own humanity. These are the ones to love unconditionally, the ones to give up your life for. And as each friend dies in battle, with

every loss, with every kill you make, you're pulled deeper into the Warrior's World of no return.

I had a Soldier tell me about his Buddy. His brigade had gotten back from Iraq. This was his third combat deployment. He said, "Yeah, no shit Sarge, in the down time, we argue and fight over dumb shit stuff... we bitch at each other all the time. Once I even told Sanchez, 'You fuckin' asshole, I hate your guts!' He continued, "But no shit Sarge, I'd take a round for him any time. That's the way it is out there. I'm not gay or nothin', but I gotta tell ya, I love my brothers more than I give a shit about bein' alive. We all feel the same way."

I suspect some would call that unconditional love-to-the-death... I would. And we're gonna talk about that Warrior Trust Bond a bit later on. But for now, let's explore how this attitude of Honor shapes the Warrior's future, everything he or she will ever do, ever think, or make a choice over for the rest of their lives.

First off we're gonna talk about a subject that scares the shit out of most civilians; that subject being suicide and how it relates to the Warriors Code of Honor. You'll need a little background first. I'll be as brief as is possible.

When I talk to civilians and say suicide, the normal reaction is fear. You can watch their eyes dilate and their body posture change. Maybe their hands even get fidgety. But the fact is they're afraid. Why?

It's because many folks in the gray civilian world haven't come to terms with their own mortality. You know, getting choppered out to that big Post Exchange in the sky... in other words, dyin'.

It's damn hard livin' in a nice house, drivin' a nice car, havin' all the chow you want, goin' to the mall... and thinkin' about dyin'. Unless, of course, you just came from

a Freddy Kruger movie while suckin' down popcorn, soda pop, and other such Podunk.

A lot of folks just don't come to terms with death and the idea of everything endin'... that at any minute, every hope, every dream, goal and/or aspiration for the future could come to a screechin' halt.

I don't personally know what's on the other side of life here, don't care. But the one thing I do know is that there's no guarantee you're gonna be around tomorrow. At any time, the real Commander In Chief can pull your liberty pass.

As a little jog off the trail here, I was doin' a presentation at a conference in Washington D.C. (my least favorite place) and at the end of the talk a Chaplain gets up and asks me, "Sarge, did God have anything to do with how you're feeling now?"

And without a pause I said "No shit, Padre! There weren't any disbelievers in my foxhole. But you know what? I really don't give a rat's ass if there's a heaven or hell, as long as there's a few Marines there to drink beer with." And with that the Chaplain sat back down, pale and shocked. But it was all the damn truth!

It'll be damn good liberty, drinkin' brain grenades with old Saint Peter and a battalion of Jar Heads, causin' shit, Up-Range!

Fact is a lot of civilians cling to their faith, their religion, or their God for a little comfort. And most of 'em don't ever think about making the passage. That is, until they get long in the tooth (become mean old farts) or they're lyin' in a hospital bed with tubes stickin' in every hole. Sometimes it takes a loved one diagnosed with a fatal disease or maybe watchin' a relative die slowly of cancer, or the like, that makes people think about their own

mortality.

Warriors, on the other hand, don't fear death. How could we? Guess the only absolute, true, scientific way to explain this is *We Just don't Give a Shit!* I know, I know, that's damn hard for a lot of civilians to understand, so let's shoot up a couple flares overhead, then maybe you'll see what I'm talkin' about.

You just can't get up every single day for fifteen months or sixty months, knowin' you're gonna die and not embrace the strong, almost certain possibility that you ain't gonna make it home for the next Trick-or-Treat. And many times in war it's so damn miserable and you're so brain-fried that you long for death. At least I sure as hell did.

Think about it: Imagine humping up and down a 4,000 foot mountain every day with body armor, weapon, ammo, and a sixty-plus pound pack, in the rain, being shot at, and watching your friends get wounded and killed. Then, making it back to your shit-hole base, filthy, stinkin' like a goat, sore, pissed off, MRP's (Meals Ready to Puke) for chow, and then getting your ass up the next day and doin' it all again. That is, for fifteen months and then another five deployments after that. Do ya think you might come to terms with death? Do ya think you might be just a little edgy when you get back to the States, maybe think your family and old friends don't have a clue?

Are you startin' to get a feel for our feelings here?

We Warriors don't kill ourselves for no good reason. Often it's because we feel we have in some way violated our Code of Honor. Sometimes we kill ourselves because we choose to protect our fellow Warriors. You know, like in those bullshit, Holly-woody war movies showing some

Hero jumping on a grenade? But sometimes that actually does happen in battle... in our real world.

Remember, we die to protect our Brothers and Sisters without hesitation. Now maybe you'll understand why. But isn't voluntarily killing yourself in any fashion, suicide? That's the definition of the word. Or do we conveniently call it self-sacrifice? Don't see much difference, you're simple ass is dead one way or another.

Sometimes we get so damn burned out, so numb to life, so alone and empty from the loss of our Brethren, that we don't give a shit about anything. We don't care if we live another day; but more often than not, we prefer to die at that moment.

As with so many of the Troops I've talked with, it's no different now than during my time in the Nam with Victor Charlie. You want to die, but you'd like to take out as many of the enemy as you can on the way out. Like in Go Out in a Blaze of Glory, John Wayne style, but not get up for donuts and coffee after the scene ends.

When Warriors get like that, and I did, that's often when a medal for Valor Under Fire is given out. You already know you're gonna die, you don't give a shit about anything, and you want to kill a bunch of the bad guys... dying with honor in a righteous firefight. Fact is you can't wait for an excuse to kill and to end all the pain in an act of glory!

"A sick and twisted perspective" you say. Nope... that's just war.

If you haven't been there, you may not get it. Sorta like the issue of giving Purple Hearts to our new Troops. You really have to get in their brain-housing-group and think about what they're feelin' before you get the true scoop. You know, their reasoning behind their actions.

They think real differently than we did, and those differences are gonna be dramatic when they finally come home. I'll explain that in a bit for you. But gettin' back to the topic of the Purple Heart Medal.

A Purple Heart is given out when you're wounded in battle. Up till now, you gotta bleed to get one. Old George Washington came up with the idea of a Purple Heart Medal back in the days of the Continental Army as a Badge of Military Merit for enlisted men.

Well anyway, many of our new Warriors won't take a Purple Heart even if they get shot. That's right! They don't feel they deserve it unless they're severely wounded.

My friends at the Military Order of the Purple Heart tell me that they're havin' a hard time getting our Combat Veterans to even come forward for a Purple Heart Medal. The Troops feel guilty if they were only nicked by an AK-47 round, or if they only got a little shrapnel from a road side bomb or RPG (rocket propelled grenade).

I know one Soldier who was blown up 15 times on patrol in Humvees by roadside bombs, was wounded several times, and he still wouldn't come in for a Purple Heart. For those who have been blown up in an IED (Improvised Explosive Device) and lived, but not wounded, the military at this time is considering giving them a Purple Heart as well.

Don't know if that's gonna happen or not. But even a combat line company Soldier or Marine who has a one hundred percent rating for PTSD (called Combat Trauma) is not eligible for a Purple Heart. Hell... if you can't get the Troops to come even if they've been shot, it's not too likely they're gonna come in because of invisible wounds.

Think about it. Imagine you're drivin' down the nice smooth, civilian freeway and a bomb goes off under your

SUV, exploding with such a force that it propels your vehicle ten feet in the air! When this happens, the Concussion Injury inside your head is incredible. Maybe you've heard the more familiar term for describing this effect called TBI, or Traumatic Brain Injury, by the media.

“So what's the point?” you ask.

The point is that we're dealing with a whole New Breed of Warrior unlike any in our history, and they live by a New Standard of Honor. They think differently than we did in the past, and they're gonna react differently when they come home. I'm gonna talk about many of my deep concerns as we move through this work; and believe me, you'd better pay attention.

Along with thinking differently about Honor and rewards, they also think differently about suicide. This is something that may confuse you a bit or even piss you off. But it's an important topic; so let's get right to it.

Suicide to a Warrior is an honorable choice over disgrace and dishonor. In other words, **Death before Dishonor!** And to help you understand this a little better, let's talk about what this means as described in the Big Book of Words (again, what Marines call the dictionary).

Shame means a strong emotion caused by a sense of guilt, embarrassment, unworthiness, or disgrace. The word disgrace means a **Loss of Honor**, respect, or reputation. Honor can also mean homage, reverence, or veneration.

So then, when we violate a trust, the Code of Honor, we disgrace ourselves, those we love and those we respect. This is an act of dishonor and a demonstration of weakness to our military family. We then become a burden, an outcast from the Warrior Class... from everything in which we find true meaning and every standard we'd die to

maintain. We are shamed through the eyes of everyone we love.

Sound a little Samurai-ish, a little historically romantic? Well get over it. This is the way things are now and the way they've been for thousands of years. One of the only things that's changed with war in modern times is that we've gotten better at killing at a distance. But the killing is the same, the battlefield is the same, and living by the Code of Honor is the same. The one significant difference in the present wars is that no one in history has seen so much combat.

The problem is, how much combat can one human being endure before breaking down? Our Troops now call this Hitting the Wall. We used to call it Losing it, going Bug-Fuck, or Dinky-Dow (Crazy in Vietnamese).

If you think about what we've just covered, it's easy to see how our Troops are in a Catch-22 situation. After experiencing more combat than anyone in history and feeling like they're gonna explode any second from the trauma, they can't say squat shit about it; or they get cast out of the only way of life that means everything to 'em. Fact is, this way of life is life itself!

Do you see why some of our Troops are committing suicide by cops?

It's not that far of a stretch, especially if your brain-housing-group is twisted up and the Beast is runnin' the show. Here's an example.

Last year, after three combat deployments, a young Marine was diagnosed with PTSD, declared unfit for duty, and given a medical discharge. In case you don't know, PTSD stands for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I never liked that Tag stamped on my head in 1980, anymore than the young Troops like it now. Sounds like something you

got dumpster-divin' in Bangkok or caught off a toilet seat on B Street in Okinawa.

In Civil War days, PTSD was called Soldier's Heart; then later on, Shell Shock and Battle Fatigue. At least those names had some dignity to 'em. I prefer to call this effect of battle, which has been around since battle began, Combat Trauma, even Combat Stress.

In shrinker jargon, the trauma is the wound of an event and the stress is the reaction to that event. If that don't make sense to you Jar Heads, I'll put it this way. You got your ass kicked, it's sore and it ain't gonna heal till you see the Doc.

Anyway, to say Combat Trauma is acceptable to me and the new Troops, since in some ancient language, the word trauma means to wound or pierce the soul. When I'm talkin' to shrinker egg-heads and am forced to use the term PTSD, I tell 'em it means "Psychological Training for Superior Discipline!" You get the picture? That old saying, "That which doesn't kill your ass, makes you stronger," fits real good here.

Getting back to our Marine who was already cast out of his unit family (Clan) and disgraced by being forced out of the Corps, he was further shamed by being tagged with PTSD. To me, that D at the end sure sounds a hell of a lot like Disease, or "Disgrace"? But reactions this Marine had were absolutely normal for what he'd been through.

No one had ever told this young man about his Beast, much less how to control it. No one gave him any support, love, or understanding. No one had listened to his pleas for help or his need to discuss the confusion over all the issues we've talked about so far.

He was drowning in the darkness of his own horrors with no one by his side. And there he was, standing alone

in his agony, in the nightmares that war had left him. No one had his six. No one cared to ask why.

Emotionally cut to the quick, he couldn't get a job because of the PTSD tattoo on his head; he'd lost his family when returning from the first deployment, couldn't see his little girl because of a restraining order, had lost all self-esteem/self-worth, and felt tremendous survivor guilt.

His friends were still in Afghanistan while he was living in the land of luxury, in a place he hated, in a world he no longer felt a part of. He didn't fit in anywhere.

So what does he do? Somehow he and his Beast get an AK-47, body armor, and ammo. He walks into a mini-mart/gas station, kills the attendant and calls 911, then waits for the police to arrive.

The Marine then fires a few rounds over the officer's heads and into their cars, herds them into a Kill Zone as he was trained to do, then Advances Under Fire to his death... Suicide by Police.

This Marine had nothing left. He wanted to die a Warrior's death. And in his mind, he needed to feel that last surge of combat adrenaline, kill as many of the enemy as he could till his last breath, and die with Honor as a Marine.

Trouble is, he wasn't in Afghanistan or Iraq, he wasn't fighting the enemy, and there was no Honor in killing innocent civilians. Tragically, fine police officers paid the price for this Marine getting little or no help. There are far too many stories like this one.

This is not an unusual or isolated case. And if we don't immediately change our entire system, many more episodes like this and Ft. Hood will be on the horizon. Look at it this way: If the system was working, if the Vet Centers had more money and far more combat counselors,

if the VA wasn't already burdened, if the programs in the military were working, etc., etc., then these violent expressions of pain wouldn't be happening. Oh sure, maybe a few once in awhile. But not like this and what else is about to occur. And I mean, look out America!

It's truly impossible to know for sure what that Marine was thinking. But I can say without a doubt that his reactions to extreme and sustained combat are very "Normal." In other words, if millions of Warriors are exposed to severe and sustained combat trauma, most if not all will have the same kinds of reactions and will act out in similar fashion.

We learned this from my era of returning Combat Veterans fresh out of the scenic bush of Vietnam. The killing, the loss, the guilt, the survival guilt, the shame, the disgrace, and the need for combat adrenaline all cause the same types of reactions. Hell, the military has charts on this stuff. But you see, the problem is that our young Troops have, in some cases, been through six and seven times (or more) War than we experienced.

The suicide rate in the military far exceeds the national average for civilians. At this time (2011), there are eighteen suicides per day by our OIF/OEF Troops. And that don't include the ones who get classified as drunk drivers, on drugs, or accidental (?) deaths.

Look, ya don't have to be an egg-head with all that high level, brain-cloggin' math to figure this one out. If you multiply (Marines: Borrow a calculator) 18 suicides per day, times 365 days in a year, you come up with 6,570 dead by suicide (this year!). Now if that don't shake your ass out of the tree, let's keep doin' the math.

Let's just take the next twenty years, or about one half of the time from the end of the Vietnam war until now. So

once again, multiply 6,570 suicides per year, times twenty years. That's a Roger! It comes out to be 131,400 deaths by suicide.

And what about women suicides? You know, the ones that no one talks about. Think about it. The average woman has about two children (or more) in her lifetime. That means for every one woman suicide, at least **THREE** lives are lost.

So what's the point? Well, without getting too damn pissed off, the point is this: We still loose about seven Vietnam Veterans a day to suicide as of right this minute. It took us nearly forty-five years to hit the over-a-hundred-thousand-suicides mark. Our OIF/OEF Warriors will do that in HALF the time. And there ain't no miracle in sight to slow it down, any more that there was for my generation.

When we end the war in Afghanistan, we will have lost approximately five thousand dead from combat, about thirty thousand wounded, and in twenty years, over **130,000** dead from suicide!

So what's wrong with this picture? Well no shit Sherlock! Unless you're plain-and-simple, as stupid as a piece of Double Bubble stuck between a shoe and the sidewalk, you gotta see the Truth of this. That, **“War Destroys the Warriors!”**

I'm explaining here WHY we come back from War half-dead, why we kill ourselves, kill other people, abuse ourselves, and abuse other (innocent) people.

In my Old Green way of lookin' at things, ya just can't help but wonder why no one ever looked at this before. If they have and ignored it, then they have sure as hell qualified for extinction.

If you consider all the Warriors who fought in

Vietnam, the first Gulf War, Afghanistan and Iraq, we will see over one quarter of a million suicides in the next twenty years. That's right, 250,000 men and women will be unable to endure the aftermath of War, the pain and torment of their lives ripped apart.

This is totally unacceptable. And it can in fact be prevented, or at least drastically reduced. There are dozens of what shrinkers call modalities for treating Combat Trauma (PTSD) that are working right now. So why aren't they all being used nationally? You decide.

I make every effort to explain that all these new approaches are just fine and dandy. But let's focus first on the most dangerous consideration facing our Troops and the civilian population. It's the Primal Side of our nature! The Beast. If there was ever a psychological triage... this is it! In case you don't know, triage is taking care of the worst patient first like on the battlefield.

Once we give our Young Warriors the tools to control this savage side of our nature, keeping it in check, (that is, preventing suicide, homicide, family abuse, and substance abuse), then they can decide what kinds of "alternative" therapy they feel comfortable with.

Then Warriors can have steel, ninja pins stuck in 'em (lookin' like Pinhead-Hellraiser?), pressure points poked with fingers (and other small objects?), their asses rubbed with incense oil, sit in a hot tub, or ride horses and pet dogs.

If they first control their Beasty, then they won't be stickin' the pins in the temples of the therapist, drowning the shrinker in the hot tub, or riding off in to the sunset, like the Horsemen Men From Hell, screaming, "The Reckoning has come!"

We've trained our Warriors to kill, and now we must,
train them to live.

Think about it over the roar of the chopper blades.

We're comin' into a Hot L.Z. "Under Fire!" on this next
topic.

RED SMOKE up ahead!
Door gunners at the ready!

SAFETIES OFF!!