

1-6 Home Is Where the War Is

A lone candle burns slowly on the small crate in the center of your sandbagged bunker. Except for the small yellow flame, the darkness seems impenetrable as you look Eastward through the open passageway.

Your weapon is clean, locked and loaded. Your web gear is resting on the cot you now call a bed. Thoughts are racing as you consider the mission ahead.

The silence is broken by a swirl of wind and the sounds of raindrops tamping the parched desert soil outside the doorway.

“Been a long time since I’ve heard that sound,” you think, “Guess I’d better bring my poncho on this one.”

At last it’s time to “move out!” A choice must be made. And for a moment you stand confused.

“Which one do I take?”

You’re alone, but you’re speaking out loud as though having a conversation with your squad leader.

As the first faint light of day makes the path to your vehicle visible, you decide. Ever so gently, laying your true love on the cot, you give her a tender rub, and softly whisper...

“I’ll be back soon my dear friend”. Your M-4 lies motionless.

Placing a 9mm Beretta in the small of your back, and slipping the poncho over your head, you make your way out to the truck. Starting the engine and letting Matilda warm up a bit, you’re off to the supermarket for dog food, cat litter, and beer for the weekend.

“Hope I make it back from this one, ”thinking to yourself as you light up a cig.

“I hate going to town. Hope I don’t have to shoot

someone. I'd really like to, but if I get locked up... who's gonna feed the dogs and my old cat?"

"Shit! I'd better just bring my K-bar into the store."

This may sound like a stretch for some, but take it from me, it ain't. Why is that, you ask? Well now, let's see if I can explain a few things that may just make sense to civilians about this topic.

Remember I mentioned that our Troops from the Afghan and Iraq Wars have seen more combat than anyone in our history? Ask yourself then:

What effects might that have on how they act, when and if they return to this country?

I just talked to a Combat Trauma Clinician who told me of a young Medic who got wounded by an IED (Improvised Explosive Device) three months into his ninth Deployment! Can you possibly imagine the obstacles this soldier is facing of ever reintegrating into society? He has seen unbelievable horror, has watched his Brothers and Sisters die in his arms on the battlefield, and felt helpless to do anything about it... in twenty times more combat than WWII!

The guilt shapes our behavior, the killing shapes our behavior and the losses shape our behavior. All so-called civilized human beings need to feel loved or at least accepted by someone. Hell, for most of us Vets, at times that might only be our dog. But we all collect the things around us that make us feel comfortable and then express ourselves accordingly.

Some folks like fish, other than on their plate at chow time; so they go out and buy an aquarium, fill it with expressionless creatures, and then pretend the little

suckers are glad to see 'em when they come home. Some folks collect “things” like knick knacks or art, stick pink flamingos on their lawns, or hang Buddhist prayer flags on their front porches to piss off the neighbors.

Everyone is attempting to express themselves and fill their lives with things that make them feel comfortable. Us Warriors are the same. But the things that make us feel comfortable usually scare the shit out of the civilians we're forced to live with.

Are all Warriors armed? Absolutely. It makes us feel comfortable. Do all Warriors dress like they're on patrol in the bush? Not all, but it feels good when we do. Do all Warriors like to talk about killing those who truly deserve to die? Of course we do, and we'd even volunteer for the mission. It makes us feel comfortable thinking about it, and it would make us feel even better doing it.

Unless you live in a glass bubble in La-La-Land, you damn sure know that there are lots of folks out there who qualify for extinction. We Warriors know, too. But we'd like to do something about it... you know, flush the toilet of Humanity? Think about it.

Consider this: We were trained to kill the enemy; we did it, we liked it, and we're now denied that intensely strong desire. But even so, that doesn't mean we're still not comfortable thinkin' about it.

First of all, many of our young Warriors dislike being here to such an extent that they constantly self-medicate to tolerate what they believe is bullshit. That is, people bitchin' about everything doesn't make us feel comfortable. This ain't war, so what's there to bitch about?

So we avoid the whiners like we'd avoid takin' a laxative with every meal. It makes us very uncomfortable to be around people who constantly complain about

nothin' that isn't life threatening... and truly tempts us to end their discomfort permanently.

I'm not real certain if you're starting to understand that Combat Warriors are carrying around a whole lot of baggage? Maybe if you keep reading, you will?

One thing that needs to be real clear is that all Combat Warriors do not look at things intellectually. We "Feel" our way through life, one moment at a time. We constantly deal with memories, even if we've been through all the programs (and the programs worked?). We still operate on a day-to-day schedule, evaluating the threat level at all times.

We must always maintain control of our emotions because we know full well what we're capable of.

And ain't that a major bummer?

Once, we were just like all the rest of those innocent little brats who pissed off their teachers and demoralized their parents. The big deal in my time was drinkin' on Friday night with the other jocks, pukin' up the Colt 45 Stout Malt Liquor, and Peach Brandy, then tellin' exaggerated stories till the following weekend. And then we'd do it all the hell over again.

That all changed, "Long, Long Ago in a Jungle Far, Far Away." Now it's the Desert or Goat Country, "Far, Far Away." The results are still the same: No matter how ya look at it, War changes everyone. And it's about time to accept that fact. And I mean the Military Command, politicians, and civilians alike.

I suspect that if the cake-eaters and military contractors had to listen to the Mothers and Fathers, the Spouses, and other loved ones like I do, they'd do a bit more to help our Troops when they get home.

For a starter, how about putting money into meaningful programs that actually do work and desperately need funding? Well anyway, I didn't mean to get too far off the trail, it just pisses me off the way things are goin'. We'll zero in on the topic of betrayal later on.

And since we're talking about, "The Raging War inside," I'd like to explain how most Warriors view holidays. Hope this don't burst any bubbles?

If you know a Warrior, a Veteran of War, you probably already have some idea of what I'm about to say. But for those of you who don't have that privilege, I'll ask you the question,

"Why do you think Warriors don't like holidays... especially Christmas?"

I mean, besides the Turkey Genocide, and for most people who should be eatin' diet yogurt anyway, Christmas really sticks in our craw. And it doesn't have a thing to do with the religious side of it.

You might think we don't like it because it reminds us of sittin' in a foxhole somewhere in some shit hole country, longingly thinkin' of good chow, marginally sane relatives, and the festive spirit with that Podunk-eatin' fat-man in a red suit.

Well, if that's what you think, then we need to "adjust fire", 'cause your spotter rounds are way off the target.

Sure, when you are sittin' in a foxhole in another country, in a War, hungry, tired, filthy and pissed off, of course you're gonna wanna be somewhere else. And for those of us from the Blue Collar to No Collar sector of society, we always looked forward to Papa-san's bad jokes and Momma-san spendin' all day cookin' a great meal.

"So what's the point," you ask?

The point is this: Unless your IQ is so low you that can't twist the top off a jar of peanut butter, you damn sure wanna be home for the holidays. But once you are back here, it's harder to be here than it is to be back in War.

Is that clear as mud? I'll explain.

To say, "Home is where the War is," simply means, home is where our Brothers and Sisters-in-arms are. Ask any of our young Troops, and they'll tell you the exact same thing. Besides all the other issues we're talkin' about, this one causes a lot of problems.

This one Soldier told me...

"Sure, I miss the adrenaline and feeling so damn alive, "In the Moment." But what I miss the most is that to-die-for friendship of my Bros." And, "Sharing the bad times together is a hell of a lot better than being alone in the times that aren't so bad."

I'm gonna venture a guess here, that just maybe the unconditional bond of loving friendship in War outweighs the comforts and shallow friendships in civilian society? Just a guess.

I was also talking to a medically discharged Soldier the other day. He said he felt ashamed because his wife accused him of loving his dog more than her and their daughter.

But he said...

"Ya know, Sarge, fact is I do love my dog more." Then he went on to say, "I just don't know if I'll ever be able to love again."

So in true Marine Corps fashion I replied...

"Bullshit Buddy! You are capable of loving right

this minute. Problem is, you're only capable of loving other Warriors."

And after a couple of seconds he replied...

"No Shit, Sarge... you Old Fuckin' Grunt... you're right!"

Ya see, that's part of the "Change" we go through. We now only love those who love us unconditionally like our dog... those who would die for us without hesitation. This tends to make relationships with non-combatants extremely difficult, if not impossible.

Speaking of dogs, if you do or don't have one, here's a joke I heard that reinforces the point of unconditional love.

"Let's suppose you lock your husband (or wife) and your dog in the trunk of your car for two hours on a hot Summer's day. When you open it, which one will be glad to see you?"

Oh sure, once we go through the long re-evolution from sociopaths (Marines: Not a trail for people) to semi-human, to having a relationship with a warm-bodied creature like a dog, we're capable of loving a human quite a bit.

But it ain't like a Battle Buddy coverin' your ass in a firefight. And it will most likely never be at that one hundred percent die-for-you mark like another Combat Warrior. And by the way, for those of you Warriors who have kids, this includes them as well.

I've heard a bunch of stories about trusting their kids by the Troops... especially when those kids are set-off-an-IED, or pull-the-trigger-on-an AK, little-Hajji age. We're gonna talk more about this more later on, but for now let's get back to the subject of where your heart is... if you've

been down range.

Have you ever asked yourself, “What is Love?”

I know, I know, there are one helluva lot of books and brain-dead Hollywood movies on the subject... all giving their civilian interpretation of “True Love”. But let’s look at the Ivory Tower definition.

One dictionary defines love as,

“A deep tender, ineffable feeling of affection and solicitude toward a person, such as arising from kinship, recognition of attractive qualities, or a sense of underlying oneness”.

That bein’ said, and lookin’ up solicitude (care or concern) and ineffable (indescribable), then wondering why the hell they can’t just say that in the first place, I’m struck with how similar this definition is to the Warrior Trust Bond.

We have a deep concern for the safety of our comrades in arms; we feel an incredibly strong bond of kinship or clansmen-ship; we are attracted to the strength of character of our fellow Warriors and we feel like we belong to the same inseparable blood family. Guess that means we know what love is?

Not only do we understand the true meaning of love; fact is, the War comes back home with us because we liked a lot of what we experienced. And when we’re not likin’ what we’re experiencing now, it tends to make us want to go back to War, or at least be with our real friends... even if those friends are sittin’ in a shithole bunker in Afghanistan.

A lot of folks have a hard time in life because they spend way too much of their day thinking about the past. But here’s where being a brain-fried Warrior comes in real

handy.

We live in the present most of the time, with brief periods of remembering the horrors in our past. And the more we process those memories, the more they stay in the past. And the more “they” stay in the past, the more we’re able to focus in the present moment.

Ya see! Yet another reason for you Warriors to feel good about **who** you’ve now become!

So... bad memories are sorta like a bad target... out of range. You can see your target but you can’t reach out and touch him. Only thing good here is that he can’t hit you either. You know he’s there, but you’re safe.

No matter how much therapy and processing you go through, you’re always gonna know you’ve got shit memories somewhere in your head, but if you’ve worked through your trauma enough, they’re out of range to kill you.

So you see, our hearts may always be in War for many reasons, can’t be helped... and that’s normal for us Warriors. But if we learn to control our Beast and bring the best parts of the War into our new lives as new people in society, then we live the best of both worlds.

Fact is, that’s exactly how we do live in both worlds. We take the best of each and mix ‘em together, like a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

As a short training exercise for you young Warriors, make a list of what you liked about war and a separate list of what you like about civilian society. Then make a list of what you didn’t like about war and another of what you don’t like about society.

By doing this, you’ll see how to adapt your military skills to civilian life... based on the stuff you’d like to include in your future. Just for example’s sake, I’m gonna

guess: that Flush toilets and good chow are keepers for sure; and what about paved streets, and running water and electricity at all hours of the day and night?

If you like these, then you may lean toward not shootin' rabbits for dinner while living in the mountains with your Beast... and not competing in the who-smells-the-worst contest.

And if for example, you like the idea of pickin' out your own school, and courses and future job (unlike getting the green weenie in the military), then maybe you'll opt for getting a good education?

Maybe you won't waste 35 years like I did, being a dumb shit and having over sixty-five jobs. I'm happy now, but why waste time figurin' it out?

But then again, each of us has to decide for ourselves, don't we? The War may always be with us, but do we have to be at War with ourselves? It is Your choice... isn't it?

Time to wrap up this topic. But no time for chow call... just grab some ammo!

More Hostiles up ahead!
We're now in a Free Fire Zone... No Friendlies...
Everyone is the Enemy!
Watch your flank!
INCOMING!