

CHAPTER TWO: *The Noble Warrior*

A choice for war not only engenders bloodshed, but risks turning its perpetrators into moral monsters.

Michael W. Brough¹

The United States today is transitioning our military into “a profession of arms.” Our collective military force is growing smaller and will continue to shrink. It is all volunteer, highly trained, and mobile, heavily armed with and dependent on high-technology weaponry, heavily dependent on pharmaceuticals to keep stressed troops operating and expected to endure multiple deployments.

Edward Tick²

In March of 2012, two U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan made the news. On the 11th, Staff Sergeant Robert Bales murdered 17 Afghan civilians, including three women and nine children. Eleven days later, Sergeant Dennis P. Weichel, Jr., of the Rhode Island National Guard, was killed after pushing a 10-year-old Afghan boy out of the path of a 14-ton armored vehicle. The difference in behavior between these two warfighters could not be more striking. Sergeant Weichel was a hero, a man worthy of both respect and emulation. His obituary makes that clear:

A highly respected member of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team with the 25th Infantry Division, Sgt. Weichel epitomized the Army values of Duty, Selfless Service and Personal Courage by disregarding his personal safety to protect the life of an innocent civilian child. Sgt. Weichel is an inspiration to the Nation.³

In contrast, Staff Sergeant Bales' behavior was both monstrous and disgusting. How do we account for the difference in behavior of these two men who both wore the nation's uniform?

Their lives were similar in a number of ways. Both joined the military in 2001. Both had served in Iraq prior to deploying to Afghanistan, Bales completing three tours and Weichel one.

¹ Michael W. Brough, “Dehumanization of the Enemy and the Moral Equality of Soldiers,” *Rethinking the Just War Tradition* ed. Michael W. Brough et. al. (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007), 164.

² Edward Tick, *Warrior's Return: Restoring the Soul after War*. (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2014), 16.

³ Obituary, SGT Dennis Paul Weichel Jr. <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/87247636/dennis-paul-weichel>

Both were highly decorated. Both were family men: Bales was married and the father of two; Weichel had three children and was engaged to be married. Both received the same military training in discipline, professionalism, and core values. Yet Weichel displayed incredible self-sacrificing heroics while Bales committed one of the worst atrocities of the entire Afghan war.

An editorial in a military newspaper pointedly asks:

How do we reconcile the acts of our two comrades? On the one hand, a protector of life and on the other a taker of life. Because of one we feel pride and brotherhood of purpose. Because of the other we feel shame and revulsion. Yet they are both our comrades. We trained with them, ate with them, laughed with them and cried with them. What does this mean for us? Are we capable of doing what they did?⁴

After eleven years of military service, Weichel retained his humanity. Bales had turned into a barbarian. This chapter asks the question: what is the difference between a warrior and a barbarian? Both are capable of taking human life. What is the difference between the young nineteen-year-old who takes the life of a Vietnamese nineteen-year-old in a jungle in Southeast Asia and his high school classmate who takes a human life on the streets of Detroit? What is the difference between a sniper and a hit man? Where is the line between atrocity and heroism?

IS MILITARY SERVICE A NOBLE PROFESSION?

Civilians often talk about “the military,” but the term *warrior* is seldom used. Unlike many societies throughout history, we have no recognized warrior class.⁵ The profession of bearing arms in the nation’s defense does not seem to be given the same respect accorded to other professions. Joining the military is often seen as a less desirable choice for high school

⁴ Kevin Ryan, “A Soldier’s Moral Compass Constantly Tested,” *Stars and Stripes*, April 2, 2012. <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/soldiers-moral-compass-constantly-tested>

⁵ Tick, *War and the Soul: Healing Our Nation’s Veterans from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder*. (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 2005) 181.

graduates than attending college. To meet their quotas, military recruiters focus their efforts on young people from the lower classes who have limited options.

This has caused an interesting disconnect in the attitudes of many people toward military service. When they see someone in uniform, they have a sense of respect and even awe. But when it comes to recommending military service to their own sons and daughters, there is a resistance. An exception to this trend is the southeastern part of the country, those states that make up the former Confederacy. In the American South, serving the nation by joining the military is still largely respected and even expected. The result is that our warriors are disproportionately from lower-income families (what has been referred to as the “poverty draft”⁶), from the deep South, and from families with a strong history of military service.

Is the military a noble profession? Is the profession of arms something worth pursuing? Is becoming a warrior an honorable goal to seek? Is it possible for military service to be a vocation, a calling from God no less honorable than a call to be a doctor, a lawyer, or a minister? Can a committed Christian become a career Marine?

THE IDOLOTRY OF WAR

According to Tertullian (155-220 AD), an elder in the North African city of Carthage and one of the earliest Latin Christian writers, the answer is no. “It is not by merely being in the world, however, that we lapse from God, but by touching and tainting ourselves with the world’s sins.” Tertullian was therefore opposed to Christians attending the circus, where games were played, or the theater. “The polluted things pollute us,” he writes. “It is on this account that we set before you to whom places of the kind are dedicated, that we may prove the things which are

⁶ Rita Nakashima Brock and Gabriella Lettini, *Soul Repair: Recovering from Moral Injury after War*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012) p. 2

done in them to belong to the idol-patrons to whom the very places are sacred.”⁷ Tertullian uses the same logic when he writes about military service. Marching in formation behind a military flag is inconsistent with the believer’s call to follow the banner of the cross. Weapons and sacraments are diametrically opposed to each other, as he writes in his treatise, *On Idolotry*:

But now inquiry is made about this point, whether a believer may turn himself into military service, and whether the military may be admitted into the faith, even the rank and file, or each inferior grade, to whom there is no necessity for taking part in sacrifices or capital punishments. There is no agreement between the divine and the human sacrament, the standard of Christ and the standard of the devil, the camp of light and the camp of darkness. One soul cannot serve two *masters*-- God and Caesar. And yet Moses carried a rod, and Aaron wore a buckle, and John (Baptist) is girt with leather and Joshua the son of Nun leads a line of march; and the People [sic] warred: if it pleases you to sport with the subject. But how will a *Christian man* war, nay, how will he serve even in peace, without a sword, which the Lord has taken away? For albeit soldiers had come unto John, and had received the formula of their rule: albeit, likewise, a centurion had believed; *still* the Lord afterward, in disarming Peter, unbelted every soldier. No dress is lawful among us, if assigned to any unlawful action.⁸

Throughout church history there have been those who have embraced Tertullian’s teaching and encouraged pacifism. The Anabaptist tradition, which includes the Mennonites, completely disavow military service. Many Christians who are not members of the so-called “peace churches” nevertheless consider themselves pacifists. A number of secular thinkers also consider themselves pacifists. The government of the United States recognizes conscientious objection, the opposition to all wars, as a legitimate reason not to be required to serve in the military.

When Karl Marlantes, who probably never heard of Tertullian, seeks to describe the battlefield, he refers to the Roman god of war, a god that was certainly familiar to Tertullian and

⁷ Tertullian, *De spectaculis*, viii https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Ante-Nicene_Fathers/Volume_III/Apologetic/The_Shows,_or_De_Spectaculis/Chapter_VIII

⁸ Tertullian, *On Idolatry*, Lighthouse Christian Publishing, 2015, p. 48.

his readers when he wrote *On Idolatry*. “I had entered the temple of Mars, where not only were humans sacrificed, including me, but I was also the priest. This priest, however, had only been to a seminary called the Basic School where he learned the ritual moves but none of the meaning.”⁹

It’s not difficult for the cynic to conclude that we view war as a religion, the idolatry of the Roman god Mars. The Idolatry of War is supported by a well-developed mythology and special holy days and celebrations.¹⁰ The mythology of the Idolatry of War is chronicled in Hollywood movies. John Wayne, who never served in the military, is the archetype of the ideal mythical warrior. Richard Gere is *An Officer and a Gentleman* according to the title of a 1982 film. Warriors are upheld as heroes, men and women of honor to be emulated. Long before the days of Hollywood, the mythical figure of the Noble Warrior was best captured by the medieval knights’ word *chivalry*.

The leaders of The Idolatry of War, who are called *officers*, are often trained at one of the three academies run by the military: Annapolis, Colorado Springs, or West Point. Naval officers who do not attend the Academy in Annapolis attend an Officer *Indoctrination* School (OIS). Leaders of the Idolatry of War are well trained to propagate the faith.

Like all religions, The Idolatry of War demands sacrifice. The two Holy Days, Memorial Day and Veterans’ Day, honor those who have “sacrificed so much.” The ultimate sacrifice is child sacrifice. Those who hold to this religion willingly sacrifice their children in the worship of Mars. Young people are sent to war by those who are older and who often have a financial

⁹ Karl Marlantes, *What it is Like to Go to War*. (New York, Atlantic Monthly Press, 2011) 5.

¹⁰ Camillo “Mac” Bica, PhD. *Worthy of Gratitude? Why Veterans May Not Want to be “Thanked” For Their Service in War* (Commack, NY: Gnosis Press, 2015) chap. 1, Kindle.

interest in war. In 2021 half of the United States Senators were over 65.¹¹ Companies who profit from war have cleverly located their offices and factories across the country. Their donations to reelection campaigns are simply the cost of doing business (and are tax-deductible). Congressmen support their constituents (and their pocketbooks) by voting according to the desires of the war industry. The whole racket is justified by those two most sacred of all words: “create jobs.”¹²

According to Tertullian and those who follow his lead, war is an idolatry. There is no such thing as a Noble Warrior. Christians need to distance themselves from military service, lest they be tainted by its evil.

JUST WAR THEORY

St. Augustine of Hippo (354 A.D.-430 A.D.), another early Christian from North Africa, offers a different answer to the question of whether Christians could be called military service. When Boniface, a governor in Africa and a military officer, was considering leaving the military to pursue a monastic life, he sought Augustine’s counsel. Augustine advised Boniface to consider his bodily strength a gift from God and to use it through military service.

Do not think that it is impossible for anyone to please God while engaged in active military service. Among such persons was the holy David, to whom God gave so great a testimony; among them also were many righteous men of that time; a soldier, was given high praise by our Lord. Many of the just men of his time were also soldiers . . .¹³

Think, then, of this first of all, when you are arming for the battle; that even

¹¹ Chris Cillizza, “2 charts that show just how old this Congress actually is.” *The Point with Chris Cillizza*, January 29, 2021. <https://www.cnn.com/2021/01/29/politics/congress-age/index.html>

¹² Bica, refers to this as the “military-industrial-Congressional complex,” an allusion to the warning of President Eisenhower, who was a military General, about the danger of the “military industrial complex.” *Worthy of Gratitude?* Chap. 2, Kindle.

¹³ Augustine, “Letter 189” par. 4. *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 1, Philip Schaff, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956) 553.

your bodily strength is a gift from God; for, considering this, you will not employ the gift of God against God. For, when faith is pledged, it is to be kept even with the enemy against whom war is waged. How much more with the friend for whom the battle is fought.

When you are arming yourself for battle, therefore, let this thought be foremost in your mind: Even your bodily strength is a gift of God. Think about God's gift in this way, and do not use it against God. Once you have given your word, you must keep it to the opponent against whom you wage war and all the more to your friend for whom you fight.¹⁴

Augustine believed there was such a thing as a Noble Warrior, and the military was a place where God might call a Christian to serve.

Augustine continues in his council to Boniface. The central issue for a Christian in the military is his or her motives:

Peace should be the object of your desire; war should be waged only as a necessity, and waged only that God may deliver men from the necessity and preserve them in peace. For peace is not sought in order to the kindling of war, but war is waged in order that peace may be obtained. Therefore, even in waging war, cherish the spirit of the peacemaker, that, by conquering those whom you attack, you may lead them back to the advantages of peace; for our Lord says: "Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called children of God."¹⁵

For Augustine, Christian participation in war must be an act of love. Christians are called to love their neighbor, and that neighbor includes their enemy (Matthew 5:44). This command includes the enemy with whom one is at war. Coming to the aid of someone innocently attacked can be an act of love, but so is confronting the one who is attacking. The evil of war is not the destruction and killing, but the wrong love.

What is the evil of war? Is it the death of some who will soon die in any case, that others may live in peaceful subjection? This is mere cowardly dislike, not any religious feeling. The real evils in war are love of violence, revengeful cruelty,

¹⁴ Ibid., par. 6, 554.

¹⁵ Ibid.

fierce and implacable enmity, wild resistance, and the lust of power, and such the like; and it is generally to punish these things when force is required to inflict the punishment, that, in obedience to God or some lawful authority, good men undertake wars, when they find themselves in such a position as regards the conduct of human affairs, that right conduct requires them to act, or to make others to act in this way.¹⁶

In summary, for Augustine war is an act of “tough love,” a rejection of enabling behavior that allows aggressors to evade responsibility for their criminal behavior, seeks justice for the victims of their evil behavior, and has as its the ultimate goal the pursuit of peace.

War is “a moral world . . . in the midst of hell,” writes Michael Walzer, echoing St. Augustine.¹⁷ What makes war a moral world is the rule of law. “War is distinguishable from murder and massacre only when restrictions are established in the reach of battle.”¹⁸ Warriors are not barbarians. They operate under strict rules.

Most of the rules and standards of the warrior’s code have been codified into law. The difference between the nineteen-year-old who kills in Southeast Asia and his high school classmate who murders on the streets of Detroit is the rule of law. International law, such as those established by the *Geneva Conventions*,¹⁹ military publications such as the *Department of Defense Law of War Manual*,²⁰ and the rules of engagement that proscribe limits on the use of

¹⁶ Augustine, “Reply to Faustus the Manichaen” Book 22, par. 74. *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 1V, Philip Schaff, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956) 301.

¹⁷ Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 5th ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1977) p. 36.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ *Geneva Conventions and their additional protocols*. Legal Information Institute, https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/geneva_conventions_and_their_additional_protocols#:~:text=The%20Geneva%20Conventions%20and%20their%20Additional%20Protocols%20is,to%20individuals%20who%20become%20victims%20of%20armed%20conflicts.

²⁰ *Department of Defense Law of War Manual*. Washington, D.C.: Office of the Grand Council Department of Defense, 2015.

force in specific conflicts, all regulate the behavior of those in combat. Failure to follow these laws can result in severe consequences including court martial and dishonorable discharge from the military. In Western civilization these laws are rooted Augustine's teaching on just war.

According to Augustine, a just war can only be fought for a just cause (justice) and with the right intent (love). Both must be satisfied for the choice for war to be morally acceptable. Augustine follows the Roman philosopher, Cicero (106-43 BC) in identifying five requirements, known as *jus ad bellum* (justice in going to war), that must be satisfied before war is considered justifiable. These criteria are legitimate authority, just cause, right intent, last resort, and reasonable chance of success. Two additional criteria, known as *jus in bello* (justice in waging war) deal with conduct in war. These are discrimination and proportionality. The five criteria of *jus ad bellum* and the two criteria of *jus in bello* form what is now known as Just War Theory.

In his acceptance speech when he received the 2009 Noble Peace Prize, President Barack Obama spoke of Just War:

And over time, as codes of law sought to control violence within groups, so did philosophers and clerics and statesmen seek to regulate the destructive power of war. The concept of a "just war" emerged, suggesting that war is justified only when certain conditions were met: if it is waged as a last resort or in self-defense; if the force used is proportional; and if, whenever possible, civilians are spared from violence.

The President continued, expressing his belief that war was sometimes morally justifiable, that going to war was right thing to do.

We must begin by acknowledging the hard truth: We will not eradicate violent conflict in our lifetimes. There will be times when nations – acting individually or in concert – will find the use of force not only necessary but morally justified.²¹

WAR IS A REGRETTABLE NECESSITY IN A FALLEN WORLD

²¹ Barack H. Obama, "A Just and Lasting Peace." *Noble Lecture*, Oslo, December 10, 2009. <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2009/obama/lecture/> .

Perhaps Tertullian and Augustine need to be held in creative tension. War is a paradox. The title of the second chapter of Michael Walzer's book, *Just and Unjust Wars* is "The Crime of War." The third chapter is called "The Rules of War." War is both a crime and is governed by rules.

Exactly seven years before President Obama gave his speech Jimmy Carter gave an acceptance speech for the Noble Peace Prize from the same podium. "War may sometimes be a necessary evil. But no matter how necessary, it is always an evil, never a good. We will not learn to live together in peace by killing each other's children."²²

The 39th President differed significantly from the 44th President-- and from both Tertullian and St. Augustine-- in his views on the morality of war. "My first chosen career," he told the Nobel Committee, "was in the military, as a submarine officer." Carter was no pacifist. But his words differ significantly from those of Augustine, quoted above: "in obedience to God . . . right conduct requires them [soldiers] to act, or to make others to act in this way."²³ For Augustine war as an act of love in the pursuit of justice was an act of obedience to God. For Carter war was always evil.

Western Christianity offers a binary choice regarding war. War is either always wrong (pacifism) or under certain circumstances is the moral choice (Just War). Carter offers a middle ground, one that is similar to the teachings of Eastern Orthodoxy.

The East did not seek to deal with just war themes such as correct conditions for entering war, and the correct conduct of war on the basis of the possibility of the existence of a 'just war,' precisely because it did not hold to such a view of war. Its view was different from that of the West. The East's approach to war was that

²² Jimmy Carter, *Nobel Lecture*, Oslo, December 10, 2002.
<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2002/carter/lecture/>

²³ Augustine, "Reply to Faustus the Manichaen" Book 22, par. 74. *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 1V, Philip Schaff, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1956) 301.

it was a necessary evil. The peace ideal continued to remain normative and no theoretical efforts were made to make conduct of war into a positive norm.²⁴

Whereas pacifism looks to Tertullian and Just War theorists quote St. Augustine, Orthodox theologians' writing on the morality of war inevitably begin by quoting St. Basil (329-379), Bishop of Caesarea, who died seven years before St. Augustine's conversion to Christianity. Basil's *Epistle 188* to Amphilochius the Bishop addressed a number of moral questions. In "canon 13" of *Epistle 188*, Basil writes: "Homicide in war is not reckoned by our Fathers as homicide; I presume froth [sic] their wish to make concession to men fighting on behalf of chastity and true religion. Perhaps, however, it is well to counsel that those whose hands are not clean only abstain from communion for three years."²⁵ Canon 13 uses the Greek word *φόνος*, "murder" or "homicide" twice. There were a number of other words Basil could have chosen that mean "to kill," but he chose to use the same one twice. "*Murders* in war is not reckoned by our Fathers as *murders*." For Basil, killing on the battlefield is murder. "Our Fathers" did not consider such killings as murder, but the warrior who has killed on the battlefield no longer has clean hands. The normal penance for someone convicted of murder was excommunication for 30 years. Basil reduces the sentence for someone who has taken a human life in battle to three years. But a penance is necessary to atone for the murder. The soldier with blood on his hands ought to abstain for a time from the Eucharist.²⁶

²⁴ "The Teaching on Peace in the Fathers," in *Wholeness of Faith and Life: Orthodox Christian Ethics*, part 1, *Patristic Ethics*, ed. Stanley S. Harakas (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1999), 155.

²⁵ St. Basil, "Epistle 188" trans. Rev. Bloomfield Jackson, M. A. vol. 8, *The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Second Series, vol 8: St Basil: Letters and Selected Works. <https://archive.org/details/St.BasilLettersAndSelectedWorks/mode/1up?view=theater> p. 539

²⁶ Valerie A. Karras, "Their Hands are not Clean" in Perry T. Hamalis and Valerie A. Karras, ed, *Orthodox Christian Perspectives on War*. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018) p. 147. Bernard J. Verkamp, citing the twelfth-century Byzantine historian and canonist John Zonaras, questions whether Basil's canon

For Augustine, participation in a just war morally right, an act of love. Love for the enemy requires confronting the evil behavior. Love for the victims of the enemy's wickedness requires acting to restore justice. As Daniel Bell concludes, "Just war is not something less than faithfulness. Rather, just war was a faithful form of Christian discipleship. It was not a compromise of the high calling of the Christian life."²⁷ In the Orthodox tradition, war is a paradox. A good example of this paradox is the fact that clergy are not allowed to participate in war, but offer prayers for the "Blessing of the Weapons."²⁸

Is war an idolatry, the worship of the god Mars as Tertullian suggested? Was Augustine correct when he suggested that war was sometimes a moral necessity rooted in the Christian virtue of love? Is war a regrettable necessity which leaves its participants with dirty hands, as the Orthodox contend? For veterans, these are not academic questions. They often wrestle with whether their military service was honorable and noble or participation in the greatest of all human evils. Their answer this question impacts their self-esteem, the significance of the life they have lived and value of the sacrifices they have made.

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was ever actually followed. *The Moral Treatment of Returning Warriors in Early Medieval and Modern Times*. (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Press, 1993) 22.

²⁷ Daniel M. Bell, Jr. *Just War as Christian Discipleship: Recentering the Tradition in the Church rather than the State*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2009), 33. Bell makes a strong case against the idea that war is a necessary evil, 32ff.

²⁸ Fr. Ernesto Obregon. "Blessing of weapons and the Orthodox," *Ortho Cuban*, February 17, 2004. <https://www.orthocuban.com/2014/02/blessing-of-weapons-and-the-orthodox/> This practice remains controversial. In 2020 the Russian Orthodox Church issued guidelines banning the blessing of nuclear weapons, Tom Balmforth, "Russian priests should stop blessing nukes - church proposal," *Reuters*, February 5, 2020. <https://www.reuters.com/article/russia-church-idINL8N2A45V3/#:~:text=%22The%20blessing%20of%20military%20weapons,the%20Moscow%20patriarchate's%20website%2C%20says>. But following the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 4, 2022, Orthodox priests resumed the practice. Cathleen Falsani, "Blessing Bombs, Putin's Altar Boy, and Twisting Russian Orthodoxy to Sanctify Nuclear War: Why the Russian Orthodox Church is Blessing Nuclear Weapons in a Once-atheistic Society." *Outrider*, July 6, 2022 <https://outrider.org/nuclear-weapons/articles/blessing-bombs-putins-altar-boy-and-twisting-russian-orthodoxy-sanctify>.

THE RESHAPING OF A WOMAN OR MAN INTO A WARRIOR IS DEPENDENT ON THE WARRIOR'S PREPARATION AND CODE. IT IS DEPENDENT ON THE TRADITIONS OUT OF WHICH IT WAS BORN AND OPERATES. IT IS DEPENDENT ON THE PARTICULAR CAUSE FOR WHICH WARRIORS FIGHT AND FOR WHICH THEY ARE ASKED TO TAKE LIFE AND OFFER THEIR OWN. IT IS DEPENDENT ON THE NUMBER, LENGTH, INTENSITY, AND KINDS OF TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES BEFORE SERVICE AND WHILE IN THE MILITARY AND THE WAR ZONE. AND IT IS DEPENDENT ON A SOCIETY'S USE AND CARE FOR ITS WARRIORS BEFORE AND DURING SERVICE AND DEPLOYMENTS AND FOR THE REST OF THEIR LIFE SPAN.

--EDWARD TICK²⁹.

Chapter One identified two major life transitions all veterans must make: from civilian to soldier, and from soldier to veteran. There is a third transition that some but not all soldiers make: from soldier to warrior. To become a Noble Warrior, a soldier must successfully make this transition at some point during a military career.

Along with training in how to wear a uniform, physical fitness, and close-order drill, recruits are also given lessons in character development. Each of the military services has developed a set of “Core Values” that set the standards of behavior expected of anyone who wears that service’s uniform. In the Navy and Marine Corps the Core Values are “Honor, Courage, and Commitment.” The Air Force values are “Integrity First, Service before Self, and Excellence in all we do.” For the Coast Guard, the values are “Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty.” The Army uses the term “Army Values” and has seven: “Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage.”³⁰ But these are just words, ideals

²⁹ Tick, *Warrior's Return*, 59

³⁰ The newly developed Space Force has adopted the three Core Values of Agility, Innovation, and Boldness. According to the *Space Force Mission and Vision Statement*, “The Space Force core values can be stated: “As a lean, mission-focused, digital service, the United States Space Force values organizational agility, innovation, and boldness.” Notice these are attributes describing the institution rather than virtues describing the character of those who wear the uniform. <https://mission-statement.com/space-force/>

imposed from the outside, “printed on pieces of metal shaped like dog tags and on cards that soldiers keep in their wallets” as Stephen Mansfield observes.³¹

Noble Warriors are men and women who have internalized these words and made them their own. The Core Values learned in boot camp have been embraced and transformed into personal virtues. They are internal standards to which Noble Warriors hold themselves accountable. The Core Values have become part of their own, personal core, a part of their deepest self. These values define who Noble Warriors *are*. They constitute the essence of their souls.

The central virtue for the warrior is *honor*. The importance of honor in the military cannot be overstated. Lack of honor is the worst charge that could be levied against any member of the military. Honor that motivates military officers to behave like “gentlemen” and observe proper table etiquette. They observe proper manners because they are disciplined, a character trait indispensable on the battlefield. They treat people with respect because they value others, including those under their command. They put the needs of their nation, their service, and their fellow warriors ahead of their own needs because they are leaders, and that is what leaders do. Character matters. Those who have served well, whether officer or enlisted, are given a final gift that will be theirs for the rest of their life: an *honorable* discharge.

The difference between Sergeant Weichel and Staff Sergeant Robert Bales can be summed up in this single word. To sacrifice one’s life to save a 10-year-old Afghan boy from being killed by an armored military vehicle is *honorable*. To murder civilians including women and children is *dishonorable*.

³¹ Stephen Mansfield, *The Faith of the American Soldier*. New York: Penguin, 2005, p. 122

Nine to thirteen weeks of basic training are not enough to create mature warriors out of the young Americans who arrive at bootcamp from diverse recruiting centers across the country. The best this initial military training can accomplish is to set the groundwork that will enable young soldiers to eventually become warriors. The transition from soldier to warrior will take time. The newly minted young soldiers will be tested by the challenges of military life. They will need to ask difficult questions and reflect deeply on their experiences.

Staff Sergeant Bales eventually matured. His time in prison provided him with the opportunity to reflect on the deeper, spiritual questions that need to be asked and answered. While incarcerated, he focused on his Christian faith and submitted to baptism.³² Tragically, his maturity came too late. He never made the transition from soldier to Noble Warrior.

WARRIORS

A warrior looks ahead
They remove barriers
They ensure justice is done
They do not back down.

A warrior is like the eagle in a storm
They do not take shelter
They face the battering winds
They soar above the storm

A warrior cares for the weak
They redirect the wayward
They care for those who suffer
They protect the community

Be a warrior for your people
Heed the call
Promote justice
Ride above the turmoil

³² Staff Sgt. Robert Bales Came to Hate 'Everyone Who Isn't American.'" *NBC News*, June 8, 2015. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/military/staff-sgt-robert-bales-came-hate-everyone-who-isnt-american-n371391>.

Dedicated to Jonathan Maracle, one of God's warriors who inspires others to be a warrior.

Jasper Hoogendam. © May 2023