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LET ME NOT THEN DIE INGLORIOUSLY:
HOMER, AFGHANISTAN AND LEADERSHIP

by

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ABSTRACT

LET ME NOT THEN DIE INGLORIOUSLY:

HOMER, AFGHANISTAN AND LEADERSHIP

Adam F. Cook

The neglect of studying Homer has resulted in a deficiency in the formal training and leadership of military commanders. As a military we focus our attention on theory, maneuver or tactics. Leadership is frequently discussed also; however, we forego any instruction on *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* while these texts represent a brilliant source of information with which to groom military leaders. While tactics and arms change throughout history, what remains consistent from the times of Ancient Greece to our current period is the human condition. The effects of combat in all its forms have not changed since Achilles took the battlefield. Yet we neglect Homer because he offers no strategic or tactical advantage. As military leaders we have sacrificed the opportunity for a more thorough understanding of our troops and their struggles so that we can dream of our own Cannae. We would be better served by reading Homer to gain knowledge of the troops of we lead.

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Introduction

Regimental Combat Team-1, or RCT-1, arrived in theater in September 2010.¹ Nine years had elapsed since the initial invasion of Afghanistan. The irony of the situation was not lost to me; I was familiar with another siege that lasted ten years: *The Iliad*. That old Greek poem would become more and more relevant and useful during the year-long deployment.

RCT-1 deployed to Camp Dwyer in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. At the time, the camp was a large encirclement of HESCO barriers in the middle of a seemingly infinite desert.² The isolation of the desert added some comfort as the fear of being attacked was remote. As an RCT, we were responsible for the operations of four infantry battalions occupying the town of and regions surrounding Marjah.³

My unit within the RCT was the Motor Transport platoon belonging to the Logistics shop. We were 42 Marines in all. Our responsibilities consisted of conducting mounted patrols, repairing our own vehicles, re-supply missions to forward areas, facilitating the construction of forward operating bases (FOBs), training in-coming units and the oversight of operations and maintenance of motor vehicle assets to four infantry battalions. Aside from the mounted patrols, our role consisted of the stuff that would hit the cutting room floor in Hollywood. Our role was not glamorous but essential to waging war. In a year's time, my Marines would alter the concept of logistics for not only our Regiment and its infantry battalions but other Regiments and their

¹ Regimental Combat Team-1, or RCT-1, is the deployed designation for the 1st Marine Regiment. The Regimental level is a Command and Control element consisting of Administrative, Intelligence, Operations, Logistics and Communications shops. The RCT takes direct from Division and in turn directs four infantry battalions occupying forward areas (possibly less but the traditional number is four). In truth, the RCT and Division are not exactly involved in glamorous work as they do not possess the combat power of a battalion.

² HESCO barriers are made up of wire and cloth. They open up to form a square which is filled with sand (a material in abundance in Afghanistan). They provide effective barriers from small arms fire.

³ Less than a year prior to the arrival of RCT-1 in Helmand Province, Marjah was considered a stronghold for Taliban forces. The town and surrounding environs are located in a major belt of poppy fields and vital to Taliban interests.

battalions. So great were their efforts that other units observed, adopted and implemented their concepts. Their accomplishments deserve much more praise than I could give. Their dedication and determination were simply incredible. In short, they were Marines.

As platoon commander, my job was the supervision of the Motor Transport unit; as an officer, my purpose was to look after my Marines: train them, praise them in public, discipline in private, encourage ideas, listen to them, defend them, maintain the standard. I learned that a good officer is a friend to his peers, usually scorned by his superiors and loved by his Marines. It was the trust and commitment of the 41 Marines “beneath” me that was overwhelmingly more important than the support of the one or two above me.

The deployment would be trying to all us, perhaps each in his own way. For some reason, morale remained high when everyone is suffering. Over the course of a year, we sweat and bled, laughed and cried and ultimately triumphed over the perils of Southeast Afghanistan to return home to our families.

A month into the deployment, I decided to read *The Iliad*. As an English undergraduate student, I had read the poem a few times in my studies. The story always appealed to me. Brave Hector, wise Odysseus and matchless Achilles were not just characters in a story to me but very real. My decision to re-read *The Iliad* was prompted by a bond shared between the Greeks at Troy and my unit in Afghanistan: we were both in a prolonged war without a definitive end in sight. The parallel was apparent immediately. While in my previous readings, never had I recognized such a connection or revelation; of course, I had never been to war before either. My academic readings focused on Homeric similes, the pettiness of the Gods or the wrath of Achilles. This reading would be different. As the first parallel between my deployment and *The Iliad* arrived so naturally, I decided to search for further similarities. As my reading progressed,

an understanding developed that Homer was not simply writing about Greeks and Trojans and the warriors of his time but of human nature and the struggle we call war.

The focus of this thesis is to demonstrate the relevance of Homer applied to our military leaders of today and tomorrow. Through the upcoming chapters, events experienced by me and my Marines will be compared to events suffered by the heroes of *The Iliad* and, to some extent, *The Odyssey*. The parallels will exhibit the experiences shared by both parties, despite a separation of nearly 3,000 years, to be much the same. Technology progresses the methods in which we conduct war but human nature has not changed. Human nature cannot change. Courage, fear, anger, sadness, joy and regret will forever remain imprinted on the fabric of humanity. Achilles' tears are the same as any soldier who lost a close friend. The pride of Agamemnon would be echoed by that of MacArthur. The Greeks and Trojans who fought at Troy are still the men who fight today in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁴

The Marine Corps spends valuable resources to groom its leaders, both enlisted and officer. Yet, none of that formalized training includes *The Iliad*. The argument of this paper is that studying Homer would increase the ability and knowledge of Marine Corps leaders. *The Iliad* is not simply a book on war, it is *the* book on war. The poem provides dramatic and subtle examples demonstrating the gamut of human emotion in combat. *The Odyssey* details the pitfalls of returning home and describes how those at home have also suffered. Through the course of my deployment, the issues encountered by me and my Marines were challenges confronted by Greek and Trojan warriors of ancient times. The text contributed to my understanding of the emotions suffered by my Marines and, hopefully, made me a better leader and led to the belief that any military leader would benefit from a thorough understanding of *The Iliad*.

⁴ The need to argue Homer's usefulness is almost paradoxical. A copy of *The Iliad* was inseparable from Alexander the Great as he made his conquest of much of the known world.

A brief distinction must be made before moving forward. What is *The Iliad*? The subject has become somewhat ambiguous due to popular culture and adaptations. Those who have not read *The Iliad* most likely have some idea of the poem's context and heroes. The common answer being: the story of Helen and Paris, of Achilles and the fall of Troy. To a certain extent, that answer is not wrong. The familiarity of the overall story demonstrated by those who have not read the poem is somewhat surprising; perhaps, in a backhanded way, it is a tribute to Homer that his work endures even among those who have not read his poem. Nonetheless, that answer is not entirely correct. Ironically, those who have read *The Iliad* maybe once or twice out of leisure without a true academic pursuit are likely to answer alike to those who have not read the poem: the story of Helen and Paris, of Achilles and the fall of Troy.

This thesis will not attempt to provide a thorough synopsis of the poem lest it become yet another unworthy adaptation. In truth, there is no such thing as an adequate summary of *The Iliad*. One must simply read it. Most likely more than once. The best method for our purposes is to condense the principle components of the plot.

The Iliad begins in the tenth year of the Greek siege of Troy. Agamemnon has seized Briseis the beautiful war prize belonging to Achilles. In his anger, Achilles has decided to refrain from any further fighting against the Trojans. The Trojans begin to give the better of it pressing the Greeks back to the ocean threatening to burn their ships. Patroclus, the cousin and close friend of Achilles, joins the fray wearing Achilles' armor only to be killed by Hector. Achilles becomes enraged, rejoins the fighting, slaughters scores of Trojans and kills Hector. The anger of Achilles is so great that he desecrates the corpse of Hector and refuses to return it to his father, King Priam. The poem concludes as Priam enters the hut of Achilles and begs for the return of

his son. The wrath of Achilles subsides and he returns Hector's body to his father and Hector's remains are given a proper burial.

As stated earlier, no summarization or later adaptation does *The Iliad* justice. A working knowledge of the poem is all that our audience requires to continue. Additional commentary on *The Iliad* will be employed when necessary to demonstrate the shared experiences of the men at Troy and coalition forces in Afghanistan.

The Iliad opens as the Greeks are in the tenth year in their siege of Troy. The poem will conclude with the return of Hector's body to his father, Priam, not the victory of the Greeks over the Trojans. *The Iliad* opens and closes with Greek and Trojan fixed in struggle. The conflict does not end but endures. Perhaps the continuous fighting is one of Homer's transcendent observations. War is internal to mankind while the brief interruptions of peace are the uncommon pauses between. Even within the poem, the Greeks and Trojans will meet in combat then break away only to return once more to the breach. The death of a great hero results in a brief resolution to honor the dead but before long both factions will return to battle and carnage. Possibly, Homer is presenting a philosophical question regarding the nature of humanity and conflict.⁵ For the moment we can eschew the philosophy but need only recognize how important and interesting a question we neglect by not reading *The Iliad* but familiarizing ourselves instead with lesser adaptations. The point is that *The Iliad* is a poem on war. Contemporary audiences might become confused by the inclusion of extraneous stories pertaining to the Trojan War by various contributing authors. Those stories are not *The Iliad* and to fail to make that distinction will cloud the true meaning within *The Iliad*: war and how men struggle through combat.

⁵ The permanence of war is a concept well known and accepted by the Greeks. Plato makes such a statement in his *Laws*: 'Peace is but a name.'

My proposal to read Homer begets another question: why is Homer not read whether it be for serious academic study or personal leisure or military training? Or if Homer is read what are the areas of concentration? Is the class or individual focusing on Achilles' shield, the internecine rivalries between the gods or the awkward and implausible duels between Greek and Trojan warriors?

The Iliad can be a difficult text. It is lengthy with a few translations reaching 600 pages. The gods are more human than divine. They are prone to pettiness, guile and deceit to get what they want. A god may take form and participate in battle only to be wounded by a Greek or Trojan warrior and be forced to retire to Olympus nursing his or her wounds. The gods of *The Iliad* are incompatible with the Judeo-Christian God. Only two characters resemble divinity: Helen in her unsurpassed beauty and Achilles in his unrelenting slaughter not even stopping to eat or drink. The futility of the gods might be written off by certain audiences and with it the rest of the poem. Also, the combat scenes are somewhat ridiculous. In the heat of battle, opponents stop to deliver lengthy orations before engaging in combat or delivering a fatal blow. Surely, no one fought in such a method. Such odd conversations during battle might ruin much of the poem for some or render it irrelevant due to the weaponry of the time.⁶

Despite the gods and the clumsy battle scenes, there is much to be gained from studying Homer. The gods and the battles are not the point and to discard *The Iliad* because of them is a terrible abuse and misunderstanding of the real themes. The length of the poem weighed against the wisdom it can bestow is a minimal investment offering fantastic returns. The benefits need not only to be judged in a military context because the poem leads to a better understanding of human nature in any learning environment.

⁶ While the battle scenes are awkward, Homer's depiction of death is final and grim. Homer does not trivialize or make any qualms about the finality of death.

As a book or poem might be assigned in a collegiate course of study, so does the Marine Corps designate books to read. This method is informal and in the academic world would be considered a very liberal approach to independent study. As such, *The Iliad* might present too difficult a text for some to read without helpful instruction. This is certainly not a knock towards anyone who might attempt to read it as the text is challenging and the finer points might be overlooked even by accomplished readers.

In the course of my studies, I fortuitously stumbled onto the works of Dr. John Shay. Dr. Shay is a clinical psychologist with over twenty years of experience in VA hospitals serving Veterans. His contributions *Achilles in Vietnam* and *Odysseus in America* are extraordinary works. Dr. Shay meticulously compares excerpts from *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* with the experiences of American troops in Vietnam and their return home while concentrating on the psychological effects of combat. He is the man for the job as he is a practicing psychiatrist and his knowledge of Homer is scholarly. His works identify that the conflicts our troops endure are the same as suffered by those fighting at Troy. Reading *Achilles in Vietnam* and *Odysseus in America* is a revelation and highly encouraged. Oddly enough, I cannot recall ever seeing anyone reading either of them while in the service. I had never heard of them prior to conducting research for this paper. Both books are included on the Commandant's Reading List; however, the only level that *Achilles in Vietnam* is recommended for is the highest ranking enlisted personnel in the Marine Corps: Master Gunnery Sergeant and Sergeant Major.⁷ The book is not designated for any rank of officer. *Odysseus in America* is not assigned to any specific rank but a category: Wounded Warrior. Personally, I think this decision is a mistake and a scary insight into our mentality as a Marine Corps and a country. The trials of homecoming are not limited to those

⁷ The Commandant has a published reading list broken down by rank. For the most part, the list is an exceptional tool to groom Marines; however, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are not included.

who are “wounded.” Any troop deployed and the family of that troop will have issues resulting from that deployment and his or her return home. Simply to label *Odysseus in America* as reading material for wounded troops or veterans is retroactive and falls short of what our troops deserve. Consider that our country as of 2013 has been at war for 12 years. Our front line troops and those in combat are subject to numerous deployments. It is not uncommon to meet Sergeants with five or six years in the service with the same number of deployments (Army soldiers might have fewer deployments but only because Army deployments are longer than those of Marines). The number of troops and frequency in which they saw combat is an all-time high for our country. Consider that most Marines and soldiers join the service before they are twenty years old and will deploy not long after. Consider the number of U.S. troops returning home with traumatic brain injuries, missing limbs and all the horrors associated with Improvised Explosive Devices. Recognize that we are re-deploying our troops out of Afghanistan and have left Iraq. As our forces scale down, we are releasing Marines and soldiers whose sole occupation has been to fight and kill for a decade and routinely exposed to deployments which demand their skills. As a country, we have been sheltered from the effects of combat. Our troops have not. As they re-integrate into society, those effects will be felt by everyone. Possibly, instead of a book on tank maneuver warfare, military leaders should focus on the psychological issues suffered by our troops and reintegration into society.

Dr. Shay has offered a competent source for our leaders and society to study. We have so much to learn about what is happening to our troops and how we can stem the tide. As his books help us to learn the psychological effects of combat; we can still learn more from Homer. Particularly, our military leaders need to understand the significance of Homer while in combat and returning home. *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* have proven valuable since Alexander. As our

country transitions from a decade of war, the importance of Homer might never be greater. My thesis may lack the clinical knowledge of Dr. Shay. However, I hope it provides an insight not from one who studied war and its effects but one who has lived through it.

Themis

The Iliad opens in the ninth year of the Greek siege of Troy. Agamemnon, the supreme commander of Greek forces, has abducted the daughter of a Trojan priest to the god Apollo. Chryses, the priest, offers a large ransom for her return. After Agamemnon's refusal, Chryses prays for aid from Apollo who sends a fatal plague through the Greek army. For nine days, Greeks die as the result of Agamemnon's refusal. On the tenth day, Achilles approaches Agamemnon with the seer Calchas who has divined that in order to appease Apollo and end the Greek destruction, Agamemnon must return the priest's daughter. Agamemnon rages at the idea. He rebukes Calchas as a seer of misery and declares that to lose his prize without remuneration would be a disgrace and cause him to lose his place of honor. Achilles promises that the Greeks will reward Agamemnon three-to-four times over when Troy is captured, but for the sake of the Greek cause the girl must be returned. Agamemnon agrees to release the girl but determines to humiliate Achilles by seizing the prize awarded him by the Greek army: Briseis.

The plot of *The Iliad* follows the descent and restoration of Achilles (the greatest warrior of the poem), his humiliation at the hands of Agamemnon, refusal to fight, the death of Patroclus provoking his return to fighting, his slaughter of Trojans in a beast like state, desecration of the corpse of Hector and his restoration to noble character by returning Hector's corpse. Homer wastes no time developing the plot, as Agamemnon will humiliate Achilles in Book 1 triggering the subsequent series of events. The remainder of the poem is the struggle of Achilles to reform to his noble state. As Homer introduces his first plot element early in the poem, he also provides an opportunity to compare Greek leadership styles. Within a few stanzas a contrast in leadership emerges: incompetent and capable, Agamemnon and Achilles.

Achilles is considerate and noble. He recognizes the destruction of his brothers-in-arms from Apollo's wrath and calls upon Calchas to provide some revelation to lift the god's anger. When asked he promises protection to Calchas from Agamemnon's possible reprisal. Achilles stands up to Agamemnon to end the strife visited on the Greeks. Achilles wants the safety of his brothers, desires to appease the gods and presents a solution to a superior ranking officer. In contrast, Agamemnon shouts down and threatens a holy man, refuses the return of a daughter to her father, allows his own troops to die, throws a temper tantrum when told he cannot keep his prize then humiliates a subordinate, though more capable, officer. The episode will send Achilles into a descent from his noble state and have disastrous effects for the Greeks.

With command comes the expectation from subordinates to do "what is right."⁸ Once this expectation is damaged or flawed, morale declines and trust is broken. This breach of faith may affect one troop or resonate discord throughout the entire unit. Homer was able to use one word that proficiently describes that expectation. Veterans Affairs psychiatrist and author, Dr. Jonathan Shay writes:

No single English word takes in the whole sweep of a culture's definition of right and wrong; we use terms such as moral order, convention, normative expectations, ethics, and commonly understood social values. The ancient Greek word that Homer used, *themis*, encompasses all these meanings.⁹

The anger of Achilles and his decision to refrain from fighting might be from the loss of Briseis; possibly, he was deeply emotionally attached to her. More likely, his anger is the result of the act in and of itself in which he is humiliated and the breakdown in "what is right" or *themis*. The

⁸ Dr. Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (Scribner, 1994), 25.

⁹ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 5.

breach of Agamemnon forces the anger of Achilles and his removal from combat. The seizure of Briseis is a betrayal; a complete loss of faith that forces the most capable Greek warrior to stop fighting and prepare to sail home. Agamemnon commits the ultimate sin; he exploits a troop for the sake of his own advancement.

The effect of this betrayal on Achilles is dynamic. He is disgraced in front of his own men (the Myrmidons) and the entire Greek army to include its officers. Achilles launches a tirade against Agamemnon and recalls earlier abuses of Agamemnon's leadership:

Staggering drunk, with your dog's eyes, your fawn's heart!
 Never once did you arm with troops and go to battle
 or risk an ambush packed with Achaea's picked me-
 you lack the courage, you can see death coming.
 Safer by far, you find, to foray all through camp,
 commandeering the prize of any man who speaks against you.¹⁰

In his rage, Achilles contemplates killing Agamemnon. Athena races down from Olympus to assuage Achilles' anger and stay his hand. The hero is resolved to abstain from fighting and chooses to wait until the Greeks, particularly Agamemnon, are desperate for his return.

It is an ugly scene. The abuses of power by Agamemnon are of the worst kind. He is greedy and selfish. He humiliates his best soldier by taking possession of his property. Such an action between commander and troop suggests a jealousy of the latter's ability. Agamemnon can now include petty to his description. The betrayal of "what is right" shatters the confidence possessed by the Greeks in their commander (as attested to in Book 2 to be discussed later).

¹⁰ Robert Fagles, trans., *The Iliad* (Penguin Books, 1990), 85.

Agamemnon's actions, though the specifics are not universal, are not altogether unique. He humiliates a subordinate who seemingly questions orders. From the text, it can be assumed that Agamemnon and Achilles have had a previous history and Achilles already felt slighted by his lack of reward. Achilles' suggestion to Agamemnon to return the girl in lieu of prizes to come is not a chastisement, yet Agamemnon takes considerable insult. Choosing not to resolve the matter quietly, Agamemnon addresses Achilles in front of the army deriding him with the appropriation of Briseis. Agamemnon had options. Commanders have options. Plagued by his insecurity and selfishness, Agamemnon acted out of anger making the decision to humiliate rather than conciliate. The commander who is insecure will often make the same decision. It is not a matter of a subordinate being correct in his suggestion to commands. The manner in response, whether yes or no, can be given in a method which renders the same result: "Yes, I see your point. Let's continue like this" or "I gave that some consideration but have decided the best result is to follow this path." If needed, correction or discipline can be given at a later time and place away from the public eye. There are times when discipline is necessary. The commander needs to make a thoughtful calculation of when that time should be.

The most egregious abuse of power or break in *themis* is the removal of Briseis. Obviously, within our own forces, we do not capture foreign women as war prizes. However, prizes need not be pretty girls but may include financial benefits, awards or promotions. There are many ways in which to reward or humiliate troops. I witnessed three enlisted Marines, all Staff Sergeants, standing in formation in front of the company for an award ceremony in which they were to be commended for their performance. Their officer, a major, marched to the first Marine and the Adjutant read off the award citation. The major congratulated the Marine, pinned his medal then side-stepped neatly to the Marine next to him. The Adjutant read off the award

citation, the major congratulated the Marine, pinned his medal, then side-stepped neatly to the Marine next to him and the Adjutant read off the final award citation. The major looked at the last Marine, about faced to the left and proceeded to the rear of the formation without giving the last Marine his award. The major disagreed with the decision to decorate the Marine so he declined to pin his medal. The confiscation of Briseis is the removal of reward. The major acted much the same as Agamemnon. I remember hearing the major arguing with the Adjutant about not awarding the Marine “I don’t think he deserves it”. Eventually the Marine would be given his award.¹¹ Eventually Briseis would be returned to Achilles. The behavior of the commander caused his Marine to be humiliated in front of peers, junior Marines and his superiors. The major apologized to the Staff Sergeant as did Agamemnon to Achilles. Agamemnon’s apology was sycophantic and behind-closed-doors, I’m willing to bet so was the major’s. The major clearly disrupted *themis*. The scene was a pathetic display of leadership.

As the behavior of Agamemnon is replicated by posterity, so is that of Achilles. Despite the offense of Agamemnon, Achilles is guilty of insubordination, desertion and threatening an officer. Dozens of similar events throughout history come to mind. One of the most recent and prevalent concepts associated with Achilles and his anger towards a superior ranking officer is fragging. Achilles strongly considers killing Agamemnon after being given offense:

¹¹ Based on the award, approval is run up through various chains-of-command. The General of 1st Marine Division most likely signed off on that award (if not the General then someone certainly higher ranking than the Major). I wonder what repercussions might have been against the Major had certain authorities learned what he did, not only humiliating one of his Marines but disobeying an order from a higher ranking officer.

The heart in his rugged chest was pounding, torn...
 Should he draw the long sharp sword slung at his hip,
 thrust through the ranks and kill Agamemnon now? -¹²

The intervention of the gods is necessary to calm Achilles. Not all were as lucky as Agamemnon to have such interference. In Vietnam, fragging referred to the purposeful killing of higher ranking leaders by their own troops. Bullets do not recognize which side you are on. Who is to say that an NVA ambush did not toss one grenade directly where the Lieutenant or Staff Sergeant was sleeping then slip back into the jungle. If a fictional account can be considered a creditable source Norman Mailer wrote about fragging that occurred in World War II. In *The Naked and the Dead* Sergeant Croft purposefully allows Lieutenant Hearn to lead a patrol directly into a Japanese ambush. His silence is deadly and represents a passive form of fragging. There were various reasons for committing such an act, the main cause was incompetent and/or biased leadership. If troops felt that their commander was incompetent and likely to get them killed, fragging them was considered. If troops felt that squad A never went on patrol while squad B was continuously conducting ambushes, fragging the commander making the decision was considered. The consequences of leadership in this context are extreme but real. Our earliest narrative of war, *The Iliad* speaks to the possibility of fragging. From Homer to Vietnam, the environment to kill their own commander is not an innate desire of troops but a product of poor leadership.

The breach in *themis* is analogous to original sin. Both are definitive departures from the status quo and there can be no turning back. Agamemnon will make other poor decisions as a leader but his incompetency has peaked when he humiliates Achilles and disrupts “what is

¹² Fagles, *The Iliad*, 83-4.

right.” Consequently, he can recover from his other ‘minor’ leadership transgressions but not from his violation of *themis*. While there are many other minor sins to follow, the original sin remains paramount. Such is true about Agamemnon’s leadership.

Agamemnon will commit additional leadership offenses. Even prior to his seizure of Briseis, Agamemnon demonstrates abysmal leadership. For the sake of keeping his honor, he will allow Greeks to die. “Men were dying and all because Agamemnon spurned Apollo’s priest.”¹³ He risks the outcome of the war for his pride. The lives of his men he discards without consideration. Agamemnon trivializes his most critical assets in both morale and materiel. Sufficient food, water and weapons are never an issue for the Greek or Trojan armies; however, men are at a premium either in number or in value. Yet, Agamemnon spurns the wrath of the gods at the cost of human lives.

In Book 2, Agamemnon continues to err in his leadership. After having a dream in which he is told to attack Troy, he blunders over a speech intended to quasi-shame yet inspire his men to press the attack. His speech has the opposite effect as his troops decide to forget-and-forego the sack of Troy and return to Greece. Agamemnon completely lacks charisma; his troops simply do not respond to him. Instead of recognizing his address as mocking, his men take his words literally and race to the ships to return home. The sack of Troy seems all but lost when Odysseus intervenes and restores order amongst the ranks. Homer provides another comparison of leaders in which Agamemnon proves the lesser.

In ironic fashion Odysseus delivers much the same speech. He scolds the men, calling them “...green, defenseless boys or widowed women whimpering to each other.”¹⁴ He humiliates

¹³ Fagles, *The Iliad*, 77.

¹⁴ Fagles, *The Iliad*, 109.

the army claiming they intend to disgrace their leader, Agamemnon. He even beats one soldier rather mercilessly. Yet, the troops respond to him. By the end of the speech, he has worked the army into a frenzy:

He fired them so
the armies roared and the ships resounded round them,
shattering echoes ringing from their shouts
as Argives cried assent to King Odysseus' words.¹⁵

Quite a different response compared to Agamemnon's earlier speech. Two men give a similar speech with opposite effect. There is a disparate level of skill between the two men. Agamemnon remarks there is "no end in sight"¹⁶ and "our work drags on."¹⁷ In contrast, Odysseus launches into a lengthy interpretation of an omen as a metaphor for the sacking of Troy and concludes that the time is near at hand. Agamemnon harangues and abuses using sarcasm to shame his army into fighting (though he ends with an order to sail home). Odysseus slanders the troops and questions their resolve in order to provide them the possibility for redemption. As the audience learns, Agamemnon is an incompetent failure again and again.

In between the two speeches a common soldier, Thersites, catcalls Agamemnon. In humorous fashion, Thersites scolds Agamemnon for his greed in acquiring prizes: gold and women, from the men who won them for him. He even suggests that if Achilles wanted to, he could have killed Agamemnon over the offense of Briseis (a return to fragging). The observation is that troops may perceive wrongs not only done to their person but to their comrades as well. Thersites happens to be the soldier whom Odysseus confronts.

¹⁵ Fagles, *The Iliad*, 110.

¹⁶ Fagles, *The Iliad*, 103.

¹⁷ Fagles, *The Iliad*, 104.

The eagerness of the troops to fight following Odysseus' speech suggests that the men are ready for battle but are particular for whom they fight. Two speeches, similar in vein, different speakers, drastically different results. Agamemnon's intention to launch a full scale attack against Troy somehow deteriorates into a stampede to the ships. After Agamemnon's flop, Odysseus appears an early Henry V rallying his brothers at Agincourt. The army is eager for battle and raise their voices in excitement. Agamemnon's failure is not surprising. The betrayal of *themis* still lingers amongst the army and Achilles' absence is a constant reminder. Or, perhaps the troops are still smarting from the ten days of plague visited them from Agamemnon's indifference.

Throughout *The Iliad* Agamemnon will continue to plod through important leadership decisions with the same tact and carelessness as before. Still, much can be learned from Agamemnon's example. Specifically, his departure from "what is right." A breach in faith can have devastating effects on the individual, unit and/or army. Possibly there are examples where confidence is restored but the number of such examples are exceptionally limited, if any; instead, the result is final. The violation of *themis* need not be so dramatic as the removal of Briseis but a more indirect breach of "what is right" will suffice in the breakdown of moral and good order.

Money, awards and promotions are central to the lives of troops. This statement is a bit obtuse as troops do not ask much for any of the three. Military pay is competitive, at best. Consider the long hours when in CONUS, deployments of 6-7 months or 18 months or up to 2 years and the hazards associated with being overseas.¹⁸ The awards process is capricious. Supposedly they are objective without any relationship to rank; a running joke in the military as

¹⁸ CONUS is the acronym for Continental United States and referred to when back in the States. Standard Marine infantry battalion deployment is 6-7 months, Army deployments last up to 18 months and sailors aboard a nuclear submarine deploy for two years at a time.

officers and senior enlisted routinely receive higher ranking awards than their juniors.

Promotions can be affected by time in service. The longer a troop has been in one rank the more points he/she earns towards promotion. It's a slippery slope. The system can reward troops with time over those with actual merit. Also, every troop is evaluated by a superior. This relationship can become tenuous and lead to direct conflict. Like most hard workers, our troops simply want to be recognized for their efforts; yet, they remain underpaid, unappreciated and unrecognized, to a degree. The systems we have in place to ensure the proper distribution of benefits are usually fair and routine. Troops do not question the fairness of the system as long as they can depend on its regularity. When the systems are adjusted, or perhaps a flaw is discovered, there can be a breach in *themis* and consequences follow.

Military pay is based on time-in-service and rank. Skill, awards, job within the military, specific training do not affect salary. An Army Special Forces soldier and a cook in the Navy with equivalent rank and same time-in-service earn equal pay. I am not one to question the system but take the time to provide clarification. Usually civilians are not familiar with military pay grades. Even when I was in the Marine Corps, we held the belief that Air Force personnel with equivalent rank and time-in-service earned more money than we did. Of course, this was nonsense and no one was sure where the rumor originated (there might be some merit to the rumor that Air Force personnel earn a stipend when staying in lodging deemed not up to their standards; specifically, Marine Corps billeting).

Earlier I wrote, the pay is competitive. Let us examine that closer. Suppose you joined the Marine Corps directly after high school. You have spent three years in the Corps and have reached the rank of Lance Corporal, Congratulations. You earn \$1,923.00 a month. You are only 21 years old, the service has been your only occupation after high school and \$23,000/yr. is not

too bad. After all, you live in the barracks and meals are served to you in the chow hall, you have medical benefits should anything happen and you will make even more money next year and even more if you get promoted! For the sake of the argument, let us adapt the scenario with a few alterations. You are 21 years old, a LCpl with 3 years in, you earn \$1,923.00 a month and you are married; this means you earn another \$650/m, most likely you have one child or your wife is pregnant with your first and you're on deployment for a year; this means you get \$225.00/m Imminent danger pay and \$250.00/m for Family Separation Allowance.¹⁹ Total it up and you are earning \$3,048/m and considering you're on deployment to Afghanistan, that money is tax-free. \$36,000 a year is a lot of money for a 21 year old. Of course, you have bills. Your wife needs to live somewhere and you cannot live in the barracks. Between the two of you, a car is a requirement. Who knows how much the baby is going to cost. Living off of \$36,000 is not so easy with rent and a car payment. Wife has to eat too. Regardless, we will consider the \$36,000 as our base. Let's determine your hourly wage. You "work" every single day of the deployment. You are always a Marine and if necessary will work around the clock but to be conservative we will settle on a 16 hour day. \$36,000 divided by 365 days divided by 16 hours equals \$6.16/hour. That number is less than minimum wage and those people are not being shot at. If you were not married and did not earn that extra \$650 BAH and \$250 Family Separation Allowance your hourly wage would be \$4.41.

Of course you did not join the service for the pay. Still you are married and you have obligations that have to be met. You have no needs while overseas and your paychecks go to a bank account in which your wife has access in order to pay the bills. You have no concerns regarding money. Your wife is more than capable of paying bills on time. No worries.

¹⁹ Married Marines, Marines ranking Staff Sergeant or higher and Officers are entitled to Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH). The amount of the entitlement is based on rank and time-in-service.

By September 30, 2010 the budget proposal for 2011, despite being initially presented in February 2010, was not passed. What followed were a series of continuing resolutions for different periods of time, one after another. As Congress argued and the President proselytized, April approached one day at a time. First only a handful of Marines paid attention. Probably some egghead commented that the budget did not pass. Undoubtedly he received a few odd looks. Do you know where you are? And you're concerned about the budget? No one paid attention. Time marched on.

Another resolution and another and no one cared. Then another resolution. More Marines started to take notice. News reached Afghanistan through the same conduits through which people at home receive it, television and the internet. We also receive news from an incredibly unreliable source: family, our loved ones trying to keep us informed of the goings-on back home. News received from home is subjective and severely flawed, often replacing factual information with impassioned response. Marines deployed hardly paid attention to the Budget Crisis. We simply did not have the time. With the little free time he had, no Marine was going to select the Yahoo article about Congress' inability to pass the budget. The spark originated back home. Phone calls between husband and wife, father and son and brother-to-brother fanned the flame and by March with only a month left until April 8, the Budget Crisis reached Afghanistan.

Our understanding was built around what we were told, not necessarily fact. As we understood it, government employees would not be paid if the budget did not pass. The reliability of information was immaterial. Fear, panic, anger, rage all began to circulate among the troops. No one had concrete answers. If they did, their information was merely rebutted by the next guy gripped in paranoia. Rumor is a deadly foe. The same questions whirled around in a tempest of fear and doubt. Which employees? All employees? When? To include the troops? To

include troops that are deployed? Are they going to recall us? Slowly, the response to the Budget Crisis began to take form. “Sir, if they don’t pay us, we don’t have to work. We won’t work.”

Troops deployed to Afghanistan do not need money. Food, drinks (no alcohol), tobacco (sent in care packages) are all provided for one way or another. However, despite a collective age within the platoon in the early 20’s, most of my Marines were married. Mortgage payments, car payments, feeding the family, etc. do not suddenly stop when you leave the country. The genuine anger hit once the Marines started thinking about back home.

The lack of answers to straight forward questions was negligent. No one knew who to blame. Who was there to blame? It seemed that no one knew what the repercussions would be. The President, Congress, news networks, family, our command, my superiors and myself did not have an answer to the question that continued to resurface: will troops overseas continue to get paid? Up to that point, the issue had a focal point and energy was directed in how to care for the families back home. That energy would turn dark as we angered over a sense of betrayal. News networks began to air the perks of United States Congressmen.

A breach in *themis* is a moral violation. It is a betrayal of “what is right.” Agamemnon had the most among the Greeks yet took from Achilles. The troops, if not the entire country, were outraged to learn about the abuses enjoyed by Congress. We were literally fighting for our lives and were faced with the possibility of not being able to feed our children. In Washington, fat cats, supposed public servants, were living large: handsome salaries, petty cash to furnish government offices, unparalleled pensions. We felt betrayed. Congress could not do their job and were going to make us do ours without getting paid.

The rumors that circulated were at the same time absurd and credible. The news aired the benefits of being a Congressmen. After five years in Congress, you received full pension. Medical benefits for life, to include family. Free first-class airfare. Four day work weeks. Government money to furnish offices in Washington and your home state. Great salary. In the event the budget should not pass Congress would still receive their salaries and benefits while nearly 100,000 government employees would be put on furlough. The perks listed are a mixture of fact and sensationalism but the truth is a relevant concept in matters such as these. Anger and rage fuel a mob into creating its own truth. In the Marine Corps, we have the phrase "Perception is reality." No definitive word reached us about what would happen. Neither the President nor any member of Congress addressed our specific concerns (if they did, it never reached us).

Fury grew every day. Marines worried about feeding their families and paying the bills. News networks pumped more and more information about Congressmen and their benefits. No one could answer if we would continue to draw a paycheck. Never mind that little war we were fighting in an awful place. Still there was no culmination of anger that resulted in an event. There was no display. Anger boiled over but the Marines continued to perform. Ultimately, the budget would pass without incident. No one missed a paycheck. Still, the incompetency and indifference of Congress had a grave effect. The tenuous faith held by the troops in their government and its current administration continued to plummet.

Three months later another financial crisis would plague us. This time the emergency did not center around immediate benefits but of the future.

Military retirement is not complicated, as of 2011. You put in twenty years you receive half-salary of your last monthly paycheck along with medical benefits. You put in longer than twenty, you add a percentage based on how many more years you serve. Should a Marine enlist

when he was eighteen. He served twenty years and retires as a Gunnery Sergeant. Twenty years at Gunny (E7) he is making \$4,189.20/m so for the rest of his life he receives \$2,094.60/m and has great medical insurance. One of the major draws to the military is the retirement. Earning \$2,000/m, possibly more, with medical insurance prior to turning forty without any education past high school can be a very attractive offer. With the retirement package in mind, many young men and women decide to enlist in the US Armed Forces.

In July, Chief Warrant Officer V— handed me an email with a worried look on his face. A new retirement plan had been drafted. Veterans were living longer than ever and, simply, the government was running short on cash. They needed a system to pay soon-to-be veterans less retirement money.

CWO V— had just re-upped. He had served twenty-two years, loved being a Marine and had a wife and two daughters. He made this deployment as a result of his re-enlistment. Had he declined to re-up, he would have been enjoying his retirement, probably looking for a new job but meanwhile secure and home with his family. The new plan threatened his future.

The Defense Business Board was established in 2001. According to their website, the Defense Business Board provides the Secretary and Deputy Secretary of Defense, as well as other senior leaders, with independent advice which reflects an outside private sector perspective on proven and effective best business practices for application to the Department. In English, they try to save the government money regarding the Defense budget by applying proven practices they implemented in their own businesses. The board consists of about twenty individuals with substantial business and financial experience. Any military experience shared among the board members was coincidental and after thought to their inclusion. They were Wall Street types. This was the board that deliberated on the new retirement plan.

The plan spoke of a retirement for every troop not just those who served twenty years. Citing the system was binary and punitive to those who served for any tenure less than the pre-conceived retirement length (only 17% of military members serve 20 years and draw retirement). Regarding the 17%, the proposal remarked “the system likely over pays with roughly 40 years of retirement benefits for 20 years of service.”²⁰ The board offered a 401(k)-style plan as compared to the antiquated twenty year pension. Age eligibility to draw into retirement was unclear but understood to be the usual retirement age. The premise of the plan rested on two concepts: removal of the pension and the adoption of a 401(k)-style plan.

Only 17% of military members serve 20 years and draw retirement. Yet, these are the people the board targeted to save from, at their expense. The 83% who do not serve twenty years do not receive any retirement benefit from the government. Again, those who do receive any retirement benefit are targeted to save from. The system likely over pays with roughly 40 years of retirement benefits for 20 years of service. Care to find another profession in which you can serve 20 years and earn only \$50,000/yr and be considered a top professional in your field? Recall that Gunnery Sergeant discussed earlier. \$50,000 is his base pay. Within an infantry company there is one Gunnery Sergeant. He provides leadership, conducts training, facilitates administrative duties and other personnel issues, meets the logistical requirements and a whole lot more for 160 Marines. Within the private sector his responsibilities would be divided up between 3 or 4, possibly 5, positions each to match his salary, then add 10-15%. Plus, the occupational hazards of those positions do not include being shot at or blown up. Deployments are not part of the job description either. For the “40 years” of being overpaid in retirement benefits, what about the 20 years in which the Gunnery Sergeant was miserly compensated?

²⁰ <http://crfb.org/blogs/defense-business-board-recommends-military-retirement-changes>.

The sanctimonious view of the board to help the 83% is garbage. The inclusion of the 83% by the board is a backroom cry to seem balanced and fair. However, what is fair is the understanding going into the agreement. Those who choose to serve do so with full recognition of the retirement policy. Alterations to the plan are unfair. The 401(k)-style plan is an interesting concept. Once the word “style” is incorporated into the discussion, the 401(k) is subject to any interpretation one might choose. 401(k)-style plan really suggests a savings account. Naturally that money will be placed in either investments of stock or bonds or mutual funds and the troop will have choices where he or she can put their money; however, the issue of what constitutes a 401(k) plan is clouded. The “style” part of the plan leaves out the matching contribution of the troop’s employer: the government. The proposal skirts the issue claiming that a combination of factors will determine the matching contribution percentage and that the percentage amount is yet to be determined (or a matching percentage was never conferred). The proposal does clearly distinguish one number: 16.5%. That percentage is the defined amount that is to be taken from a troop’s monthly paycheck and put into the savings account. Bring the Gunny back into focus. Instead of making \$50,000 his last year or two, he only brings home \$41,750. He’s 36 or 37, married, two kids, mortgage, car payment, the same costs-of-living we all have. Can anyone afford to have 1/6 of their salary removed?

For the troops the removal of the pension and addition of the savings plan means less money now and less money later. The proposal is the scam of scams. How do you improve your situation when you underpay your workforce and only provide retirement to 1/6 of them? Pretend to provide retirement for everyone but make them do it from their own pockets. You lower your costs all while appearing to be the good guy. Seems to be the behavior one would expect from seven-figure salaried CEOs in the private sector but not what our troops deserve.

The breach in *themis* centered not on the adoption of a new retirement plan but the proposed absorption of the plan by service members already in the military. Should the plan be relegated to include only enlistees who entered the service once the plan was adopted there would be no betrayal. The proposal would not be a great deal for the troops but it would be fair. Consequently, the plan had retroactive measures that provided an supposedly adequate transition for service members with any tenure in the military. Based on the length of service military members would get a percentage of their pension but would be forced to contribute to their retirement right away. The plan deviated from the agreement. Instead of “what is right” the board adopted a strategy of “what might save.” They were going to take money from the troops.

CWO V— leaned back in his chair, “I could have retired last year. Adam, if they take my pension, I’m screwed. My family and I are depending on that money.”

Regarding the previous two situations, the breach in *themis* is not a result of the direct action of one individual against another. Instead, the betrayal belongs to a group or institution: Congress and the board. The lack of a direct individual substituted for an institution can be equally demoralizing possibly even more undermining. When one individual is responsible for the breach in *themis* the abused can focus his or her anger towards that person. Without that individual, the abused might sour against “the system” to include everyone associated no matter how remotely involved. There was no one to blame, no one to hold accountable, only a faceless bureaucracy we couldn’t touch. The wholesale of betrayal we felt could be overwhelming. Questions surrounding motivation surfaced nearly every day. The people that sent us overseas seemed determined to take our legs out from underneath us. We felt that our service and sacrifices were viewed as inadequate.

Homer teaches military leaders the consequences of their decisions regarding benefits. The frustration and reaction of Achilles provide a plausible demonstration of the response of any troop in a similar circumstance; specifically a breach in *themis* that results in a loss of honor or the decrease in one's livelihood. Achilles was able to remove himself from the fighting; our troops are not able to do so, they must continue to fight despite circumstances. However, their morale affected by a breach in *themis* can negatively influence their overall ability as fighters and mission accomplishment. Homer proves instructive, as once Achilles is removed from fighting, the Trojans begin to win the war. The effectiveness of waging war wanes once morale drops.

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Possibly no greater feeling or sense of accomplishment exists for a troop than to be selected for promotion. Each subsequent rank becomes more difficult to attain. To be promoted is the recognition of continued professional excellence. The troop earns more responsibility, greater respect among his peers and most likely influences more troops. Plus more money.

Once a Marine earns the rank of Sergeant, he is evaluated by the most immediate officer in his chain-of-command. The most prevalent component of the evaluation process is the Fitness Report (FitRep). The officer makes a formal written assessment of that Marine's performance and abilities compared with the Marines of the same rank and Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). The FitRep is kept with that Marine's official file for the rest of his career. The FitRep is the instrumental tool utilized for selecting a Marine for retention and/or promotion. As such, one of the most critical responsibilities of officers is to correctly, accurately and timely evaluate Marines and submit their FitReps.

Yet junior and senior officers frequently blotch the evaluation process. There are a myriad of errors committed. Considering the frequency of errors, the problems are most likely systematic. Every Marine Corps officer is trained at The Basic School (TBS).²¹ Regardless of contract, each officer receives six months of training in which they develop the technical and tactical skills to lead an infantry platoon.²² The training is excellent and the purpose unique. The infantryman is the center of the Marine Corps. As a corps the emphasis is to enable and support infantrymen in combat. TBS is unique as though every officer may not be assigned to lead an infantry platoon they understand the requirements of the infantry and can better support the warfighter in whichever MOS they are designated. A segment of the training covers the FitRep. As I remember TBS, we had about three or four 1-hour sessions that instructed a class of nearly 300 lieutenants on FitReps. Each session began with our instructor emphasizing how vitally important the FitRep process was and how we would screw our Marines if we did not properly administer evaluation. After these sessions, no one doubted how vitally important FitReps were but genuinely lacked the knowledge how to properly evaluate. In comparison, we spent weeks dedicated to land navigation using topography maps and a compass in the woods of Virginia. At the end of training, I could positively answer which helicopter would be necessary in order to lift an incapacitated HMMWV against the required helicopter for a downed MRAP based on the weight of the vehicles and capabilities of the helo. I knew the effective range, blast radius, rate-of-fire and proper employment of every weapon system in the Marine Corps. Regarding FitReps I was dubious at best, one of the most vitally important aspects of being an officer.

²¹ Marine Corps Officers are eligible for three different contracts: ground, air and law. Officers will receive an MOS based off their contract.

²² During the last month of TBS, Marine Officers with ground contracts will be given an MOS based on the Marine Corps needs and that individuals specific goals. Following graduation from TBS, officers will receive MOS specific training to include those selected to become infantry officers who continue to develop and enhance the skills necessary to lead an infantry platoon.

Staff Sergeant B— came to the Regiment to bolster numbers in the Logistics shop. His was a mentally taxing and unheralded assignment. He worked in the Unit Movement Control Center (UMCC). In very simplistic terms, he monitored and reported the movement of all friendly mounted forces within the Regiment's Area of Operation. SSgt B— used no less than three software systems, a secured computer chat line and two telephones to monitor and communicate these movements. No Marine or MOS is specifically designated to perform such a role. Like many others SSgt B— volunteered for the deployment. Assignment dictates responsibilities not necessarily what one was trained for.²³ SSgt B— was a senior Staff Sergeant. While on deployment he would become 'in the zone' for promotion to Gunnery Sergeant.

Lieutenant W— was new to the Regiment. Fresh from his MOS school. A good kid, eager, probably a bit too serious, a lieutenant. Out of the five lieutenants and one captain in the Logistics shop, he was assigned to evaluate SSgt B—.

After five months of observation it was report time. Lt W— presented SSgt B— with his FitRep. SSgt B—received the report, read its comments then had it pulled from his file.²⁴ The Staff Sergeant had Lieutenant W— sit down in his chair and explain the purposes of each system he employed. With his own superior officer present the lieutenant proved incapable to the task. He never made an attempt to learn about the systems. He evaluated a Marine without understanding what the Marine did. SSgt B— embarrassed the entire cadre of officers in the Logistics shop. He was absolutely right to do so.

²³ A similar position is common for Infantry lieutenants and captains termed "Watch Officer." The Watch Officer (Watch-O) monitors activity within the Command Operations Center and reports significant events to higher. It is not a desired position. The position is usually a year-long deployment of watching a tv screen for twelve hours at a time. Young officers will volunteer for this assignment should they not previously deploy to Iraq or Afghanistan (not having a deployment to one of these countries can hinder the opportunity for advancement later in one's career).

²⁴ To pull a Fitness Report is a provision afforded Marines should their FitRep be deemed deficient or biased. Considering the lack of expertise by the evaluators, it is surprising more Marines do not exercise this option.

The failure did not belong to Lt W—, at least not to him alone. The Marine Corps had not supplied him with adequate training to the task. Even worse, we (the officers in the Logistics shop), failed him. We all knew Lt W— was new to the Fleet. This was probably his first FitRep. He could have used some help. It was not that the remainder of the lieutenants within the Logistics shop represented a wealth of knowledge but could have improved Lieutenant W—'s situation.

The bottom line is that we failed SSgt B—. Possibly we held that Marine from a promotion he earned by his own merits. We failed in the most vitally important aspect of being officers. It was not just the lieutenants who failed. Captain H— signed off on the report. To the surprise of no one the captain proved incompetent. The pulled report did not help or hurt SSgt B— but certainly would not have helped him on the promotion board. For that reporting period SSgt B-- had proven himself an outstanding Marine. He had nothing to show for it due to our failure. His FitRep should have impressed a promotion board; instead, in the place of six months time while deployed there was only an empty page representing his career. The breach in *themis* is patent. The right course of action would have been to competently administer evaluation. No one took the time to observe SSgt B— even though it is the greatest responsibility of an officer.

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Homer does not discuss promotion; however, the prestige and place of honor denied to Achilles correlates to the situation of SSgt B—. Both were denied an honor, whether a trophy or promotion, which they deserved. In both circumstances, the officer with authority over subordinates made poor judgments which had destructive consequences. Agamemnon made a willful decision to strip Achilles of his prize; whereas Lt. W— was neglectful in his duties

without the intention of harming the career of an enlisted Marine. Regardless of intentions the outcome was the same.

Reading Homer facilitates military leaders to recognize the consequences of the actions not only at the individual level (Achilles) but to include a much larger perspective (Trojans nearly defeating Greeks). Furthermore, the anger of Achilles provides insight to the psyche of troops who have been dishonored by their commanders. An understanding of that psyche would promote greater thought into the actions of military leaders before they decide to willfully strip a troop of a prize or fall into neglect of their duties. Book I of *The Iliad* presents a tremendous example to study regarding the abusive power of a commander as well as the mental state of troops who become victim to those abuses.

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A Marine or soldier walks into a room wearing his dress uniform. His or her appearance is exceptional. Located above the heart is a decoration of medals that tell a story. Awards are appreciated and valued. They commend immediate action often an act of tremendous courage or recognize sustained outstanding performance and commitment. They are the formal recognition of excellence. Not everyone who deserves an award receives it; not everyone who receives an award deserves it.

Master Gunnery Sergeant T— was a large man. And old. A real John Wayne type. He was never loud but his voice managed to fill any room. No one saw him eat. He smoked cigarettes and drank coffee. If either were Olympic sports he'd have a few golds. His two habits so dominated his life we joked that he "smoked coffee." His job was to supervise the Command Operations Center (COC). As a Regiment we watched the operations of four infantry battalions

located in Marjah. Literally we watched their operations. There must have been close to twenty TV screens against a wall each with a separate feed from a G-Boss.²⁵ In the middle was the largest screen which received whatever activity took precedence at the time. In the room sat roughly thirty Marines. Each with his own assignment. A shift consisted of a twelve hour ‘watch.’ There was at least one Marine representing every shop and section: Operations, Intelligence, Air, Logistics, Artillery, etc. The battalions we watched had their own COCs though with a significantly smaller detail of Marines. Division had a COC who watched our battalions as well. MEF had a COC who also watched our battalions. Division and MEF were located on the same base.²⁶ Rumor was that they worked in buildings next to each other. Possibly even the same building, sitting next to each other. Joseph Heller would have howled.

After six months of smoking coffee and supervising the COC, MGySgt T— received orders to Division. He was to supervise their COC. Before he left the command awarded him the Bronze Star an award most frequently associated with troops who fought with valor on the battlefield.

Lieutenant Colonel S— also worked in the COC but with less influence. He too left the deployment early. He received the Legion of Merit.

Captain H— was supposed to oversee the competent supply functions of four infantry battalions. His was not a coveted position.²⁷ A month or so into the deployment he became the

²⁵ A G-Boss was a large tower with a camera on it that provided 360 degree coverage. The towers could extend to 80 feet in the air. The goal was to have overlapping coverage from G-Bosses leaving no area of ground unmonitored. Marines would sit and watch the G-Boss all day long. It was consider one of the worst assignments.

²⁶ The hierarchy in the Marine Corps is as follows: battalion, regiment, division then MEF. In Afghanistan, an infantry battalion will have three command-and-control units above it.

²⁷ During RCT-1’s previous deployment, the Marine fulfilling Captain H’s role engaged in criminal activity. That Marine established a fake business in the states and used it as a front. He appropriated funds under the guise of buying gym equipment for the battalions purchased through his phony business. In all, the Marine stole over a

joke of the regiment. Instead of his job he attempted to do everyone else's. His incompetence was generally amusing as long as he was not meddling with your work. A lieutenant and a Staff Sergeant performed his job in addition to their own responsibilities. Capt H— was free to roam around, interfere and completely foul up the work of others. With two months left in the deployment there was a small, informal ceremony. Capt H— was to receive an award. I was present with two of my Staff Sergeants. My Master Sergeant refused any interaction with Capt H— and would not come to the ceremony under any circumstances. To the relief of everyone Capt H— received the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal. We all hoped that once he had his award he would stop trying to do everyone's job and attempt his own (time would prove us wrong). The Colonel was in attendance for the ceremony. In front of God and men, he shook the hand of Capt H— and said "Well deserved. One of the finest officers I've ever served with."

The Staff Sergeants and I walked back to our quarters in silence. After a few minutes, SSgt P— mocked the Colonel's words "One of the finest officers I've ever served with." A chuckle in agreement turned into outright laughter turned into a fit of hysteria. We could hardly walk and spent a minute or two bent over clasping each other by the shoulder, laughing and laughing. The absurdity of the lie could not have been more ridiculous. And we laughed.

Troops can become irate when a superior or anyone undeserving receives an award. The prestige of the award is not the cause of their anger but the recognition in itself. The award represents a breach in "what is right." Capt H— did not deserve the award he was given and he certainly was not one of the finest officers anyone had ever served with. We were able to laugh it off but circumstances are not always so humorous.

million dollars. He was caught and prosecuted. The joke around the regiment was 'at least Capt H- isn't a crook' met with 'at least the other Captain got something done.'

Sergeant D— was meritoriously promoted in the last few months of the deployment.²⁸ More than any other junior Marine he influenced and executed the adaptation of a radically altered concept of logistical support. The concept was not new. It was recognized for its merits by RCT-1's predecessors but failed in their execution. RCT-1 was laughed at by higher headquarters when we determined to attempt the concept. All were aware of the previous failures. Without detail and the technical jargon, Sgt D— was a critical factor that enabled Marines of four infantry battalions (approximately 3,000 Marines) to continuously conduct mounted patrols in vehicles that were able to engage the enemy and protect against IEDs. His contribution can never be truly appreciated as it is measured by Marines who were not killed, have legs blown off or suffer traumatic brain injury. We can never know how many lives he positively affected.

When writing his citation I was repeatedly informed that the level of his award was based on his rank of sergeant not his efforts. Meaning that he could not receive anything higher than the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal (a proud achievement but not one commensurate with his performance). The earlier statement is a direct violation of the Performance Evaluation System (PES) manual. It clearly states that awards are not to be determined by rank. Yet, that was exactly how the performance of Sgt D— was evaluated and recognized.

The *themis* in this situation is in direct opposition of a standing order. Still the order is blatantly ignored and disobeyed. Sadly, the junior troops recognize the falsehood. They have

²⁸ Meritorious promotion is the result of being selected for advancement based solely on achievement (the other component for promotion being time). Marines are nominated from their commands and a review board is convened. Only exceptional Marines are nominated. One Marine is chosen to be meritoriously promoted. It is a distinction that remains on a Marine's permanent file throughout his career.

come to terms with the fine print and understand they will receive lesser awards than their superiors for similar actions much like Capt H— receiving his award.

As usual the first step in correcting a problem is to recognize there is an issue. Most within the Marine Corps perhaps throughout all branches of the military are hesitant to even suggest much less admit the award system is flawed or at least the administration of the established policies is incorrect. The most common defense of higher ranking officers and enlisted receiving more prestigious awards claims the inherent responsibilities of higher ranks are greater and warrant greater recognition. This statement is partially correct. Those of higher rank hold billets with greater responsibility. Such an idea would seem implied. To give more prestigious awards to those with greater responsibility is not rewarding them for excellence but for doing their job.

Recognition that the standing order is not being observed will not be enough. Those who authenticate the awards need to give greater attention to their duties. The signing authority is dependent on the level of the award; however, the award must go through each commander in the chain-of-command (Lieutenant Colonel, Colonel, General). Most likely, those commanders do not see those awards but have someone in their staff peruse and approve them. Those commanders need to make a better effort in deciding what actions are meritorious in receiving an award and which level of award.

One possible solution is to exclude rank when submitting awards through the chain-of-command. This resolution is by no means perfect. Within the citation, the level of rank will most likely become apparent due to the level of responsibility of the individual involved. Still, exclusion of rank in the award process is a step in the right direction.

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Despite the extensive leadership training our military leaders receive breaches in *themis* occur quite often. Most likely they are unaware of the consequences of their actions like the Major who humiliated his Marine by not giving him his award. Possibly the breaches are intentional such as the direct violation of the award system similar to the situation surrounding Sgt D—. Regardless of intention these breaches do occur and have a deleterious effect on morale. Leaders need to better identify possible breaches in *themis* and recognize the repercussions of such. These repetitive failures in leadership demonstrate a lack of understanding by commanders in the military while validating the powerful didactic message of Homer.

Leadership is trained in the military. A discussion of whether leaders are born, taught or groomed can be entertained; however, within the military leadership is drilled like any other skill. As a group, we study it, practice it and preach a core of ideals around it. Of the many methods of instruction is independent reading. As mentioned earlier the Commandant has a professional reading list for Marines of every rank. Also mentioned earlier is the exclusion of Homer. The described transgressions of leaders towards their troops demonstrate an obvious shortcoming in the development of leadership that would directly benefit from studying *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

The selections chosen from *The Iliad* are but a few of the many leadership failures throughout the poem. Agamemnon proves a figure as to what not to do regarding leadership. A negative figure can be just as instructive as a positive. There are many more examples to study in *The Iliad* whether it be Agamemnon, Hector or Odysseus. Every troop will not prove to be an Achilles; however, their potential is fostered under the care of their leaders. There are no bad Marines just bad leaders. Achilles was the best soldier among the Greeks. He became

recalcitrant, abusive and insubordinate only as a result of a breach of “what is right.” The leadership of Agamemnon was to blame. From the perspective of grooming leadership Homer proves invaluable. His exclusion directly precludes the development of military leaders and subsequently prevents troops from reaching their full potential.

Death

Homer portrays death as a bleak and dismal finality. There is no Valhalla. No virgins wait for the Greek and Trojan warriors. There is no redemption. While there is an Underworld the status of those in it is not clearly defined. The battle scenes in *The Iliad* can be a bit much for a modern audience. Quite often the two combatants deliver speeches to one another before engaging in their duel. Those speeches leading up to combat can become humorous or unusual and distract readers. However, Homer does not trivialize the outcome. His most gruesome descriptions are reserved for the fatal blows delivered by Greek or Trojan. In Book XVI, Homer describes the final spear thrust of a Greek warrior laying low a Trojan:

Idomeneus skewered Erymas straight through the mouth,
the merciless brazen spearpoint raking through,
up under the brain to split his glistening skull-
teeth shattered out, both eyes brimmed to the lids
with a gush of blood and both nostrils spurting,
mouth gaping, blowing convulsive sprays of blood
and death's dark cloud closed down around his corpse.²⁹

Much of the battle scenes that include death are described as such. While Homer does attribute glory to combat he does not romanticize the horrors associated with it.

When a Greek or Trojan warrior is killed his body, armor and weaponry are fiercely contested for. In Book XVI of the poem, Patroclus wears the armor of Achilles in order to meet the Trojans and prevent the burning of Greek ships. After successfully securing the safety of the

²⁹ Fagles, *The Iliad*, 423-4.

Greek fleet, Patroclus is killed by Hector. Frenzied fighting ensues following his death. Both Greek and Trojan are fighting for the remains of Patroclus and the armor of Achilles. Patroclus' corpse would bring a handsome price from his parents or Achilles. To win the armor of Achilles, the finest Greek fighter, would be a great distinction for any Trojan. Hector manages to pry away Achilles armor but the Greeks recover the body of Patroclus.

The prospect of losing either the armor or corpse of Patroclus rallies the Greeks. The tide had turned back into Trojan favor once Patroclus was killed. Menelaus, one of the highest Greek commanders, is the first to protect the corpse. Sensing the vigor of the approaching Trojan effort, he calls out to Ajax, a Greek fighter second only to Achilles, to help aid his effort for the remains of Patroclus. Homer describes Ajax and his resolve:

But Ajax,
Shielding Patroclus round with his broad buckler,
stood fast now like a lion cornered round his young
when hunters cross him, leading his cubs through woods-
he ramps in all the pride of his power, bristling strength,
the heavy fold of his forehead frowning down his eyes.
So Ajax stood his ground over brave Patroclus now-³⁰

The preservation of one of their comrade's remains stirs the Greeks to some of their finer moments in the poem. The same is true of the Trojans as well. Most often the side of the fallen is outnumbered and facing a desperate situation. Quite easily they might join their fallen brother-in-arms. Yet repeatedly Greek and Trojan will fight fiercely to save the corpse from any

³⁰ Eagles, *The Iliad*, 446.

molestation by the enemy. Regarding the fighting around Patroclus, the presence of Achilles aided by Athena cause the Trojans to lose heart and abandon the fight for the corpse. So fierce was the contest for the remains of Patroclus it required the interference of a god to end the fighting.

Achilles is beset with grief over the death of Patroclus. However he refuses to bury Patroclus until Hector is slain. This situation is somewhat paradoxical. The fight for the corpse is partly to ensure no desecration might occur. Ironically Achilles inadvertently contributes to the desecration of Patroclus' remains by not bestowing them the proper burial rites. He orders Patroclus' body to be washed but not burned on a funeral pyre then his bones buried. The irony is that Achilles wants to impart a tremendous honor to his lost friend but commits a form of desecration if not sacrilege to the remains and memory of Patroclus. Once Hector is killed the ghost of the slain Greek warrior visits Achilles in a dream to chastise the living in order to do what is necessary. The slain Patroclus to Achilles in Book XXIII:

You've forgotten me, my friend.

You never neglected me in life, only now in death.

Bury me, quickly-let me pass the Gates of Hades.

They hold me off at a distance, all the souls,

the shades of the burnt-out, breathless dead,

never to let me cross the river, mingle with them...

They leave me to wander up and down, abandoned, lost

at the House of Death with the all-embracing gates.

Oh give me your hand-I beg you with my tears!

Never, never again shall I return from Hades

once you have given me the soothing rites of fire.³¹

Achilles himself is the one who denies Patroclus those soothing rites. The shade of Patroclus is forced to wander in a Greek Limbo. His soul cannot enter the Underworld. By this point in the poem, Achilles is forcing the same fate on his enemy Hector. He has slain Hector then desecrated his body by dragging it behind his chariot, exposing Hector's flesh to the Sun and elements and leaving it for the dogs. Achilles refuses to provide any burial to Hector. The message can be somewhat muddled and confusing. Achilles denies both friend and foe alike the proper rites whether intentional or not. What is clear is that the desecration of the corpse is to be avoided at all costs. To commit such an act is the harshest form of cruelty. Parents beg for the clean, whole corpse of their children. Greek and Trojan will fight to the death to preserve their comrades. Even the dying make one final plea to the humanity of their victor to allow their remains to go unharmed. The plea of Patroclus to properly dispose of his remains also provides insight why Greek and Trojan fight so hotly for the remains of the fallen friends. Potentially that soul might be forced to wander in Limbo without rest as their foe may not provide the proper burial rites.

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In Book XXIII Achilles and the Greeks prepare the funeral procession for Patroclus. Homer describes a funeral pyre a hundred feet in height and breadth. Thousands of Greeks line up to watch the corpse being carried to the pyre. They cut off locks of their hair and toss them on the corpse to mark their grieving. Sheep, cattle, stallions and dogs are slaughtered and added to the pyre. A dozen Trojan warriors will be hacked to death by Achilles to honor his friend. The funeral procession is no small affair.

³¹ Fagles, *The Iliad*, 561-2.

The day following the funeral pyre Achilles hosts funeral games to honor his friend. He offers lavish prizes to victors in boxing and wrestling matches, archery contests and a chariot race. The contestants fight, shoot or ride with great excitement and tremendous skill as the prizes offered by Achilles are highly sought after. The significance being: the more esteemed the prizes offered, the greater the honor bestowed upon Patroclus. In a narrative about combat Homer dedicates an entire chapter to the honoring of a fallen comrade that revolves around eating, drinking and sport. Following the death of Patroclus, Achilles has hardly rested, eaten, taken anything to drink or cleaned his body. He has been bent on the destruction of Hector and the Trojans. Homer often describes him as a beast during this time. During the games Achilles has returned to a nobler version of himself similar to that in the brief period prior to being insulted by Agamemnon. Achilles is a gracious host and his overall superior ability is again recognizable. His wrath has not completely subsided as he will continue to desecrate the corpse of Hector; however, he is no longer bent solely on the destruction of the Trojans. He has left his bestial state.

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Death is always a possibility. It lingers in the back of your mind. How will I go? The number of KIA in Iraq and Afghanistan totals 6,717 with an additional approximate 51,000 injured. Numbers do not tell much of a story. I remember hearing one TV analyst commenting something to the effect that given the number of years the country had been in two places fighting wars the numbers were not that bad.

Death is recognized as an occupational hazard. Most are realistic about the consequences. Some of the troops are eighteen and nineteen year olds who like most eighteen and nineteen year

olds believe they are bulletproof. A discussion about the possibilities in combat will eventually lead to death or being maimed. Frequently troops will attempt to determine if they would rather die in combat or live without legs or another limb. The conversation has no winner but only reveals the stark possibilities confronted by the troops.

The weaponry and tactics in *The Iliad* are possible reasons for its aversion by military commanders. Greek and Trojan use chariots, spears, bows and swords, not rifles, machine guns and tanks. The form of combat in *The Iliad* is aristocratic. One officer identifies a foe and engages him in direct combat. This is no longer prevalent. In Afghanistan and Iraq coalition forces are faced with a relatively old but effective weapon. IED stands for Improvised Explosive Device. I suppose the military and their devotion to acronyms could no longer stand to call them landmines but effectively that is exactly what they are.

IEDs will be placed just about anywhere the enemy believes coalition forces will patrol either mounted or on foot. They can be of varying size, have several methods of detonation and be stored in a variety of casings. For instance, a pressure plate IED of one hundred and twenty pounds inside an undetonated artillery round would probably be placed in an area where coalition forces frequently conduct mounted or vehicle patrols. Usually the pressure plate will be in the direct path of tire tracks. Pressure plate means that the downward force generated by the weight of the vehicle will cause the IED to detonate. This is a clever tactic as coalition vehicles are armored whereas any vehicles belonging to the local populace will not be heavy enough to trigger the weapon. Also with a pressure plate the enemy is able to dig then emplace the IED cover it and walk away. They do not have to be present to initiate the weapon. The active ingredients which cause the explosion are usually a combination of fertilizers that are readily

available. The casing for the IED can be just about anything but unexpended artillery rounds are used frequently as they can store a large payload and provide substantial shrapnel.

IEDs became such a viable weapon against coalition forces that digging by the side of the road became grounds for engagement. Still IEDs are nothing new. Their employment can be dated back to World War I and observed in every major engagement for the past century. Their usage will not decline.

IEDs can be devastating. A single IED might destroy an armored vehicle specifically designed to withstand the blast and kill everyone inside. Or an IED might kill two troops on foot patrol, permanently maim another and injure another two. Despite their potential lethality the true effect of an IED might be better measured by the damage to the psyche and morale of its victims. A patrol might encounter enemy troops in the open engaging them with small arms fire (semi-automatic rifles). The patrol responds in accordance with their training. The zinging sounds of bullet fire pass overhead. The troops begin to maneuver under cover fire closing the distance between the enemy. Possibly the enemy flees at this point, possibly they continue to fire. A soldier gets shot. The medic makes his way to the wounded as best as he can. The troops return fire at the area in which they receive fire and continue to close in. Possibly the troops have a mortar team attached with them and begin firing explosive rounds at the enemy. The possibilities in this scenario are nearly limitless. Death, gunshot, being forced to kill another human being are all real possibilities. There are real and horrific consequences of this engagement. When engaged by small arms fire or even machine gun fire there is the opportunity to re-engage the enemy. There is an opportunity to defend and retaliate. There is someone to hold accountable and punish. There is someone to fight. That opportunity to retaliate provides a sense of closure.

With an IED there is only a blast. Troops rolling on the ground screaming. Perhaps limbs are missing or horribly mangled. Those closest to the detonation cannot hear the screams, the blast has made them deaf. A column of dirt has been blown in the air and rains down seemingly everywhere. The unharmed troops look outward for a possible trigger man. Could be anyone. Most likely the area is deserted. There is no one to pursue. No one to fight. Just a troop who might have lost a leg or both and might be bleeding out. A sense of hopelessness. No enemy to engage only bombs to step on.

Traveling in and out of the narrow streets of Marjah, I could not help but think of how I would be riding along rather peacefully suspecting nothing then a sudden white flash and a cacophonic rush of noise, steel and dirt. This is how my world would end. Not with a whimper but with a bang.

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Al Qaeda and the Taliban would have liked nothing more than to capture a U.S. Soldier or Marine alive. The gruesome decapitation of an American telecommunications worker in 2004 was recorded and distributed via Internet. Al Qaeda took responsibility for the video. The purpose for selecting that individual for such a barbarous act is unclear; however, its effect was both infuriating and worrisome to U.S. forces. A captured Soldier or Marine would escalate U.S. forces into near panic mood and all-out search conducted for those missing in action. The beheading of a U.S. troop would incense our forces into committing war crimes or possibly capitulation. In either sense, Al Qaeda and/or the Taliban had to believe they would benefit from such extreme behavior.

In July 2006 a video was released revealing the decapitated corpses of two Army Soldiers. Their bodies were found a few days later. Their cause of death was determined to be wounds suffered prior to decapitation. Nonetheless the molestation of the remains enraged U.S. troops.

In May 2007 three Army Soldiers were captured in Iraq. The response from U.S. forces was as expected. A desperate search was conducted. Hundreds of Iraqi nationals were arrested and detained for questioning. Despite exhaustive searches their bodies were not recovered. Over a year later the remains of two of the Soldiers were found (one had been identified not long after the initial attack but was presumed MIA).

The effect on morale is difficult to accurately measure. The effect on the level of the individual troop most likely can never be truly surmised. A study examining the number of war crimes by U.S. personnel after the death, capture, torture or execution of a troop would enlighten commanders of the secondary consequences of such tragedies. The effect on the unit is more attainable. Never leave a man behind. Those are not merely words to anyone in the U.S. forces. We trust each other with our lives. Death is an accepted possibility but to leave or lose the remains to the enemy is an unconscionable insult. It is unacceptable. The confidence shared by one another is shaken as the holiest of bonds has been broken.

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When overseas the first indication that an American is KIA or severely injured is the termination of any communication from Afghanistan or Iraq to the US. Communication is suspended until the family is properly notified. When a death occurs a Casualty Assistance Officer and possibly a Chaplain visit the closest family member at their residence to inform them

of the situation. Personally, I cannot think of a worse job. However, it is a grave responsibility that must be handled with dignity and care. Should a troop be injured but in stable condition, most likely the family will receive a phone call possibly from their son or daughter.

Communications are temporarily terminated so the information of the fallen or wounded troop does not reach home through the improper channels. Overseas we learn that someone has been hurt or killed as our communications are down. After a while an email is distributed to commanders over a secured network describing the events. The term “River City” is used to refer to the communication blackout. Marines will simply say “We’re in River City.” It’s a piece of lingo that has confused and irritated many girlfriends, wives and other family members. Once the communication blackout is lifted it is not uncommon to hear Marines talk about how their significant others attempted to find “River City” on a map of Afghanistan.

The remains of the fallen are transported to one of the larger bases and await further transport to the U.S. The wait is not long. The handling of the corpse is very delicate. Every leader is given instruction on the collection and proper storage of the items belonging to the fallen. Improperly handling of a troop’s personal items will draw attention from high level officials. Generals get involved. One Marine KIA collected Playboy magazines. His Captain tried to do the right thing and disposed of the magazines. He believed that the family probably did not want to know that their son was collecting Playboy. Turns out the father collected them and gave them to his son. Those magazines were somewhat of a family heirloom.

On Camp Dwyer we received many KIAs. The corpse is awaiting transportation to either Kandahar or Camp Leatherneck then back to the States. A special plane with the call sign “Dust off” is utilized to transport KIAs. Dust off will be waiting on the tarmac as Marines fall in to give their final respects. Single or double filed lines form from the edge of the runway to the entrance

of the plane. An honor guard slowly leads the procession carrying the casket. As the procession advances Marines raise their hands in a final salute as the casket is carried onto the plane.

It may not be much but that final respect is the most we can do to honor our fallen comrades. The procession always seemed to occur at about 3 or 4 in the morning, always in the dark. Often the processions were surreal. The Marines to the left and right of me seemed carved of stone. Their faces stoic and grim. The procession was not only to honor the fallen. Despite the terrible consequences that surrounded the situation the demonstration of support was galvanizing. To my left and right were a hundred or so of my best friends who were all committed to doing whatever we needed to do to leave that place alive.

The family members have the option of a military burial for their deceased troop. The casket is accompanied by fellow troops depending on the branch of the deceased. The spouse or parents will be given a folded flag to honor his or her memory. A death benefit of approximately \$100,000 is bestowed to the spouse, parents or closest of kin.

The separation after losing a friend in combat is difficult. Usually the cause of death is immediate or should an injury be sustained the wounded is medevac'd out as quickly as possible. He or she might pass away later from that injury but will do so away from his or her closest friends. In either respect the presence of that troop is instantly removed. There is no goodbye. The friends of the fallen troop will not be present at the funeral. They must continue to perform their duties. The concept of closure is relevant in this situation. Troops that lose someone in combat are not provided any sense of closure. They might be feet away from their buddy before he or she gets hit and not even know it until after the engagement. When there is an injury or fatality Navy Corpsmen (paramedics that are attached to Marine units) will not refer to the wounded by name or initials. Instead they refer to a roster with social security numbers to

designate who has been wounded. This method is practiced to ensure that troops continue fighting and not concentrate on who has been hurt.

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There is no uniquely American view on death or the afterlife. As a nation we celebrate many faiths and belief systems. Regarding the Ancient Greek beliefs, if anything can be inferred from *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, it is better to be counted among the living rather than the dead. Achilles echoes these sentiments to Odysseus as the latter has descended into the Underworld during an opportune meeting:

I'd rather slave on earth for another man--
some dirt-poor tenant farmer who scrapes to keep alive--
than rule down here over all the breathless dead.³²

These are powerful words from a man who while living would suffer no insult or abuse from any man. Empathically the Greek believed it better to be alive than dead. Among U.S. forces this is an issue often debated. The injuries suffered from IEDs have made an argument between choosing death or living as an amputee or with traumatic brain injury. A macabre argument but one that is frequent due to the number and type of injury caused by IEDs. Parents, spouses, siblings will argue that certainly it is better to live. Soldiers and Marines have a different perspective. The response is by no means unified for one outcome or another yet the discussion does occur. It should be noted that Homer points out that those who survive war are not free from suffering. *The Odyssey* is a testament to the suffering of those who escaped death to return home.

³² Robert Fagles, trans., *The Odyssey* (Penguin Books, 1996), pg 265

Achilles is the best man among Greek and Trojan. When Patroclus is killed by Hector, Achilles ceases to be human. He does not eat, sleep, rest or bathe. He becomes a beast. Achilles is only interested in the slaughter of Trojans, killing Hector then mutilating his corpse. Achilles does not act differently than that of our own troops who have witnessed or have suffered a comrade lost, captured or tortured. War films display this trend accurately. A troop is killed or his corpse found mutilated and the unit he belonged to behaves criminally or excessively violent towards the next village, soldier or whomever they find. *Platoon* vividly portrays the visceral and horrific consequences of finding a friendly soldier killed or even worse desecrated. The platoon is on patrol as they stumble onto their lead scout who has been killed and his body mutilated. The patrol continues onto a nearby village where they bludgeon a man to death, execute the chief's wife, threaten to do the same to a child, nearly commit rape and eventually burn down the village. Film is a useful medium as it is expressed through imagery not thoughts on paper. The scene from *Platoon* gives the audience an idea of the horrors we are capable of should we pushed too far.

Achilles only begins to recover his true form once he has properly buried Patroclus. This matter took a few days. Perhaps Homer is trying to comment on the idea of closure. He was able to see his friend (though deceased) and provide the proper rites for him. Achilles was even able to get retribution for the death of Patroclus by killing Hector. Once Patroclus is killed Achilles has a choice. He can stay and fight or he can leave. Achilles has been warned by his mother that he will die in Troy should he fight and kill Hector. Achilles acts as if it were no choice at all. Homer might suggest that retribution and closure are more important for some men than life itself. Considering Achilles' behavior and descent into a bestial state such a suggestion is not implausible.

With IEDs our troops are not given an opportunity for closure or retribution. A young LCpl is on patrol with his squad when his best friend steps on an IED and is killed within seconds. There is no one to shoot at, his friend's body is collected and put into a bag then hauled off. That young LCpl never sees his friend again, will not attend his funeral and will be expected to continue his responsibilities. He misses his friend, is angry he cannot retaliate against anyone or seek revenge and quite often would be willing to trade places with his friend so that he might still be alive.

Our troops are not given an opportunity for closure. Achilles was able to build a magnificent pyre for his friend and hold a celebration in his honor. The only ceremony we observe are the formations held for Dust off. However the front line troops will not be present for that. Even if they were it certainly would not be enough.

My own personal experience lacked closure of a different kind. My unit and I returned home at the end of August 2011. In less than two weeks, I was out of the Marine Corps. After any deployment there are certain procedures and training that must be followed in order to allow troops to transition back to life outside of a warzone. Additionally any troop who is about to transition out of service is to be given at least three months to transition after a deployment. He or she is to be fully medically cleared. The three months are also recognized as a period in which the troop is able to find employment or enroll in school. Instead of three months of job searching and medical evaluation I was given a four day course on how to write a resume designed for Corporals, turned in my gear and declared medically cleared despite missing one of my front teeth from the deployment. Less than two weeks and I was history.

I did not care. The only difficulty I had with transitioning and closure dealt with the Marines and friends I no longer get to see. Marines whom I shared every waking moment with

for a year in a desolate place. Those bonds do not break so easily. Part of that transitioning training is responsible for the closure that the troops require. My entire platoon seemed ripped away from me. Less than two weeks and I will never see them again.

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The rituals we undertake can be similar to that of the Greeks and Trojans. Specifics will vary but the principles behind them remain much the same. While deceased Greek warriors were burned on a pyre our troops today have their remains nobly escorted to the United States and interred by their preference. What remains unchanged is the significance behind those rituals. Homer portrays these rituals in detail and illustrates their significance throughout *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Reading Homer may not be enough. As brilliant as the ancient poem was it is difficult to believe he was as advanced in terms of psychology as we are today. For greater understanding our military leaders must read Dr. John Shay and his remarkable contributions: *Achilles in Vietnam* and *Odysseus in America*. Every commander has much to gain by reading these books and understanding the issues as their troops are the ones that suffer the consequences of combat.

The purpose of this paper is far too important not to recognize the opportunity for improvement. Mission accomplishment and troop welfare are the two principles on which decisions are made. Most will say the balance is 51% mission accomplishment, 49% troop welfare but recognize that sometimes the scales of the balance tip in the other direction. Reading Dr. Shay's books will lead to a more thorough knowledge of the trials our troops face and the issues they continue to endure after their service. Dr. Shay's has interacted with hundreds of troops, possibly thousands, managing a variety of health issues. His experience and scholarship must receive deference from military commanders.

My experience and scholarship provide a different perspective from that of Dr. Shay. My work is certainly not as groundbreaking or thorough but might obtain more significance. Dr. Shay discovered Homer through the lessons taught to him by his patients and their suffering. His efforts are rehabilitative and reactive. The rigors of combat and the shock of experiencing or witnessing traumatic events are onset once patients reach Dr. Shay. My experience provides another path to include *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Homer was revealed to me while my Marines lived through events similar to those as the Greeks and Trojans 3,000 years ago. The parallels became apparent. My observations lacked the fundamental understandings of a trained medical professional and my grasp of the psychology behind certain events was limited with trace thought behind the events and their significance. Had I read Dr. Shay prior to the deployment to Afghanistan I would have better understood the psyche of my Marines. I would have been a better leader. Perhaps the trials our troops face could have been recognized earlier than the clinical phase. The first level of care is the responsibility of their immediate commander. Our efforts would become proactive and the degree of issues braved by our troops would decline in number and severity.

Wrath

The response from troops in combat can vary dependent on the situation or from troop-to-troop. There is no distinct set of parameters that will cause troops to act in a specific or desired manner. Leaders must be cautious in every situation for the possibility of their troops to act unlawfully. Rage or wrath is a bleak reality in combat. Men are capable of horrible acts given a context of anger, potential for loss of life and feeling threatened. Examples of massacres and merciless slaughter spread throughout history suggest that wrath is innate within man and that we are all capable of truly horrendous acts.

Homer addresses the horror of war and what drives men to commit acts of rage. Following the death of Patroclus, Achilles will desecrate numerous Trojan corpses after mercilessly killing dozens of men. U.S. troops will commit the same atrocity by murdering civilians in Vietnam and Afghanistan despite laws of war and ideals as a country that condemn such behavior. An understanding of Homer might have bestowed those leaders with the ability to recognize a situation with the potential for slaughter and the circumstances that reduced unit morale to commit those crimes. Reading Homer enables military leaders to become better in tune with the psychological effects combat has on troops. An engaged leader can gather a sense on the morale of an individual or the unit and prevent the massacre of innocent lives.

Wrath or Rage is the first word of *The Iliad*. The wrath of Achilles will lead to the death of Greek and Trojan warriors: the former indirectly as Achilles refuses to participate in the fighting as Greeks perish; the latter as he slaughters Trojan warriors after returning to battle. As discussed in the chapter titled “Themis” the first instance of Achilles’ wrath is a result of Agamemnon’s breach in *themis* when he strips Achilles of Briseis. An act that dishonors

Achilles so much he becomes content to allow his fellow countrymen to die and considers killing Agamemnon.

The second and greater instance of Achilles' wrath results from the death of Patroclus. The death of his friend will have a devastating effect on Achilles. He refuses to rest, eat, drink or bathe until he has his revenge. Achilles is able to ignore his humanly needs to concentrate on his single goal: the destruction of Trojans; specifically, the death of Hector. Once he returns to battle Achilles pursues his merciless onslaught. Book XXI is a testament of Achilles' hateful destruction of the Trojans. Effortlessly he cuts through them. In one exchange Achilles is wounded; however, the wound is of no consequence as it riles him to fight harder. One Trojan warrior begs for mercy clinging to Achilles knees, asking that he be taken captive and ransomed (a common practice and not an abnormal request). The response of Achilles is chilling:

Fool,
don't talk to me of ransom. No more speeches.
Before Patroclus met his day of destiny, true,
it warmed my heart a bit to spare some Trojans:
droves I took alive and auctioned off as slaves.
But now not a single Trojan flees his death,
not one of the gods hand over to me before your gates,
none of all the Trojans, sons of Priam least of all!
Come, friend, you too must die. Why moan about it so?³³

³³ Fagles, *The Iliad*, 523.

Achilles slaughters Trojans by the score. A few days earlier the Trojans, led by Hector, pushed the Greek lines so far back they were able to burn Greek ships. Once Achilles returns his fighting is so fierce he nearly single-handedly forces the Trojans to retreat behind the walls of their city. His destruction of the Trojans is so overwhelming that the gods fear Achilles might capture Troy before its intended time.

Achilles' decision to fight is morbid if not downright suicidal. He has knowledge that his death is assured should he continue to fight in Troy. Before the death of Patroclus he was resigned to sail home and live out his life within the halls of his father's house to raise his own family. Achilles is content to live a life of anonymity while being denied the glory and fame of battle. His decision changes once he loses his friend in combat. He becomes intent on staying in Troy and inflicting as much destruction as possible even if it means committing to his own death. The faster he destroys the Trojan Army and kills Hector the sooner approaches the day of his own death. Yet nothing will deter Achilles from slaughter. Moreover, he embraces the fact of his impending mortality. In the same speech delivered to the Trojan clutching to his knees, begging for his life, Achilles continues:

And look, you see how handsome and powerful I am?

The son of a great man, the mother who gave me life

a deathless goddess. But even for me, I tell you,

death and the strong force of fate are waiting.

There will come a dawn or sunset or high noon

when a man will take my life in battle too-³⁴

³⁴ Fagles, *The Iliad*, 523-4.

His behavior is not sane. In the Ancient Greek world it was far better to be counted among the living than the dead. Death was grim and there were no guarantees of a redeeming afterlife. Even so Achilles is accepting of his fate. He is the rare person who controls his destiny; he decides whether he lives or dies. Achilles prefers to revenge the death of his friend than to continue living.

Homer repeatedly refers to Achilles as a lion. His menacing ability as a killer allows a natural comparison to the prowess of an animal like a lion. Men transforming into beasts is a common motif in literature. The symbolism usually signifies men indulging in their base desires. A common scene of such a motif revolves around men eating and drinking to excess and sometimes carousing after women. There is such a scene in *The Odyssey*. The goddess Circe gives men food and drink that transforms them into swine. Odysseus overcomes Circe through the assistance of the gods and forces the goddess to restore his men into their human form. However the transformation of Achilles is different. He develops no fangs or claws but the change is from within. He is bestial by nature.

The decline of Achilles is instigated by his rage. As early as Book I he descends from a noble figure after being dishonored by Agamemnon. His fall is marked by the death of his fellow countrymen as he sits idly by and allows their deaths. Consequently Achilles hits his lowest point when he returns to combat. He ceases to act humanely. Pitilessly he encounters and overwhelms Trojan after Trojan. He scorns any appeal for mercy. Achilles throws the corpses of dead Trojans in the river so their flesh can be eaten by eels and fish. He mocks Hector's plea to allow his corpse to remain unmolested. Instead he ties the slain Trojan hero to his chariot and drags it around purposefully attempting to mutilate his remains. Achilles will expose the corpse of Hector in the Sun to rot and be left for the dogs. The dignity of Achilles has completely

deteriorated. He behaves as an animal without compassion for an honorable adversary deserving of respect.

The noble character of Achilles begins to return once he has killed Hector. He hosts funeral games in honor of Patroclus and provides him the proper burial rites. Achilles is an excellent host as his guests are well attended to and he provides impressive prizes to the victors of the various funeral contests. In one occasion he proves a skilled deliberator as a difficult decision must be made between two deserving contestants. The situation and subsequent resolution amplify the ability of Achilles as host.

Achilles is not restored to his full noble character until he releases the body of Hector. In the final book of *The Iliad* Priam, King of the Trojans and father to Hector, is aided by the gods and given safe passage to the lodge of Achilles. Priam begs Achilles to remember his own father and the suffering he must endure and to release the body of Hector unto his custody. Achilles relents. He orders the body of Hector washed and anointed with oil. Achilles is not content simply to hand over the body. He prepares a meal, allows Priam to rest (he has not slept in nearly two weeks) and is willing to allow the Trojans twelve days to properly bury Hector. Within a small period of time Achilles undergoes a complete reversal of character. In Book XXI no Trojan is safe from his wrath. In Book XXIV the King of the Trojans is welcome in his tent and spared no courtesy. *The Iliad* concludes with the burial of Hector and the restoration of Achilles' nobility.

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Rage is a pervasive element in combat and in life, the instigation of which can be attributed to any number of factors. For our purposes rage or wrath is defined as the act or

actions motivated by anger for the purposes of revenge or retribution. Acts of rage are commonly disproportionate with their cause. Justice is not good enough. Rage is over the top. Killing Hector was not enough for Achilles. He had to desecrate his remains and humiliate him. Revenge is rarely an eye for an eye. The concept of revenge tends to be of a personal nature, but entire groups or units might be persuaded to act out of revenge.

U.S. forces operate within established Rules of Engagement or ROE. We are instructed in who we can engage, under what circumstances and with what weaponry. Policy makers will state that as a military force we have a clear and established ROE. Clear is a word that should never be associated with combat. Fog is a better word. You cannot see far through the fog and once things come into focus they are close to you and tend to be moving very quickly. For instance, our ROE states that we cannot engage military age males grouped together each carrying an AK-47. Carrying a weapon is part of the Afghan and Iraqi cultures. Under ROE our troops can engage should a threatening gesture be made or hostile intent inferred. So if one of those males collected in that group all carrying AK-47s should raise his weapon as if intending to fire then we are allowed to engage. On paper this policy sounds reasonable. However when a nineteen year old sees a group of men carrying AK-47s approaching his patrol he tends to get a happy trigger finger. Perhaps he would rather not wait for one, or many, of those men to point assault rifles at him.

On one mounted patrol we skirted around the western part of Marjah. Our patrol consisted of two MRAPs, two M-ATVs and a few 7-tons for cargo. The western part of Marjah is a desert. There is nothing there at all. Rolling hills of sand and nothing else. Between vehicles we usually maintained about 100 yards. In the desert the sand kicks up. Any closer than 100 yards and you most likely cannot see the vehicle in front of you just a column of sand whirling

through the air. We travel in the desert as IEDs present less of a threat. However the hills provide opportunities for places to hide and possibly ambush.

A white sedan speeds out of the hills completely unnoticed and heads between our fourth and fifth vehicle. The gunner of the fifth vehicle, Corporal H—, is the first to notice the sedan. The sedan is less than 100 yards away. Our ROE states that at 100 yards to pop a pen flare. A pen flare is a handheld device that shoots a harmless but threatening flare fairly accurately. The message is clear: stay away. Cpl H— does not have time to pop a pen flare and in the Marine Corps there are no such things as “warning shots.” He aimed in his 240 Gulf on the target as the vehicle approached steadily. At the same time the driver of the fifth vehicle slowed down sensing what was about to happen. The sedan was not going to stop and would have collided into the fifth vehicle if both vehicles continued in the same direction and speed. Within 50 yards our ROE states we are authorized to use deadly force. A 240 Gulf is a machine gun that shoots 7.62mm rounds. It is a common weapon on mounted patrols for its accuracy, relative fire power and lack of jamming. Cpl H— could have incapacitated the sedan with ease most likely killing all passengers. The sedan continued its course as the fifth vehicle all but stopped. The sedan zipped past the fifth vehicle twenty yards directly in front. Cpl H— tensed as if ready to squeeze the trigger then decided not to. The sedan continued in the same path dipping through the hills until the car was out of sight.

Cpl H— had every right to engage the target. The ROE indicated that he should do so. Lawfully he would have been protected. Still he decided not to. The ROE are simply guidelines that provide criteria designating when engagement is authorized. Once those criteria are met it is up to the individual to make a series of decisions discerning what constitutes a legitimate threat. Cpl H- had roughly four to five seconds to filter through all the information provided, determine

if the information was consistent within our ROE and then judge the veracity of the threat. While the ROE provides guidelines it also addresses the individuals' requirement to assess the situation and act responsibly. Troops are not exonerated should they act unlawfully with the universal military band-aid "I was just following orders."

ROEs are a good concept. They help to provide criteria for discrimination of threats and proportionality in relation to mitigate that threat. They seek to prevent acts of rage, wrath and/or revenge and are intended to ensure that only viable threats become the target of lethal force. ROEs provide U.S. and coalition forces the opportunity of waging war in a lawful manner.

Yet there is a human element which under proper leadership can be mitigated though not completely controlled. The Greeks had something of an unwritten ROE. Desecrating remains were against the ROE; yet still it happened. Rage is an inevitable possibility. When a troop is killed his friends will want retaliation. On the other hand, in some situations the impetus for rage is unknown. In either circumstance, the death of a comrade or the random opportunity for wanton violence, commanders must recognize the possibility for every situation to escalate into slaughter.

Such was the case during the My Lai massacre. In March 1968 U.S. Soldiers entered two hamlets approximately 100 miles south of Da Nang and killed hundreds of old men, women, children and infants. Some of the women and children were raped. Some of the corpses were mutilated. Only a few Soldiers from the unit, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment attempted to intervene during the attacks. The officers not only gave the orders to butcher the villagers but actively led the way by cutting down scores of innocent lives themselves. The My Lai massacre remains one of, if not the most, atrocious and horrific war crimes committed by American forces.

By the time of My Lai Charlie Company had endured substantial casualties to include a handful of KIA. Possibly the casualties they suffered as a unit turned into rage and developed a desire for revenge. Perhaps their need for destruction superseded any logical thought or humane sentiment. They reached a moment in which they descended into beasts and could not discern right from wrong. Imagine the hate and anger, the complete lack of compassion and absolute disdain for the value of human life to group together families and fire machine guns at them. The horror lasted an entire day; Charlie Company even took a break for lunch.

A more recent example is the story of American Soldier Robert Bales. SSgt Bales was deployed to Camp Belamby in Kandahar Province, Afghanistan. In March 2012 he single-handedly murdered sixteen Afghan citizens as well as injuring six others during a one night killing spree. Nine of his victims were children. Bales set a number of bodies on fire. Under Islamic Law the burning of the body is considered a desecration. After committing murder Bales surrendered himself and admitted his guilt to the crimes.

Bales acted alone. His motivation to commit such crimes have not been revealed. During his trial Bales stated that he was upset over an IED attack in which his friend lost his leg. It should be noted that Bales had previously deployed three times to Iraq and Afghanistan. The Kandahar Massacre, as the incident was publicized, occurred during his forth deployment to a combat zone. Perhaps the episode in which his friend lost his leg triggered a response that led him to commit murder. Possibly continued high levels of stress incurred from multiple combat tours aggregated into a definitive moment of brutality. Maybe a combination of both events led to the massacre.

In both events American troops attacked civilians not combatants. Achilles killed Trojan warriors; however, it can be inferred from *The Iliad* that every person in the city of Troy is in jeopardy.

Leaders must continue to provide an ROE that is flexible enough for the troops to operate under while feeling protected lawfully as well as maintaining the right to defend their person. The onus of individual culpability must continue regarding the decision making process to engage targets as well as legal responsibility. There must be consequences to illegal activity.³⁵ Mock battles or scenarios should be included in pre-deployment training that present information or a series of events in which a definitive decision is difficult to reach.³⁶ Rarely will troops find themselves in situations in which the information is clear and the decision obvious.

Overall pre-deployment training covers most of the aforementioned material. Troops recognize what is lawful and illegal. They understand the consequences of acting unlawfully. They know they are not permitted to act under an unlawful order and will be responsible as individuals for their actions under such an order.

Once troops are exposed to combat and their units have suffered casualties the potential for rage becomes an issue. Leaders need to continually remind troops of ROE and the consequences of acting unlawfully. Should troops be willing to commit such crimes it is unlikely they are concerned with potential consequences. A better deterrent would be to remove troops from the front lines closest to a recent WIA or KIA. There are roles that troop can perform in which he is removed from the front lines, at least for a time. Troops should receive continuous

³⁵ From the My Lai massacre only one Soldier was convicted of war crimes. His sentence was later curtailed by President Nixon.

³⁶ Some of these suggestions are obvious. One would be surprised. Despite the majority of the unit never leaving the wire and recognizing they would not be in combat situations, RCT-1 spent a week training on throwing hand grenades and shooting machine guns.

monitoring while deployed specifically after fire fights or IED attacks. The opportunity to discuss the event with a therapist would be beneficial to the troop(s) as well as provide a primary indication to an authority figure should the troop be at risk to act out of rage.

These are a few ideas that would benefit our troops as well as reduce the potential for revenge. The most effective means to mitigate the risk of rage remains a leader who is engaged with his troops on a personal level. A leader who keeps a finger on the pulse of the squad, platoon or company can effectively curb the potential for misconduct. A lack of leadership will allow the morale of the unit to deteriorate and become more susceptible to committing unlawful acts. No training, deterrent or therapy will prove more effective than engaged leadership.

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Sergeant P— was assigned to the unit late in the training cycle. He was present for the last month of the work-up leading to the deployment. This was not exactly ideal for unit cohesion. Still he proved a valuable asset as he provided excellent technical knowledge as well as leadership to the junior Marines.

Halfway through the deployment we returned home from a patrol. Sgt P—'s vehicle passed through the checkpoint to enter Camp Dwyer and suddenly stopped. Marines from the vehicle behind rushed to his vehicle. Immediately they took him to the Regimental medical center.

Sgt P— had been in the Marine Corps for six years. This was his fifth deployment either to Iraq or Afghanistan. When revived he said that something in his mind snapped. Despite being in a safe and secured area something reminded him of a previous deployment in which a large

IED catastrophically hit the vehicle in front of him. He began to sweat, he started to lose vision then he passed out.

Sgt P— had been medically cleared to deploy. Despite several major concussions and the need to wear hearing aids from sustaining multiple IED attacks medical authorities saw him fit for duty. Four deployments in five years never registered to anyone with the authority to prevent a fifth deployment. Sgt P— remained with the unit for another month. He was not allowed outside the wire. It devastated him to learn that he had to return home. He felt that his contribution was not enough and that he was leaving his buddies behind.

The decision to allow Sgt P— was an egregious failure in leadership. The medical staff failed him. The Commanding Officer that allowed him to transfer units failed him. The Commanding Officer that accepted his transfer and allowed him to deploy failed him. No one bothered to look into the Marine's history nor did they care about his well-being. Most likely Sgt P— fulfilled a requirement on paper to make the unit ready to deploy. For Marines the term is Table of Organization, more commonly T/O, complete. Looking good on paper was more important than troop welfare.

A soldier or Marine with three to four deployments despite only serving for six to seven years is not uncommon. Most of America is unfamiliar with how the military operates and the vast functions within every branch. Some soldiers prepare and serve food every day. Some Marines install communications equipment and maintain their operation. Their deployments are still difficult for many reasons. However they are not confronted with the consistent stress levels encountered by front line troops who bear the burden of combat. Exposed to extended periods of combat situations they function under extreme duress. Ironically these troops are continually

recycled from one unit to another all with the same function: seek, close with and destroy the enemy.

A Marine who is a logistician might start with an Infantry battalion. He ensures the logistical needs of the unit are supplied in a timely manner through the proper channels. He might be exposed to extended periods of high stress levels while serving with the Infantry battalion. From the Infantry battalion he might transfer to an Air wing unit or a rear echelon maintenance unit. Either way his threat level is drastically reduced considering the differences in mission between the Infantry and other units. He has a set of skills that make him valuable to a variety of units and is able to move about within the Marine Corps. An Infantry Marine is trained for one purpose: seek, close with and destroy the enemy. He will go from one Infantry unit to the next. Most likely he will encounter high stress levels for extended periods of time during every deployment. Considering we had been fighting two wars for over ten years combat deployments were frequent.

As I write this at the end of 2013, our forces have pulled out of Iraq. The timeline is set for U.S. forces to pull out of Afghanistan within a year or so. The men who have done the fighting in both wars have done nothing but fighting for over a decade and our military is downsizing. Many of those men will become casualties of budget cuts and pushed out of service. The skills they have developed are translatable (to a degree) but the lifestyle they have learned is unrecognizable to someone who has not encountered that level of stress.

In the Marine Corps we have the saying “America is not at war, America is at the mall. The Marines are at war.” There is much truth to this statement. The burden of two wars spanning over a decade was the responsibility of a minority of people. The overwhelming majority of Americans were not affected. That is not to say they were not supportive but there is no

collective experience. The majority of Americans did not sweat, bleed or suffer. Supporting is not the same as sharing. When troops deploy they usually stop in Bangor, Maine before their next destination. Without fail there will be a fair number of people present in Bangor to greet, talk with and thank the troops. The group consists primarily of WWII, Korea and Vietnam vets and their wives, no one else. They *know*.

The transition from war time to peace time is going to be difficult. America has only had to deal with a few troops at a time returning from combat and integrating into society. In a few years, if not earlier, America will have to learn to cope with troops returning to civilian life in wholesale numbers. Troops feel a distinction between those who served and those who did not. There is not an animosity felt by veterans but certainly a distinction. Without that familiar military structure to fall back on troops will become even more isolated. Patience on both sides will be required and a dialogue has to be initiated and prolonged. The outreach groups and charities supporting veterans bring tremendous promise to a looming problem. The support has to be consistent. The interest of the American public for the continued support of veterans for the next five, ten, twenty years is crucial.

Homer proves instructive in the pitfalls regarding transition from war time to peace time. In *The Odyssey* the audience learns that Agamemnon returned home only to be murdered by his wife and lover. When Odysseus returns to Ithaca he kills a room full of men because they were courting his wife. These situations are not merely dramatic examples of literature. They do occur and will continue to happen unless the issues are recognized as a threat that will plague our country for decades. Imagine a soldier with extensive training, years of combat experience and no inhibition to resort to violence. Place him in circumstances where he feels cornered, threatened or humiliated. The described scenario confronted by service members today is the

same scenario confronted by Odysseus. The audience knows how Odysseus reacted. The war may have ended but the struggle continues.

PTSD is a misnomer. There is no disorder associated with post-traumatic stress. The body's response to high levels of stress is normal that is to say the human body/mind is not equipped to deal with continued high levels of stress. Acting out of character after a traumatic event is not a disorder; it is reality. PTSD is a term associated with behavioral responses that have been observed throughout history. In World War I the term was shell shock. Erich Maria Remarque writes about the effects of prolonged periods of being exposed to artillery fire in *All Quiet on the Western Front*.³⁷ Remarque also describes an episode of post-traumatic stress in *The Road Back*. Obviously post-traumatic stress was a relevant theme since WWI. The men of World War II also experienced PTSD. Often WWII is overlooked in terms of stress as if those men did not suffer its effects. Possibly the obstacles they faced after the war were ignored considering the prosperity of our country in the years following WWII. Possibly as America felt triumphant as a nation after defeating Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan the country did not want to put a damper on the mood by recognizing the harsh toll the war had on its young men. However they did indeed struggle with post-traumatic stress. The HBO television series *The Pacific* follows the island hopping campaign of the Marines during WWII. In one episode the Gunnery Sergeant is overwhelmed by the carnage that surrounds him and becomes unresponsive while his limbs shake. The GySgt was the most hardened and seasoned of them all yet he reached a point in which he broke down and could not continue. No one would argue the effect of post-traumatic stress experienced by those who served in Vietnam. Theirs would seem to provide the greatest and most recent lesson to our county about the effects of combat. Yet it seems that we pretend to

³⁷ An exceptional book that is on the Commandant's Reading List.

have made a breakthrough in medical science or just our overall understanding of human nature by applying the term PTSD to behavior that does not fit within the accepted norms of society. The effects of combat have been continuously demonstrated for the past century. In the past two major wars our country has fought spanning a time of over fifty years, we have done little to improve our knowledge of post-traumatic stress or have ignored the steps to prevent these injuries.

Achilles demonstrates PTSD when the death of his best friend causes him to act completely out of character. Achilles is the greatest warrior for either side so killing Trojans is not out of character but the zeal and lack of compassion in which he kills is unlike his behavior when previously interacting with enemies. His erratic and abnormal behavior becomes the principle theme of *The Iliad*. Homer suggests PTSD as early as Ancient Greece.

As leaders we cannot forget the lessons of the past. *The Iliad* is one of our earliest sources for post-traumatic stress. As a military we overlook Homer, we forget the horrors of WWI, we disbelieve any combat stress occurred in WWII, Vietnam we treat as a secluded incident of post-traumatic stress itself the result of a war so horrific that its ill effects could never be replicated. Currently we are faced with an epidemic of post-traumatic stress due to the same personnel being deployed to numerous combat tours, yet we pretend to be shocked by the effects so label it a disorder.

We need to stop pretending to be surprised by the effects of combat stress. The military needs to recognize that post-traumatic stress can be as dangerous if not more dangerous than a gunshot wound. A limit needs to be placed on the number of combat deployments. Sustained IED attacks need to become information readily available to every Staff Noncommissioned Officer and Officer in that troop's chain-of-command. Better testing needs to be developed and

implemented. Before RCT-1 left for Afghanistan the pre-screen for Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) consisted of the speed in which troops hit a button in response to seeing a flicker on the screen or hearing a buzz in their headsets. A beep test. Those results were to be measured against how quickly troops responded after returning from deployment. I suppose if your response time had slowed you obviously suffered from TBI. I certainly never did the follow-up test and I am confident most did not either. Perhaps this test was partially responsible for allowing Sgt P- to deploy for the fifth time. Therapy has proven useful in treatment. Still as a military we need to become proactive in preventing post-traumatic stress. We can limit the number and severity of post-traumatic stress cases by restricting the number of deployments and retrograding troops who have experienced situations of high stress to lesser demanding roles.

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Achilles chose death.³⁸ The death of his friend drove him to rage and a killing spree that sealed his fate. Once Achilles decides to fight he is “already dead.”³⁹ He expresses guilt for not protecting Patroclus and will return to battle even though to do so ensures his death. Achilles initially laments his fate but willingly accepts it. Before striking down a Trojan warrior he icily speaks of his assured death without remorse.

Vietnam Veterans have expressed similar statements to being “already dead.” Dr. Shay writes “Most viewed themselves as already dead at some point in their combat service, often after a close friend was killed.”⁴⁰ This view is consistent with the behavior of Achilles. Also,

³⁸ There is only one reference to suicide in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Ajax is second only to Achilles in martial prowess. The armor of Achilles following his death is awarded to Odysseus when that honor should have been bestowed to Ajax due to his stature in the Greek Army. Ajax will later commit suicide out of humiliation. Odysseus calls out to Ajax during his trip to the Underworld but Ajax refuses to respond.

³⁹ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 49.

⁴⁰ Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*, 51.

troops who lost someone particularly close to them were unconcerned with the possibility of death. Revenge or blood became their driving factor and those troops often demonstrated a complete loss of fear or loss of all emotion. These troops developed a reputation of invulnerability as they pursued combatants without concern for their own lives. Of course these troops were not invulnerable but simply did not care about the consequences of their own mortality. Again this behavior and reputation is consistent with that of Achilles. Both Achilles and Vietnam Veterans who lost close friends utilize revenge as their exclusive source of motivation. Perhaps Homer's commentary is a reflection of the innate being of man and his desire for revenge as a universal theme.

The desire to seek revenge might result in the death of those seeking retribution. As stated above troops might lose all emotion particularly the fear of death. For some of those who experienced particularly traumatic events death might be a welcomed reprieve. Their fierceness in attacking combatants might be the latent desire to die and end any mental suffering they are experiencing. Pain and suffering does not end once a troop is removed from combat. As Vietnam Veterans, and I am confident Veterans from additional wars did the same, attempted suicide by enemy gunfire to ease their suffering, our Veterans are also attempting to alleviate their pain but have taken matters into their own hands.

Suicide has become epidemic among Veterans and troops. Twenty-two Veterans commit suicide a day.⁴¹ This number is so alarmingly high it is difficult to comprehend. Jot down the names of twenty-two people you know. Do the same tomorrow and the same the next day without using the same person twice. In a week or so you will probably run out of people you

⁴¹ <http://www.cnn.com/2013/09/21/us/22-veteran-suicides-a-day/>

know. The number in a year's time is 8,030. Our county did not lose that many in over twenty years combined in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The suicide rate will continue to increase in the next few years. Regrettably, it is a matter of numbers. More troops will leave the service possibly against their wishes. The familiar structure that supported them will be removed and they will struggle to find work. The work that is available they might discover to be insignificant or without the desired levels of responsibility. They might struggle to reintegrate into a society that despite being supportive does not fully understand them. Patience might wear thin and they could become outcasts in their home towns or cities. Addiction to alcohol or drugs is a distinct possibility. They might be haunted by their experiences overseas. The suicide rate will increase due to the downsizing of the military and the number of troops who have experienced extended periods of combat stress and/or traumatic events.

The Veterans taking their own lives are not only troops who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan but those who served in Vietnam. This trend is alarming as it suggests Vietnam Vets have been struggling for over forty years then decided to commit suicide. Also implied is that our Veterans did not receive the attention they needed. The trend might continue with Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans. Should we fail as a country to provide for those at risk Veterans we are exposing them to tragedy not only today but forty to fifty years from now.

Homer demonstrates that the mental anguish experienced by some troops is too difficult to overcome, even for the greatest of warriors. Following the death of Patroclus, Achilles laments "I've lost the will to live" and continues "Then let me die at once."⁴² There is nothing to suggest that suicide is a societal custom of Ancient Greece from *The Iliad* or *The Odyssey*. The

⁴² Fagles, *The Iliad*, 470.

poems frequently intimate that to be among the living is better than to be counted among the dead. For a man of Achilles' stature to prefer death illustrates how powerful grief can be. Homer provides perhaps the earliest text that indicates the stress and trauma of combat can lead to mental and emotional suffering so severe that those afflicted would prefer to die than to live.

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Rage is the underbelly of war where glory fades and only the bleakest parts of humanity remain: desecration of human remains, the murder of innocent people, rape, an utter lack of compassion. Instances of rage are spread throughout history. One of the earliest narratives of war is centered on the rage of one man and the awful consequences that ensue. As the dramatic lessons of history demonstrate rage would appear to be in our nature without the ability to completely remove.

For military leaders, the imperative is to recognize the potential for wanton slaughter or unlawful retribution in every situation. Identifying and isolating all situations of probable conflict is not possible. Though we might better understand the contributing human factors and recognize certain situations with higher potential for unwarranted escalation of force we cannot wholly distinguish which scenarios will result in massacre. As leaders we can determine who is further exposed to potential situations of immoral escalation. Leaders must keep a feel on the pulse of their unit at the individual level. An individual displaying erratic signs of behavior should be withheld from kinetic operations. A squad or platoon should not be ordered to patrol following the death or wounding of a troop within the unit. Units or troops continually exposed to traumatic events should be recycled with units less exposed to combat. These suggestions will not eliminate rage but will reduce the opportunity for troops to act in retribution or immoral violence.

The potential long term effects of combat must be considered by decision makers at the highest levels. Wars are costly. The greatest price the nation will pay is the lives of our troops. Leaders must recognize that the suffering continues long after the last shot is fired. The suicide rate of troops and Veterans will reach 8,000 lives this year. That loss of life will never be considered KIA but is most likely the direct result of combat stress. Thousands of troops had their lives physically irreparably affected by war particularly in the past decade. Veterans with missing limbs or prosthesis have become so common that most people with a prosthesis are assumed to be a Veteran. Some of the more devastating injuries leave no physical mark. Traumatic Brain Injury and post traumatic stress can be debilitating. The behavior associated with these afflictions include: forgetting the names of loved ones, restriction of motor skills, inability to concentrate and unprovoked mood swings.

Studying Homer fomented our growth as leaders as he discusses much of the issues listed above. Homer is not concerned with tactics or weapons. He explains the condition of being human and comments on the heavy psychological toll of combat and its possible effects. The loss of a friend causes a warrior to act in a radical manner and commit war crimes. U.S. troops such as SSgt Bales committed the same crime supposedly for the same reason.

Reading Homer facilitates military leaders in the identification of conditions whether environmental or at the individual level which contribute to rage. Furthermore, he deliberately instructs on how radically men can act out of character and their zealotry for blood. By reading Homer we can effectively mitigate the possibilities of unlawful violence by . The first step is to recognize that the possibility for massacre exists. Military leaders must also recognize that we too are capable of committing horrific acts. Achilles was the best of the Greeks not only in fighting but as a nobleman; he fell victim to wrath.

Nostos

Nostos is the Greek term for homecoming or the desire to return home.⁴³ The concept is presented throughout *The Iliad* and is the premise for *The Odyssey*. Greek warriors nearly abandon the battlefield and forego sacking Troy in Book II for the sake of returning home. *Nostos* is a powerful theme in both poems perhaps the most powerful theme. Bringing everyone home is the priority of every military leader. My experience is that glory or prestige on the battlefield has taken a backseat in the mind of every military leader who directly leads troops in combat. To lose someone is naturally to be avoided at all costs; however, this includes obtaining glory or even victory. Understandably casualties do occur; yet in the minds of leaders the life of the troop is more valuable than any victory and returning home with everyone is preferred over any other situation.

Homer presents some dichotomy to my argument. The supreme commander, Agamemnon, is unconcerned with troop welfare, he will let them die for the sake of his vanity as he refuses to return Chryseis. From this standpoint, the Greek leadership is singly concerned with winning glory and taking Troy. Consequently, Homer identifies Agamemnon as a uniquely poor and unfit leader. For the Greek warriors their homecoming is directly related to their capture of Troy. They cannot return home until the city has fallen. The Greeks must fight and win glory or *kleos* in Greek on the battlefield before they earn their homecoming. Homer introduces an interesting dilemma. Which is the more desirable theme for the Greeks: *kleos* or *nostos*? In Book II the Greek Army is prepared to retreat to the ships and do without glory.

The warrior who can end the war is in conflict with winning glory or returning home. Separate from all other Greek and Trojan warriors Achilles is afforded his choice between *kleos*

⁴³ The word "nostalgia" is derived from the Greek term. The meanings of both words are quite similar.

or *nostos*. He alone is aware of his fate being dependent on two choices: win glory and die or sail to Greece and receive his homecoming. In Book IX Achilles informs Odysseus the prophecy of his fate:

If I hold out here and I lay siege to Troy,
my journey home is gone, but my glory never dies.
If I voyage back to the fatherland I love,
my pride, my glory dies...⁴⁴

Achilles will choose to sail home. He prefers to be reunited with his father, have a wife and raise a family. Of course his decision will change but that decision is not predicated upon *kleos* but rage. The most capable of Greek warriors decides to forego never ending glory in exchange for homecoming. The decision of Achilles is a powerful message. Returning home, even without honor, is preferable to winning glory.

Homer instructs military leaders on the power of returning home. In Book IX Odysseus leads an embassy to Achilles on behalf of Agamemnon. The Greek commander is willing to gift Achilles: tripods, gold, cauldrons, stallions, seven women from Lesbos, twenty women from Troy, his own daughter Orestes to marry and to return Briseis. Achilles is not interested. He has set his mind on returning home and no bribe of gold, women or glory will stop him from doing so. Homer teaches us on two powerful themes at once: *themis* and *nostos*. Once the breach of “what is right” has occurred it is very difficult to patch that relationship. The insult that Achilles feels cannot be mended and the most powerful emotion he feels is to return home.

⁴⁴ Fagles, *The Iliad*, 265

Military leaders can benefit from Homer by understanding how strong the pull to return home can be. Such a desire is not altogether surprising but the intensity of the desire to return home can often be underestimated. Consider the effects of Achilles' desire to return home. Without his aid the Greek Army falters at the Trojan advance. Hector leads his forces to the Greek ships and sets fire to them. *Nostos* can have serious implications on morale and possibly lead to defeat.

The Odyssey is a poem dedicated to the theme of *nostos*. Odysseus journeys for ten years to return home. The struggles of the hero are celebrated; however, his responsibilities as a leader are ignored by casual readers but deserving of attention from military leaders so that similar mistakes will not be made. Consider that Odysseus left Troy with twelve ships fully manned yet he is the only one to return to Ithaca. Odysseus will make several decisions that jeopardize the lives of his men. Sometimes the mistakes we make are honest ones. We were not aware of the implications attached to our decisions or what consequences might bring. Reading *The Odyssey* is instructive in how our decisions as leaders can be harmful to our troops. Particularly in situation as delicate as coming home. Odysseus' actions are selfish. We must be wary not to commit the same selfish acts. Understanding Homer can help military leaders preclude the errors and rushed judgment that are associated with coming home.

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Home is always on the mind of the troops. "How are things back home?" The question asks many things. How are your kids? How is the wife? How are your parents? Did anything happen? The question entails many things. There are times when all you can do is think about home. The task at hand, the next mission and everything else is washed away by a daydream of what is going on back home. For the most part thinking about back home is only natural and

without consequence. Subsequently, “home” can lead to problems. Any number of factors back home can result into potential issues while deployed.

Cpl C— was a tough kid from South Jersey. He could talk the talk and rarely had to back it up. More than anyone he was responsible for preparing the junior Marines for their first deployment. He had a talent for identifying weakness. He had a greater talent for removing weakness. His words after a healthy exchange to a Marine fresh out of school “I feel that my job is to introduce a little stress into their lives. If they can’t deal with it here, they won’t be able to handle it out there.” The deployment would be the third for Cpl C—.

Early in the deployment Cpl C— learned of his mother’s condition. She had stage four lung cancer. The doctors gave her eight months to live. Eight months was approximately the same amount of time left in the deployment. When a family member dies or becomes sick or injured the Red Cross delivers a message to the Administration shop of that troop’s unit who deliver the message to the individual. The message simply relates the information of what has occurred. Cpl C— received notification of his mother’s situation via Red Cross message though he knew of her circumstances through phone calls back home. Not every troop is afforded the opportunity to communicate back home and the Red Cross ensures that troops are informed of dramatic events to family members.

Efforts were made to send Cpl C— back home. His mom was dying. His experience and leadership would be missed but we could finish the deployment without him. He deserved to go home. The official policy states that Marines are allowed to return home from a deployment if an immediate family member is given three months or less to live. Cpl C—’s mother had been given eight months. He was not allowed to go home. Policy is policy and Marines adore procedures.

Prior to deployment a staff Officer and his wife were expecting their first child. As a staff Officer this Marine had the ear and influence of the Colonel. The staff officer was able to miss the first month of the deployment to greet his child into the world. The situation is not unethical or dishonest. The Colonel exercised his judgment and recognized that the unit could function despite the absence of the staff Officer. The decision only spoils when compared to the treatment of Cpl C—.

For the next three months every effort was made and scheme developed to get Cpl C— home as soon as possible. After three months of trying we were able to send Cpl C— back the States. For the first month after the Red Cross message Cpl C— remained effective at his job. After several attempts to send him home failed his frustration manifested into anger and disillusionment. His focus was elsewhere and his work suffered. An attitude characterized by work ethic and attention to detail withered into lethargy and a lack of concern. His mother's health was all he could think about. No one blamed him. As a unit we became soured to the system that kept a Marine away from his family when they needed them most. Rules and regulations took precedent over common sense. The Colonel hid behind the policy because it was easier to keep Cpl C— in country rather than send him home. The great misnomer asked if we send Cpl C— home against the policy where do we draw the line? The commander gave little thought to his troops and their needs. To appear tough but fair trumped being reasonable.

Cpl C— would be sent home but not because of his mother's health. In an effort to find any loophole to get him back to his family he changed Military Occupational Specialty (MOS). Cpl C— was a Motor Transport Vehicle Operator. He had three deployments under his belt and possessed the leadership commands coveted considering the favorite weapon of our enemies is the IED and specifically targets mounted patrols. He possessed the skills to competently

command patrols as well as the experience to respond to an IED attack. Rather than continue his development in a field that required more leadership Cpl C— was reassigned to a unit designed for amphibious assault. At the time we happened to be fighting two wars in landlocked countries.

For the Marine Corps it was acceptable to send a troop home from deployment because he received orders (such as training for a new MOS) but not because a family member was terminally ill. The end result is the same. The deployed unit is down a Marine. However there are contingency plans that deploy fill-ins for situations exactly as that of Cpl C—. In effect Cpl C—'s absence would not have been noticed in terms of manpower. Before the decline in his attitude the unit would have experienced a drop in morale and technical expertise but a month after receiving news of Cpl C—'s mother the best course of action for the unit would have been the removal of the Marine.

Before Cpl C— left the deployment he had already explained the situation to his new command. They decided to delay his entry into the requisite training school. To make a Marine begin training under his circumstances was not practical. Cpl C— could begin his training once his family affairs were in order.

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LCpl G— was one of those kids you would never guess was a Marine. He was tall and lanky. A quiet kid. You had to pry information out of him. He was a good Marine and performed his responsibilities with enthusiasm and attention to detail. He drove me around Marjah for a year and I probably knew the most about him but that was not saying much.

Three months into the deployment LCpl G— received a Red Cross message. Before it reached the Marine MSgt W- was the first to receive the message. The news was devastating. Something that we all fear but realize is a distinctive possibility.

MSgt W- brought LCpl G— into his office and had him sit. The Master Sergeant informed him that some horrible news had happened back home and handed him the message. The confusion on the Marine's face quickly turned to grief as his eyes scrolled further down the Red Cross message. LCpl G—'s father had passed away.

For ten minutes we sat in the crowded office making what assurances we could. MSgt informed him of his upcoming travel and how long he would get to stay home. Tears rolled down a red face with swollen cheeks. He was overwhelmed with grief. LCpl G— got up to leave after we informed him that if he needed anything he just had to ask. Through broken sobs he nodded then left the office. A few days later LCpl G— was on a plane to spend time with his family.

There are no words to console the grieving. Though we might wonder what it might feel like to lose a father or mother we cannot truly understand unless we experience it ourselves. Losing someone while deployed presents additional hurdles and pain. The fundamental questions: why or how might remain unanswered. There are no family members or loved ones to share in the grief. LCpl G—'s friends consisted of the Marines in the unit but they could not reciprocate his emotions regardless of how much they felt for him at the time. A greater sense of loss and separation might be experienced as other family members might have been able to say goodbye or at least had the opportunity to see the deceased one last time. The grieving and healing process begin almost immediately. The same is not true when deployed. When overseas you are isolated. Instead of being together as a family and dealing with the event together you receive a message telling you that your father is dead.

A month later LCpl G— returned to the unit. He was the same quiet and hardworking Marine he was before. The time home was enough to bring him closure to the death of his father. LCpl G— continued developing as a Marine and earned the rank of Corporal by the end of the deployment.

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The Greek warriors can only sail home once they capture Troy. *Kleos* and *nostos* are inseparably connected. Earning *kleos* on the battlefield is required to gain *nostos*. Homer introduces an interesting concept. You have to win the war in order to go home. Troops in WWII fought under the same conditions. They were not deployed for a year at a time or given a tour in Vietnam. They deployed with a unit and fought in battle after battle to secure victory. The efficacy of waging war in such a manner is not in the scope of this argument; however, the similarities of circumstances between Greek warriors and American GIs should be noted.

Everyone pines for home. To get everyone home safe is the goal of every leader. Sometimes going home is not as comforting as presumed. The concept of home can change. Fathers might pass away, moms might be losing their lives to cancer and fiancées may have moved on and found somebody new. There are a great number of events that can radically alter the concept of home. The smallest alteration of homecoming can have substantial effects. The wound may not have occurred in combat but a change to homecoming can be equally traumatic for a troop. A loss of a family member or any change at home during a deployment will be attributed to that deployment in the mind of a troop.

Post-deployment surveys cover a wide number of topics. However those topics are limited to actions or events which occurred overseas. Leaders must recognize that the physical,

emotional and mental well-being of their troops is not restricted to what transpired overseas. The goal needs to shift from getting everyone home safe to everyone is home is everyone safe. Safe meaning well in mind, body and spirit. The various branches can develop different phrases or acronyms as they deem appropriate. The intention remains clear: post-deployment surveys must also probe the situation back home and determine if any significant changes occurred.

As leaders we tend to believe we cover this subject by asking our troops “How’s everything back home?” This is simply not enough. Questionnaires are unpopular and would most likely prove unproductive. Questions about home should be included into a mandatory therapy session or sessions dependent on the opinion of the counselor. Should a potential issue be discovered then that troop receives more attention from his or her psychologist and command.

Returning home may not be as therapeutic and relieving as intended. For Odysseus returning to Ithaca including a final trial involving suitors to his wife. For American troops who fought in Vietnam returning home also proved a trial. Currently the American public supports its military and her troops and Veterans are recognized as heroes. However the support of the public does not suggest that troops do not encounter dilemmas in their homecoming. Leaders must recognize the potential for issues of troops returning home.

Homer demonstrates the yearning to return home as a powerful theme. The Greeks nearly lose the war after ten years as Achilles decides that returning home is more important than fighting. Military leaders would gain knowledge of how powerful *nostos* can be through a working knowledge of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. A leader with a greater understanding of Homer might recognize the usefulness of sending Cpl C— back home and not hiding behind procedures. Regarding Achilles and Cpl C— morale and effectiveness in both units dropped. The

desire to return home has not declined in recent years or conflicts. The onus is on leaders to recognize that desire and to successfully inspire or persuade their troops to perform and fight. One method in which to maintain morale refers back to *themis*. Leaders cannot make the mistake of violating “what is right.” Cpl C— should have been sent home once the news of his mother’s condition was known; particularly, in light of the fact an officer was allowed to skip the first month of his deployment for the birth of his child. A perceptive commander with insight of Homer would have recognized the slight to Cpl C— as well as the potential for reduced morale for the unit as a whole.

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Penelope, the wife of Odysseus, waited twenty years for the return of her husband. Ten years she waited while her husband fought the Trojans; another ten years she waited while he made his journey home to Ithaca. Unruly suitors, believing Odysseus to be dead, vied for her hand in marriage, beleaguered the halls of Ithaca and abused her hospitality. Greedily they devoured her stores of wine and cattle with lavish banquets. They often humiliated her son, Telemachus, too young to defend his mother’s honor or his own. Repeatedly they demanded she select a new husband and successor to the throne. Still, she waited for her husband. To stay her would be suitors, she developed several delaying tactics. When the hope of Odysseus’ return appeared remote, she assented to the whims of her suitors and declared she would take another husband, but would only do so after completing a burial shroud for her father-in-law, Laertes. She wove for three years and every night she destroyed her day’s labor. Eventually her suitors became wise to her chicanery though her ruse bought valuable time.

In Book 21 of *The Odyssey*, the suitors reissue their demand that Penelope accept a new husband. Once again, she acceded to their commands. Instead of creating another delaying tactic she issues a challenge. Only the man who could string the bow that belonged to Odysseus and fire an arrow through a dozen axe heads would be awarded her hand in marriage. The challenge illustrates Penelope's intelligence while demonstrating the inferiority of her suitors as none of them possess the required strength. At this point in the story, Odysseus has made his way back to Ithaca and was present at the contest disguised as a lowly drifter. After he watches each would be usurper fail in his attempt to string the bow, Odysseus goads the suitors into allowing him an attempt, if only for their amusement. The request from such a lowly subject enrages the suitors. Telemachus, knowledgeable of his father's true identity, declares that the stranger would be given an opportunity.⁴⁵ Odysseus deftly strings the bow, fires an arrow through the axe heads then turns to slaughter. With the aid of his son and two loyal subjects, Eumaeus and Philoteus, Odysseus massacre the suitors within the hall. After successfully answering Penelope's challenge and ridding Ithaca of pretenders to the throne, Odysseus reveals his identity and reunites with his wife.

However, Penelope is not convinced. She requires additional assurance that the man who stands before her is indeed Odysseus. The twenty years apart do not allow the queen to so easily recognize her king. Besides, after waiting for two decades, to jump into the arms of any man who claims to be Odysseus would not be prudent. Once again, Penelope proves a match in wits with

⁴⁵ Penelope was present in the hall while the suitors failed to string the bow and during their protests against allowing an attempt to a lowly beggar. She shamed the suitors and stated the beggar should be given an opportunity to string the bow. After her cajoling of the suitors, Telemachus ordered Penelope to attend to the female servants and she promptly obeyed leaving the hall. Her awareness of the true identity of the drifter (Odysseus) is a point held in contention. Consider that Penelope introduced a challenge in which she was confident only her husband could succeed then demanded that a complete stranger be given the chance after her suitors had predictably failed. Her knowledge of Odysseus' identity cannot be inferred from the text but in some ways adds to the cleverness of Penelope.

her husband. She orders her servant, Eurycleia, to re-position the bed that her husband had made. In her order lies a clever ruse. Within the bedroom chamber a sturdy branch of an olive tree rose from the floor. Odysseus built their bed with use of the branch as a bed post. To move or re-position the bed is impossible. Only Odysseus, Penelope and her handmaid Actoris have knowledge of the bed's construction. Odysseus answers his wife stating that to move the bed would require the act of a god or necessitate cutting down the olive tree. Penelope, at last, is convinced. Homer describes the faithful wife:

Penelope felt her knees go slack, her heart surrender,
recognizing the strong, clear signs Odysseus offered.
She dissolved in tears, rushed to Odysseus, flung her arms
around his neck and kissed his head...⁴⁶

For this moment, Odysseus braved countless perils, sailed the violent sea and forsook the embrace of goddesses, to reunite with his faithful Penelope.

Penelope embodies fidelity and devotion. To wait for such an extended period of time and persevere through the habitual perils presented by the suitors exhibits a commitment that surpasses expectation. Her suitors could override her house, seize her wealth and carry her off as a prize. A man with superior strength and wealth compared with the remaining suitors could dictate a marriage to Penelope. She even risks the life of her own son. More than once the suitors plot to murder Telemachus. The protection of a god is required to save him. Yet, she perseveres and waits for the return of her husband. In addition to her faithfulness, she is a woman of considerable intelligence and cunning. In this regard she displays an aptitude which rivals that of her husband. Through her shrewdness she is able to keep her suitors at bay. Should she resort to

⁴⁶ Fagles, *Odyssey*, 462.

force in an attempt to expel her suitors, she would stir their ire, consolidate their strength and, ultimately, would be forced into marriage. Instead, she plays them against each other and gives them food and wine enough to content their appetites. She gives them false hope. As Circe is able to transform men into beasts through magic; Penelope accomplishes much the same through her craftiness.⁴⁷ The judgment of the suitors is clouded from their continual merriment of base pleasures. Penelope fans their vanity until the moment her husband returns and slaughters them to a man.

“The fame of her great virtue will never die” proclaims the deceased Agamemnon.⁴⁸ His statement has proven correct. Even to this day, Penelope is remembered as the model of faithfulness and her name is synonymous with fidelity. Consequently, she need not have waited. Penelope could have remarried whomever and whenever she wanted. Instead of shedding tears every night waiting for a man she is not certain would ever return, she could move on with a new husband. Consider the years of anguish and torment that she could have avoided. Odysseus, should he return after Penelope’s remarriage, would be an exile in his own land. She risks nothing by taking another husband. Her lands, her wealth, her title would have remain the same. Under these circumstances, Penelope’s fidelity obtain significance.

As Penelope is confronted with opportunities for life without her husband, so is Odysseus presented attractive prospects without Penelope. The narrative of Odysseus begins with his confinement to the island of Ogygia, home to the beautiful goddess, Calypso. For seven years Odysseus enjoys the comforts provided by the immortal goddess. His return to Ithaca is delayed

⁴⁷ Fagles, *Odyssey*, 237. Circe was a minor goddess or nymph who transformed half of Odysseus’ crew into swine on the island of Aeaea. The goddess employed magic potions to assist her. A comparison between Circe and Penelope is favorable on the latter’s behalf. Penelope is a mortal woman and was able to reduce men to their bestial, unthinking natures without the use of magic but only her wit and charms.

⁴⁸ Fagles, *Odyssey*, 474.

due to Calypso's charms though he pines for home and longs for his wife. Hermes, by order of Athena, demands that Calypso release Odysseus and the hero begins his arduous journey home anew.

A comparison between Calypso and Penelope is inevitable.⁴⁹ However, the comparison is more instructive into the nature of Odysseus than revealing of the two ladies. Odysseus has his choice between Calypso and Penelope. He could remain on Ogygia or attempt to return to Ithaca. Calypso offers immortality, freedom from Earthly desires and, by Odysseus' consent, is more beautiful than Penelope. Whereas Penelope is mortal, has aged twenty years since his departure and there is no guarantee that she will not remarry. Why does Odysseus brave the risks to return home? Eternal life with a beautiful goddess had to weigh considerably against the challenges that await his journey home. The ladies are representative of two exceedingly dissimilar realities. Calypso represents an immortal life free of concerns or desires. As such it implies a life without consequence, given to wantonness and empty. Odysseus, should he choose to remain with Calypso, would remain a wanderer. Penelope offers what Calypso cannot: fulfillment.

In Book 6 Odysseus departs the island of Ogygia. In his rage, Poseidon whips the sea into a raging frenzy and destroys Odysseus' vessel.⁵⁰ The shipwrecked Odysseus drifts onto the shores of Scheria, the land of the Phaeacians. They harbor Odysseus, feed him, clothe him and later provide him with safe passage to Ithaca. During his stay, King Alcinous urges Odysseus to remain in Scheria. He offers his beautiful daughter Nausicaa as a bride, proposes to donate him great wealth and provide him a home. Once again, Odysseus is confronted with an attractive

⁴⁹ Helen of Sparta is also introduced in *The Odyssey* as queen to Menelaus in Sparta. A comparison can be made between Helen and Penelope. It is reasonable to assume that Helen, with so many suitors courting her, would not have waited for her husband to return from war but would have remarried, perhaps more than once. The example can be employed to further exemplify the fidelity of Penelope.

⁵⁰ Poseidon was angered over the blinding of his son, the Cyclops Polyphemus, and punished Odysseus when he traveled by sea.

alternative to returning to Ithaca. King Alcinous and his people enjoy a blissful existence. They live without strife or knowledge of hardship. Theirs is a life of luxury. Odysseus has to choose between a comfortable, if not sumptuous, life or resume his course despite the hardships that await him.

At a feast prepared in his honor, Odysseus thoroughly defeats the Phaeacian champion Broadsea in the discus after being crudely mocked by his antagonist. King Alcinous applauds Odysseus for his physical gifts and continues to comment on the abilities of his own people, underscoring a theme evident since Odysseus' arrival in Scheria:

We're hardly world-class boxers or wrestlers, I admit,
but we can race like the wind, we're champion sailors too,
and always dear to our hearts, the feast, the lyre and dance
and changes of fresh clothes, our warm baths and beds.⁵¹

By the King's admission, the Phaeacians possess no martial prowess. Their skill lie in the pursuit of leisure. The Phaeacians cultivation of the finer things in life and neglect of the coarser suggests a community free from strife. Such a community had little to offer a man who experienced nothing but suffering for nearly twenty years. A young beautiful wife, wealth and a home though attractive to any man could not provide the sense of belonging that Odysseus craved. Scheria represents a utopia. Consequently, a man of Odysseus' suffering is an outcast in such a society.

Within *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, the return home is a prevalent, re-occurring theme and longingly discussed among the Greek warriors. The homecoming is comprised of returning to

⁵¹ Fagles, *Odyssey*, 199.

one's community with many contributing factors. Peers, friends, allies, children, duty, the homeland and wives all constitute the homecoming. Penelope plays a substantial role in Odysseus' homecoming though she does not encompass its entirety. For Odysseus, homecoming includes reuniting with his father, meeting his son, vanquishing his wife's suitors and establishing his reign over Ithaca. For these reasons, he shuns the utopian society of the Phaeacians.⁵² Consequently, his amazing journey would not be as celebrated if not for reuniting with his wife.

The basis of *The Odyssey* is a simple story: a man returning to his wife. While duels with fantastic beasts, surviving overwhelming odds and interludes with beautiful goddesses may interest the reader, they are merely subplots which emphasize the hero's efforts to return home. The hardships endured directly correlate with the importance placed on his homecoming. Penelope's tribulations, though not as fantastical as her husband's, are just as oppressive. Routine threats do not present less of a menace than extraordinary ones. Penelope's continued persistence in the face of habitual danger might demonstrate greater courage than that of Odysseus. He must overcome the incredible while Penelope is confronted with the mundane. Odysseus usually enjoys the hospitality of a sympathetic host or god after his frequent trials. Penelope is not so fortunate. She is besieged every day by the presence of the suitors without respite. Homer does not develop a comparison to suggest wife or husband suffer more than the other but to demonstrate that both Odysseus and Penelope suffer, they suffer together and they suffer for one another.

⁵² Penelope, Telemachus, Laertes and the servants of Odysseus suffered greatly in his absence. His reunion with those individuals comprised his fulfillment or homecoming. Those that did not or cannot suffer are unable to offer any solace to Odysseus.

Nobody's story is as incredible as that of Odysseus. As outlandish as one's own tale might be, one can be sure he or she will never battle a Cyclops or descend into the Underworld. The trials our troops encounter may lack in the fantastic but present the same hazard. Consequently, Penelope's story is one that is encountered every day by military spouses. Wives, sometimes husbands, are left behind to manage things at home for months even years at a time. The day-to-day struggles are bravely met by spouses waiting for their troop to return home. The story of Odysseus and Penelope is shared by the families of our troops when I was deployed to Afghanistan in 2010. As long as troops are away from their families and home *The Odyssey* will remain relevant.

Not always is there a story book ending, not always do things go according to plan. I knew there were no dragons or demons to battle and understood no beautiful goddesses would tempt me; still, I believed I would return home to the woman I loved. My tale is nothing unfamiliar. Thousands of U.S. service members and soldiers throughout history share my fate. A story of suffering, regret and sadness.

I met Marilyn while in the service. She was beautiful. After the first time I saw her working at a local restaurant, I went there every night for a week. I was helpless. In a short time we became involved; it was not long until we were deeply involved. As we fell in love our relationship developed into one of the greatest friendships either of us ever had. We began to speak of the future as if it were set in stone. Marriage and family were considered a foregone conclusion.

My upcoming deployment to Afghanistan did not appear as a burden but an opportunity. Once I returned from the deployment, my tenure in the military would be over, and I had but one more, great journey to endure and everything I wanted would be mine: the woman I loved,

marriage and a family. Regarding the entire situation, I was not only optimistic but a bit zealous. In my mind, I was a conquering Don Quixote campaigning for his Dulcinea. Unlike the famous knight, my heroine was real and waiting.

Though I was eager to start the deployment, I did not lack concerns. In our last conversation before my departure, we discussed my fears. No one was quite sure what to expect. Helmand Province, particularly the town of Marjah, had been an area of land fiercely contested between coalition forces and Taliban insurgents.⁵³ While the level of fatalities and injuries were minimal compared to the slaughter our brethren encountered in World War I, World War II, Korea and Vietnam, Marines were being killed and wounded on a near daily basis. Though statistics favored our chances of coming home the fact that there were statistics indicated not everyone was so fortunate. My concerns were the same as everyone else. I was afraid I may not return home. I was afraid that I may not return home with everything I left with: an arm, my legs, my mind. I was afraid that I may not return home to everything I had left behind. In short, I was afraid. The vastness of the deployment spread before us like the emptiness of the Afghan desert. A bleak and desolate place, a supposed graveyard. Remote beyond description. Both time and distance seemed to work together in a combined sense of overwhelming disbelief that neither would ever come to an end. The nothingness of the land was strangely disturbing. I remember thinking “I don’t want to die here. There’s nothing here.” A brief existential crisis.

Months went by. It was not the most joyful of arrangements but it was the best we could make of the moment. We knew this period of time would be challenging, but weighed against the

⁵³ Marjah can be spelled as Marja, Marjah or Marjeh. Marjah had been controlled by Taliban forces due to the production of poppy in the immediate and surrounding area. A joint operation consisting of Afghan and coalition forces launched in February 2010 effectively cleared the area of a Taliban presence. However, insurgents continued activity months later. By the time of our deployment, IED attacks and small arms fire were a daily occurrence.

optimism of our future, our present troubles were of minor significance. We remained in contact through letters, email and phone calls. I remember writing each letter with care thinking that our future generations might someday read them and smile. Hope of the life I dreamed about with the woman I loved carried me through the bleak moments of the deployment. Dark clouds were never far off but one could see the silver lining.

About a week before Christmas I received an email. Marilyn wrote me asking if we could get married while I was on my R&R period in June.⁵⁴ Emphatically I replied that I loved her and that she was the only woman that I had ever thought of marrying but that I could not marry her in June. My reply was made not from a lack of sentiment but the assessment of the surrounding facts. The concept of leaving my wife behind as I went to fight a war was a reality I was not willing to accept. What if I did not come back? To leave her for a few months was one thing, to make her a widow was another. I understood her proposal as a consequence of her enthusiasm; I stated my response as one of validation while stemming her eagerness in the face of practicality. On both sides of the exchange, I do not believe Marilyn shared my views.

February was the most trying month of the deployment. Our region in Afghanistan was one large desert. Sand and nothing but sand for miles. February and the early half of March make up the rainy season in Helmand Province. It rained hard. All that water turned the sand into mud. Our vehicles weighed about a dozen tons and we got stuck every time we conducted a mounted patrol and it seemed we were always on patrol. It was painstaking to move a few hundred yards. On patrol everything you owned became soaked within the first few hours. There was nothing to

⁵⁴ R&R period. Rest and Recuperation period provided to Marines on year long deployments. Marines from could take their R&R anywhere from the third to ninth month of the deployment. The period lasts for two weeks once you land on U.S. soil. I took my R&R after being deployed for nine months. I felt I needed to stay in Afghanistan as long as possible and ensure our procedures were established, practiced and perfected. Leaving earlier would have been a failure of leadership. I owed it to my Marines. Once I returned from R&R, the deployment would be nearly over.

prevent it. On the ground the water would collect in pools and bring another menace that the searing heat and blistering cold decimated in the months before: bugs. Mosquitoes swarmed us every night we bedded down. Shelter was limited in every position so many nights we slept in the rain.⁵⁵ The rain made the roads unpredictable and they collapsed without warning under the weight of our vehicles.⁵⁶ IEDs became impossible to spot.⁵⁷ IEDs remained the central threat but a vehicle rollover from a collapsed road was just as menacing. The majority of roads traveled alongside canals pregnant by the rainfall. Should the road collapse and the vehicle roll over, the Marines would be trapped upside down, underwater, in a truck with doors that weigh 80lbs, while wearing their kit of about 50-60lbs. Most likely, they would drown. A few of my Marines spent less than a week on base for the entire month, the majority were not too far behind. February was the halfway point for the deployment. Six months had passed. Despite the admonishments from the command about counting the days, everyone counted the days. February was also a popular month for Marines to take their R&R. Allot the R&R periods as best as you could, the platoon would never be at full strength. The work never decreased as Marines went on R&R; it simply meant more work and more posts for fewer people. The Marines that had not yet been on R&R were exhausted. The concept of R&R is to refresh and revitalize the troops for what lie ahead. It is a great concept in theory. In reality, it makes you truly understand the hellhole that is Afghanistan. Once you return from home and get your second look at Afghanistan you really appreciate how dreadful and awful a place it is. February was a bad

⁵⁵ The Marines were more than happy to share any food and shelter they had but space was at a premium. At Camp Hanson we were provided a tent and slept on cots. In the night it rained. We woke with a foot of water on the deck. All of our gear, minus weapons, was soaked. That was day two of a weeklong patrol.

⁵⁶ In the town of Marjeh, 'roads' can loosely be interpreted as anything that does not bear substantial vegetation. During one patrol, two bridges collapsed from the weight of our vehicles within a three hour span. The roads are made of mud and are usually bordered by canals. The habitual rainfall ruins the integrity of the side of the road and vehicles are prone to fall into the canal.

⁵⁷ IED. Improvised Explosive Device. The preferred weapon employed against coalition forces in Afghanistan and previously Iraq. The conditions brought on by the rain made identifying IEDs highly unlikely.

month. In short, the weather was terrible, roads were collapsing, identifying threats was nearly impossible, we were undermanned, the Marines we did have were getting tired and those that were refreshed could not wait to go home for good.

The month would get worse. After one particularly difficult week-long patrol in which our vehicles became stuck dozens of times, multiples roads collapsed from underneath the vehicles (miraculously no one was hurt) and we pulled into a patrol base during a fire-fight with insurgents. After a long week, we limped into Camp Dwyer. Mission accomplished. After tending to my responsibilities, I started trying to call Marilyn. As I waited for the phone, I browsed her Facebook page knowing that just the sight of her would cheer me up. What I saw saddened me beyond belief: pictures of her in the arms of another man, terms of endearment describing every frame, the betrayal I never expected.

The woman I loved, my best friend, lied to, cheated on and abandoned me. My mind did not race but my heart was pounding. “Why” was my only thought. The sadness I felt hurt physically. My stomach turned, my back and shoulders were sore. There was no strength in my arms or legs. It felt like I played a football game on asphalt. The loneliness, confusion and desperation that overwhelmed me cannot be expressed only felt. For hours that night I sat hunched forward and stared into the distance as warm tears lined my cheeks. Never have I felt so alone.

Only after a week or two, Marilyn and I started talking as often as we did in the beginning of the deployment. The other gentleman hardly seemed like a concern. All the things we used to talk about were re-introduced into our conversations: the mini-van, Marilyn as a soccer mom, one day becoming a nurse. Once again we spoke of our future as a certainty. I asked if she still wanted to get married. “Yes, of course” she replied and I could hear the rise of

excitement in her voice. Marilyn asked when my R&R period started and intimated that she wanted to visit me while I stayed with my parents in Pennsylvania. Two long months and I would be with her again. It felt good to be back in demand. Though I was optimistic our relationship was not the same. Faith had been broken. There were many questions I did not ask for fear of the answers. How quickly we fell back into the old routine was comforting though a bit alarming.

The wheel of fortune is exactly that, a wheel. “One minute you are up, the next minute you are down. It is when the damned wheel comes down that it gets you.”⁵⁸ As everything began to align for Marilyn and I, the wheel took a turn. About two months before my R&R, I received an email from Marilyn, “I need to talk to you. The other gentleman proposed.”

My parents, my brother and sister, cousins, nephews, friends, cookouts, food, lots of beer, a membership to the VFW were all part of my R&R but not Marilyn. She was broke as well as emotionally and physically exhausted. It was not only a matter of money. Her father had passed away a month earlier. She could not afford to take more days off and keep her job. Emotionally she was exhausted. If my R&R had been a week or two earlier, I could have been with her at his service perhaps 100 miles from my parents’ house. Her father’s passing had overwhelmed her. The best we could do was to talk on the phone. With three days left on my R&R we had the most serious of our conversations.

“Adam. Get on a plane. We can get married the same day.”

“Marilyn, it’s not as easy as that.”

“Yes it is. You can arrive in the morning and that afternoon we can go to the courthouse and sign the papers. The whole process only takes an hour or two.”

⁵⁸ Ernest Hemingway, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (Quality Paperback Book Club, 1993), 228.

Long pause.

“What about [the other gentleman]?”

“It doesn’t matter.”

Longer pause.

“I can’t believe you’re not going to rescue me.”

Within a few days I would board a plane, not to North Carolina but back to Afghanistan. Within a few months the other gentleman would marry Marilyn, the woman I love, my best friend, whom I will never see again. Do not judge my Marilyn too harshly. Life had been nothing but a collection of sorrows for her. She suffered in ways in which only a woman can, though never should. The promises of a new life were too much for her to resist. As much as I tried to make her happy, what she needed was a fresh start.

At times I blame myself. Never in my life had I let someone down; never left unfulfilled a promise. Now the woman I loved the most is the only one who knows the bitter taste of my failure. Often I hear the sad, soft compassionate plea when she asked to marry me and her weeping over my silence. After a while that sweet euphoric sensation of love I had for her dissipates as I remember her lies and how easily she told them. How desperate I was for the truth and how she wantonly discarded me when every day could have been my last.

Had Marilyn been able to tell the truth: to me, to the other gentleman, to anyone, maybe we could still be friends. Had she been true to either of us, our situation would be different. Her husband knows nothing about her plans to abandon him and we no longer talk. I, her best friend, have become the one she must fear the most; it’s an empty feeling when all you can do for the person you care about is hurt them.

I am often reminded of Marilyn. The transition has been difficult at times. I have become separated from about forty brothers of mine two weeks after seeing them every day for a year and I will never again see or talk to the woman I loved. Odysseus lost his entire crew but at least he returned home to a faithful wife. Often I am embarrassed to tell my story. But I feel it is important to remember Marilyn and to speak about what happened. Perhaps doing so will bring some closure to the issue. I remember reading a quote that provided perspective as to why I decided to write about Marilyn and what happened. Vietnam veteran and author Tim O'Brien penned it:

...the remembering makes it now. And sometimes remembering will lead to a story, which makes it forever. That's what stories are for. Stories are for joining the past to the future. Stories are for those late hours in the night when you can't remember how you got from where you were to where you are. Stories are for eternity, when memory is erased, when there is nothing to remember except the story.⁵⁹

I wanted our story to continue forever though with a happier ending. Perhaps I wrote it down so that I would remember. I want it to be remembered who I was and what I meant to that woman and what she meant to me. Now, I am nothing to her and she but a painful memory of what could have been. Often I catch myself daydreaming I'm back in Afghanistan, early in the deployment, hearing the love and excitement in her voice, believing she was mine and would be forever, dreaming of when I would see her again, hold her at night and never let her go. Nearly a year has

⁵⁹ Tim O'Brien, *The Things They Carried*, (Broadway Books, 1990), pg 38.

gone by, I'm safe and unharmed, living back in the States with friends and family, a bright future ahead but at times it feels I'm thousands of miles away and never will come home.

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Homecoming is not always what we want it to be. Coming home for LCpl G-, Cpl C- and myself proved difficult and trying times. *The Odyssey* makes obvious that the struggles for those returning home are not over. Like Achilles, LCpl G- never had the opportunity to see his father again. Like Odysseus, Cpl C- was able to see his mother again but sadly only as a shade of her former self.⁶⁰ Simply returning home does not signify that the struggles have ended.

As leaders we have the ongoing responsibility for the welfare of our troops. That responsibility does not end once the war is over or we have returned home. Odysseus failed in his responsibility for the safe passage of his men to Ithaca. Homer provides a negative role model in Odysseus while demonstrating how a leader can become selfish consumed with his own desire for homecoming. We need to recognize the consequences of our actions particularly those that might jeopardize the well-being of our troops. Odysseus scarcely made a decision that benefitted his troops; every judgment was based off of selfish impulse for his own glory.

Leaders must also recognize that not everyone who struggles through a deployment is a troop. The trials endured by the families of service members are no less taxing. Sons and fathers might have become estranged like Odysseus' relationships with Telemachus and Laertes. Financial strain might have added stress to the family similar to the suitors eating and drinking the provisions of Odysseus. Perhaps the community may not be receptive to the return of a troop as observed during Vietnam; a similar situation is addressed in *The Odyssey* as Odysseus must

⁶⁰ Odysseus travels to the Underworld and speaks to his deceased mother, Anticlea.

encounter the suitors then later the people of Ithaca enflamed by the death of their sons who fought at Troy and also the suitors.

Conclusion

Homer provides a context for study of nearly every human emotion and response to combat. Human behavior has remained unchanged since Troy and would seem incapable of change. Achilles and Hector felt the same pain and fear as did the troops from the Civil War, WWI, WWII, Korea, Vietnam and Iraq and Afghanistan. As the emotional responses to combat have remained the same for 3,000 years, *The Iliad* serves as a leadership manual in understanding the human response. A thorough comprehension of Homer enables military leaders to recognize conditions that are detrimental to the morale of the individual or unit or identify a troop that is at risk for committing an unlawful act or even a threat to him or herself.

The Iliad provides numerous examples of breaches in faith or “what is right” known as *themis*. Homer demonstrates how *themis* can adversely affect the morale of an individual or the unit. An abuse of power rarely goes unnoticed but might result in disastrous effects. The Greeks nearly lost the war due to Agamemnon’s reprehensible treatment of Achilles. Homer instructs military leaders on the consequences of *themis* and foreshadowed what most current leaders should know: place the needs of your troops before your own.

The battle scenes in *The Iliad* can be problematic for a modern audience; particularly an audience that prefers a realistic exchange to maintain their interest or to acquire a possible tactical advantage. However, the death scenes of *The Iliad* do not provide a dilemma. Death is treated as a bleak finality to combat. Dirt, darkness, blood, gasping and pain are the reoccurring images associated to one Greek or Trojan slaying another. Homer portrays in deliberate detail the dreadful deadly wounds inflicted on combatants. He provides context in his gruesome descriptions of death. The generation who fought in Iraq and is still fighting in Afghanistan has become desensitized to violence. The blame falls to violence on TV or video games which

immediately regenerate characters after death or possibly additional attributing factors. The benefit to gain from Homer's death scenes is to prepare troops for the gruesomeness of a wound or death caused by an IED blast. Military leaders might better prepare their troops for the horrors they could encounter through studying Homer rather than preserve their assumptions based off of video games. Reading *The Iliad* also demonstrates the need for ceremony or ritual as a group to facilitate closure. The Greeks and Trojans celebrated the death of a great warrior for nearly two weeks. As a military we pay our respects to the living in the brief ceremonies that time will allow. We do everything we can to honor the fallen troop (deservingly so); however, the ceremonies to honor the dead have to two participants: the dead and the living. The ceremonies we perform are done to benefit the living as well as honor the dead. Homer knew this yet it seems that we have forgotten the importance of closure. Studying Homer provides perspective in why we perform rituals to honor the dead and what else we can do to communalize the grieving process.

Wrath or rage is the first word of *The Iliad*. The death of Patroclus triggers Achilles into a rage that devastates the Trojan Army but also exhibits the descent of Achilles as a noble figure. To fight and to kill opponents does not satisfy Achilles, he cannot show mercy to enemy combatants and then must desecrate their remains. He becomes a beast and cannot exercise judgment but only slaughters victim after victim. History has proved that men will act like Achilles and commit atrocities against unarmed civilians to include women and children given the proper context. They too can become beasts. Military leaders can learn from Homer by studying the example of Achilles. We are reminded that men are capable of grotesque acts of violence but are better served by Homer through his identification of what might cause such a descent into slaughter: the death of a close friend.

Perhaps the most fervent desire in combat is to return home. Homer instructs military leaders how strong the motivation for home can be when Achilles decides to forego glory and sail for home. The warrior with the greatest share of glory to win determines coming home is the more attractive offer. The will to return home is the basis for *The Odyssey*. So great is the yearning of Odysseus to return to Ithaca, he overlooks his responsibilities as a leader as none of his men complete the journey home. Furthermore, he rejects the charms of goddesses and the utopian society of Scheria for the sake of *nostos*. Homer proves valuable in both texts. He provides perspective for military leaders regarding the true wishes of their troops to return home more than any other desire. Homer also demonstrates how the yearning to return home can lead a commander to make rash decisions that only affect his aims positively while neglecting the welfare of the troops.

If Homer provides so many excellent reasons to read the *Iliad*, why is he ignored? Alexander the Great carried a copy of *The Iliad* with him at all times. The book was considered one of his most treasured items. For a military force, particularly the Marines, who claim to be avid students of history, it is shocking to believe we would disregard what the Greeks knew.

The purpose behind the exclusion of Homer most likely has several factors. *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are difficult texts. Perhaps military leaders deem them too complicated for the absorption of their troops. Again, this is not to suggest a lack of aptitude of military personnel. The themes of these texts can remain hidden from experienced and educated readers. Personally I have read *The Iliad* about a dozen times and require supplementary reading material for instruction on the finer points of the poem. Still Homer remains too valuable to neglect as a source of information and direction on how to effectively lead troops.

Another possible reason for Homer's exclusion is the lack of tactical advantage.⁶¹ Greeks and Trojans engage in an aristocratic form of combat that is comparable to a duel. We no longer fight this way and reading Homer will not produce better tacticians. Nothing enthralls the attention of military leaders (particularly younger leaders) as tactics and maneuvering. The training of young military leaders is centered on tactics. Regardless of their military occupational specialty, every Marine Officer receives six months of training on how to lead an infantry platoon. There are many skills and areas of proficiency that are common to all MOS's covered in that six months; however, tactics is the subject which garners the most attention. The attention given to tactics does not stunt the growth of officers or any leader but it would seem that the amount of attention suggests that competency in other areas becomes secondary.

The Iliad and *The Odyssey* are the essential narratives of war and returning home. The themes developed in these poems promote the knowledge and understanding of military leaders in respect to the vital human responses to combat. There is no substitute for examining Homer. Dr. John Shay has contributed two excellent accounts of how Homer remains not only relevant but crucial to understanding the effects of combat. Unfortunately, my guess is that only a minor fraction of our Armed Forces have any knowledge of Dr. Shay's books much less have they read them.

The Iliad and *The Odyssey* remain the essential narratives for examining humanity in combat. They provide military leaders with an array of knowledge and insight into the mindset of their troops and the consequences of combat stress. Their exclusion from professional military education can only conclude in a lack of development among military leaders. By studying

⁶¹ It should be noted that weaponry is an important subject in *The Iliad*. Book XVIII demonstrates the significance of having the proper weapons and armor to become effective in combat as Hephaistos forges a set of armor for Achilles that will protect him and help slay Hector. The selection of arms falls under the sphere of tactics.

Homer we afford ourselves the opportunity to develop our troops into the best they can become by developing ourselves into the best leaders we can be. Through 3,000 years human nature has remained unchanged. The suffering of Achilles and Hector are the same endured by our troops in our present time. Homer provided a blueprint thousands of years ago on human nature and combat, the book has yet to be written that can challenge the insights of *The Iliad* on the human response to combat stress while promoting the development of military leaders.

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