

## Homer, Vietnam, Operation Desert Shield, and the Problem of War

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**Note:** This article was written shortly after the Iraqi army invaded the country of Kuwait (Aug., 1990). In response, an international coalition of forces, headed by the U.S., attacked the Iraqi army.

The resulting armed conflict, called the Gulf War (also known as Operation Desert Shield, Aug., 1990 – Jan., 1991 and Operation Desert Storm, Jan., 1991- Feb., 1991) resulted in mental health problems among numerous American troops. These problems ranged from generalized anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder to depression. Like Vietnam veterans, Gulf War veterans sought help from the Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Centers and Vet Centers, where I was employed.

### **Kerna, Kerna (or, Pass the Wine)\***

Pass the wine boys  
And listen to me

My story is old  
But it must be told

How I fought across the sea  
For a woman who meant nothing to me

[Ten Trojans with spears  
Wanting to cut off my ears]

All for a woman  
Who meant nothing to me

How because of one woman  
An entire village wept

Pass the wine boys  
Pass the wine

\*Adapted from the song "Kerna Kerna," by T. Boskopoulos, in the album, Ego Ke Si, P. I. Records, Inc., 619 West 54th Street, New York, NY 10019

Sometimes troubled Vietnam veterans are accused of "dwelling in the past" because they cannot forget their war experiences. "After all, the war ended almost twenty years ago. You should be over it by now," the argument goes. However, as the above song from today's Greece illustrates, some Greeks are still not over the Trojan War, which, some scholars contend, may have actually taken place hundreds of years B.C.

There are many parallels between the Trojan War and the Vietnam War. Both wars were the longest overseas wars in their respective countries' histories; both were "stand still" wars with many years of no decisive victories on either side; and the purposes of both these wars were contested, not only by conscripts and the general public, but by military leaders and heroes alike.

Only time will tell if subsequent wars will mirror these aspects of the Vietnam and Trojan wars and if combatants from subsequent wars will, like some of Vietnam veterans, be labeled "crybabies" and "sissies," if, for some incomprehensible reason, they cannot instantly divest themselves of every unhappy memory. Like it or not, war can leave a permanent imprint on the human psyche, regardless of the alleged "strength" of the individual. Consider the high psychiatric casualty rates of WWI and WWII, as well as the fact that (according to one study) an estimated one third of the thousands of WWII vets in VA hospitals during the 1960s and 1970s still had nightmares about WWII at least once a week.

The Trojan War lasted approximately ten years. Afterwards, the atrocities committed by the Greeks, as well as the war itself, were severely criticized by Greek playwrights, poets, and others. We do not know how long the current war in the Middle East will last, nor how it will be viewed in the future.

There is hardly any war that can be said to be caused by only one event or force. According to Homer's Iliad, however, the reason the Greeks attacked Troy was to rescue Helen, the wife of King Menelaus, from Paris, son of the king of Troy. (Similarly, the stated reason we are in the Gulf War today is to rescue Kuwait from her rapist, Iraq.) Paris was on a trading mission at Menelaus's court when he became so captivated by Helen's beauty that he simply kidnapped her and took her across the sea with him to Troy.

Although Paris's act would ultimately destroy Troy, according to Greek mythology, Paris could scarcely be blamed for his lust. After all, Helen was the most beautiful woman in the world. According to Homer, she was so gorgeous that even the citizens of Troy, who knew that Helen would bring grief to their city, understood why both Greeks and Trojans would fight so long for her.

Homer writes that when the Trojans saw Helen "they murmured softly to each other, 'Surely there is no blame on the Trojans and [Greeks], if for long time they suffer hardship for a woman like this one. Terrible is the likeness of her face to immortal goddesses.'" (p. 42 in Michael Grant, Myths of the Greeks and Romans, A Mentor Book, the New American Library, 1962, New York.)

One can only wonder if the ordinary citizens of Iraq "forgive" Saddam for overtaking Kuwait, even though his actions have caused such destruction to their country. After all, Kuwait, so rich in oil, was irresistible. In truth, we do not know how many Iraqi citizens are secretly decrying their leader's actions. But we know that certain Trojans hated Paris for bringing the curse of war into their lives.

In Agamemnon (an ancient Greek tragedy by Aeschylus) Paris's own sister, Cassandra, laments, "Woe, Paris! Woe on thee! Thy bridal joy was death and fire upon thy race and Troy!" Meanwhile, the chorus (which in Greek tragedies usually speaks for the people and/or the gods) chastises Paris for his thoughtless lust and warns him that Zeus, king of the gods, will make him pay, first, for violating Menelaus's hospitality and secondly, for bringing total destruction to his city. (p. 93, p. 75 in Seven Famous Greek Plays, edited by Whitney Oates, The Modern Library, New York, 1950)

While Kuwait did not willingly surrender to Iraq, it is not clear whether Paris had to drag Helen away by force or whether Helen "allowed" herself to be kidnapped. It has even been implied (in Euripides's Trojan Women, for example) that Helen seduced Paris rather than the other way around. The most commonly accepted version of Helen's seduction, however, is that Helen had little choice in the matter. She was swayed by the irresistible powers of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, to abandon her marriage vows and surrender to Paris.

According to Greek mythology, human lives were controlled by destiny, personified as three old women known as the Fates. The three Fates were the daughters of Zeus and Themis (Goddess of Law and Keeper of Oaths). They are also known as daughters of "Night," symbolizing the mystery and uncertainty of human existence. The role of three Fates was to spin the tapestry of human life with their thread. But with their scissors they could also cut off human life, sometimes by accident.

The three Fates tried to be just, but unfortunately, they were blind. Between the three of them, they only had one eye. So in order to see what human beings were doing, they had to take turns using the eye. However, as they passed around the eye, sometimes they dropped it, thereby failing to see an act of kindness or love on the part of a particular human being. Or sometimes they fought over whose turn it was to use the eye and, in the process, the eye fell to the ground. Then, in reaching for the eye, sometimes they accidentally snapped a thread, thereby ending the life or happiness of some poor mortal. Even some of today's Greeks feel their lives are ordained by fate and, like the ancient Greeks, they do not expect fate to be necessarily kind or just.

The ancient Greeks also saw their lives as being controlled by the whims and needs of the gods and goddesses on Mount Olympus. (Do Iraq's citizens see their lives as being controlled by Saddam?) While the Greek gods had compassion for human beings and could be influenced by proper sacrifices and good moral behavior, they were not quite like Yahweh, the Hebrew god of moral righteousness.

Like Yahweh, the Greek gods were concerned with the issue of justice and frequently acted as judges of human morality. However, they themselves suffered from all the human flaws. From Zeus on down, they were proud, vain, greedy, selfish, lustful, and, very political: i.e. extremely concerned about their power position with respect to the other gods and goddesses. If some poor mortal was so unlucky as to interfere with a god or goddesses' desire for power, revenge, or romance, that mortal, regardless of the uprightness of his or her soul, was doomed to suffer.

So far, our soldiers in the Middle East have yet to voice objections to the government or the military, if, in fact, such objections exist. However, depending on the course of the war, some of these men and women may eventually come to echo the complaint of some Vietnam veterans: that they were "pawns" of the government. But whether or not this will be the case, nobody knows.

Many who fought in the Trojan War had the same complaint, only the "government" they were referring to was not that of their political and military leaders, but that of the gods on Mount Olympus. Just as Vietnam veterans sometimes claim that they could have won the war had not certain military officials and politicians contaminated combat operations with their personal or political considerations, throughout the Iliad, warriors bewail the fact that military victories were being determined not so much by their military skills, but by the personal and political rivalries of the gods who dwelled on Mount Olympus (ancient Greece's Saigon or Washington, D.C.).

For example, Teuces skillfully aimed an arrow at Hector, the greatest of the Trojans. The arrow would have killed Hector, had not Zeus, king of the gods, intervened by breaking the bowstring. "Teucer shook with anger and said to his brother, 'Alas, see how heaven thwarts us in all we do; it has broken my bowstring and snatched the bow from my hands, though I strung it this self-same morning.'"

"Ajax . . . answered, 'My good fellow, let your bow and your arrows be, for [Zeus] has made them useless in order to spite the [Greeks].'" p. 108-109 The Iliad of Homer, translated by Samuel Butler, The Great Books, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., Chicago, 1952. [This text will be referred to as EB throughout the rest of this article.]

Hopefully the Gulf War will be relatively free of self-defeating policies and actions, as well as of duplicitous officials. During the Vietnam War, however, some South Vietnamese generals and other officials kept changing allegiances depending on self-interest or outside pressures. In addition, some US officials were being influenced by considerations which were not purely patriotic. Hence the soldier in Vietnam didn't know who to trust, whom to turn to, for the authority figure who alleged to be a "friend" could easily be, or turn into, a "foe."

Warriors of the Trojan War didn't know whom to trust either because any number of gods and goddesses kept changing their minds about which side, or warrior, they would support. Zeus, for example, changed his mind several times.

Ultimately, Zeus allowed the Greeks to win. Yet he had nothing personal against the Trojans. Nor could he understand why his wife, Hera, and his daughter, Athena, were so intent on seeing Troy in rubble. Furthermore, Zeus loved Hector (Troy's chief warrior) who always honored him with the choicest sacrifices; and Zeus's son, Sarpendon, a valiant warrior and an honor to his father's name, was a Trojan.

Yet, when the sea nymph Thetis wrapped her arms around Zeus's knees and begged him to avenge her son (Achilles, Hector's enemy) for the wrongs done to him, Zeus agreed. He could not say "no" to the lovely Thetis, even though he knew that his decision would spell the ruin of Troy and the death of his beloved Hector and his son, Sarpendon.

Before Thetis' appeal, however, Zeus had saved Hector's life repeatedly. For example, when Zeus saw the wounded Hector vomiting blood before the Greek ships, he threatened to beat Hera for allowing Hector to suffer so and immediately sent Apollo, the god of healing, to fill Hector with "desperate courage" and heal his wounds. Yet to fulfill his promise to Thetis, Zeus eventually allowed Hector to perish by Achilles' hand.

As Hector lays dying, he cries, "Alas!" Hector cries, "the gods have lured me on to my destruction . . . death

is now indeed exceedingly near at hand and there is no way out of it -- for so [Zeus] and his son Apollo the far-darter have willed it, though heretofore they have been ever ready to protect me. My doom has come upon me; let me now then not die ingloriously and without a struggle, but let me first do some great thing that shall be told among men hereafter."

Hector then springs on Achilles like a "soaring eagle," but Achilles, "mad with rage" spears him through the neck. (EB, p. 158)

In sum, the Greeks knew that no matter how much they honored the gods and tried to live justly, that the gods could be self-contradictory (if not capricious), that they had favorites, and that in appeasing one god or goddess, they might incur the wrath of a rival god or goddess. They saw the gods as being very much like human beings in being swayed not only by humanitarian concerns, but by selfishness and vanity.

In fact, the very origin of the Trojan war, lies in vanity and pride, as perhaps part of the current war can be attributed to Saddam's overconfidence and unweaning ambition. According to the Greek myth, Thetis (the sea nymph) made a disastrous mistake in planning her wedding. She invited all the gods and goddesses except for Eris, Goddess of Discord. Highly offended, Eris threw a golden apple among the guests with the inscription, "To the Fairest," knowing the havoc it would create.

The "top three" goddesses vied for the apple: Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite. Hera was the wife of Zeus, king of the gods, and a powerful goddess in her own right. Athena was Zeus's daughter, a forever virgin "daddy's girl" who almost always sided with her father and the male gods against the female goddesses. Aphrodite, however, was the goddess of love and beauty.

Although she was not a warrior goddess like Athena, Aphrodite was one of the most feared goddesses on Mount Olympus. If someone offended her (whether it be god or man), she could make that someone miserable beyond belief by depriving him (or her) of the peace and pleasures of love, or, alternatively, by causing him (or her) to fall in love with someone who would love them not. Many were the times Aphrodite (or her son, Eros) caused even the most logical of human beings (or gods) to act like a fool by giving him (or her) an irrational passion for someone who was rejecting or cruel.

"May you never launch at me, O [Aphrodite] your golden bow's passion-poisoned arrows, which no man can avoid," the chorus chants in Euripides's Medea. " (p. 46, in "Medea," in Ten Plays by Euripides, translated by M. Hadas and J. Mc Lean, Bantam Books, New York, 1960).

The three goddesses squabbled over the apple for hours. When it became apparent they could not settle the matter themselves, they turned to Zeus to make the final decision. But Zeus, in his divine wisdom, knew better than to make such an impossible choice. He deferred the decision to a hapless mortal, Paris, who was tending sheep on a mountain side outside of Troy. Although Paris was the son of the king of Troy, he had been relegated to the status of a shepherd because an omen had foretold that he would bring ruin to Troy.

"Give me the apple and you will no longer be a miserable shepherd. I will make you the richest man in the world," Hera promised.

"No, chose me," said Athena, "and I will give you more fame and glory than you ever dreamed of."

"Alas, all I can offer you is the most beautiful woman in the world," sighed Aphrodite.

Paris (whom his brother Hector called "woman-mad" and full of "bed tricks") gave the apple to Aphrodite, thereby incurring the eternal wrath of Hera and Athena. Just as Saddam and many of his followers would like to see Israel blown off the map, Hera and Athena swore that they would totally (not partially, but totally) destroy Troy in revenge for Paris's insult to their feminine pride.

Apparently as the result of this little beauty contest, Helen could not be blamed for her adultery. Since she was the most beautiful woman in the world at the time, mythological it was her fate, or destiny, to leave her husband for Paris.

But some Trojans viewed Helen as an immoral, selfish hussy whose infidelities resulted in the needless deaths of their loved ones. In Euripides' tragedy, Trojan Women, for example, the captive Trojan women cannot find words strong enough to vent their hate for Helen. Because of Helen, not only have they lost their city and their husbands, brothers, and sons, but they have been relegated to lives of slavery.

Many Greeks despised Helen also. In the Agamemnon, for example, the chorus mourns with the Greek widows: "Alas! And yet alas again!" one cries. "And woe!" another moans. "My spouse is slain, the death of honor, rolled in dust and blood. Slain for a woman's sin, a false wife's shame!" . . . "Such muttered words of bitter mood, rise against [Helen]." (p. 64-65 Oates)

Whom will the widows and bereaved families in our country see as their "Helen?" Saddam and his forces? All Muslims? Or the oil companies, munitions plants, and other businesses and institutions (regardless of nationality) which are perceived, justifiably or unjustifiably, as profiting from the war?

Even Helen's husband, Menelaus, swore he would kill her if he ever found her. "She must die. She must die," he kept saying throughout the war. But after Troy fell and Menelaus found Helen, the sight of her naked breasts made him change his mind. He "threw away his sword and led her in safety to the [Greek] ships." Robert Graves, The Greek Myths: 2, Penguin Books Ltd., Baltimore, Md., 1975, p. 336-337)

Back in Greece, Menelaus treated Helen like his beloved queen. But the popular feeling against Helen was so strong that she was afraid to venture forth alone, lest she be attacked by a grief-stricken relative of a fallen Greek. In fact, she was almost killed once by some of her in-laws, who saw her as "the originator of every misfortune that had befallen them." (Graves, p. 65)

Nobody knows exactly how Helen died. According to one account, she was made an immortal. According to another, Helen was murdered by an angry Greek widow who arranged to have Helen hung.

Although Helen's kidnapping may have been the trigger for the war, the "real" reason, some scholars contend, was economic. Athens and other Greek cities were competing with Troy for trade on the Mediterranean; and it would be to their economic advantage to destroy Troy. According to Graves, "The Trojan War . . . was a trade war. Troy controlled the valuable Black Sea trade in gold, silver, iron, timber, linen, hemp,

dried fish, oil, and Chinese jade. After Troy fell, the Greeks were able to plant colonies all along the eastern trade route." p. 302.

At that time, Greece was not a united country, but an assembly of city states and other localities, each with their own ruler. Menelaus and his brother were rulers of city states that would profit greatly in trade if Troy was out of the picture. However, they could not hope to overtake Troy without the support of as many other Greek rulers as possible.

While some rulers readily joined the war effort, some were reluctant. They had little vested interest in trade or, they simply did not want to risk their lives, or the lives of their troops, for some other man's pocketbook, or wife. Achilles, hero of the Greeks, echoes their sentiment:

"Why pray, must the [Greeks] fight the Trojans? Why did the sons of Atreus [Agamemnon and Menelaus] gather the host and bring them [to Troy]? Was it not for the sake of Helen? Are the sons of Atreus the only men in the world who love their lives? Any man of common right feeling will love and cherish her who is his own. . .

.. "My life is more to me than all the wealth of [Troy]. Cattle and sheep are to be had . . . and a man may buy . . . horses if he wants them, but when his life has once left him, it can neither be bought or harried back again." (EB, p. 60-61)

"Hell no! I don't want to go," Vietnam War protesters chanted in our streets. "Hell no! I don't want to go," was also the sentiment of at least a few Greeks, who, like Achilles, didn't want to go to Troy. Yet like those drafted for Vietnam, many Greeks had to go. There was no draft, but there was this oath.

When Helen was still unmarried, almost every Greek ruler wanted her. In fact, the competition for her was so fierce, that she was afraid to make a choice lest she or her intended be slain by some thwarted suitor. Ulysses, king of the island of Ithaca, solved the problem by having all the suitors (including himself) promise not to harm one another after Helen had made her selection and to defend and protect Helen until the day she died.

Such oaths were considered sacred. To forsake them would dishonor one's name and defame one's masculinity. Another compelling reason to keep the oath was that Menelaus's brother was Agamemnon—the most powerful chieftain in Greece. It would do no Greek ruler well to contend with him.

Nevertheless, a few Greek chiefs tried to avoid the "draft," anyway. Ulysses, the very originator of the oath, saw no reason to go fight far away from home in what promised to be a long, lonely war. So, when a representative was sent to enlist him, Ulysses tried pretended he was insane by sowing his fields with salt and driving his plow in the most erratic manner he could muster.

Aware of Ulysses' reputation for craftiness, the representative placed Ulysses's small son in front of the plow. When Ulysses swerved to avoid the child, his ruse was up, and Ulysses was marched off to war.

"Where's Achilles?" Ulysses asked upon joining the troops.

Nobody knew.

"If I can't get out of this fool war, neither can he," Ulysses fumed.

Achilles was hiding as a girl in a certain king's court. (Achilles liked wars, but his mother had begged him to hide because she'd been warned that if he went to Troy he would die there.)

In hopes of finding Achilles, Ulysses disguised himself as a merchant of women's silks and jewels, then went to the city where Achilles was rumored to be hiding and presented these silks and jewels to king's daughters and maids. However, knowing how much Achilles loved war, Ulysses hid some weapons among his wares. Most of the king's daughters ignored the weapons and focused on the silks and jewels. But there was one "daughter" who began lovingly stroking the weapons. With that, Ulysses immediately spotted Achilles and persuaded him to join the battle.

Latest reports indicate that increasing numbers of Americans are volunteering to serve in the current war. At the same time, others, fearing that a draft may be instituted, are making plans to file as conscientious objectors or, to flee the country, as did many during the Vietnam War.

During the Trojan War, Graves's reports, there were many "draft dodgers" who fled to isolated areas of Greece. Some were peasants, but some were princes or nobles who held deep seated grudges against Menelaus or Agamemnon. Still others figured that they could make more money by seducing the lonely rich wives of the warring soldiers than by going off to war.

Chief among these was Nauplius. According to Graves, Nauplius went to Troy (most likely to gather information about various wives' marital problems, etc.). Then he coasted around Greece priming these lonely wives into adultery by preying on their vulnerabilities and emphasizing that the war seemed endless:

"If your husband isn't already dead, he's probably enjoying himself with some slave woman. Even if he survives the war, he might not make it home. Troy is far away, the seas are rough, and God knows when the war will be over. Nobody seems to be winning. Your husband could easily be gone another twenty years."

Nauplius convinced Idomeneus's wife, Meda, to take a lover named Leucus. Leucus eventually murdered Meda (and her daughter) and made himself king. (Graves, p. 350) Nauplius's most famous "victory," however, was persuading Clytemnestra, wife of Agamemnon (the leader of the Greek expedition to Troy) to take Aegisthus as a lover. Aegisthus had avoided the "draft" by hiding on an island until the troops left. Then, under Nauplius's guidance, he emerged to pursue Clytemnestra.

Clytemnestra was especially vulnerable because Agamemnon had forced her to marry him by killing her newborn baby and her husband. Also, behind her back, Agamemnon had sacrificed their daughter, Iphigenia, for the sake of the war. In addition, Clytemnestra knew that Agamemnon had fathered twin boys with the Trojan princess, Cassandra.

Despite Clytemnestra's grievances, however, she was well-aware that as the wife of the most powerful king of Greece, all eyes were upon her. Nevertheless, eventually she yielded to Aegisthus and, together with him, plotted and executed the murder of Agamemnon (and Cassandra and the twins).



Aside from contributing to the downfall of Agamemnon's household, Nauplius lit a beacon in order to lure ships of returning Greek warriors into dangerous waters. This crime so outraged Zeus that he arranged for Nauplius to die by a false beacon.

Nauplius is reminiscent of those South Vietnamese military and political officials who abused American financial aid and military resources. He is also similar to "Joadie." (During training for the Vietnam War, soldiers were goaded on by commanding officers who reminded them that while they were fighting for their country, "Joadie" was home ravishing their women.)

Aside from economic gain and any personal feelings about Helen, many Greek and Trojan warriors were motivated by the glory and challenge of battle and the chance to prove one's arête, or excellence. Similarly, many Vietnam veterans enlisted to prove their physical strength, manhood, or patriotism.

As Herbert Muller writes, "As the Boy Scout says, 'It doesn't matter whether you win or lose, its how you play the game.' It does matter a great deal, of course, especially to the Boy Scout grown up as a college graduate," [who, after the cheering and flag waving have ceased, finds death and dismemberment staring him I the face] . . . More vulgar, and more genuine, is the legendary saying of the American sergeant of World War I as he led his men into battle, 'Come on, you sons of bitches, d'you want to live forever?'" (The Spirit of Tragedy, Washington Square Press, 1956, p. 19)

Heroism isn't cheap. As Muller reminds us, our sons and daughters were not born "Galahads, but ordinary men [and women] who want to live forever and have [little or] no passion whatever for dying for any cause. Yet they are still capable of rising above [their] fear . . . and of meeting their destiny in something like the spirit of . . . tragic heroes." (p. 19, op. cit.)

Throughout the Iliad, Homer turns mere mortals (both Greeks and Trojans) into god-like creatures of Rambo-like strength and fortitude and awesome dedication to their cause, whether that cause was their homeland, their honor, or their sense of masculinity. For example, during one battle, Ulysses stands "alone; not one of the [Greeks] stood by him, for they were all panic-stricken. 'Alas,' said he to himself in his dismay, 'what will become of me? It is ill if I turn and fly before these odds, but it will be worse if I am left alone and taken prisoner, for [Zeus] has struck the rest of the [Greeks] with panic. But why talk to myself in this way? Well do I know that though cowards quit the fight, a hero, whether he wounds or be wounded, must stand firm and hold his own." (EB, p. 76)

Ulysses is then surrounded by Trojans who attack him like "hounds and lusty youths set upon a wild boar." (EB p. 76) They tear the flesh from his side, but he keeps on fighting.

There are other heroes also: Achilles, Ajax the Greater, Diomedes, Idomeneus, and Ajax the Lesser, Nestor, Sarpendon, Polydamas, and Hector. Achilles and Hector are not only heroic, but tragic, in that they keep on fighting even though they know they are going to die. They, and others, are so magnificent, courageous, and outstanding in battle or in character that they seem almost super-human.

In fact, the only way the ancient Greek mind could comprehend the excellence of these men was to deem

them sons or favorites of some god or goddess. Hence Achilles was viewed as the son of the goddess Thetis; Sarpentdon, as the son of Zeus; and Hector, as one of Zeus's favorites. Ulysses' wisdom allegedly came from his protector, the goddess Athena, and Paris's sexual charms, from the goddess Aphrodite.

During the Vietnam War many "ordinary" men became heroes too, in that they acted bravely or honorable in spite of their fears. Unlike the heroes of the Trojan War, however, the heroes of the Vietnam War had no Homer to sing their praises. Instead, for decades, Vietnam veterans went largely unrecognized. In many instances, they were publically denigrated. Hopefully, such stigma and rejection will not be dumped on our current troops.

Yet even today, despite our country's belated appreciation of Vietnam veterans, some vets have yet to receive the recognition they deserve. Even more distressing, some are unable to give that recognition to themselves. In counseling Vietnam veterans, I have encountered many dedicated patriots who remember clearly the one or two instances where they felt or acted like cowards, but who seem to forget the many times they acted heroically. Medics especially tend to remember in vivid detail the deaths of men they were unable to save, but "forget" the many men whose lives they did save.

Those who return from the Gulf War may suffer the same torment and find comfort in the knowing that in Greek mythology, the god of war, Ares (or Mars), had two sons. One was named Fear, the other, Panic. Ares (or Mars) never went to war without these two sons, either of whom was so "fierce and indomitable," that "even the staunchest warrior turn[ed] tail."

Indeed, the Iliad is full of examples of both Greeks and Trojans running for cover. Usually it took a god or goddess coming down from Mount Olympus to persuade these frightened men to keep on fighting. (p. 242, The Iliad, Translated by E. V. Rieu, The Penguin Classics, Baltimore, Md., 1950)

For example, when Agamemnon tests his men by suggesting that they give up the fight and sail home, the men begin to cheer. Without a moment's hesitation, they run for their ships preparing to go home. It took the goddess Athena herself to return the men to battle.

When Achilles' best friend, Patroclus, is killed, the Greeks too tired to try to save Patroclus' body from being mutilated by the Trojans. But Athena saves the day by wrapping herself in a "radiant raiment" and coming "down from heaven" to "rouse fury" among the Greeks. She speaks with each warrior individually, starting with Menelaus:

"It will be shame and dishonor to you if dogs tear the noble comrade of Achilles [Patroclus] under the walls of Troy. Therefore, be staunch, and urge your men to be so also." She then put "strength into his knees and shoulders" and made him exceedingly "bold." (EB, p. 127)

Even the superheroes of the Trojan War lost their courage at times. At one point, for example, the Greeks have almost overtaken the walls of Troy. Their advance is halted, however, by the Trojan hero Agenor.

Agenor fights mightily, but when he realizes that he will surely die, he wants to run. At that point the god Apollo scurries down from Mount Olympus to give him an extra dose of courage and stand by his side as protection.

Yet even with Apollo right next to him, when Agenor sees the ferocious Achilles, he freezes with fear. Not caring if Achilles finishes off his comrades, Agenor wants to abandon his post and go hide. He doesn't act on this thought, but the temptation is great.

Even Hector, the bravest and strongest of all the Trojans, ran when faced with Achilles. Yet Hector can be scarcely branded a "coward." He did not approve of his brother's kidnapping of Helen, and, being the king's son, Hector didn't really have to fight. Nevertheless, he fought in almost every battle.

Towards the end of the war, King Priam begs Hector to forsake the front lines and stay safe behind the city walls: "Come . . . my son, within the city, or you will . . . lose your own life. Have pity also on your unhappy father while life yet remains to him, on me, whom the son of Saturn [Zeus] will destroy by a terrible doom on the threshold of my old age, after I have seen my sons slain and my daughters hauled away as captives."

Soon, Priam predicts, "fierce hounds will tear me in pieces at my own gates after someone has beaten the life out of my body with sword or spear. The old man [then] tore his grey hair . . . but he moved not the heart of Hector." (EB p. 155-156)

Hector's heart remained unmoved even when his mother bared her bosom "and pointed to the breasts which had suckled him. 'Hector,' she cried, weeping bitterly the while, 'Hector, my son, spurn not this breast, but have pity on me too. If ever I have given you comfort from my own bosom, think on it now, dear son, and come within the wall. Stand not [outside the wall, alone] to meet him; should the wretch kill you, neither I nor your . . . wife shall . . . weep . . . over the bed on which you lie, for dogs will devour you at the ships of the [Greeks].'

"Thus did the two with many tears implore their son, but they moved not the heart of Hector, and he stood his ground awaiting the huge Achilles as he drew nearer towards him." (EB, p. 155-156) As Achilles approached, however, looking more like Ares, god of war, than a man, Hector ran.

Like the warriors of the Trojan War, Vietnam veterans often interpret their instinctive desire to stay alive as a form of cowardice. Unlike the Greeks, however, our soldiers couldn't blame one of the gods for making them afraid, for missing a target, or for miscalculating a military move. Instead, they tend to blame themselves, which greatly compounds any post-war readjustment problems.

Vietnam veterans did not wield spears, and the Greeks and the Trojans had not even heard of guns. Yet all these warriors had to deal with the same two unruly conditions of battle: combat chaos and combat paranoia. Combat is chaotic, not orderly. There is usually so much going on all at once, and in such a confusing manner, that it would take many objective observers to piece together an accurate description of what is actually occurring.

The solitary soldier sees only a part of the action (weather permitting) and what he does observe is highly colored by his emotional and physiological state of hyperarousal, fear, panic, rage, and grief. If, in addition, the trauma is extreme, the warrior may suffer from amnesia, "forgetting" what transpired during periods of time ranging from five seconds to five years. Such amnesias are not voluntary: neither are they signs of insanity or mental weakness. They are simply the result of certain biochemical processes which can occur when an

individual is in a life-threatening situation.

Homer did not use words like combat chaos or biochemically induced amnesia. Instead, he talked about "clouds" or "mists" being sent by the gods either (a) to comfort terrified warriors, (b) to create even more combat chaos in order to help one side or the other, or (c) to protect the corpse of a favored warrior from mutilation. For example, when Aphrodite sees Paris close to death, she covers him with a cloud and whisks him into Helen's bedroom, where he eases his combat stress with love making.

Soon afterwards Hector, upbraids Paris for being "good in bed," but not in battle: "Evil hearted Paris, fair to see, but woman-mad. Would that you had never been born. . . . Better so, than live to be disgraced. Will not the [Greeks] mock at us and say that we have one who is fair to see but who has neither wit nor courage? Did you not from a far country carry off a lovely woman hang-dog shamefulness to yourself? And now can you not dare to face Menelaus and learn what manner of man is he whose wife you have stolen? Where indeed [will] be your . . . love tricks, your comely locks, and fair favor, when you [are] lying in the dust before him?"

**Comment [Comment1]:** . To bring sorrow to your country but joy to your enemies, and

Paris replies, "Hector, your rebuke is just. Still, taunt me not with the gifts that golden Aphrodite has given me; they are precious; let not a man disdain them, for the gods give them where they are minded and none can have them for the asking." (EB, p. 19)

Paranoia is another possible feature of the war experience. Soldiers can easily come to suspect everything or everybody because their lives are constantly at risk. Under such conditions men seek some way to control or predict their fate. In the Iliad, warriors on both sides offer sacrifices to the gods in hopes of obtaining some protection and, ultimately, victory. They also try to interpret their dreams, their inner thoughts, and certain omens, such as a bird flying overhead, as containing a message from a god about which direction to take. However, as Homer illustrates and as any Vietnam veteran can verify, in battle, not much can be trusted -- not one's prayers, not one's inner voice, not one's comrades, nor any outward "signs."

During the Vietnam War, many Americans were wounded or killed by "friendly fire," i.e., by other Americans or by South Vietnamese, either accidentally due to combat chaos or purposely due to some personal or political reason. According to Neil Sheehan, author of The Bright Shining Lie, (Random House, Inc., N.Y., 1988) over one fifth of American deaths in Vietnam can be accounted for by "friendly fire."

So far, there have been no reported "friendly fire" deaths in the Middle East. However, there is concern that if many nations become involved, allies may shoot each other's planes down or otherwise inadvertently harm each other due to language barriers, as well as the general chaos of war.

"Friendly fire" deaths are reported by Homer, but the perpetrators are not human beings, but one of the immortals. Throughout the Iliad, the gods are constantly making fools of men by sending false dreams, whispering false messages in their ears, or allowing them to misinterpret certain omens. The gods even disguise themselves as warriors in order to lead some poor soldier to his own death.

For example, Zeus sends Agamemnon a false dream to lead the Greeks astray; Apollo disguises himself as a Trojan to divert Achilles; and Athena disguises herself as Hector's brother in order to lead Hector to a certain death. Because Hector thought his brother, Deiphobos (an especially skilled warrior) was at his side, Hector

decided to accept the challenge of facing Achilles. But when Hector turned to his brother for help, there was no one there. Hence Hector was quickly slain.

During this century, much progress has been made in understanding the psychology and biology of combat. It is now generally accepted that combat, as well as other forms of trauma, can give rise to biochemical changes, such as adrenalin rushes, psychological and physical numbing, as well as to a psycho-biological disorder known as PTSD, or Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Adrenalin rushes give the warrior the physical strength and emotional motivation to keep on fighting, whereas psychological or physical numbing enable him to keep on functioning by muting the full extent of his emotional or bodily pain.

Homer didn't talk about adrenalin rushes. Instead he personifies them as gods and goddesses who whisper words of encouragement or, in Homer's words, "give heart to," weary or terrified soldiers. Numbing is also personified as gods and goddesses who mercifully reach down from Mount Olympus to lessen the pain of, or actually heal, physical wounds.

No divine intervention is needed, however, to supercharge even the most discouraged or wounded warrior when he sees a relative or beloved comrade fall in battle. In the Trojan War, as in the Vietnam War, the death of a comrade, cousin, or brother empowered the warrior to fight with special fury and, in some instances, led to atrocities.

In revenge for the slaying of his best friend (Patroclus), Achilles entered what Nietzsche called the "abyss of hatred." Achilles allowed his comrades to desecrate Hector's corpse. Then he tied it to a horse and dragged it around Troy. As further vengeance, he sacrificed twelve youths and four fine horses at Patroclus's funeral. In a parallel manner, some of the atrocities committed in Vietnam were, in part, motivated by witnessing the deaths or atrocities committed on comrades.

Like the warriors in Vietnam, warriors of the Trojan War suffered from symptoms of acute PTSD: insomnia, anxiety attacks, panic attacks, depression, and rage reactions. E.g., Agamemnon "was troubled and . . . could get no rest. . . [and] heaved many a deep sigh, for his soul trembled within him. [He] tore his hair by the handfuls before [Zeus] on high and groaned aloud for the very disquietness of his soul. . . . Neither could Menelaus sleep." (EB, p. 65)

However, the combatants of the Trojan War seem to suffer somewhat less from one of the major symptoms of PTSD: emotional or psychic numbing. Emotional or psychic numbing refers to the inability to feel, the feeling of being "numb," "blank," or "dead" inside. Such numbing is a natural and necessary response to the conditions of battle. Sheer survival requires that the warrior concentrate on the task at hand -- staying alive or helping his comrades -- not on his emotional state.

Being emotional in battle is highly impractical, for, as Homer accurately notes, grief is "ungovernable." True grief, once it emerges, can overwhelm the individual for an undetermined amount of time. It can be extremely disorienting and cannot be "turned off" at will, except by some addiction or by a massive denial system

Homer frequently describes how a Greek or a Trojan felt intense grief or fury over the loss of a comrade or charioteer, but "didn't have time" to stop and feel his feelings. He had to go on fighting. Yet, unlike the Vietnam

veteran, within a short period of time, the Greek or Trojan soldier was able to get back to his emotions.

Why? Because during the Trojan War, the Greeks and Trojans called several truces specifically to give each other time to bury and grieve their dead. Hence they didn't have to wait, as some Vietnam veterans have had to wait, ten or twenty years to go to a therapist and grieve. Hopefully those returning from the Gulf War will seek assistance with this most necessary grieving process.

Sometimes the ancient warriors didn't even have to wait until a truce was called in order to grieve. Their culture allowed them to grieve on the spot. For example, after the Trojans brought in a tribe of Amazons to help defend their city, Achilles slays the Amazon queen, Penthesilea. As he stoops over her corpse and notices how young and beautiful she is, he begins sobbing.

At that point Thersites, a fellow Greek, jeers at Achilles for crying, and Achilles slays him on the spot.

In the Iliad, even horses cry. For example, after their charioteer is slain, Achilles' horses "bowed their heads to the ground. Hot tears fell from their eyes as they mourned the loss of their charioteer, and their noble manes drooped all wet."

When Zeus saw the horses cry, he "took pity on their sorrow. He wagged his head and muttered to himself, saying, 'Poor things, why [must you] share the sorrows that befall mankind? Of all creatures that live and move upon the earth there is none so pitiable as [mankind].'" (EB, p. 126)

This not the emotional repression which characterizes the experience of some PTSD afflicted Vietnam veterans. They tended to not grieve in battle, or even afterwards, possibly because they expected to be called "sissies" or "weak" or ridiculed the way Thersites ridiculed Achilles.

Thersites was slain for his attitude (and insult to Achilles) and was generally disrespected. He is described as a "brawler and demagogue" and an "unruly" conscript. (p. 228, Bullfinches Mythology Illustrated, Avenor Books, New York, 1978) But had Thersites been in Vietnam, he might have been exalted as a "real man" for espousing the view that emotionality is a sign of masculine deficiency and other forms of weakness and therefore deserves to be rebuked.

Not only scholars and students, but "real men" can read the Iliad and enjoy it for there is there is enough action and intrigue in the Iliad to make it as entertaining as any John Wayne movie. However, the Iliad is more than a war thriller: it is a commentary on war. While the battle scenes are exciting enough to be of interest even to die-hard blood and guts war lovers, Homer does not spare us knowledge of the carnage of war.

The Iliad bursts with detailed descriptions of how and where a spear or knife entered a warrior's body, how and where the weapon emerged, what body parts were destroyed, and how they oozed out of the armor or the body onto the black earth (or, often, a red, blood-soaked earth). For example:

- (a) When Meriones killed Phereclus, the "point of the spear went through the bone into the bladder, and death came upon him as he cried aloud and fell forward on his knees (EB 31)

- (b) When Meges attacked Pedeaus, he “drove a spear into the nape of his neck: it went under his tongue all among his teeth so he bit the cold bronze, and fell dead in the dust.” (EB p. 30- 31)
- (c) When Hyperenor was speared, "the bronze point made his entrails gush out." (EB p. 102-103)
- (d) When Peneleos attacked Ilineos, he "wounded him the eye under his eyebrows, tearing the eye-ball from its socket; the spear went right through the eye into the nape of the neck, and he fell stretching out both hands before him. . . . Peneleos then drew his sword and smote him on the neck, so that both head and helmet came tumbling down to the ground with the spear still sticking in the eye; he then held up the head as though it had been a poppy head and showed it to the Trojans, vaunting over them as he did so. 'Trojans,' he cried, 'bid the father and mother of noble of Ilioneus make moan for him in their house.' (EB p. 102-103)
- (e) Achilles slew Tros by driving his sword "into his liver, and the liver came rolling out, while his bosom was all covered the black blood that welled from the wound." Achilles then went on to behead Deucalion, and as he flung the head "helmet and all away . . . the marrow came oozing out of [Deucalion's] backbone." (EB, p. 147)

Achilles killed so many Trojans that he filled a river with corpses. River (a god) pleaded with Achilles to stop, but he would not. In revenge, River flooded and tried to drown Achilles. With the help of certain gods, Achilles survived and went on to slaughter more and more Trojans.

Not only Achilles, but other Greeks, were such ferocious fighters that Homer frequently compared them to wild animals, e.g., "ravening wolves" (EB, p. 116). The Iliad is full of animal imagery which captures not only the physical vitality of the warriors, but their viciousness and cruelty. Even the gods (specifically Athena and Apollo) are described as "vultures" because they sit on a tree and amuse themselves watching men mutilate and kill one another.

Although the action in the Iliad may be entertaining to those who love war, Homer never lets us forget the human cost of the killing, not only for the warrior, but his parents and family. The description of many a warrior's death is followed by a heart-rending account of the grief of that warrior's loved ones.

Diomed killed two brothers, "the sons of Phaenops, both of them very dear to him, for he was now worn out with age, and begat no more sons to inherit his possessions. But Diomed took both their lives and left their father sorrowing bitterly, for he nevermore saw them come home from battle alive." (EB, p. 31).

When Hector died, "the shrouds of death enfolded him, whereon his soul went out of him and flew down to the house of Hades, lamenting its sad fate that it should enjoy youth and strength no longer." (EB p. 159)

As Eli Sagan explains, even cultures that have faith in aggression, are ambivalent about that aggression. Furthermore, each culture distinguishes between acts of violence which are considered legitimate and those which are considered illegitimate. (Eli Sagan, The Lust to Annihilate, Psychosocial Press, Publishers, N.Y., 1979, p. 19)

Although Homer is Greek, his graphic descriptions of the war crimes of the Greeks make it seem as if he were a Trojan. He only depicts Greeks, never Trojans, killing and maiming beyond the call of battle; slaughtering women, children, and other unarmed persons; refusing ransoms in exchange for lives; raping daughters of priests and other women whom the gods ordained to remain untouched; engaging in human sacrifice; betraying one another; and in many ways, acting foolishly and selfishly because of uncontrollable lust, pride, or greed.

For example, when Menelaus was about to kill an unarmed Trojan named Adrestus, Adrestus "caught him by the knees begging for his life. 'Take me alive,' he cried, 'and you shall have a full ransom for me; my father is rich and has much treasure of gold, bronze, and wrought iron laid by in his house. From this store he will give you a large ransom.'"

"Thus did he plead and Menelaus was for yielding." But Agamemnon rebuked him: "Let us not spare a single one of them -- not even the child unborn and in its mother's womb; let not a man of them be left alive, but let all in [Troy] perish, unheeded and forgotten."

Agamemnon is once again heartless when he captures two brothers named Pisander and Hippolochus. "Take us alive,' they cried, "and you shall receive a great ransom for us. Our father . . . has a great store of gold . . . and he will satisfy you with a large ransom should he hear of our being alive.'

"With such piteous words and tears did they beseech the king, but they heard no pitiful answer in return." (EB, P.101). Instead Agamemnon cut off their heads and hands and rolled them in the crowd as if they were toys.

Agamemnon, like other Greeks, keeps going past the limits of "normal" battle and offends the gods repeatedly. Furthermore, he seems incapable of learning. When he took the daughter of a priest of Apollo as his "prize," the girl's father came to him with a golden ransom. Agamemnon refused the ransom, even though all the rest of the Greeks insisted that the priest be respected and the ransom taken.

Agamemnon's refusal so infuriated Apollo that he punished the Greeks with a plague which threatened to wipe them out. Angry that he had to return the daughter to her father in order to stop the plague, Agamemnon forces Achilles to give him his captive woman. Thus began the feud between Agamemnon and Achilles, which is one of the major themes of the Trojan War.

Achilles subsequently refused to fight, which cost the Greeks one defeat after the next. After suffering so terribly, Agamemnon might have learned to stay away from priests' daughters or women dedicated to the gods. Instead, he forced Cassandra, who the gods had ordained to remain a virgin, to be his concubine. This not only offended some of the gods, but fueled his wife's hatred of him, which ultimately resulted in her killing him.

Achilles's mistreatment of Hector's corpse also offended the gods. As, day after day, Achilles continued to desecrate Hector's body, some of the gods wanted to save the body. But other gods hated Troy so much that they insisted that Hector's body be allowed to rot. Apollo rebuked them as follows:

"You gods ought to be ashamed of yourselves. You are cruel and hard hearted. Did not Hector burn you



thigh bones of heifers . . . and now dare you not rescue even his dead body, for his wife to look upon? So then, you would all be on the side of mad Achilles, who knows neither right nor truth? He is like some savage lion that in the pride of his great strength and daring springs upon men's flocks and gorges on them. Even so has Achilles flung aside all pity, and all . . . conscience?

"Brave though [Achilles] may be . . . we gods . . . take it ill that he should vent his fury upon dead clay."  
(EB, p. 171)

Over the objections of his wife, Zeus arranges for Hector to receive proper burial. Like Zeus, other gods intervene throughout the war to save the corpses of fallen warriors from mutilation.

With the passage of time in the Trojan War, the Greeks grew increasingly weary and homesick, and as a result more and more brutal. Hence, at the end, Cassandra is raped by Ajax in the holy temple of Athena; the young Trojan princess Polyxena is slain at the tomb of Achilles; and Hector's infant son is murdered. Even though Ulysses promised not to hurt Trojans who did not resist the Greeks, the Greeks freely slaughtered sleeping Trojan men, women, and children. The bodies of the more famous Trojan warriors were atrociously mangled, and King Priam's body was left headless and unburied.

Yet not all of these acts were committed without protest. According to Graves, the Greek troops engaged in considerable debate over whether or not to kill Polyxena or Hector's infant son. Some troops couldn't stomach these actions, nor did they deem them necessary. They argued as follows:

Why did a live woman (Polyxena) have to be sacrificed to appease the alleged ghost of a dead man (Achilles)? And was there any reason to fear Hector's son? He would grow up a slave in Greece. With almost all the Trojan men dead; the women, captives; and Troy, in shambles, how could he ever amass the strength to pose a threat?

According to one account, Ulysses grew so frustrated with the debate over whether or not to kill Hector's son that he literally took matters into his own hands and threw the baby off a battlement.

Just as Vietnam had its post-war critics, so did the Trojan War. In Euripides's Trojan Women, Andromache (Hector's wife and mother of the dead child) bellows, "O you Greeks, how un-Greek are the tortures you devise. Why are you killing this innocent child?" (Trojan Women p. 200)

In the same play, Hector's mother, Hecuba, shrieks: "Oh you [Greeks] with whom prowess in war bulks larger than wisdom, why did you fear this child and add slaughter upon slaughter? Were you afraid he might someday raise fallen Troy? Then you are cowards after all. Our city is taken, Troy is destroyed, yet you were afraid of a child, a little child, though even Hector's victories and thousands of brave men besides could not prevent our doom. I do not admire a fear that has no basis of reason." (Trojan Women p. 200)

Holding her crushed grandchild in her hands, Hecuba further mocks the Greeks, "What will be the verse inscribed on your tomb? 'Within this grave a little child is laid, slain by the Greeks because they were afraid.' An inscription to make Greece blush." (Trojan Women p. 200)

But there was no tomb for the child, nor was Andromache given the time to bury her son, though she had been specifically promised to be allowed to do so. For these and other inhumanities, Ulysses and other Greeks, eventually pay a heavy price.

In another post-war play, Euripides' Andromache, Hector's wife Andromache, now a defenseless slave woman in Greece, is about to be murdered by Menelaos for no cause. "Don't you believe in the gods and a day of retribution?" she asks.

For some Greeks, the day of retribution came in the form of death. They survived combat, but died as a direct result of having overstepped moral bounds. E.g., Ajax allegedly lost his life because he raped Cassandra; and Agamemnon, because he flaunted his concubine in his wife's face.

For other warriors, the "day of retribution" was a long and perilous journey home. In Trojan Women, the long journey home is presented as a direct punishment for war crimes:

In Trojan Women Athena, the former protectors of the Greeks, now turns against them. Athena was no pacifist. She not only believed in war, but greatly enjoyed it. Nevertheless, she wanted the Greeks punished for overstepping certain moral bounds, e.g., killing sleeping Trojans, desecrating tombs, etc.

"The mortal is mad who sacks cities and desolates temples and tombs, the holy places of the dead; his own doom is only delayed," Athena tells Poseidon. (Trojan Women p. 177) She then asks Poseidon, god of the sea, to inflict on the Greeks a "sorrowful homecoming" so that they will learn "proper respect" for the laws of the gods.

Poseidon agrees to "make the crossing of the Aegean a din of monstrous waves, a maelstrom of waters." Hence many Greeks do not make it home, or like Ulysses, take ten years to do so.

It is not clear how often combatants in Vietnam protested atrocities. It is clear, however, that the combatant who did take a stand against such actions risked not only ridicule, but various punishments, e.g., being given dangerous assignments. Furthermore, soldiers who reacted emotionally to witnessing or participating in war crimes were frequently told to "forget" whatever occurred for "it was nothing."

Those vets who could "forget" are lucky, because those who can't forget often live in daily torment. They don't need a Zeus or a Poseidon to punish them. Their internal self-beating for not having had the courage to protest a war crime or resist group pressures to participate in one, can be merciless and intense. On a spiritual or emotional level, they find it difficult, if not impossible, to forgive themselves, even if, on the rational level, they realize that in some situations they had no choice but to remain silent or conform to the group.

According to Joseph Campbell in Myths to Live By (Bantam Books, New York, 1972), except for those Native American citizens who still have access to ancient warrior rituals, our society does not prepare men to be warriors, or to recover from having been one. While there is physical training, there is no emotional or spiritual preparation for all the killing. Simply telling new recruits that the enemy is a monster who deserves to be killed is usually not enough. If it was enough, we would not have veterans in conflict over the fact that they killed, or didn't kill; that they killed "too little" or killed "too much;" that they should have killed a certain person, but not

another, etc.

Contributing to this inner torture is the fact that most Americans are raised with two contradictory philosophies: first, that war is necessary and good to protect one's people and ideals; but, secondly, that war is evil. Returning veterans, however, were rarely helped in resolving these contradictions.

Neither were they offered returning rites with which to "turn off" the battle heat-- the primitive rage and killing mania which can be so easily be unleashed and which, in fact, is a tremendous asset, in battle. Without societal support and some means of spiritual-emotional resolution, this whole business of killing can create unending inner strife, a strife which the former warrior usually feels he must keep to himself lest those who only have a superficial understanding of combat.

On his way home from Troy, Poseidon punishes Ulysses with unruly waters, monsters, and many traps. In Greek mythology, Poseidon, is god of the ocean, which represents the unconscious and human emotions, especially the deep unruly feelings of anger, jealousy, guilt, grief, and fear. Storms at sea symbolize emotional conflicts or some strong emotion that is not allowing the human being to rest.

Vietnam veterans didn't come home on ships, but some are still being tossed about in the sea of their emotions, just as Ulysses and his men were on the Aegean. Just as many Greeks survived the war, but died on their way home, some Vietnam veterans survived the rice paddies, but lost their lives to suicide. Others commit slow suicides via alcohol and drug abuse or lives of social isolation dominated by intense self-hate.

Psychologically speaking, some Vietnam veterans still haven't "come home" yet. They are still on the life raft with Ulysses, floating on the sea of their turbulent, restless emotions and memories that cannot be erased, or calmed. The monsters they encounter are not those which faced Ulysses, but monsters which live inside their own heads -- the terrible flashbacks, the merciless nightmares, the agonizing self-condemnation, and "irrational" fears of revenge by the dead. For these unfortunate souls, the war may never end.

Ulysses left for the war a young man and came back twenty years later an old man. Psychologically, some Vietnam vets feel that they not only aged in Vietnam, but "died" there. "I left my soul in Vietnam," more than one Vietnam veteran has stated, meaning that his innocence, his love of life, his faith in human goodness, and his own goodness, were lost in some rice paddy or obliterated by some experience of human horror.

It is easy to point fingers and blame veterans for their own pain. However, except in the case of psychopathic and other anti-social individuals, it is the institution of war which creates impossible choices even for the most principled individual. It is war, not the warrior that puts the individual in a situation where he must choose between his life, and the life of another, or between his life and his own sense of morality. It is war, not the warrior, which makes men numb to the horrors of war while they in it, but slaves to their memories of those horrors once they are safe back home.

"War is hell," said General Sherman of the Civil War and it is double hell when one feels or somehow senses that he (or she) may be fighting not for a glorious ideal, but for, what Sheehan calls, "a bright shining lie" -- for somebody else's pocketbook or power, not for the good of the country or humanity. In his book, [The Bright Shining Lie](#), Sheehan argues that the Vietnam War was one large bright shining lie composed of a thousand

little dirty ones and that it was the fighting men who paid the price, allegations considered unfounded by others.

In the Trojan War, however, there definitely was a “bright shining lie.” Her name was Helen. In Trojan Women, Euripides unmasques Helen's deceitfulness and shallowness. The image he paints is unforgettable: Troy is in smoke and Hecuba, Priam's wife, Hector's mother, and former Queen of Troy, is prostrate on the ground, so grief-stricken she cannot move. She is grieving the loss of her husband, her city, and all her sons, when she learns that her daughter, Polyxena, has just been butchered in front of the tomb of Achilles and her only remaining child, Cassandra, is going to be carried off into concubinage.

Hecuba is begging the gods for the mercy of death. Her lamentations are echoed by the other captive Trojan women, when Menelaus arrives looking for Helen. Swearing that he will kill Helen for her adultery, he orders her out of the tent where she is hiding.

In the midst of the weeping captives, Helen emerges in fine shiny clothes, looking like a golden star. Summoning all her charm, she argues that she was not to blame for leaving her husband. It was Menelaus's fault for being on a business trip and leaving her prey to the young visitor from Troy. It was the goddess Aphrodite's fault too. She made her do it.

And why be so upset about all the dead? Now that the war has been won, the Greeks have boatloads of gold and other booty to take home with them. The Greeks should be thanking her for causing this war, not talking of killing her.

Menelaos is almost convinced, when Hecuba rises from the dust to shriek the truth: Helen had a bodyguard in Greece, but did she call for help when Paris tried to abduct her? No. And didn't the Trojans give Helen many opportunities to return to Greece, which she refused? It was not Paris or the Trojans, nor the goddess Aphrodite, that caused the war: it was Helen's lust and vanity -- her desire for the admiration of Trojan men. Helen cares only for herself, not Menelaos, or Greece, or Troy.

With that, Helen crumbles. She admits that Hecuba is telling the truth, then begs Menelaos for forgiveness. Softened by Helen's beauty, Menelaos decides not to kill her. Yet, to save face, he tells the Trojan women that he is only taking Helen to his ship in order to let the other Greeks decide her fate. But Hecuba is certain that once on the ship with Helen, Menelaos will be seduced by Helen's charms and that Helen, the one who caused so much suffering, will never pay the price of suffering herself.

While Menelaos is making love to Helen on his ship, the Trojan women--former queens, princesses, and noblewomen--are being parceled out as slaves to the men who slew their husbands and sons.

. The Trojan War had its Trojan women; Vietnam had its boat people; and the Gulf War will have its living victims also. These are the people who, in addition to troubled returning warriors, will keep paying the price of the war, over and over again.

At this time of war in the Middle East, one may wish to remember what the ancient Greeks observed: that the sorrows of the broken Hecuba laying in the dust and the lamentations of the Trojan women were as real and as important as any military victories or economic gains. In Trojan Women, Athena, goddess of wisdom, states

"The wise man shuns war, however, should war come, it is an honor to die for one's country" and Homer quotes the god Apollo as saying, "It takes much sorrow to kill a man."

"For the gods -- ageless, powerful and immortal," writes Lefkowitz, "war is a game without lasting consequences; the gods can return to Olympus and leave human misery behind. But mortals, because they cannot escape time or death, achieve greatness through their awareness of their mortal limitations and suffering. It is significant that [the Iliad] ends not on a note of triumph, but with [the] lamentations at Hector's funeral.

"Like Hector and Achilles, Andromache [and] Hecuba . . . live on in memory not for what they have won but because of all that they have lost." (Mary Lefkowitz, "The Wrath of Achilles," The Washington Post, Book World, September 16, 1990, p. 5)

The Iliad of Homer, translated by Samuel Butler, *The Great Books*, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., Chicago, 1952 [Referred to as EB in this article.]