THE FORTY-SEVEN
HARMON MEMORIAL LECTURE
IN MILITARY HISTORY
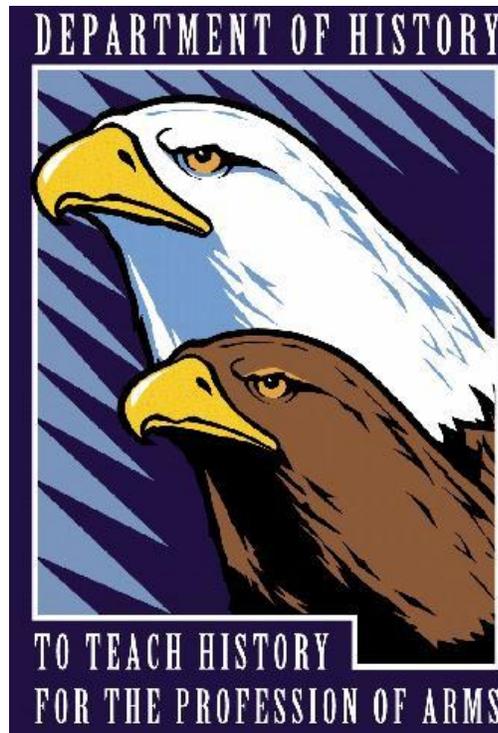
The Code of the Warrior
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United States Air Force Academy
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The oldest and most prestigious lecture series at the Air Force Academy, the Harmon Memorial Lectures in Military History originated with Lieutenant General Hubert R. Harmon, the Academy's first superintendent (1954-1956) and a serious student of military history. General Harmon believed that history should play a vital role in the new Air Force Academy curriculum. Meeting with the History Department on one occasion, he described General George S. Patton, Jr.'s visit to the West Point library before departing for the North African campaign. In a flurry of activity Patton and the librarians combed the West Point holdings for historical works that might be useful to him in the coming months. Impressed by Patton's regard for history and personally convinced of history's great value, General Harmon believed that cadets should study the subject during each of their four years at the Academy.

General Harmon fell ill with cancer soon after launching the Air Force Academy at Lowry Air Force Base in Denver in 1954. He died in February 1957. He had completed a monumental task over the preceding decade as the chief planner for the new service academy and as its first superintendent. Because of his leadership and the tensions of the cold war, Congress strongly supported the development of a first-rate school and allotted generous appropriations to build and staff the institution.

The Academy's leadership felt greatly indebted to General Harmon and sought to honor his accomplishments in some way. The Department of History considered launching a lecture series to commemorate his efforts, and in 1959 the Harmon Memorial Lecture Series in Military History was born.

The Harmon Lecture series supports two goals: to encourage the interest in contemporary military history and to stimulate in cadets a lifelong interest in the study of the history of the military profession. The lectures are published and distributed to interested individuals and organizations throughout the world and many are used in courses at the Academy. In this way, we continue to honor the memory of General Harmon, who during his lifetime developed a keen interest in military history and greatly contributed to establishing the United States Air Force Academy.

LIEUTENANT GENERAL HUBERT REILLY HARMON

Lieutenant General Hubert R. Harmon was one of several distinguished Army officers to come from the Harmon family. His father graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1880 and later served as Commandant of Cadets at the Pennsylvania Military Academy. Two older brothers, Kenneth and Millard, were members of the West Point class of 1910 and 1912, respectively. The former served as Chief of the San Francisco Ordnance District during World War II; the latter reached flag rank and was lost over the Pacific during World War II while serving as Commander of the Pacific Area Army Air Forces. Hubert Harmon, born on April 3, 1882, in Chester, Pennsylvania, followed in their footsteps and graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1915. Dwight D. Eisenhower also graduated in this class, and nearly forty years later the two worked together to create the new United States Air Force Academy.

Harmon left West Point with a commission in the Coast Artillery Corps, but he was able to enter the new Army air branch the following year. He won his pilot's wings in 1917 at the Army flying school in San Diego. After several training assignments, he went to France in September 1918 as a pursuit pilot. Between World Wars I and II, Harmon, who was a Major during most of this time, was among that small group of Army air officers who urged Americans to develop a modern, strong air arm.

At the outbreak of World War II, Brigadier General Hubert Harmon was commanding the Gulf Coast Training Center at Randolph Field, Texas. In late 1942 he became a Major General and head of the 6th Air Force in the Caribbean. The following year General Harmon was appointed Deputy Commander for Air in the South Pacific under General Douglas MacArthur, and in January 1944 he assumed command of the 13th Air Force fighting in that theater. After the war General Harmon held several top positions with the Air Force and was promoted to Lieutenant General in 1948.

In December 1949 the Air Force established the Office of Special Assistant for Air Force Academy Matters and appointed General Harmon its head. For more than four years Harmon directed all efforts at securing legislative approval for a U.S. Air Force Academy, planned its building and operation, and served on two commissions that finally selected Colorado Springs, Colorado, as the site for the new institution. On August 14, 1954, he was appointed first Superintendent of the Air Force Academy.

Upon General Harmon's retirement on July 31, 1956, the Secretary of the Air Force presented him with his third Distinguished Service Medal for his work in planning and launching the new service academy and setting its high standards. In a moving, informal talk to the cadets before leaving the Academy, General Harmon told the young airmen that the most important requirements for success in their military careers are integrity and loyalty to subordinates and superiors. "Take your duties seriously, but not yourself," he told the cadets.

General Harmon passed away on February 22, 1957, just a few months before his son Kendrick graduated from West Point. The general's ashes were interred at the Air Force Academy's cemetery on September 2, 1958. On May 31, 1959, the Academy's new administration building was named Harmon Hall in his memory.

SHANNON E. FRENCH
The Code of the Warrior

You have all heard the recent news story about a Marine who may have shot an unarmed, wounded Iraqi insurgent. The question being asked is, was this war or murder? The distinction between a warrior and a murderer is not trivial one. For those whose calling is the profession of arms – for <u>you</u> – understanding this distinction is essential.

Murder is an act that is cross-culturally condemned. Whatever their other points of discord, the major religions of the world agree in the determination that murder (variously defined) is wrong. Unfortunately, the fact that we abhor murder produces a disturbing tension for those who are asked to fight wars. When you are trained for war, you are given a mandate by your society to take lives. But you must learn to take only certain lives in certain ways, at certain times, and for certain reasons. Otherwise, you may become indistinguishable from a murderer and suddenly find yourself condemned by the very society you have sacrificed so much to serve.

Warrior cultures throughout history and from diverse regions around the globe have constructed codes of behavior, based on that culture's image of the ideal warrior. These codes have not always been written down or literally codified into a set of explicit rules. A code can be hidden in the lines of epic poems or implied by the descriptions of mythic heroes. One way or another, it is carefully conveyed to each succeeding generation of warriors. These codes tend to be quite demanding. They are often closely linked to a culture's religious beliefs and can be connected to elaborate (and frequently death defying or excruciatingly painful) rituals and rites of passage, such as the Sun Dance ritual performed by Native Americans of the Plains Tribes or the Corridor of Death that separated disciples from masters among the Chinese warrior monks of Shaolin.

In many cases this code of honor seems to hold the warrior to a higher ethical standard than that required for an ordinary citizen within the general population of the society the warrior serves. But the code is not imposed from the outside. The warriors themselves police strict adherence to these standards, with violators being shamed, ostracized, or even killed by their peers. In the Roman legions, a man who fell asleep while he was supposed to be on watch, allowing an enemy to penetrate the camp, could expect to be stoned to death by the members of his own cohort.

The code of the warrior not only defines how warriors should interact with their own warrior comrades, but also how they should treat other members of their society, their enemies, and the people they conquer. The code restrains the warrior. It sets boundaries on acceptable behavior. It distinguishes honorable acts from shameful acts. Achilles must seek vengeance for the death of his friend Patroclus, yet when his rage drives him to mistreat the corpse of his arch nemesis, he angers the gods. Under the codes of chivalry, a medieval knight has to offer mercy to any knight who yields to him in battle. In feudal Japan, samurai are not permitted to approach their opponents using stealth, but rather are required to declare themselves openly before engaging in combat. Muslim warriors prosecuting an offensive *jihad* cannot employ certain weapons, such as fire, unless and until their enemies use them first.

But why do warriors need a code that ties their hands and limits their options? Why should a warrior culture want to restrict the actions of its members and require them to commit to lofty ideals? Might not such restraints cripple their effectiveness as warriors?

What's wrong with, "All's fair in love and war?" Isn't winning all that matters? Why should any warrior be burdened with concerns about honor and shame?

In fact, there are many reasons to maintain warrior's codes. The most obvious is to protect innocent lives. There has never been a war in which innocents did not die, even with warrior codes in place. When there are no codes at all, innocents – those least able to defend themselves - become easy targets for atrocity. War is hellish enough without at least some attempt to limit its scope. When the concepts of guilt and innocence become too complicated to apply, we rely instead on the distinction between combatants and noncombatants.

Not all rules of war, however, relate to the protection of those not directly involved in the conflict. Some limit how warriors can treat other warriors, such as rules about what weapons or tactics of war may be used, as well as those pertaining to the handling of surrenders, POWs, and enemy wounded and dead. Many arguments in favor of such rules are based on the notion of reciprocity with the enemy. We hope that if we treat our enemy's troops well, our own troops will receive equally good treatment. Or perhaps more often than not, we fear that if we *fail* to treat our enemy's troops well, our troops will surely become the objects of retaliation. Yet this tit-for-tat rationale is disturbingly conditional. If reciprocity is our only motive for urging our warriors to show restraint, it will quickly dissolve whenever we fight enemies who do not share our ideas of what is honorable in war.

The disciplined Romans were caught off-guard by the ferocious shock troops of the Celtic and Germanic tribesmen and responded with unspeakable brutality. The British were horrified when they first faced the hit-and-hide tactics of the colonial American militia and some responded by punishing civilians with torture and death. When white settlers moved West, they confronted native tribes who considered stealth an honorable warrior skill and did not always recognize the combatant/noncombatant distinction, while white settlers did not shrink from using biological weapons or attempting genocide against the native peoples. The Japanese claimed to be appalled by Chinese-derived ninja tactics of espionage and assassination yet exercised no restraint in terrorizing their Asian neighbors. The past offers clear warning of the danger when fighting an enemy with different values of violating one's *own* values.

When both sides in a conflict abandon all restraint, another casualty is the hope for peace. When atrocities escalate and conflicts devolve into personal hatreds, cycles of violence can span generations. If each side's violations are answered by reprisals, bringing both sides to the table to discuss terms to end the conflict becomes more and more difficult.

Even warring parties who do not care about the prospect of peace may yet be concerned enough about international opinion to exercise some restraint in their conduct of war. This potentially restraining principle is once again conditional. Not all belligerents will care about international opinion, and some will think that they can hide their actions from scrutiny. And even those nations that do concern themselves with their international images may not effectively translate that concern into appropriate leadership and discipline of the soldiers who represent them.

Within democratic nations, domestic opinion can also be a factor in encouraging warriors to exercise restraint. If public support of a conflict is required in order to sustain funding for it and if that public support depends on the perception that the war is being conducted in an honorable manner, then domestic opinion may encourage strict observation of conduct of war rules. On the other hand, concern about domestic opinion may do no more

than inspire cover-ups of any actions by members of the military that might be condemned by the general public.

All of the reasons for restraint I have mentioned thus far are in a sense external to our warriors themselves. The most compelling reason for warriors to accept restraint may be the internal moral damage they risk if they fail to do so and the serious psychological damage they may suffer. The nature of the warrior's calling places him or her in peculiar moral peril. The power to kill with impunity and possibly even to dominate entire foreign cultures could certainly corrupt character and promote hubris. Warriors need the restraint of a warrior's code to keep them from losing their humanity and their ability to enjoy a life worth living outside the realm of combat.

In the introduction to his valuable analysis of Vietnam veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*, psychiatrist Jonathan Shay stresses the importance of "understanding… the specific nature of catastrophic war experiences that not only cause lifelong disabling psychiatric symptoms but can *ruin* good character."[1] Shay has conducted countless personal interviews and therapy sessions with American combat veterans. His work has led him to the conclusion that the most severe cases of post-traumatic stress are the result of wartime experiences that are not simply violent, but which involve what Shay terms the "betrayal of 'what's right.'"[2]

Veterans who believe that they were directly or indirectly party to immoral or dishonorable behavior (perpetrated by themselves, their comrades, or their commanders) have the hardest time reclaiming their lives after the war is over. Such men may be tortured by persistent nightmares, may have trouble discerning a safe environment from a threatening one, may not be able to trust their friends, neighbors, family members, or government, and many have problems with alcohol, drugs, child or spousal abuse, depression, and suicidal tendencies. As Shay sorrowfully concludes, "The painful paradox is that fighting for one's country can render one unfit to be its citizen."[3]

Warriors need a way to distinguish what they must do out of a sense of duty from what a serial killer does for the sheer sadistic pleasure of it. Their actions, like those of the serial killer, set them apart from the rest of society. Warriors, however, are not sociopaths. They respect the values of the society in which they were raised and which they are prepared to die to protect. It is therefore imperative for them to conduct themselves in such a way that they will be honored and esteemed by their communities, not reviled and rejected by them. They want to be seen as proud defenders and representatives of what is best about their culture: as heroes, not "baby-killers."

In a sense, the nature of the warrior's profession puts him or her at a higher risk for moral corruption than most other occupations because it involves exerting power in matters of life and death. Warriors exercise the power to take or save lives, order others to take or save lives, and lead or send others to their deaths. If they take this awesome responsibility too lightly – if they lose sight of the moral significance of their actions – they risk losing their humanity and their ability to flourish in human society.

In his powerful work, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*, Lt. Col. Dave Grossman illuminates the process by which those in war and those training for war attempt to achieve emotional distance from their enemies. The practice of dehumanizing the enemy through the use of abusive or euphemistic language is a common and effective tool for increasing aggression and breaking down inhibitions against

killing. Yet this process can be taken too far. If there is excessive dehumanization of the enemy – if warriors genuinely come to believe, deep down, that their enemies are somehow less than human – the result is often lingering psychological trauma.

Like Shay, Grossman has interviewed many U.S. veterans of the Vietnam War. Grossman found that some of the men he interviewed had never truly achieved emotional distance from their former foes. Interestingly, these men seemed to be better off for having held on to their respect for the humanity of their enemies. They expressed admiration for Vietnamese culture. Some had even married Vietnamese women. Most significantly, they appeared to be leading happy and productive post-war lives. In contrast, those who persisted in viewing the Vietnamese as "less than animals" were unable to leave the war behind them.

Dr. Shay describes an intimate connection between the psychological health of the veteran and the respect he feels for those he fought. Shay stresses how important it is to the warrior to have the conviction that he participated in an *honorable* endeavor. Dr. Shay writes:

> Restoring honor to the enemy is an essential step in recovery from combat PTSD. While other things are obviously needed as well, the veteran's self-respect never fully recovers so long as he is unable to see the enemy as worthy. In the words of one of our patients, a war against subhuman vermin "has no honor."[4]

He notes that this true either in victory or defeat.

Shay finds echoes of these ideas in the words of World War II veteran J. Glenn Gray from Gray's modern classic on the experience of war, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle*. Gray brings home the agony of the warrior who has become incapable of honoring his enemies and thus is unable to find redemption himself. Gray writes:

> The ugliness of a war against an enemy conceived to be subhuman can hardly be exaggerated. There is an unredeemed quality to battle experienced under these conditions, which blunts all senses and perceptions. Traditional appeals of war are corroded by the demands of a war of extermination, where conventional rules no longer apply. For all its inhumanity, war is a profoundly human institution…. This image of the enemy as beast lessens even the satisfaction in destruction, for there is no proper regard for the worth of the object destroyed…. The joys of comradeship, keenness of perception, and sensual delights [are] lessened…. No aesthetic reconciliation with one's fate as a warrior [is] likely because no moral [reconciliation is] possible.[5]

By setting standards of behavior for themselves, accepting certain restraints, and even "honoring their enemies," warriors can create a lifeline that will allow them to pull themselves out of the hell of war and reintegrate themselves into their society, should they survive to see peace restored. A warrior's code may cover everything from the treatment of prisoners of war to oath keeping to table etiquette, but its primary purpose is to grant nobility to the warriors' profession. This allows warriors to retain both their self-respect and the respect of those they guard.

Nor is it just "boots on the ground" front-line and special forces troops who need the protection of a warrior's code. Every warrior sent into combat risks moral damage. Men and

women who fight from a distance – who drop bombs or shoot missiles from planes or ships or submarines – are also in danger of losing their humanity. What threatens them is the very ease by which they can take lives. As technology separates individuals from the results of their actions, it cheats them of the chance to absorb and reckon with the enormity of what they have done. Killing fellow human beings, even for the noblest cause, should never feel like nothing more than a game played using the latest advances in virtual reality.

In his book *Virtual War: Kosovo and Beyond*, international journalist and scholar Michael Ignatieff airs his concerns about the morality of asymmetric conflicts in which one side is able to inflict large numbers of casualties from afar without putting its own forces at much risk (for example, by relying primarily on long-range precision weapons and high-altitude air assaults). In such a mismatched fight, it may be easy for those fighting on the superior side to fail to appreciate the true costs of the war, since they are not forced to witness the death and destruction first-hand. Distance warriors may not feel the moral weight of what they do. Ignatieff warns modern warriors against the "moral danger" they face if they allow themselves to become too detached from the reality of war. He writes:

> Virtual reality is seductive. …We see war as a surgical scalpel and not a bloodstained sword. In so doing we mis-describe ourselves as we mis-describe the instruments of death. We need to stay away from such fables of self-righteous invulnerability. Only then can we get our hands dirty. Only then can we do what is right.[6]

Warriors who dehumanize their enemies by equating them with blips on a computer screen may find the sense that they are part of an honorable undertaking far too fragile to sustain. Just as societies have an obligation to treat their warriors as ends in themselves, it is important for warriors to show a similar kind of respect for the inherent worth and dignity of their opponents. Even long-distance warriors can achieve this by acknowledging that some of the "targets" they destroy are in fact human beings, not just empty statistics. The further war evolves away from armies of declared and uniformed combatants lining up across an open field, the more need for strict codes of discrimination and proportionality.

The morality of benefiting from technological advances that make it possible to kill at a greater distance has made proponents of ethical warfare nervous for centuries. Pope Urban II in 1097 outlawed the use of one of the earliest instruments of death-at-a-distance, the crossbow. In 1139 Pope Innocent II went even further, threatening anyone who used the crossbow with excommunication and condemning the weapon as, "hateful to God and unfit to be used among Christians."

It is precisely this suspicion of technology-enhanced distance warfare – the idea that it is somehow less honorable or brave than the up-close-and-personal combat of the traditional battlefield – that may have led some modern warriors to go to even greater lengths to identify themselves with a demanding warrior's code. From the first use of aerial combat, fighter pilots have self-consciously compared themselves not to foot soldiers with crossbows but to knights on horseback. They have adopted the ideals, and even the language, of chivalry.

One of these knights of the air was Sir Hugh C. T. Dowding, a fighter pilot for the Royal Air Force in World War I and strategist for the Battle of Britain in World War II. Dowding was passionately committed to maintaining the nobility of his vocation. An

incident from the First World War illustrates this plainly. Dowding's squadron brought down a German aircraft. He was then appalled to see the pilot and crewman shot while climbing out of their wrecked plane by ground troops. In an attempt to redeem what he saw as soiled British honor, Dowding gathered up the personal effects of the two dead Germans and dropped them behind enemy lines along with a note saying exactly where their bodies were buried.[7]

There was no law or international convention that required Major Dowding to go to such lengths. It was his own warrior's code that prompted him to act. He clearly believed that there must be things that honorable warriors simply do not do, regardless of the provocation.

Similar sentiments were behind a story I heard from an older gentleman who approached me after I spoke about the warrior's code to a Kiwanis Club meeting in Reisterstown, Maryland. This man, whom I will call "Dan," told me that he had been a fighter pilot in World War II in the Pacific Theater. Near the end of the war, he was commanding a squadron over Tokyo. They flew a mission near a crowded train station, where hundreds of people were desperately pushing to climb aboard trains that could take them away from the besieged city. Acting against direct orders, one member of the squadron broke formation, flew down and strafed some of the helpless Japanese civilians.

When they returned from this mission, no one in the squadron would speak to the pilot who had murdered the noncombatants. Tears filled Dan's eyes as he told me the conclusion of this sixty-year-old story: "We were all so ashamed of what he had done. He had shamed the entire squadron. He was killed in an engagement two days later. And, God help us, we were *glad*."

Warriors who retain the capacity to feel shame have not yet lost their hold on their humanity. In Homer's *Iliad*, we know that the great Achilles has crossed the line and surrendered his humanity to war when he abuses the body of his noble opponent, Prince Hector of Troy. The god Apollo describes Achilles, the former warrior, turned killer:

> His twisted mind is set on what he wants,
> As savage as a lion bristling with pride,
> Attacking men's flocks to make himself a feast.
> Achilles has lost all pity and has no shame left.
> Shame sometimes hurts men, but it helps them, too.
> … But this man? After he kills Hector,
> He ties him behind his chariot
> And drags him around his dear friend's tomb.
> Does this make him a better or nobler man?
> He should fear our wrath, good as he may be,
> For he defiles the dumb earth in his rage.[8]

When Achilles desecrates the body of Hector by dragging it behind his chariot, it is clear that Achilles has been damaged by war. Something has died inside him. He can no longer honor his enemy, so he no longer has honor himself. As Apollo says, he has lost all sense of shame. The truth of Apollo's accusation highlights the wisdom of one of the edicts found in the *Bushido* code of the Japanese samurai: "A sense of shame will uphold justice."[9]

Legend has it that when a Spartan mother sent her son off to war she would say to him, "Come back with your shield or on it." If a warrior came back without his shield, it meant that he had laid it down in order to break ranks and run from battle. He was supposed

to use his shield to protect the man next to him in formation, so to abandon his shield was not only to be a coward but also to break faith with his comrades. To come back on his shield was to be carried back mortally wounded or dead. Thus the adage meant that the young warrior should fight bravely, maintain his martial discipline, and return with his honor intact: "Death before dishonor."

The warriors' mothers who spoke this line were not heartless monsters – far from it. It was spoken from great love. They wanted their children to return with their sense of self-respect still with them, feeling justifiably proud of how they had performed under pressure, not tortured and destroyed by guilt and shame. To come back with their shields was to come back still feeling like warriors, not like cowards or murderers.

Today, as throughout history, the warriors' code is the shield that guards their humanity. Modern warriors must balance the physical risks of combat against the moral risks. And they may face enemies who will try to use their values and their commitment to a code against them. Is it worse to come home on your shield or to come home without it? It is a question you must answer for yourself. But I will leave you with the words of Seneca, a Roman Stoic:

> [I will never let concern for my] flesh drive me to fear, never to a role that is unworthy of a good man. …I will not allow any wound to penetrate through the body to the real me. My body is that part of me that can be injured; but within this fragile dwelling-place lives a soul that is free.[10]

[1] Jonathan Shay, M.D., Ph.D., *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), p. xiii.

[2] Shay p. xiii.

[3] Shay p. xx.

[4] Shay p. 115.

[5] J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), pps. 152-153.

[6] Michael Ignatieff, *Virtual War: Kosovo and Beyond* (New York: Picador USA, Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2000), pps. 214-215.

[7] Robert Wright, *The Man Who Won the Battle of Britain: Hugh C. T. Dowding* (New York: Charles Schibner's Sons, 1969).

[8] Homer*, Iliad*, trans. Stanley Lombardo (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1997), 24.45-59.

[9] See William Scott Wilson, trans., *Budoshoshinshu: The Warrior's Primer of Daidoji Yuzan* (Santa Clara, CA: O'Hara Publications, Inc., 1984).

[10] Jo-Ann Shelton, *As the Romans Did: A Source Book in Roman Social History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 435.

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