

Warriors – Ancient and Modern*

By Edward Tick

*My eyes behold all things
As fearful visitations of the gods...*

Aeschylus, *The Persians*

The bulwark

I am leading a healing journey to Greece with World War II, Korean and Vietnam War veterans and their wives. We will use both ancient warrior and Asklepiian dream incubation traditions, the origins of modern psychotherapy, for guidance and healing of modern wounds.¹

We stand at the rocky base of the towering Acropolis, Athens's bulwark, and holy center. Her patron goddess Athena's gleaming temple is high above. We are in the remains of the Asklepiion, sanctuary of the healing god founded during plague and active for centuries.² Suddenly rocks fall from above, barely missing us as they clatter on the stone walkway. We look up. Teenagers toss stones down from the height and laugh.

Some onlookers freeze or duck for cover, but short and broad John Giannini steps into the barrage. John is Italian-American, a Jungian analyst from Chicago and a World War II combat veteran. His humble size betrays his strength. He stands as if ready to take the shots from above to protect the rest of us. He looks up, points, and calls out, "Stop! This is dangerous, not a joke. This place is sacred. Athena is your goddess. No violence here. You are commanded to stop!" The youths drop their raised arms and slink away.

On her height above, Athena once had several guises. She was called *Parthenos*, maiden, the virgin goddess, and *Nike*, victory, with temples to these. Her third guise greeting every supplicant coming through her gates was the goddess's tall statue striding forward with her spear and shield at the ready. She was Athena Promachos – The Defender, the One in Front, the Bulwark, the Protector. She taught that preservation

* Chapter excerpt from *Soul Medicine: Healing through Dream Incubation, Oracles, Visions, and Pilgrimage*. Forthcoming in January 2023, by kind permission of Inner Traditions Publishing. All rights reserved.

and protection, not aggression and violence, were the true warrior values and strategy rather than aggression the best tool.

On the ground below, our group's elder, an old combat veteran, strode forward to protect us all.

On the Greek warrior tradition

The Greeks were intimate with their god-powers in every aspect of life and war was one of their premier activities. The gods were inevitably and passionately engaged in war. Blind Homer gave the world the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, epic poems of the horrors of warfare and difficulties of return. These, it has been endlessly observed, were the "bibles" of ancient Greece. Their ideals of manhood, service, honor, duty, sacrifice, reverence, fitness, intimacy with the gods and between warriors, the intensity and horrors of combat, its courage and cowardice, excitement and grief, vision and stupidity, fair fighting and atrocities, victories, losses, homecoming tragedies, and what we today call Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and Moral Injury, are all in Homer. He called war "a feast". He declared that in war the gods are in battle, choose their favorites and determine the outcome for individuals and nations. Homer sang that war is "the test that brings men honor", it is "lovelier than return", the god inspires the joy of battle, the terms of war are simply these: "To meet destruction or to come through..." He declared that loved ones at home mourn even as their relations still fight and that suffering their beloved's death is itself a death.³

The Greeks knew war's horror yet glorified it. They knew its pain and damage yet practiced it endlessly. Attacks and invasions from foes and "barbarians"⁴ sometimes united city-states to resist a common threat, yet without that foe they continuously warred against each other. They knew war's folly yet could be so possessed by the Ares spirit that they pursued it for years and drained their own lives and resources unto defeat.

The pursuit and outcome of both individual combats and entire wars were relegated to the divine sphere. It was said that Zeus determined who would triumph and who lose. This was similar to the Judaic and Norse traditions that also said their king deities determined war's outcomes. Other Greek deities played politics and favorites and influenced, altered, or intruded on these decisions. Not only Zeus but favored or offended deities determined human and national fates. The Greeks saw most of our

history as “written in the stars”, shaped by universal forces beyond our control, and largely tragic.

The ambivalence of war was built into *Olympos*. The divine company included two deities of war who demonstrated its light and dark dimensions. Athena, the goddess of war, is the protectress of civilization. She is reasonable, strategic, dispassionate, and clear-headed. She is also a goddess of arts and gifted the olive. She does not like war but uses it as a last resort when all other options for protection have failed. And she grieves its necessity and her fallen. In contrast, Homer called Ares “the god who delights in slaughter”. He is brash, brutal, raging, impassioned. He is bloodlust incarnated. He is the part of humanity that craves victory, wants to defeat, and kill, delights in taking revenge, indulges in instinctual power, and gloats over victims.

Yet the Homeric Hymn to Ares expresses ambivalence. After praising the war god’s powers, the supplicant is warned against following his call. “Restrain the keen fury of my heart which provokes me to tread the ways of blood-curdling strife.... Give you me the boldness to abide within the harmless laws of peace, avoiding strife and hatred and the violent fiends of death.”⁵ The philosopher Heraclitos taught that War and Zeus are the same, war is “father and king of all”, and all existence is brought into being through the compulsion of strife. Sophocles declared, “there is nothing here which is not Zeus.”⁶ Yet, the Greeks also taught – beware, be cautious, clear-minded, careful, reticent; do not be seduced by war’s powers.

The mythic warrior tradition was a bedrock of Greek civilization. As such, along with the Judeo-Christian and Norse traditions, it is a bedrock of Western civilization and our own. From ancient times to the present, mythic warriors were the male (and sometimes female) ideals and role models to aspire to. Mythic warriors were prayed to for support, guidance, and interventions in human affairs. They were commonly quoted and referenced. They reportedly sometimes appeared on battlefields as spirits inspiring and fighting with the Greeks. Their stories demonstrated the full journey of the warrior, often through generations, childhood, lineage, divine influences, relations with the dead, victories and defeats, war’s difficult aftermath, blessings and curses, boons, and crimes.

Even the greatest and most famous of the Greek warrior-heroes made mistakes, had blemishes, sometimes acted against the gods, customs, reason, laws. One glaring example is Achilles, the fiercest Greek warrior at Troy and most celebrated in ancient times. He tried to avoid service, did not believe in the cause, fought against his

commander, became depressed and withdrawn, only entered combat for revenge when his best friend was killed, became a berserker, and committed atrocities against the living, helpless prisoners and even corpses. Today we would say he had both PTSD and Moral Injury. Yet he was irresistible on the battlefield and killed the Trojan champion Hector who only fought to protect his home and people, appeared honorable, and did not descend into war madness.

A brief survey, only a short list of mythic warriors, shows how prevalent and important this role and model was in the ancient world. We could make a very long list of actual warriors and wars from that tradition. The myths provide us with the archetypes, ideals, values, and role models used by the living and entire civilization to nurture most men into warriorhood.

We have heard about Achilles, reluctant warrior, and berserker. And noble Hector, *promachos* for his besieged Troy, moral yet defeated. Consider these:

Agamemnon, king, and commander in chief of the Greek army at Troy, was power mad, greedy, and selfish, insulting, and insensitive to his troops, and stole their booty. He deceived his family then sacrificed his daughter for fair winds to sail his fleet to war. Upon return he was murdered by his grieving unfaithful wife and her lover. Ajax, second after Achilles of the fiercest warriors at Troy, went berserk and committed suicide after being dishonored by his comrades. The Furies were avenging spirits; we can conceive of them as the spirit of PTSD. We often see them pursuing warriors and others who have wrongly killed. Menelaus, the Greek king who lost Helen, willingly destroyed a civilization to feed his lust and revenge. Paris was the Trojan prince who ran off with Helen. He was reluctant to join the battle he caused, would not return Helen to stop the war, and stayed in his room making love with her while warriors slaughtered each other on the plains outside his windows. The Trojan women, the survivors of the sacking of Troy portrayed in Euripides's play by that name, display war's wounds and losses to women, children, lineage, city, environment, and the destruction of civilization itself. The Amazons were a tribe of fierce women warriors who demonstrate, if it is nurtured, that the feminine also carries murderous rages, strengths, and skills. Herakles, another of the greatest heroes, was strong and physically supreme but of limited awareness or intelligence and committed theft, murder, and other wrongs to achieve his ends. And there is Chiron, the wise old centaur. He was teacher and mentor of the healing god Asklepios but also of the fierce warriors Achilles, Aeneas, Perseus, Theseus, and Ajax. The greatest healer and fiercest warriors were raised by the same elder. Ambivalence again, and the eternal human dilemma – that

which heals can harm, and that which harms can heal. And the gift of tragic theater came from warriors. Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides had all been warriors, the first a front-line combatant, the other two elected generals. They all experienced serious combat and their plays created public and communal rituals for awareness, grieving, catharsis afterwards. Who, what, when, where, how and why – ultimately person, context, timing, intention, guiding values, and some form of spiritual connection make the difference.

Joseph Campbell observed, “we have been bred to one of the most brutal war mythologies of all time.”⁷ He warned that the three root traditions of Western civilization are extensively brutal, war-worshipping cultures that planted the beliefs in and practice of warfare deep in our collective psyches and histories. The Bible declares, “the Lord is a man of war... Thy right hand is glorious in power... smashes the enemy... Thou sendest forth thy fury... Terror and dread fall upon them...”⁸ The Norse tradition tells us that the god Odin was the deity of both war and death. He chose the best warriors to accompany him throughout eternity. He shot into the host of other gods to start the first war in the world.

Our ancestors placed war in the divine sphere. In our roots, war was of the divine, its victors and victims determined by God or the gods, our psyches and cultures polluted by it, and we need intensive healing practices to cleanse its impact. Heraclitus’s words that war is father and king of all thus applies to all Western root traditions. An extended meaning is that war has been father and king of civilizations for the past many thousand years.

The blessings and curses we observe in warrior myths are the challenges that every returned warrior must face, the conflicts and ambivalence reconciled, the grieves released, wounds cleansed, wrongs atoned for, and communities restored. These dimensions are in the stories; our human failures at them lead to lifelong suffering, homelessness, loss, and worse. We see that war is a universally recurring pattern of images and stories – an archetype. Warrior is the archetype of one who serves in strife. The energies and patterns of that archetype become shaped and distorted by history, country, and the ways a warrior is used in any historical epoch. Studying, immersing in, modeling their best, resisting their worst, practicing the healing rituals and art forms they used, embracing the archetypal dimensions of the role and service even if protesting one’s own conflict all contribute to war healing. When warriors travel to Greece or immerse in its tradition, they transcend the secular and national, overcome alienation, access transpersonal dimensions of service, history, and psyche, and enter an

archetypal identity that needs to be restored and a universal brother and sisterhood with the legacy and lineage of all who ever served.

Veterans embrace their warriorhood

In the marketplace

Lawrence Markworth is a Navy Vietnam veteran. He studied dreamwork in graduate school, became a dream facilitator, and uses them for healing self and others. He returned to Viet Nam with me before we traveled together to Greece.

Before our trip, Lawrence met with a past lives regression analyst. During his session he imaginably journeyed to ancient Greece and had complex visions of a past life as a warrior. He took this vision to Greece. He says,

I was the only warrior on our dream pilgrimage. At first, I was intimidated by the depth of formal training of the therapists in the group. However, my fears were quickly laid to rest as the group accepted me as a warrior and dream teacher. Upon entering the *agora*, I felt immediately and spontaneously transported back to my life as a Greek warrior. In the imaginal world of conscious dreaming, I saw myself marching off to war and returning from battle in the streets of Athens, dressed as a warrior, wearing a helmet, and carrying a shield and spear while some citizens in the marketplace offered us words of encouragement and others were silent in their respect or fear.

Lawrence found me among the agora ruins. We sat together in the old foundation of “Simon’s Workshop” where, while Simon shaped sandals Sokrates and other friends shaped their philosophical discussions. Lawrence shared his dream-vision. I suggested he spend time at the remains of the Temple of Ares, the god of war. I urged him, “commune with this god-power. Reconcile with you own service that you judge to be immoral and wrong. Reconcile with this god of war who only seeks to slaughter.”

Lawrence strode off toward the long low rectangular foundation of the god’s temple along one side of the old marketplace, covered in low flowers but unvisited. He sat in the ruins and invoked the berserker god. “I felt Ares’s rage”, he testifies, “and I prayed for relief from my rage and guilt from my service in Vietnam.” He separated Ares’s rage from his own sorrow and grief. He finally said, “this was another powerful experience of healing my warrior’s soul, of bringing my cleansed soul back to me.”

In the cemetery

Kristin Lewis is a strong, dark-haired, and dark-eyed army veteran in her forties. She served six years stateside. After separating from the military, she entered graduate school to become a marriage and family therapist. Like many returned warriors, one of her professional goals is to serve other warriors in their healing and homecoming. Like them, she was bitten.

When she decided to accompany our journey, Kristin had never traveled internationally. She wished to experience life outside the continental U.S. and, like many non-combatants, did not think of herself as a warrior. She journeyed for maturation and a search to understand and embrace her military experience.

In Athens we visit the Keramichos cemetery. It is a large ruin site near and below the Acropolis and a short walk from the agora. Though in busy downtown, it is sparsely visited. Here are massive old city walls defending the *polis*. Here was Athens's potter's section where the reedy river and earth generously provided good clay, hence the English word ceramics. Here at the city gates began the road to Eleusis from which supplicants walked nine miles to Demeter's sanctuary to initiate in the soul's immortality through the Eleusinian Mysteries. And here just outside the old walls was the warriors' cemetery. We wander among its tombs. Many are small and humble identical grave markers clustered close together on a low hill. They remind us of the endless rows of anonymous war dead under identical crosses or stars in modern military cemeteries. Beyond them are avenues of large honorific grave markers – a charging bull, a cavalryman on horseback downing an enemy, a warrior son bidding his father farewell.

Our group gathers before the gravestones. We discuss the ancient tradition – two years of training, unpaid and self-supported service until age 60, universal participation. We speak of the warrior ideal that Athena represented – preservation and protection of the home and its highest values. We conjure Perikles who spoke here and Sokrates who walked and taught here. We meditate and ask theses ancestors to teach and inspire us.

Kristin wanders the grounds in silence. She strokes the stones, speaks to warrior grave markers, contemplates the protection given by the thick city walls, walks the avenue that once led to Aristotle's school, meditates before the graves of Spartans who had once fallen in defense of Athens. She sits under an olive tree and reflects.

Kristin did not feel like she “did the real thing” that warriors must – face life-threatening danger, bullets, and blood, witness the horror. This is the proving ground, the “kill-or-be-killed situation” that for millenniums has initiated warriors. In the modern military most service people do not experience direct combat.⁹ They were not *promachos*, in the forefront. They don’t know whether they have earned the right to carry a warrior identity. Walking these grounds awakened Kristin:

Now I understand that the meaning of warriorhood does not solely exist on the front lines, touching and tasting blood and bearing witness to the loss of life. I have grown to understand that to be a warrior is to show courage and a willingness to serve and protect others, whether on the front lines, behind the lines, or even long after war has ended. My service enabled me to connect to other warriors through a common training and language. It also gave us a mutual understanding of what is given and taken in war. Now I can facilitate and support healing of the psyche, heart, and soul in these warriors who have lost so much.

What did this first journey abroad do for Kristin in resolving her identity and feelings about military service?

It awakened an awareness that I have never experienced before. I felt a kinship to the warriors who gave their lives for the land beneath my feet, as many of my brothers and sisters did for my homeland. I felt our mutual commitment to persist, never give up and never leave behind those fallen, either in body, mind, or spirit.

Sitting in the ruins and temples of Keramichos and elsewhere on our journey,

I opened my heart to messages that came to me and recognized that the wisdom of their words has always been a part of me. My journey guided me to find my voice and the path that speaks to my soul. It taught me how to help others connect to their own inner wisdom and truth in ways that bring healing, aliveness, and joy.

Our group gathers in a small olive grove in the cemetery grounds. We sit on low stone walls facing each other. Accepting her warriorhood and in honor of those who sleep here and at home, Kristin recites,

Laying in the place of eternal honor, keeping watch over their city,
 At rest as they died, together under the quiet grace of pine –
 I sit still, in contemplation, waiting to hear
 the words of my warrior brothers – Speak to me!

Vision restored

Michael Philips, “Magoo,” was a convoy truck driver in Viet Nam. He did not shoot at the foe but was often ambushed. Further, he was ordered to drive through crowds and over the bodies of anyone harmed to be sure they were dead. He wonders whether he might have killed innocent civilians. He did not feel like a combat veteran but affirmed the moral wounding that non-combatants carry from any time, place, or service.

On Crete, we traveled through rambling olive orchards and pine forests through the rugged White Mountains to Lendas, a small village built on the Libyan Sea along the remote southern coast. Its tightly packed streets with low, white-washed houses rise the hillside and meander along the coastline. In its perpetually mild climate residents grow thick juicy tomatoes, melons, and other produce all year long.

The Asklepiian healing sanctuary of Lebena is attached to the village.¹⁰ The sanctuary has scattered foundation walls and few remaining white columns standing against a fierce blue sky overlooking a small clear bay. Massive stone cliffs said to resemble lions pulling the great mother goddess’s chariot embrace the ruins. The site was active beginning in the third century BCE; patients from all over Crete and northern Africa across the sea flocked here.

Our group gathers in the most complete remaining structure – waist high walls partially surrounding a wide and foot-polished marble floor with the remains of a mosaic showing a white horse with a serpent’s tail galloping across the waves. Here in a healing sanctuary by the rugged sea we view two gods’ totems joined as one – the snake of Asklepios and the stallion of Poseidon with white mane roiling like the waves.

Our group arrives to spend the day in this sanctuary. It is surrounded by an old chain fence, unlocked early, and locked late by a local groundskeeper but otherwise unattended and open to the elements. We are the only travelers and have the grounds to ourselves.

Magoo requested to serve as priest for this visit. Debra Brown, another veteran, helped decorate Magoo in costume and make-up so that he looked like an ersatz priest practicing earth magic. Magoo lined us up. “For the first time in my life”, he said, “I want a taste of the experience medicine people and ancient priests had. I want to feel the power this brings and pass it on to you.” With incense and feathers he cleansed and blessed each of us.

We each found a private sitting spot somewhere in the baking ruins. The sun rose higher and burned hotter. Shade disappeared and we roasted. Snakes slithered past us. The silence, the sea, the mountains hummed.

The day progressed as travelers napped, meditated, prayed. Finally, the day cooled slightly as the sun began its descent. One by one we gathered again by the mosaic. “You all know that I have difficulty believing in the non-rational”, Magoo said. “After my crazy childhood and service in war, I could hardly believe in anything anymore”, he beamed. “But I had a vision. I could not have made it up. I did not know any of these images or stories before this trip.” The veteran reported, “my in-country nickname is Magoo, the old clown who can’t see clearly. But even though I don’t believe, here on Crete I have seen.”

As he meditated in a quiet corner of the sanctuary, Magoo told us, he vividly saw an ancient, bearded face. He and the face stared at each other as its body slowly appeared. It finally stood before him in full manly power. The figure was wild-haired and held a trident. Magoo recognized his vision as Poseidon, god of the sea. Poseidon looked stern, demanding, wanting something from him. Awe-struck and humbled, Magoo kept watching. A second figure appeared. It was another man, this one dressed in Native American regalia. Magoo recognized the figure as the Lakota chief, warrior, and medicine man Sitting Bull carrying a medicine pipe. Both figures looked at Magoo as on one of their chosen. He fell silent and bowed.

Debra is the African American army veteran who costumed Magoo. She also arrived in Greece as an atheist and, as an artist, alienated from her craft. But as we crossed through Crete’s central mountains, we visited the undeveloped ruins of a Minoan village on a mountaintop outside Agia Barbara. We gathered in front of cave tombs, and each took a turn lying on the stone bed on which three thousand years before Minoan bodies had been laid to slowly return to earth. We each felt our beginnings long before us and our ends approaching soon. Our civilians were uncomfortable, several got up quickly. But the warriors rested peacefully in their knowledge about mortality and the

fragility of life they had attained in service. It felt confirmed here. Then we climbed the higher slopes to wander among stone walls, streets, and foundations of the archaic Minoan village. Debra's eyes were stricken awake by the green and buff vista of distant mountains, farms and tiny villages carpeted in olive orchards and goats. She could not restrain her hands. She grabbed art materials that had been riding in her backpack. Sketchpad open, fingers and eyes working feverishly, Debra lost and found herself in the broad vision. We had to awaken her from her trance to travel on.

"I arrived with disbelief", Debra summarized, "but something else is happening to me. I now remember what I forgot in military and inner-city service and survival. What is important is that I do not obey others' demands but that I be myself and value my art." Like Magoo, she said, "I feel my top layer of defenses coming off. But now I'm different. I'm not afraid of what is coming next." Finally, Debra felt her atheism melt into faith. She challenged our group with her new life-guiding question, "how big is your *We*? I now feel the Eternal *We* that is the source of all connection and communication – and of my art. Now my challenge is to hold onto this openness when we return to the States."

Days later Crete and years later at home, Magoo often recalls his vision. "Two ancient holy ones from their land and ours came to me. Their power combined for me. There, here. Then, now. It all connected as one. These experiences combined to crack open my psychic door more than anything in my life."

On our last morning in Athens, before the group disbanded to travel home, Magoo announced that the previous night, for the first time since his war service forty-five years earlier, he had slept continuously for eight hours without nightmares and without needing, as veterans often must, to check the perimeter. He said, "I now feel an openness I don't know how to live with." His farewell message to our group and to the powers was, "I'm all in!"

Modern warriors, ancient ways

It is common for professional soldiers to visit historical battle sites, their own, American sites to connect with family and national legacies, and world sites to honor the universal brother and sisterhood. Warriors have more in common with each other around the world and throughout history than they have with civilians of their own communities. Initiation into warfare changes the character and forges the brother/sisterhood forever.

Paul Henderson, a lifer who rose in rank from a private to Lt. Col. in special forces, often visits battlefields. Sometimes, he says, it is not much more than an exercise in tactical study. “But other times I feel a deeper connection to the site and have a definite feeling I was there before. That happened to me at Gettysburg, Fredericksburg, and Thermopylae.” What can “there before” mean as many warriors declare they feel? Is it epigenetic, in the DNA? Were they there as an earlier soul in a previous reincarnation? Is it because they were initiated into the universal dimensions of warriorhood – its ultimate nature and conditions, the discovery of mortality and life’s fragility, the cost of sacrifice, the reminders of what is truly important – that they now share with warriors of all times and places? Paul explains:

The Greek soldiers were my professional ancestors – not just in the military sense but because they were defending a fledgling democracy. Like us, they were citizen soldiers who answered the call when needed. Like us, they had soldiers like the Spartans who were entirely professional soldiers who followed no other path their entire lives. Like the Athenians, there were citizen soldiers who trained and equipped themselves at their own expense and formed a formidable military force when the situation demanded it.

Paul was a member of both groups – a citizen soldier who volunteered, found he was both called and “good at it,” and became professional. He affirms, “Both groups were extraordinarily successful in winning hard battles. My military and political forefathers were all from Greece.”

Tommy Laughlin was a citizen soldier. He went to Viet Nam not because he believed in the war but because he wanted to defend and preserve core democratic values. “I was in Viet Nam protecting the freedom of speech of the protestors who were against what I was doing.” He realized in country that the war was immoral, and his values transcended our national agenda.¹¹ Like an ancient he declares, “I owe my loyalty to the citizenry I truly serve, not to the military or commander in chief.”

Tommy originally joined the army not to fight but, instead of college, as a way a poor young man might travel to Europe to visit museums and ruins. He did not accomplish that during the sixties and the war wounded his soul such that he turned deeply inward and isolated. Our journey to Greece was his completion of that dream.

Paul led our group in holotropic breathwork in the Cave of the Muses. There Tommy experienced a dream/vision in which he “visited the Underworld without dying.” It

was a miniature experience replicating Odysseus's descent to *Hades* that was necessary for him to receive instruction on how to return home. "It was an adventure, not an ending", Tommy said. And he saw "a light that shines on everything. It will take me thirty years to realize this revelation."

As an alienated returned veteran in America, his strongest mythological identification is with Cassandra, the Trojan priestess of Apollo. "Like her I can witness to the horrible realities of war and what is coming, but nobody believes me."

Tommy had a "big dream" during which he had another Underworld journey. In his dream he traveled to Hades. The entrance was a large stone sphincter. Veterans called combat "being in the shit." At the dream stone Tommy felt chills and nausea and like Odysseus fled to the light. Tommy finally was able to declare, "I am not going back. I am no longer in the shit."

In recent times, in dreams, meditations and under the influence of anesthesia, rather than being back in the flying bullets and enmity of the combat zone, Tommy imaginably returns to the sites we visited. Now, he says, "I have memories so strong they are like flashbacks." The toxic images that inhabited his psyche for decades have been replaced by these visions of the ancient world and his place in it.

"Go tell the Spartans..."

Again, my group drives north from Delphi into the mountains. We head toward Thermopylae where in 480 BCE the Spartans resisted the Persian invasion to the last man. Thermopylae means "Hot Gates." It is named for the hot springs bubbling out of the earth there that in ancient times was considered an entryway to the Underworld. The thousands of warriors who fought there also left there for the dark region.

In classical times the sea ran up against the ranging mountains to the sole narrow pass that allows penetration into the mainland. Here not only the 300 Spartans, but the combined forces of Lacedaemonians, Thebans, and Thespians, originally about 1,400, blockaded and for three days held off Xerxes's invading army of over 100,000 cavalry, infantry, and archers. The Persians had vast numbers, but the Greeks held the narrow strategic pass and had the fierce motivation, critical in war, that they were defending their homeland against domineering invaders who would rob their precious freedom.

I have brought previous groups with World War II, Korean and Viet Nam veterans to this site. This journey Paul, Tommy and Canadian warrior guide Susan Raby-Dunne

are with us. About an hour drive out of Arachova or Delfi, halfway between to the Hot Gates and outside the village of Gravia, we come upon the WWI Bralo Military Cemetery. This British cemetery was used between 1917 and 1919 and contains over 100 graves, most of them British.

We park outside the open metal gates squeezed between a handsome stone wall. Mountains surround us on this lush green plain. Graves are arranged in neat rows, as in military formation. Each grave has generous space with low shrubbery sprouting between. We wander, contemplate, read names, groan as we hear of distant places these troops hailed from. Graves of a few former foes lie with their British counterparts. We are stricken into silence by the beauty and sublimity of this well-tended resting place for fallen soldiers a long way from home.

Tommy wanders alone. His tall frame bends over the low plaques as he recites names of the fallen. His head droops. He does not moan or shout. Tears leak from his eyes down his grizzled cheeks. Susan walks to his side and offers silent support. He sobs for a time, not specifically for these victims he never knew, nor for his losses in Viet Nam, but for all the victims of all the illusions of all the wars. "Until this moment", he says afterwards, "I did not know I carried this deep well of grief and I did not realize how helpless I feel before such enormity of waste and loss."

We continue our drive north to Thermopylae. We arrive at the silted plain that used to be sea. The highway now splits the land where the entrance to the valley once opened. On the north is a great statue of the Spartan warrior-king Leonidas who led the Greeks in fulfillment of a Delphic oracle that said a king must fall in order that Greece would be saved. This statue is a tall modern bronze with spear raised, his back to the sea and face toward the valley where he and his comrades fought. It was a gift of the Truman Administration honoring and strengthening Greece after World War II and against the Communists during their civil war.

We pay homage before the statue, then cross the highway to climb the low, rugged, tree covered Kolonos Hill. There, on the final day of battle, Leonidas dismissed most of the surviving Greek defenders and with the Spartans made their last stand. They are buried in a single grave mound on that hill, fulfilling the ancient practice that it is the greatest honor to bury a warrior on the spot where he fell.

We spend time in silence. Some of our group descend into the valley to walk the land where the struggle occurred. We discuss the meaning of sacrifice, remember the word means "to make sacred through the spilling of blood", and ask who among us in any

way had had to make such a sacrifice and for what? We name warriors we knew who fell in honor or without it. Then we light incense, pass wine, and toast the long and recently fallen with the Greek prayer, “may their memory be eternal.”

Tommy and Paul rise. They stand together at attention. They march slowly forward and stand before the wide round grave marker with Simonides’s memorial poem etched into a bronze plaque astride it:

Go tell the Spartans, stranger passing by
That here, obedient to their laws, we lie.

Paul, the officer present, calls them to attention as the rest of us stand erect behind them. At his order aging warriors Paul and Tommy give a long, crisp, sharp salute, hold it, then drop arms and slowly rejoin the group.

The warriors both declare that they wish they had been here with the Spartans rather than with Americans in Viet Nam. They explain that the Spartans had everything warriors need. They were trained and prepared for their entire lives. Their people fully backed and supported them. They had tried every means to avoid warfare through diplomacy. Only when that failed, and war was their last resort did they march off. They were not invading other countries, but their action was necessary to delay a foreign invasion. They were honored by their people then and by the world for all time. And rather than aggressive, greedy, or superfluous, their actions are judged by history as heroic, sadly necessary, and honorable. Paul and Tommy agreed; the Spartans had all those qualities warriors need and as American Viet Nam veterans they had none. Finally, Paul declares, “this place is the Holy of Holies.”

¹ For the full presentation of this tradition and its modern use, see Edward Tick, *The Practice of Dream Healing: Bringing Ancient Greek Mysteries Into Modern Medicine* (Wheaton IL: Quest Books, 2001).

² For the full presentation of this healing sanctuary see Edward Tick, *Dream Healing*, 77-86.

³ All quotes are from Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (Garden City: Doubleday, 1974).

⁴ “Barbarian” comes from the ancient Greeks who called the Persian invaders *barbaros* after their language that sounded strange, primitive, and unrefined to their ears.

⁵ “To Ares,” Hesiod, *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1977), 435.

⁶ Sophocles, *The Women of Trachis*, trans. Michael Jameson, *Complete Greek Tragedies*, Vol. 2, *Sophocles*, lines 1276-77.

⁷ Joseph Campbell, *Myths to Live By*, 181.

⁸ *Exodus* 15:3, 6-7, 16

⁹ The modern military is so complex, technological, bureaucratic, huge, and spread all over the world such that it is estimated that it takes at least 7 or 8 troops in background services and supplies to support each combat soldier. Universal training in the killing arts is accurate but universal exposure to combat in military service is far from the truth. The conflict of who deserves warrior status is thus built into our modern military and is a source of deep confusion and anguish for many veterans.

¹⁰ For a full presentation of the history and therapeutics at this site and my use of it in modern times, see Tick, *The Practice of Dream Healing*, Chapter 19, 205-216.

¹¹ Part of Tommy's story, including his experience and poetry shared at Mycenane, is told in Tick, *Warrior's Return*, p. 238-240, 249-51.