



## Honoring the “blooded” soldiers among us

*“ ... soldiers who have been blooded are soldiers forever. ... Even when they finally settle down, the settling is tenuous, for when they close their eyes they see their comrades who have fallen. That they cannot forget, that they do not forget, is their way of expressing their love for friends who have perished.”*

“A Soldier of the Great War”  
Mark Helprin

For all soldiers blooded in battle who scanned Mark Helprin’s lines above and immediately saw in your mind’s eye “comrades who have fallen,” God bless you in both your service to America and in your remembering “friends who have perished” in combat.

And God bless all the families who on this day recall their loved ones who have fallen. There is a most special remembering and memorializing on this day and all days.

Likewise, for the “blooded” soldiers among us, those who have survived combat.

We who have *not* experienced combat can only assume that Mr. Helprin’s lines convey something of the experience of combat veterans in all times and places. What that means for us on this special day of memory is that those who have experienced the blood and death of combat see and remember the fallen in ways we cannot.

Yes, we can imagine vividly what battle must be like. We’ve seen footage from The Great War, World War II, Vietnam, Korea, Iraq. Every June 6<sup>th</sup>, the anniversary of D-Day, we see again the scenes of soldiers landing on the beaches, young men falling everywhere, and we wonder, “How in the world did they do it?”

Aside from video of the real thing, novels and movies and documentaries and histories show us something of what combat is like. We’ve seen the carnage and chaos of the beach scenes in “Saving Private Ryan,” in “Platoon,” in scores of movies about the island battles in the Pacific or across Europe. Likewise for battle scenes in novels: the blood at Gettysburg in *Killer Angels*, at Waterloo in *Les Miserables*, or Borodino in *War and Peace*, or in Helprin’s, *A Soldier of the Great War*.

But however graphic and powerful these are, however much they give us a frightening mosaic of combat, we are not foolish enough to believe they show us the real thing: the experience of battle in its full-blooded fury and fear and courage in the face of death, with friends dying, friends who have become blood brothers.

As a writer of some consequence put it: “We few, we happy few, we band of brothers. For he today who sheds his blood with me shall be my brother.” Again, we can sense something of the strength of the bands that form between soldiers in combat. But that is all. We, the uninitiated, can not know it. We certainly do not know what it is like to see those bands severed in the blood of combat and then preserved in memory.

So on this day of remembrance, even as we all celebrate and memorialize together, we who have never been in combat recognize that there is a gap between blooded soldiers and ourselves that we cannot cross: Blooded soldiers will see and remember the fallen in ways we cannot.

As a duty of citizenship and an expression of plain human decency, we remember the fallen in our own ways, honoring and loving ways. We call to mind what we owe them. But whatever we do this day, we see a blooded soldier’s remembrance and memorializing reaching beyond what we ourselves can offer.

This itself calls for us to honor the blooded soldiers among us: We honor you for not forgetting your friends who have fallen. We honor you for closing your eyes and seeing not some abstract idea about combat, but specific men in a specific time and place who you knew.

We honor you for this as we as we honor all those who have fallen.  
God bless you and the fallen.

And we offer a special prayer for families who this day remember their own loved ones who died in combat, especially those families for whom the wounds are still fresh.

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