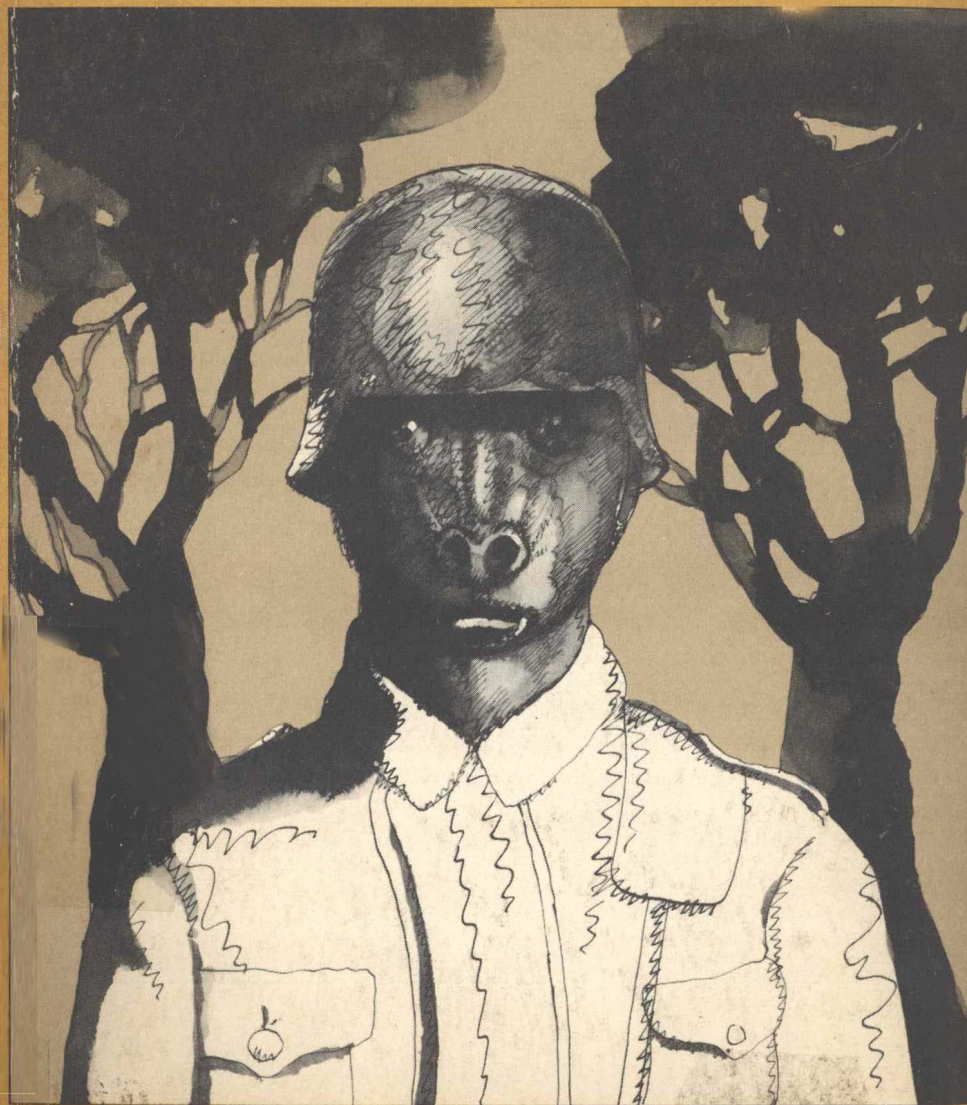


The Warriors

Reflections on Men in Battle

J. Glenn Gray

Introduction by Hannah Arendt



THE WARRIORS

Reflections on Men in Battle

J. GLENN GRAY

Harper &
New York, Evanston and London

TO URSULA, MY WIFE,
FORMERLY ONE OF "THE ENEMY"

THE WARRIORS

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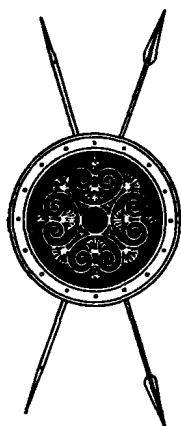
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*"It is quite in keeping with man's
curious intellectual history that
the simplest and most important
questions are those he asks least often."*

—NORMAN ANGELL



INTRODUCTION
TO THE
TORCHBOOK EDITION

HANNAH ARENDT

Something strange and disquieting happened to this book when it was published seven years ago. As a rule, very good books don't go unnoticed, just as we hope that only very bad books end up on the junk piles in editorial offices. To be sure, almost everything imaginable can and does happen to the majority of printed matter which must fall between such extremes—neglect, *succes d'estime*, best-seller list; and since this could hardly be otherwise in view of the flood of publications which, year in and year out, deluge critics and readers alike, much depends upon this rule for the presence of a minimum of standards and intellectual integrity in the general climate of our culture. But exceptions prove the rule, and when we see that Glenn Gray's

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The Warriors is among them, we can only pray that they may be rare. The book was almost entirely overlooked when it first appeared, and yet, by force of sheer availability on the market, it has acquired, slowly and surely, its own circle of not just admirers but lovers, a group of readers in very different walks of life who cherished it as a triumph of personal discovery and, perhaps for this very personal reason, began to think of its author in terms of affinity, closeness and affection, which are very rarely felt even in the presence of masterpieces. So let us console ourselves with the hope that such fraternal welcome, unmediated by critical and public opinion, awaits those authors who, for one reason or another, have not been sucked into the dubious mainstream of notoriety.

Moreover, with regard to this book, there is something oddly appropriate to its slow and intimate success. The author, an intelligence officer during the second World War, tells what he experienced and learnt during more than four years of battle and enemy occupation; and since this particular warrior, of whom a friend even then had "thought as *the soldier*," happened to be a philosopher (he received, ironically enough, his induction notice into the Army with the same mail that brought him his doctorate from Columbia University) it took him fourteen years of remembrance and reflection to understand and come to terms with what had happened in these four years. This much time was needed to learn "simplicity" and to unlearn "the simplification of abstract thinking," to become fluent in the art and the language of "concrete" thoughts and feelings, and thus to comprehend that both abstract notions and abstract emotions are not merely false to what actually happens but are viciously interconnected; for "abstract thinking is strictly comparable to the inhumanity of abstract emotions," the love and hatred of collectives—my own people, *the enemy*, especially in wartime,

or, finally and in a mood of disillusionment, either hatred of or blind allegiance to "mankind collectively [which] is doubtless as predisposed to injustice as nations are."

Hence, the first lesson to be learned on the battlefield was that the closer you were to the enemy, the less did you hate him—"a civilian far removed from the battle area is nearly certain to be more bloodthirsty than the front-line soldier," unless, of course, the soldier happens to be a killer, and only pacifists who hold abstract notions and emotions about war will mistake the one for the other. Thus, "soldiers who cherished concrete emotions found the moral atmosphere at the front so much more endurable than in rear areas that they willingly accepted the greater strain and personal danger of combat." These soldiers became our author's spiritual brothers for they, too, would agree that Nietzsche was "surely right" when he wrote: "'Rather perish than hate and fear, and twice rather perish than make oneself hated and feared.'" And the second lesson was that no ism, not nationalism and not even patriotism, no emotion in which men can be indoctrinated and then manipulated, but only comradeship, the "loyalty to the group is the essence of fighting morale." This self-taught concreteness, an unswerving fidelity to the real, as difficult to achieve for the philosopher, whose formal education had been abstract thought, as for the common run of men who indulge in no less abstract feelings and emotions, is the hallmark of this singularly earnest and beautiful book.

What must strike the reader to begin with in a book about war is its peculiar stillness, the softly reflecting tone of this voice that never teaches or preaches but tells in the greatest modesty what the author remembers. The remembrance begins on the first page; after fourteen years, Gray has begun to re-read his war journals and letters. This sets the scene. He finds

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them "sad and laughable and strange" as they remind him of Plato's description of the people in limbo at the end of *The Republic*. But they also make him aware of how much he has forgotten, of an "absence of continuity between those years and what I have become," and now he is afraid "to continue to forget" since such oblivion might indeed confirm "the deepest fear of my war years . . . that these happenings had no real purpose," that they "might well signify nothing or nothing much." This fear, he confesses, "is still with me." From which we may conclude that he never forgot but that only now the time had come to tell.

Surprisingly enough—as though he did not know how much what he has to tell would go against the grain of fashionable convictions and modern sensibilities in these matters—he begins his tale with "the enduring appeals of battle:" the "confraternity of danger;" the "powerful fascination" of the "spectacular;" the "poignancy and intensity" of life in the face of death, for "just as the bliss of erotic love is conditioned by its transiency, so life is sweet because of the threats of death that envelop it;" the "lightheartedness" that comes from being "liberated from our individual impotence and [getting] drunk with the power that union with our fellows brings," a feeling akin to intense aesthetic pleasure when we are so absorbed by its objects that our "ego deserts us" and we feel no longer "shut up within the walls of the self and delivered over to the insufficiencies of the ego;" finally, the wondrous "compulsiveness" of love in wartime when "it falls upon us 'like a mountain wind upon an oak, shaking us leaf and bough,' in the striking simile of the poet Sappho." Gray sums up these enduring appeals, quoting General Robert E. Lee's remark, "It is well that war is so terrible—we would grow too fond of it," in the word "ecstasy" that occurs again and again; for what all these experiences have

in common is that men are literally standing, or rather thrown, outside their selves, whether their "I" passes insensibly into a 'we' " or they feel so much "part of this circling world", so much alive that, in seeming paradox, death no longer matters to them. It is easy to agree that erotic love is of such an ecstatic nature, but the point of the matter is that comradeship is too, and that friendship is not just a more intense form of comradeship but its very opposite: "While comradeship wants to break down the walls of self, friendship seeks to expand these walls and keep them intact. The one relationship is ecstatic, the other is wholly individual," the one is amoral (not immoral), the other guided by moral responsibility. But since all morality depends upon self-awareness, and hence a certain amount of self-love, self-sacrifice is inspired by comradeship rather than by friendship; for "friendship makes life doubly dear," and the "unendurable fear that grips friends on the battlefield is at the farthest remove from the recklessness of the soldier-killer" and of the "love for self-sacrifice" which, as we well know, can be aroused with equal ease for good and bad causes.

Re-reading the book, one is tempted to quote endlessly and thus deprive the reader of his own discoveries and the great pleasure that goes with them. On the surface of it, this is a book about *homo furens* and *homo sapiens*, but in fact it is about life and death, love, friendship, and comradeship, about courage and recklessness, about sensuality and the "surge of vitality", about "inhuman cruelty" and "superhuman kindness," not as stereotype opposites but as simultaneously present in the same person, (for "war compresses the greatest opposites into the smallest space and the shortest time," that is its greatest fascination), and at the end about conscience, the very opposite of ecstasy, since conscience means "to set oneself against others and with one stroke lose their comforting presence." To be sure,

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these are no more nor less than the elementary data of human existence but "unless human beings are pushed to the extreme, we are not so likely to confront simple and primal realities," or to reflect about them.

Opposition to war comes easy today and for Glenn Gray it is a matter of course. It did not need Hiroshima and Nagasaki nor the fact that even in World War II more civilians were killed than soldiers in combat to teach him "the ache of guilt" which to his great surprise has been almost totally neglected in contemporary novels that deal so freely with every other agony of combat. Among the great merits of the book is that it makes opposition to war forceful and convincing by not denying the realities and by not just warning us but making us understand why "there is in many today as great a fear of a sterile and unexciting peace as of a great war." And to make his point, he tells the story of a Frenchwoman whom he had known in the years of dangers and sufferings and then met again in peace and comfortable circumstance. She said: "Anything is better than to have nothing at all happen day after day. You know that I do not love war or want it to return. But at least it made me feel alive, as I have not felt alive before or since." Gray comments: "Peace exposed a void in them that war's excitement had enabled them to keep covered up," and he warns of the "emptiness within us," of the exultation of those who feel bound "to something greater than the self." Could boredom be more terrifying than all of war's terrors?

The book, in its undemonstrative subdued fashion, turns about a little episode that happened in the hills of the Apennines. There, not too far away from the front lines, he had encountered an old man, illiterate and apparently a hermit, who was peacefully smoking his pipe in the neighborhood of no

living being except his donkey. The soldier was immediately welcomed beside him on the grass because it turned out that the old man was greatly mystified by the din and dust of battle which could be seen in the distance; he did not know that a war was going on. This was strange enough. But it was stranger that the two men, the soldier and the hermit, "began to talk at once of important things as naturally as if we knew one another well." Here our author was again confronted with "simple and primal realities," but now far away from the exultation of war and the extremities of battle, in "peaceableness and sanity," where the "familiar and the evident" seemed no longer remote because two men could share, outside, so to speak, of history, their concern about "the important questions: Who am I? Why am I? What is my function in life?" This was fraternity, and it was possible because one of them, the old man and hermit, was blessed with "the gift of simplicity" and the other, soldier and philosopher, had been stripped of his normal sophistications, of all that is subtly false in what we teach and learn. For this is what had happened: "The professors who had taught me philosophy and for whom I had had great respect and esteem became all at once puny in my imagination. . . . Even the great thinkers of Western civilization seemed suddenly to lose their stature and become only human beings. . . . Their wisdom was almost grotesquely inadequate for the occasion." No such wisdom could be expected from the illiterate peasant beside him on the grass; his company was not inadequate. Both were outside civilization, outside tradition and culture, the soldier because war had thrown him into one of those lonely foxholes with nothing to keep him company but "watching the stars at night," the hermit because it was "as though he had sprung from nature herself . . . her authentic child;" so the one had unlearned and the other never

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possessed "the arrogance" that makes men "exaggerate the significance of the human story in relation to the rest of nature's household."

The book concludes as it should with reflections about "the future of war" and the prospects for "eternal peace." Rejecting optimism and pessimism as equally "irrelevant" and convinced that "peace will never occur as a consequence of weakness, exhaustion, or fear," he hopes that the day will come when the strong and the mighty—"a people distinguished by wars and victories," in the words of Nietzsche, quoted by the author—will "break the sword" because they can afford to say "that men ought to choose death twice in preference to being feared and hated" and that "survival without integrity of conscience is worse than perishing outright." Nowhere perhaps than in these passages does one understand better that Glenn Gray's friend thought of him as "*the soldier*." For they express but the last and, under today's circumstances, inevitable conclusions of the soldier's basic credo—that life is *not* the highest good.

New York, February, 1966

A NOTE TO THE READER

Since much of the material for this book is drawn from my experience in World War II, it is best to set down here a brief record of my military service. I was inducted into the Army as a private on May 8, 1941, having received my "greetings from the President" in the same mail that brought word from Columbia University that my doctorate in philosophy was conferred. On October 28, 1945, I was honorably discharged as a second lieutenant, a battlefield commission having been granted me in December 1944 at Strassburg, France. These four years of service covered nearly a year in an armored division, over a year in Washington, D.C., as an agent of the Counter Intelligence Corps, and not quite two years overseas in the European Theater of Operations. At the end of 1943, I was sent to Africa to join an infantry division en route to the Italian front. As a member of the counter-intelligence unit I participated in the Italian campaign, the invasion of southern France, and the campaign in middle Europe until the end of the war, being, in the process, attached successively to three infantry divisions. The responsibility of our unit was the safeguarding of troops against spies and saboteurs which the enemy might send across the front or leave behind among the civilian population.

The nature of our task demanded an unusual amount of freedom and mobility. Because we worked constantly with civilians in Italy, France, and Germany, it was possible to observe the effects of war on the native populations as well as on our own soldiers. An addi-

tional year in educational reconstruction after the close of the war gave me opportunity to observe postwar reactions in shattered Europe.

The book was largely written during a recent year in Germany, made possible for my family and me by generous fellowships from the Fulbright Commission and the Ford Foundation. This year of leisure afforded me a new chance for long talks about the war in the perspective of a decade with Germans from all walks of life. They ranged from General Hans Speidel, Rommel's former chief of staff, to Hitler Youth recruits of the last days of the war; from nonmilitary men and women, students, housewives, ministers, to survivors of the July 20 revolt against Hitler. Despite the fact that we had fought each other not long before, as individuals and nations, it was possible to discuss the past with little rancor or distrust, one of the most curious phenomena of human relations.

During this year, my reading in German war literature extended from von Clausewitz to contemporary novels, memoirs, letters, and personal accounts of World War II, much of it as yet unknown in America. For several years I have studied widely, if unsystematically, comparable writings of our own tradition and of Britain, France, and Russia. Though comparatively little of it is cited in the following pages, I should not want to minimize the effect of this reading in correcting and expanding my own experience of warfare. It is only because the intention and the aim of my book are so different that I was able to make little direct use of this literature, but I am no less indebted to it as background.

For critical reading of the manuscript and for friendly encouragement, I wish to express my gratitude to Mrs. Lillian McCue, Professor William Hochman, and Dr. Ellsworth Mason. Professors Frank Krutzke and Lewis Pino have been wise counselors in the practical matter of finding the proper publisher.

J. GLENN GRAY

Colorado College

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