

November 11, Veterans' Day: Valor, Remembrance, and Complicity

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[War is a Crime](#) 5 November 2014

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November 11th in the United States is marked and marred by a holiday that relatively recently had its name changed to "Veterans Day" and its purpose converted and perverted into celebrating war.

This year a [Upload/Insert "Concert for Valor"](#) will be held on the National Mall in Washington, D.C.

In the box below is a blurb from the concert website. "Thank you for your service" and "Support the troops" are phrases used to get people to support wars without thinking about whether they should be supporting wars. Notice that you're supposed to thank veterans first and ask them which war they were in and what they did in it afterwards. What if you oppose war? Or what if you oppose some wars and some tactics?

"Thank you for your service" is not a conversation, but it's a start. Keep it going. Ask him where he served. Ask her what she did in the military. Listen, learn and, most importantly, ask: "What's next?"

Here's the [disgusted response](#) to the Concert for Valor from a veteran who's sick of being thanked for his so-called service:

"There is no question that we should honor people who fight for justice and liberty. Many veterans enlisted in the military thinking that they were indeed serving a noble cause, and it's no lie to say that they fought with valor for their brothers and sisters to their left and right. Unfortunately, good intentions at this stage are no substitute for good politics. The war on terror is going into its 14th year. If you really want to talk about "awareness raising," it's years past the time when anyone here should be able to pretend that our 18-year-olds are going off to kill and die for good reason. How about a couple of concerts to make that point?"

I'm going to repeat here something I said in [War Is A Lie](#):

Random House defines a hero as follows (and defines heroine the same way, substituting "woman" for "man"):

"1. a man of distinguished courage or ability, admired for his brave deeds and

noble qualities.

"2. a person who, in the opinion of others, has heroic qualities or has performed a heroic act and is regarded as a model or ideal: He was a local hero when he saved the drowning child. . . .

"4. Classical Mythology.

"a. a being of godlike prowess and beneficence who often came to be honored as a divinity."

Courage or ability. Brave deeds and noble qualities. There is something more here than merely courage and bravery, merely facing up to fear and danger. But what? A hero is regarded as a model or ideal. Clearly someone who bravely jumped out a 20-story window would not meet that definition, even if their bravery was as brave as brave could be. Clearly heroism must require bravery of a sort that people regard as a model for themselves and others. It must include prowess and beneficence. That is, the bravery can't just be bravery; it must also be good and kind. Jumping out a window does not qualify. The question, then, is whether killing and dying in wars should qualify as good and kind. Nobody doubts that it's courageous and brave. But is it as good a model as that of the man arrested this week for the crime of [giving food to the hungry](#)?

If you look up "bravery" in the dictionary, by the way, you'll find "courage" and "valor." Ambrose Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary* defines "valor" as

"a soldierly compound of vanity, duty, and the gambler's hope.

'Why have you halted?' roared the commander of a division at Chickamauga, who had ordered a charge: 'move forward, sir, at once.'

'General,' said the commander of the delinquent brigade, 'I am persuaded that any further display of valor by my troops will bring them into collision with the enemy.'"



But would such valor be good and kind or destructive and foolhardy? Bierce had himself been a Union soldier at Chickamauga and had come away disgusted. Many years later, when it had become possible to publish stories

about the Civil War that didn't glow with the holy glory of militarism, Bierce published a story called "Chickamauga" in 1889 in the *San Francisco Examiner* that makes participating in such a battle appear the most grotesquely evil and horrifying deed one could ever do. Many soldiers have since told similar tales.

It's curious that war, something consistently recounted as ugly and horrible, should qualify its participants for glory. Of course, the glory doesn't last. Mentally disturbed veterans are kicked aside in our society. In fact, in dozens of cases documented between 2007 and 2010, soldiers who had been deemed physically and psychologically fit and welcomed into the military, performed "honorably," and had no recorded history of psychological problems. Then, upon being wounded, the same formerly healthy soldiers were diagnosed with a pre-existing personality disorder, discharged, and denied treatment for their wounds. One soldier was locked in a closet until he agreed to sign a statement that he had a pre-existing disorder — a procedure the Chairman of the House Veterans Affairs Committee called "torture."

Active duty troops, the real ones, are not treated by the military or society with particular reverence or respect. But the mythical, generic "troop" is a secular saint purely because of his or her willingness to rush off and die in the very same sort of mindless murderous orgy that ants regularly engage in. Yes, ants. Those teeny little pests with brains the size of . . . well, the size of something smaller than an ant: they wage war. And they're better at it than we are.

Ants wage long and complex wars with extensive organization and unmatched determination, or what we might call "valor." They are absolutely loyal to the cause in a way that no patriotic humans can match: "It'd be like having an American flag tattooed to you at birth," ecologist and photojournalist Mark Moffett told *Wired* magazine. Ants will kill other ants without flinching. Ants will make the "ultimate sacrifice" with no hesitation. Ants will proceed with their mission rather than stop to help a wounded warrior.

The ants who go to the front, where they kill and die first, are the smallest and weakest ones. They are sacrificed as part of a winning strategy. "In some ant armies, there can be millions of expendable troops sweeping forward in a dense swarm that's up to 100 feet wide." In one of Moffett's photos, which shows "the marauder ant in Malaysia, several of the weak ants are being sliced in half by a larger enemy termite with black, scissor-like jaws." What would Pericles say at their funeral?

"According to Moffett, we might actually learn a thing or two from how ants wage war. For one, ant armies operate with precise organization despite a lack of central command." And no wars would be complete without some lying: "Like humans, ants can try to outwit foes with cheats and lies." In another photo, "two ants face off in an effort to prove their superiority — which, in this ant species, is designated by physical height. But the wily ant on the right is standing on a pebble to gain a solid inch over his nemesis." Would honest Abe approve?

In fact, ants are such dedicated warriors that they can even fight civil wars that make that little skirmish between the North and South look like touch football. A parasitic wasp, *Ichneumon eumerus*, can dose an ant nest with a chemical secretion that causes the ants to fight a civil war, half the nest against the other half. Imagine if we had such a drug for humans, a sort of a prescription-strength Fox News. If we dosed the nation, would all the

resulting warriors be heroes or just half of them? Are the ants heroes? And if they are not, is it because of what they are doing or purely because of what they are thinking about what they are doing? And what if the drug makes them think they are risking their lives for the benefit of future life on earth or to keep the anthill safe for democracy?

Here ends the [War Is A Lie](#) excerpt. Are ants too hard to relate to? What about children. What if a teacher persuaded a bunch of 8 years olds, rather than 18 year olds to fight and kill and risk dying for a supposedly great and noble cause? Wouldn't the teacher be a criminal guilty of mass-murder? And what about everyone else complicit in a process of preparing the children for war — including perhaps uniformed and be-medalled officers coming into Kindergartens, as in fact happens in reality? Isn't the difference with 18 year olds that we have a tendency to hold them responsible, at least in part, as well as whoever instigates the killing spree? Whether we should or not need not be decided, for us to decide to treat veterans with humanity while utterly rejecting any celebration of what they've done.

Here's CODEPINK [planning](#) a protest of the Concert for Valor. I urge you to join in.

I also encourage you to keep in mind and spread understanding of the history of November 11th. Again, I'm going to repeat, and modify, something I've said in a previous November:

Ninety-six years ago on the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month of 1918, fighting ceased in the "war to end all wars." The war brought a new scale of death, the flu, prohibition, the Espionage Act, the foundations of World War II, the crushing of progressive political movements, the institution of flag worship, the beginning of pledges of allegiance in schools and the national anthem at sporting events. It brought everything but peace.

Thirty million soldiers had been killed or wounded and another seven million had been taken captive during World War I. Never before had people witnessed such industrialized slaughter, with tens of thousands falling in a day to machine guns and poison gas. After the war, more and more truth began to overtake the lies, but whether people still believed or now resented the pro-war propaganda, virtually every person in the United States wanted to see no more of war ever again. Posters of Jesus shooting at Germans were left behind as the churches along with everyone else now said that war was wrong. Al Jolson wrote in 1920 to President Harding:

"The weary world is waiting for
Peace forevermore
So take away the gun
From every mother's son
And put an end to war."

Congress passed an Armistice Day resolution calling for "exercises designed to perpetuate peace through good will and mutual understanding ... inviting the people of the United States to observe the day in schools and churches with appropriate ceremonies of friendly relations with all other peoples." Later, Congress added that November 11th was to be "a day dedicated to the cause of world peace."

While the ending of warfare was celebrated every November 11th, veterans were treated no better than they are today. When 17,000 veterans plus their families and friends marched on Washington in 1932 to demand their bonuses, Douglas MacArthur, George Patton, Dwight Eisenhower, and other heroes of the next big war to come attacked the veterans, including

by engaging in that greatest of evils with which Saddam Hussein would be endlessly charged: “using chemical weapons on their own people.” The weapons they used, just like Hussein’s, originated in the U.S. of A.

It was only after another war, an even worse war, a war that has in many ways never ended to this day, that Congress, following still another now forgotten war — this one on Korea — changed the name of Armistice Day to Veterans Day on June 1, 1954. And it was six-and-a-half years later that Eisenhower warned us that the military industrial complex would completely corrupt our society.

Veterans Day is no longer, for most people, a day to cheer the elimination of war or even [to aspire to its abolition](#). Veterans Day is not even a day on which to mourn or to question why suicide is the top killer of U.S. troops or why so many veterans have no houses at all in a nation in which one high-tech robber baron monopolist is hoarding \$66 billion, and 400 of his closest friends have more money than half the country. It’s not even a day to honestly, if sadistically, celebrate the fact that virtually all the victims of U.S. wars are non-Americans, that our so-called wars have become one-sided slaughters. Instead, it is a day on which to believe that war is beautiful and good. Towns and cities and corporations and sports leagues call it “military appreciation day” or “troop appreciation week” or “genocide glorification month.” OK, I made up that last one. Just checking if you’re paying attention.

Veterans For Peace has created a new tradition in recent years of returning to the celebration of Armistice Day. They even offer [a tool kit so you can do the same](#).



In the UK, Veterans For Peace are marking what is still called Remembrance Day, and [Remembrance Sunday](#) on November 9th, with white poppies and peace banners in opposition to the British government’s pro-war slant on remembering World War I.

In North Carolina, a veteran has come up with his own way of making every day Remembrance Day. But it’s the celebrators of war that seem to be guiding the cultural trends. Here’s the frequency of use of the word “valor” according to Google:

Bruce Springsteen will be performing at the Concert for Valor. He once wrote this lyric: “Two faces have I.” Here’s one that I’m willing to bet won’t be on display: “Blind faith in your leaders or in anything will get you killed,” Springsteen warns in the video below before declaring war good for absolutely nothing.

You’ll need lots of information, Springsteen advises potential draftees or recruits. If you don’t find lots of information at the Concert for Valor, you might try [this teach in](#) that

evening at the Washington Peace Center.

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