

[PDF] Achilles In Vietnam: Combat Trauma And The Undoing Of Character

Jonathan Shay - pdf download free book



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Description:

Shay works from an intriguing premise: that the study of the great Homeric epic of war, , can illuminate our understanding of Vietnam, and vice versa. Along the way, he compares the battlefield experiences of men like Agamemnon and Patroclus with those of frontline grunts, analyzes the berserker rage that overcame Achilles and so many American soldiers alike, and considers the ways in which societies ancient and modern have accounted for and dealt with post-traumatic stress

disorder---a malady only recently recognized in the medical literature, but well attested in Homer's pages. The novelist , who has written so affectingly about his experiences in combat, calls Shay's book "one of the most original and most important scholarly works to have emerged from the Vietnam war." He's right.

From Publishers Weekly Shay is a psychiatrist specializing in treating Vietnam veterans with chronic post-traumatic stress syndrome. In this provocative monograph, he relates their experiences to Homer's portrait of Achilles in The Iliad. War, he argues, generates rage because of its intrinsic unfairness. Only one's special comrades can be trusted. The death of Patroklos drove Achilles first into passionate grief, then into berserk wrath. Shay establishes convincing parallels to combat in Vietnam, where the war was considered meaningless and mourning for dead friends was thwarted by an indifferent command structure. He convincingly recommends policies of unit rotation and unit "griefwork"--official recognition of combat losses--as keys to sustaining what he calls a moral existence during war's human encounters. The alternatives are unrestrained revenge-driven behavior, endless reliving of the guilt such behavior causes and the ruin of good character. Shay's ideas merit attention by soldiers and scholars alike.

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