

A Perfect Soldier

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“A Perfect Soldier-- The dead are perfect soldiers. They have no fear of pain or injury or death. Loud noises, consuming fire and hunks of hot metal cannot frighten them. They hold their position no matter what odds they face. Bomb them, shell them, gas them, and they will not retreat. The dead require no logistical support but transportation, and that only when it is safe for the living who come for them. They don't mind being “bumped” for one of the living, no matter how plebian. The dead voice no objection when the living take their weapons, ammunition, food, medical supplies, wallets and protective gear. Like Spartan soldiers of long ago they honor a warrior mother's admonition by returning home, not with their shield, but on it. The dead have great power over the living. Their presence alone is sufficient to instill wonder in their weaker, living comrades and in those who once were their enemies. Left without any accoutrements of war their ranks can spread pestilence on a biblical scale, and for those fortunate enough to be ministered to by the living, they can evoke horror simply by their terrifying visage. The dead have no false humility. They are comfortable to appear naked or to display unimaginable wounds as if to remind their living compatriots that beneath the skin, we are all the same. The dead are eternally patient, whether lying in rows of aluminum coffins, lines of dark body bags, or in the solitude of dark earth their own being has made fruitful. They will wait to be taken home, to be found, or as Ataturk said of the AnZak troops buried some 25 years in Turkish soil, to become “our sons.” The dead do not grouse about late mail or low pay. They never malign the cooks or the administrative staff or their officers. They allow one officer to speak for them, no matter how few or many they may be, and the Officer of the Dead need not even treat them with respect. And so it is that we will all, one day, become perfect soldiers.”