

The following exchange appeared in the “Letters” section of the November 15, 2015 issue of *Military History* magazine.

Defining Honor



[Re. "Honor and the American Warrior," by Joseph F. Callo, September:] While honor may be difficult for some to define, the fact is honor—military or otherwise—is a positive and necessary trait or characteristic instilled into and held by the individual that guides, directs and determines his behavior, words or actions, regardless of changing circumstances or who is watching. Honor is held internally and individually but exists as a standard external to the individual and above his immediate circumstances. The individual that is honorable in the civilian arena will, if he adheres to the absolute standards honor requires, be an effective practitioner of military honor as soon as he dons a uniform.

So, why is the article nebulous, its conclusions vague?

"Perhaps the only conclusions one could draw about American military honor is that it is a dominant but inexact—and possibly impermanent—concept.... And it is often written in blood." So, are we being led to conclude that military honor, specifically American military honor, is some dominant, inexact, indefinable thing we should despise, fear or reject because it is often written in blood?

I suspect your readers know that war is unpleasant, and that there is blood, and pain and death in the bargain. Yet, as a college history professor, I also understand a few of the lessons history has to offer. Societies that abandon their martial values and are ideologically primed to accept the assertion that nothing is worth war are doomed to slide into irrelevancy and

eventually be conquered by those who have not lost sight of the lessons of history.

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Joseph Callo responds: I wrote to get people to think, not to tell people what to think. In truth, however, I agree with much of what Uhall says. I like his description of military honor, for example, although it is lengthy and hardly a precise, universally accepted definition. On the other hand, I strongly disagree with his theoretical conclusion that my article suggests that despising, fearing or rejecting the concept of military honor is somehow connected to the idea that it is written in blood. Further, I believe that the U.S. military could well be the last bastion of honor in our society. It also seems clear to me that the concept of military honor is

under continuous attack, and too often political correctness appears to be trumping mission readiness in the military. Perhaps discussion—even vigorous argument—about military honor will trigger a realization that such honor is a crucial element of our national character. In a broader context, it also could remind us that military honor is a concept that's linked to our survival as the unique republic conceived by the founding fathers.

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