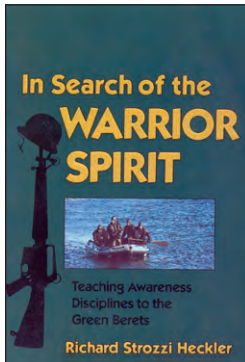


In Search of the Warrior Spirit: Teaching Awareness Disciplines to the Green Berets

Richard Strozzi Heckler

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Review by LTC Craig A. Myatt



The original print of Richard Strozzi Heckler's *In Search of the Warrior Spirit: Teaching Awareness Disciplines to the Green Berets* is now a classic reading for anyone interested in evaluating the warrior's nature and its complex integration into modern 20th century society. Can the warrior's nature be integrated into the fabric of society? Heckler suggests the answer is, "Yes."

Though revised 21st century editions of Heckler's text are available for reading, his seminal tome strikes truly at the heart of the warrior spirit free of current day social and political vicissitudes. Heckler, a doctoral psychologist and skilled black belt in aikido, provides meaningful reflections of his experiences training 25 U.S. Army Special Forces soldiers in the 1980's on psychological values and awareness techniques.

Heckler's reflections span from descriptions of his "Green Beret" team (U.S. Army Special Forces Operational Detachment – Team Alpha) to universal insights on war. The scope of his discussion articulates social perceptions of the military and its highly skilled special operations forces warriors. He also formulates metrics useful in developing, or sustaining, innovative programs designed to enhance decision-making and situational awareness in uniquely skilled warriors.

The experience Heckler presents to his group of Special Operations trained Soldiers as a psychologist and aikidoist expands their overall appreciation for awareness training while it also enhances his appreciation of Special Operations Forces. Heckler points out that the emphasis in aikido is "the loving protection of life." He sets out to instill that in his group of professionally trained warriors by introducing the values of aikido into the Special Operations Forces warrior code. To do so effectively he contemplates and shares with the reader historical and mythical relationships between elite warriors and society at large.

Heckler proposes that all of society embodies the virtues of the elite warrior archetype. Society heralds such warriors among its heroes. He demonstrates that realities

beyond those virtues require the elite warrior in society to find inner strength and integrity in the defeat of inner demons no matter what their source. For Heckler the defeat of inner demons in the elite warrior exercised with enhanced psychological values and increased awareness is a form spiritual development. The defeat of inner demons in the elite warrior whose craft has been well-exploited ultimately harmonizes relationship between the warrior and society. It further serves to broaden the scope of the elite warrior's service to humankind over time, potentially offering greater purpose and meaning to both the warrior and society.

Social perceptions of the military and its highly skilled Special Operations Forces warriors strongly influence how the military mind adapts following conflict. Heckler insists that society recognizes how a unique sense of commitment is at the hallmark of the elite warrior's mentality. He assumes the path of the elite warrior to be life-long and that mastery simply involves staying on the path in the course of individual experiences, growth, and evolution. He also reminds the reader that war remains one of the more prominent phenomena known to civilization. Heckler writes, "The human activity of war is far too ancient to pass off as abnormal." While individual physical and unit cohesive strength offer large dividends in combat, that same strength is less significant to society because of an almost inherent social distrust of military personnel who are trained to kill. Heckler explores that dilemma and suggests that success for the elite warrior following combat is not in individual physical and unit cohesive strength alone, but in the success of the elite warrior re-programming mind, body, and spirit.

The path of the elite warrior following conflict, though strongly influenced by society, is largely independent of social influence as it is the elite warrior who, according to Heckler, must remain resolute in gaining additional, or renewed, insights and awareness on the human dimension of force preservation. Heckler addresses the transcendent quality of action in elite warriors that supports their uniquely establishing a holistic view of themselves for self-preservation of character within the complexities of modern society. The true character of the elite warrior, according to Heckler, is not defined by television images of the warring hero. It is instead defined by more accurately addressing the capability to heal when

injured and to confront the ambiguities associated with transient feelings of vulnerability, anger, and emotional pain, however such feelings might emerge.

Heckler formulates a framework of synergy in body, mind, and spirit that was applied over the course of several months with objective testing and subjective evaluation in the 25 Army Special Forces Soldiers he trained on enhanced decision-making and situational awareness. He categorized the metrics along four domains: physical, psychological, team (unit) cohesion, and mission specific. He assessed each of the 25 Soldiers along each domain establishing a baseline measure before training. He obtained additional measures throughout training.

In the physical domain, he measured the understanding of new concepts associated with fitness and diet, the ability to control pain and promote healing, and the enhancement of body performance. In the psychological domain he measured management of stress and shock, the capacity to increase mental abilities, coordination of mind, body, and emotions, and solidification of key values (e.g., accountability). The ability to strengthen a team and improve individual leadership served as the measures for team cohesion. The mission specific domain was assessed among several factors measuring alertness, body control, and body management.

The average increase from baseline measures for all of the Soldiers was 75 percent. Heckler concluded that

the average increase from baseline measures reflected more of a change in lifestyle for the warriors than an increase in knowledge. He suggests that future applications of any change in lifestyle subsequently depended on the strength of reinforced psychological values and awareness at the conclusion of training. Heckler's work reinforces an appreciation of qualities unique to highly skilled warriors such as U.S. Army Special Forces Soldiers. The qualities he articulates in his text are integrity, authenticity, and self-mastery. The inner life lived defines the true warrior nature according to Heckler, not physical or social stature.

Heckler concludes his text by demonstrating how elite warriors are enriched by their experiences in carefully structured training that evaluates psychological values and awareness techniques. The enrichment appears to be rooted in the benefits of structured self-identification with the dynamic character and enduring qualities of the elite warrior. Healthy integration of the warrior's nature, and the warrior himself, into society is facilitated by accurately addressing the warrior's capability to heal when injured and in assisting that warrior to confront the ambiguities associated with transient feelings of vulnerability, anger, and emotional pain whenever such feelings emerge. Heckler's approach may not be one that is worth producing in mass for all warriors in all services, but the spirit and sophistication of his approach are worthy of endorsement by all leaders in all branches of military service.