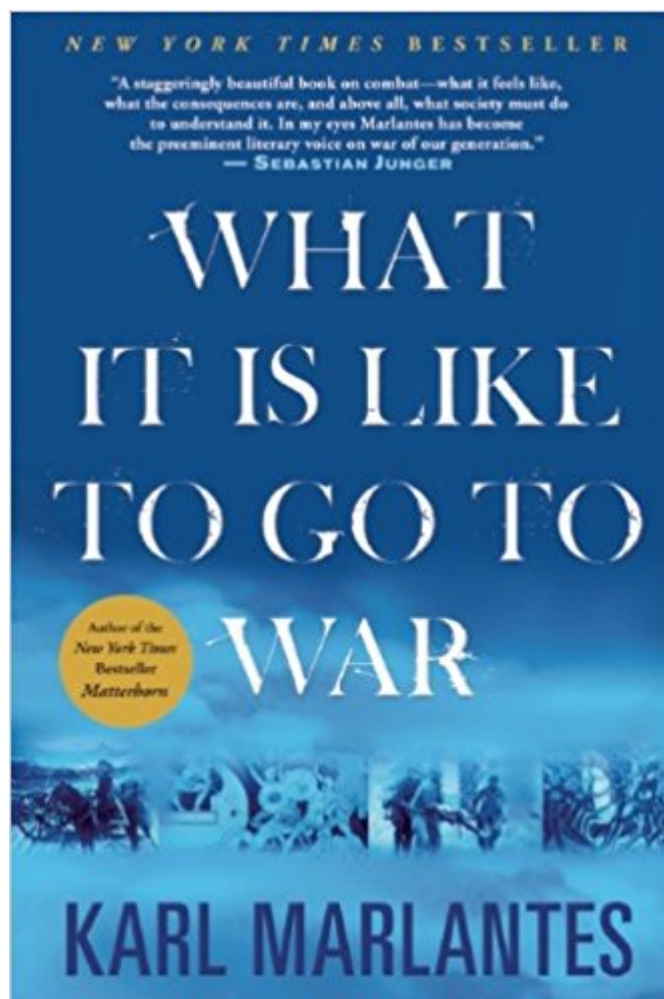


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What It Is Like To Go To War



Synopsis

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A Shelf Awareness Reviewer's Top Pick of 2011
One of the most important and highly-praised books of 2011, Karl Marlantes' *What It Is Like to Go to War* is set to become just as much of a classic as his epic novel *Matterhorn*. In *What It Is Like to Go to War*, Marlantes takes a deeply personal and candid look at the experience and ordeal of combat, critically examining how we might better prepare our young soldiers for war. War is as old as humankind, but in the past, warriors were prepared for battle by ritual, religion, and literature; which also helped bring them home. In a compelling narrative, Marlantes weaves riveting accounts of his combat experiences with thoughtful analysis, self-examination, and his readings; from Homer to the Mahabharata to Jung. He makes it clear just how poorly prepared our nineteen-year-old warriors; mainly men but increasingly women; are for the psychological and spiritual aspects of their journey.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Best Books of the Month, September 2011: With unflinching honesty, bestselling author Karl Marlantes captures *What It Is Like to Go to War* in his compassionate, powerful narrative on Vietnam. By recounting experiences that, outside the arena of war, are horrifying or embarrassing for the soldiers who lived them, Marlantes exposes veterans' self-destructive code of silence as the price for re-entering our society. American pop culture celebrates the warrior spirit, winning the

battle, but the reality for soldiers is that “reconciling the moral conduct we are taught with the brutal acts we do in war has been a problem for warriors of good conscience for centuries. Marlantes tempers the brutal truths of fear, power games, and courage with a thoughtful prescription for our soldiers’ well-being; caring for our soldiers and their families differently will benefit society as a whole. In *What It Is Like to Go to War*, Marlantes sets a new standard for understanding the experience of war. --Seira Wilson --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

“Karl Marlantes has written a staggeringly beautiful book on combat; what it feels like, what the consequences are and above all, what society must do to understand it. In my eyes he has become the preeminent literary voice on war of our generation. He is a natural storyteller and a deeply profound thinker who not only illuminates war for civilians, but also offers a kind of spiritual guidance to veterans themselves. As this generation of warriors comes home, they will be enormously helped by what Marlantes has written; I’m sure he will literally save lives.”; Sebastian Junger; Marlantes brings candor and wrenching self-analysis to bear on his combat experiences in Vietnam, in a memoir-based meditation whose intentions are three-fold: to help soldiers-to-be understand what they’re in for; to help veterans come to terms with what they’ve seen and done; and to help policymakers know what they’re asking of the men they send into combat.”; *The New Yorker*; *What It Is Like to Go to War* is a well-crafted and forcefully argued work that contains fresh and important insights into what it’s like to be in a war and what it does to the human psyche.”; *The Washington Post*; Marlantes is the best American writer right now on war . . . With *What It Is Like to Go to War* a second Marlantes book resides on the top shelf of American literature.”; Anthony Swofford, author of *Jarhead*; *What It Is Like to Go to War* ought to be mandatory reading by potential infantry recruits and by residents of any nation that sends its kids into combat.”; Marlantes’ words into combat.”; *San Francisco Chronicle*; In this thoughtful, literate work of self-exorcism, Marlantes tells tales of incredible bravery as well as brutality.”; *People Magazine*; A precisely crafted and bracingly honest book.”; *The Atlantic*; Marlantes knows what he writes. . . Raw, unsettling honesty pervades the work.”; *Time.com*; Marlantes has written a sparkingly provocative nonfiction book. . . He is an exceptional writer and his depictions here are vivid.”; *BookPage*; A gripping, first-person plea to consider the impact on the human spirit of being a soldier.”; *Huffington Post*; Karl Marlantes, author of the

excellent *What It Is Like To Go To War*, cautions his audience to understand the cost to the human psyche in sending others to kill in our names or for policies decided by politicians determined to use (and abuse) the power entrusted to their office. [Daily Planet](#); Karl Marlantes *What It Is Like to Go to War* is a deeply personal account of dealing with his harrowing time as a Marine Corps officer in Vietnam. . . . Marlantes' fiction might be just too wrenching for some readers to believe. [Logos](#); This absolutely unique and lucid personal account and analysis will be read with profit by scholars, general readers, and most particularly, by veterans of close combat. . . . The author is qualified by experience, education, temperament, and skill as a writer to make penetrating observations. Many are graphic, bold, and shocking. Some are erudite; some are ethereal; all are worthy of careful consideration. . . . His method is to reflect on a point important to him, to illustrate it with an anecdote or a combat experience, and to mull it over in sparkling prose that has the reader hanging on every word. . . . Mastery of our language and the creative use of poetic devices and images make his pronouncements memorable. . . . Marlantes has joined a short list of authors whose experience, sensitivity, and skill enable them to share wisdom with those among us who would understand. [Parameters](#); What it is Like to Go to War is already considered by many a modern classic. . . . The former Marine has three main goals in this unflinchingly honest look at what it means to be a soldier in a war: to let potential soldiers understand what to expect, to help veterans better cope with what they've experienced, and to help policy makers truly comprehend what it means when they send combat troops into a war zone. [Bradenton Herald](#); To say that this book is brilliant is an understatement; Marlantes is the absolute master of taking the psyche of the combat veteran and translating it into words that the civilian or non-veteran can understand. I have read many, many books on war and this is the first time that I've ever read exactly what the combat veteran thinks and feels; nothing I have ever read before has hit home in my heart like this book. [Gunnery Sergeant Terence D'Alesandro, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines, U.S. Marine Corps](#); Wrenchingly honest. . . . Digging as deeply into his own life as he does into the larger sociological and moral issues, Marlantes presents a riveting, powerfully written account of how, after being taught to kill, he learned to deal with the aftermath. [Publishers Weekly \(starred review\)](#); A valiant effort to explain and make peace with war's awesome consequences for human beings. [Kirkus Reviews](#); *What It Is Like to Go to War* offers profound insight on how we must prepare our youth who become our warriors for their hard and uncompromising journey through war's

hell and back home again. — Vietnam Magazine; With war such a part of contemporary American life, this book is deeply important, as timely and urgent as contemporary on-the-ground reporting from Afghanistan and Iraq. — The Minneapolis Star Tribune; A sound debunking of anything smacking of the glory of warfare; but written with compassion, honest and wit for men and now women who fight and for all of those who care about them. — St. Louis Dispatch; A slim spiritual guide. . . Marlantes' book is a sincere plea for better soldiers and veterans. — Seattle Weekly; What It Is Like to Go to War is a courageous, noble and intelligent grapple with myth, history, and spirituality that beautifully elevates the cultural conversation on the role of the military in today's world. It is an emotional, honest, and affecting primer for all Americans on war and the national psyche, and we ignore this book at our own peril. — Ed Conklin, Chaucer's Books, Santa Barbara

This is the most eloquent discussion of war, its motivations, its personal and societal impacts - in a word, it's all-encompassing in its scope. Marlantes offers modern-day Sun-Tzu-like principles in words, sentences, paragraphs, and chapters that are stunning in their logical simplicity, but which are obviously the result of some very complex thinking and introspection over the past 40+ years. I did not think anyone could equal or surpass Dexter Filkins' "The Forever War," but Mr. Marlantes has indeed done so. But that's like arguing over who was better, John Coltrane or Miles Davis. It is a tour-de-force. Suggestion: read "Matterhorn," his non-fictional account of one Vietnam experience. first (it's a tough book to read, whether you were over there or not). Let that sit for a month or so. Then take on what I consider to be "The Answer." His prescriptions for understanding Ethical Warriors, how to become one through principle-based decision-making, as well as his advice to "helicopter hovering parents" who abhor seeing the natural violence that children exhibit at times, as well as his plea for Warriors to break the Code of Silence, on and on and on. Whether you are left, right, or center, whether you are anti-war, pro-war or indifferent, whether you are a vet or know or are related to one, and mostly if you are "in the middle of the s__t" right now overseas, this book is your way towards enlightenment, understanding, and wisdom, not least of which will be the acquisition of "down-to-the-bone honest ways of dealing with "It." 'Nuff Said. If there is any justice in this world. Mr. Marlantes will get a Pulitzer for this. Personally, I believe his recommendations and solutions regarding human behavior, warfighting, and all that I've briefly and inadequately described above deserve the Nobel Prize.

Should be required reading for every soldier, sailor, airman, or marine before they sign on the dotted line to join the military. Also, EVERY politician should sign an affidavit attesting that s/he read this attentively and understands the lessons (and responsibilities) outlined here. Come to think of it, if you are planning to utter the words "thank you for your service" you must first read this book, AND the author's novel "Matterhorn" so that you understand what service really, really means before you say those words. Thank you Karl Marlantes. Thank you very, very much.

Everyone needs to read this book. Young people need to understand the consequences of entering military service at a time when war is so easily seen by our leaders as a solution to international disputes. We all, voters and legislators alike, need to know what awaits the people we send to a war that requires acts they've been told by society or their religion are morally wrong. Only if we know what war is really like can we understand that our young people need to prepare for the experience, a preparation that should be added to the excellent physical training. We will understand that we need to help the returning survivors to heal mentally and spiritually when they return home to their friends and families. The author, as a Marine combat veteran and Rhodes scholar, combines his experience, thought, and research of forty years in a book that explains what being a warrior requires, what unseen damage combat can inflict, and suggestions, not only on what the combat veteran requires to prepare for mental and moral stress, adding to the otherwise competent training, but suggestions on the help needed when the combat survivors return home. Perhaps the author wrote with the knowledge and hope that if most of us read it, we will realize we can really each make a difference. Our leaders could make big differences, and if enough voters are enlightened, the leaders will change, and we could eventually see huge changes, not only in the warrior's lot, but in the current desire to send young people to die or be maimed for political reasons.

Remarkable! Full of wisdom about the way of the warrior and things our leaders should know before they send our soldiers into battle. And beautifully written. I don't think there is another modern book like this though the Greeks knew many of its truths. Moving and evocative.

This book is a tough read. It deals very thoughtfully and carefully with the psyche of the warrior, who he/she is, how the experiences of war affect the warrior, and what we do and don't do in preparing the warrior to go, and what little we do and what more we should do to prepare the warrior to return to civilian life. The book is a tough read because it takes the reader far into the personal experiences of the author and at the same time seems to maintain a rational and relatively

dispassionate stance regarding the real issues. It is a book for the thoughtful, to be read several times. It is not for the person seeking the thrills or the battle scene excitement, although some of that is essential to the points being made. For thought provocation, the book is highly recommended.

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