It’s more than half a century since I wore the green fatigues, but once a Marine, always a Marine. *Semper Fidelis, Semper Fi.*

What’s a faithful old Marine to think about the news that a squad of young ones will be tried for the massacre of two dozen innocent Iraqis in a town called Haditha?

What I think about it is that I’m heartsick that it happened, and I’m mad as hell at the scheming fools who put those Marines and the Iraqi victims in that crazy situation.

‘Crazy,’ in French, is ‘fou’. In Scottish, ‘fou’ means ‘drunk’.

*Semper Fou.* That’s my revised Marine motto. Either *fou* is appropriate. I remember we got drunk any time we could. As for crazy, let me just come out and say it:

To train a sane person to do what a Marine must do, you have to brainwash much of the sanity and the humanity out of him.

You must make him so obedient to authority that he’s willing to die on command.

You have to obliterate that key religious commandment: Thou shalt not kill.

You certainly must rid him of most of the teachings of Jesus: Blessed are the meek, the merciful, the peacemakers; turn the other cheek, swear not at all …

By walking on water, Jesus might have been good at amphibious landings, but otherwise he just wasn’t US Marine Corps material. Sweet and mild thoughts like his are signs of weakness, and in Marine camps the Lord’s name is used mostly in vain. Your comrades need you to be strong and brutal and quick to kill, because their lives depend on it. *Semper Fou.* Gung Ho!

Gung ho is an old Chinese term evoking extreme peer pressure; the Marines shouted it as their early version of Hooah! You don’t know what peer pressure is until you’ve bonded into a squad of Marines. You don’t know what trigger-happy is until you’ve been brainwashed to hate those ‘gooks’ or ‘greasers’ or ‘ragheads’ so...
The carnage continues ... and now for Trident!

much that you could wipe them out as remorselessly as figures in a video game. And you’re made to believe that any synonym for Marine – Devil Dog, Jarhead, Leatherneck – evokes terror in any enemy. In other words, you’re trained to be a terrorist. (But not against civilians, if you can help it.)

Soon after 9-11, Osama bin Laden’s Afghanistan training camps were shown on TV, over and over: his mujahideen swarming over obstacle courses, blowing things up, firing assault rifles, marching through hot sand. Just like our boot camp. I thought, those guys would make good Marines. They’re brave as lions and brainwashed crazy. If only they believed in Jesus, and spoke English and loved the red, white and blue the way Jesus does, they’d be great Marines. Instead, they dress like Jesus but speak a foreign language and believe in some guy called Mohammed, and hate our flag.

Now, thanks to the wizardry of our Crusader-in-Chief, those terrorists have moved their training facilities to Iraq, where they’ve got our guys surrounded. The last George who managed a tactic that stupid was George Custer. (Unlike George Bush, Custer led the troops in, instead of sending them.)

After news of the Haditha massacre broke (that is, leaked out from its cover-up), Marine General Peter Pace demurred that it wasn’t Marine training that made those Marines murder those civilians.

Respectfully, General, the hell it wasn’t!

Put yourself in their boots. There you are, trained to the eyeballs for the madness of war. Semper Fou. Trapped in that trashed, gritty Fort Apache burg in the desert. Most of the natives hate you for invading and wrecking their country and kicking in their bedroom doors. In their culture you can’t stroll into town and flirt with girls in a bar, as Marines do everywhere else in the world. But every few hours it’s your duty to swagger out among the hostiles and remind them who’s boss in their country: Dick Cheney.

You know they don’t like that, so you’re expecting a blast or a bullet at every corner. It’s 114 degrees and you’re encased in heavy clothes and armour and loaded down with ammo and gear, you haven’t had a good night’s sleep in six months, and those damned Iraqis aren’t a bit grateful for the great gift of Christian capitalist democracy you’re trying to bestow upon them. You’re frustrated and scared and mad, and your trigger finger is twitchy; this is your third tour of this futile, dirty work, and you feel like a hot grenade with the pin pulled, so God help any hadji who messes with you or your buddies …

Then BAM! Your best friend becomes a one-legged, one-armed fountain of blood right before your eyes, and so you do what you’ve been trained to do: start killing everybody in sight who isn’t a Marine.

If you go berserk, that’s bad enough. If you keep on killing methodically in a controlled act of vengeance, that’s a massacre, and you must be put on trial for murder.

It’s said that the massacre isn’t such a big deal over there; the Iraqis say it’s just what Americans do. They shrug and point out the tortures and homicides at Abu Ghraib and other military prisons, and the tens of thousands of their people who
have been killed in the crossfire since George W. Bush invaded their country.

Months ago, almost unreported in the American mainstream media, there came a study saying that as many as 25 percent of US combat troops over there believe they personally have killed innocent people.

Think of coming home and living the rest of your life with that ghastly belief.

Whether or not that squad of Marines goes on trial for murder, there’s another squad-sized group of Americans who should. Their names include Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Rice, Wolfowitz, Feith, Perle, Ledeen, Tenet, etc. Many of them profess to be Christian Soldiers, though they never were personally seen marching off to war. They connived to start an unprovoked war, where real soldiers and Marines have to throw their own bodies and souls into the inferno.

Those high-placed schemers are the ones to go on trial for massacre. They’re the ones responsible for the destruction of a country and the death of thousands, and for young American veterans who will hitch along on prosthetic limbs, or wake up quaking from traumatic nightmares the rest of their lives.

That’s how one old greybeard ex-Marine feels about it.

Semper Fou.