

## **If You're Joining The Military, Is This Your Destiny?**

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Adapted from Quora, "Was there a battle where America left its' dead?" <https://www.quora.com/>

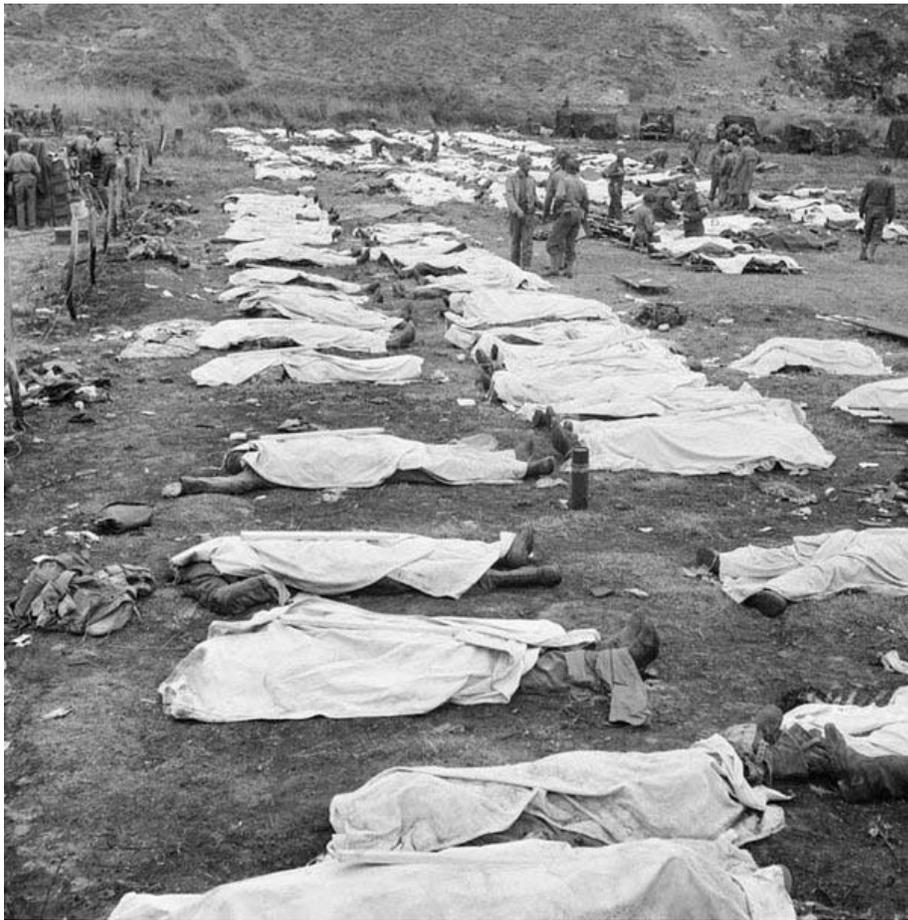
The concept of "never leave your dead behind" is a modern cultural meme and often a conceit. Throughout history, soldiers fighting for their lives see men die and spare their concern for their living and wounded buddies. It has always been this way.



In older societies, the victor in a battle would loot the bodies of the enemy dead and possibly the bodies of their comrades. In some

cultures they would take body parts as trophies, but mostly the dead were left on the battlefield. In a lot of cultures, soldiers might bury their own dead in mass graves on the battlefield. Civilians from the nearby villages, if there were any, might bury the dead to be rid of the stench and rot and threat of disease. Quite often there would be no one to dispose of the dead. After the Battle of the Wabash in 1792, an American army returned to the scene three years later and found bones scattered through the forest. In the Wilderness campaign in the spring of 1864, Union troops marched through the old Chancellorsville battlefield from a year earlier and saw skulls and bones along the road and in the brush.

In the 20th Century, most modern armies created grave-registration and burial details to deal with the corpses and body parts that littered every battlefield. What Americans call “dog-tags” were invented: metal tags hung around the neck of each soldier so bodies mutilated by artillery fire could be identified. ***(Interjection by Don***



***Chapin: And the dog tags were notched purportedly so so that it would be easier to drive one between the corpse's two front teeth, so as not to lose them.)***

While the American army and Marines were and are far more conscientious about cleaning up the

battlefields and retrieving their dead then the military of most nations, any battle that saw the loss of ground, even temporarily, could see American bodies left behind. Since the American forces rarely lost battles in either world war or after, they could eventually retrieve most American corpses and police the battlefield for pieces and fragments. If time and resources allowed, they would do the same for their enemies. Americans would get individual graves. Enemy bodies might get individual burial after intelligence officers searched them over, but, on battlefields where the the Germans or Japanese or Chinese or Iraqis had suffered major losses, a rapid mass burial was necessary for sanitary reasons.

In general, then, some unit or officer might decide that it had to retrieve all of its dead from the battlefield during a retreat—this famously happened with the 1st Marine Division in the battle of Chosin Reservoir—but that kind of action would be considered vainglory by other officers. Their responsibility is to the living, first and foremost. Only in modern wars, where Western nations take few casualties and pour their wealth into every military endeavor, can every body be retrieved and sent across an ocean to be buried at home. ***(That is, if it is ever found!)***

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