I dodged the Draft, and I was wrong

BY MARK HELPRIN

I am frequently asked how it is that I, an American, served in the Israeli Army and not in the military of my own country.

The first part of the question is easy to answer. I point out the long tradition of Americans serving in the armed forces of allies - the Lafayette Escadrille, the Air Force, and not in the military of Cummings and John Dos Passes in the Gle Squadron, the Flying Tigers. I mention that before I served under another flag I formally swore an oath of loyalty to the United States and Israel had to be held in a hotel, that despite my political assessment was not all that I thought it was. I have also come to believe, even if it has been, I still would not have been released from honoring the commitment that I had to my political assessment was not all that I thought it was. I have also come to believe that even if it had been, I still would not have been released from honoring the commitment that I had to my country, even if it was not all that I thought it was. I have also come to believe that even if it had been, I still would not have been released from honoring the commitment that I had to my country, even if it was not all that I thought it was. I have also come to believe that even if it had been, I still would not have been released from honoring the commitment that I had to my country, even if it was not all that I thought it was. I have also come to believe that even if it had been, I still would not have been released from honoring the commitment that I had to my country, even if it was not all that I thought it was. I have also come to believe that even if it had been, I still would not have been released from honoring the commitment that I had to my country, even if it was not all that I thought it was. I have also come to believe that even if it had been, I still would not have been released from honoring the commitment that I had to my country, even if it was not all that I thought it was. I have also come to believe that even if it had been, I still would not have been released from honoring the commitment that I had to my country, even if it was not all that I thought it was. I have also come to believe that even if it had been, I still would not have been released from honoring the commitment that I had to my country, even if it was not all that I thought it was.

Neither a man nor his country can always pick the ideal quarrel, and not every war can be fought with moral surety or immediacy of effect. It would be nice if that were so, but it isn't.

at Harvard, I assure you, they would have fought over like five flawless versions of the Hope Diamond.

His actions were all the more impressive when it is remembered that the First World War was far more brutal than the war in Vietnam, far more costly, and far more senseless. At least the war in Vietnam was fought in the context of a policy of containment that later was to triumph. Even were Vietnam not the best place to make a stand, it was the fact, as did Vietnam, that you simply could not understand until much later. 'I thought, Tom, you would want to see this.'

"Why Am I Here?"

I want you to know this so that perhaps you may use it. For someday you may find yourself in a terrible place, about to die from a wound that is too big for a pressure bandage, or you may find yourself in an enemy prison, facing years of torture, or you may find yourself, more likely, as I did, in a freezing rain-soaked trench, at 4 o'clock in the morning, listening to your heart, and to your own breath as you stare into the hallucinatory darkness of a field of graves with mines. You may speak, to yourself out loud, asking, why am I here? I could have been somewhere else. I could have done it another way. I could have been home.

If that should happen to you, your first comfort will be your God, and then your family, and then your country. These will carry you through. But if, after you have run through them again and again, you have time and thought left, then perhaps you will think of me, and this day at the beginning of your career. I hope it will be encouragement.

For that I was not with you, in my time, at Khe Sanh, and David, and the other places, is for me now, looking back, a great surprise, an even greater disappointment, and a regret that I will carry to my grave.

Mr. Helprin, a novelist, is a contributing editor to the Journal. This is excerpted from an address he delivered at West Point yesterday.