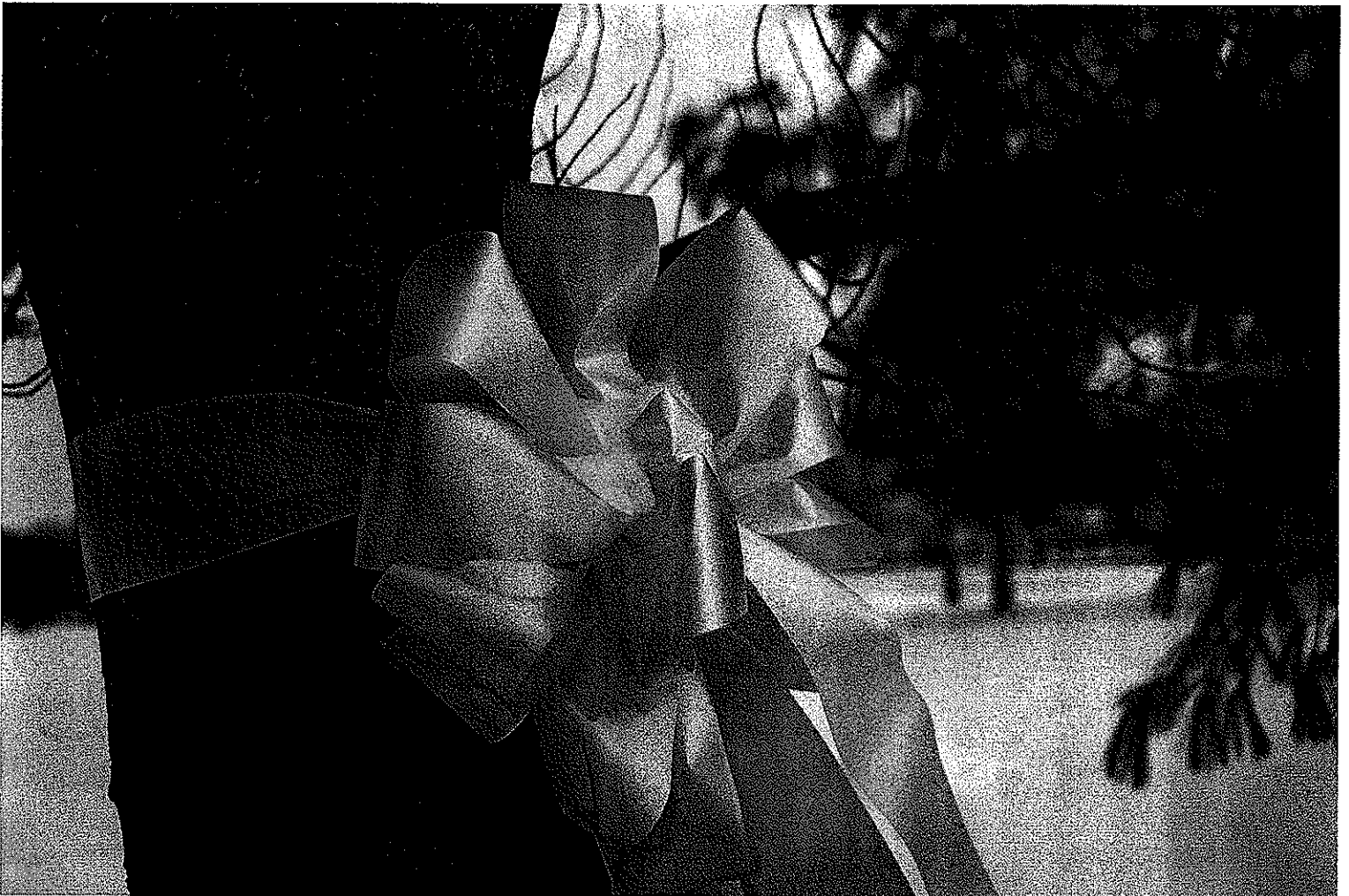


The Elephant in the Room

“Understanding the Unspoken Cost of Taking
Human Lives in War”



Dr. Samuel Arnold

FORWARD

Soldier, Sailor, Airman, Marine, you are embarking on an experience which many combat veterans experienced. An experience that is understood only by those who have walked the walk and have gone on before us. An experience that will remain in the memory as long as one lives: "COMBAT". A life struggle which only "THE FEW, THE STRONG, & THE BRAVE" know. This experience and aftermath (living with your memories) is virtually a continuation of the initial experience. Veterans of all wars have experienced this and have survived. It is (PTSD) "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder".

"The Elephant In The Room" written by Dr. Samuel Arnold identifies with all combat veterans who have witnessed the deaths and destructions of wars. It is a story of we who have survived; those who made it home with all of the baggage: guilt, memories of those who didn't make it, memories of mutilated bodies of both Americans and Enemies some rotting in the heat or stiff from cold and inclement weather. It is a story that will help all who read it. You will realize you are not alone with your thoughts and dreams. All who have witnessed war have struggled with much the same. It has been said by many combatants, "No one has seen what I have or done what I have". Do not believe the lie. You are not alone! Again, that is what we call WAR! Killing our enemies at the cost of our lives.

We are a "Band of Brothers", men who have experienced like experiences and are learning to live with ourselves and our fellowman. Combatants will ever remember our comrades in arms. Their faces are before us daily; their names will never be forgotten; and their exploits will always be remembered by we who have survived. We will walk by the monuments that have been erected in their memory in reverence. We will pay homage as we visit their final resting place. They will never be forgotten. We salute them as members of a brotherhood who laid it all on the line and paid the supreme sacrifice for our freedom.

Remember Combatant, you are not unique nor are you all alone. Most who have experienced war have processed their pain, suffering, memories of fallen comrades, and lived with their dreams of the past. We have become productive citizens of this great nation, The United States Of America, and we would do it again if we were called on to protect our nation and our families from the tyrants who seek to destroy us.

For those who will take the time to read "The Elephant In The Room" will take a major step forward toward healing and restoration to a society which appreciates all you have accomplished for them: Democracy, Freedom, Liberty, and Justice for all.

Orville M. Burk, S/Sgt. USMC

USMC 1948-1952

Korea 1950-1951

Pusan Perimeter, Inchon, Seoul, Chosin Reservoir

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3. To my sons, daughter, and grandchildren – To my sons who have served their country, my daughter who has more street smarts than any of my sons and to my grandchildren who have taught me the beauty of life.
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10. To Commander Andrew Arnold, United States Navy, who gives every day in the service of his country, I salute you. I must have done something right to have produced a son like you.

Preface

There are two Rules in War

1. Men die in war.
2. Officers don't change Rule #1.

There are two Rules in War

1. People die, are mutilated, are changed physically and emotionally forever because of war.
2. Officers, non-commissioned officers, warrant officers, and enlisted cannot change Rule #1.

Samuel Arnold, DDS
Captain, United States Army
1967-1969
Viet Nam 1968

INTRODUCTION

This is not something you want to do. This is not a project that gives you a good feeling after it is done. It is a journey that you take because it has to be done, it has to be confronted and it has to be exposed. Age gives you experience, not intelligence, not wisdom, not a complete understanding of the problem.

There are over 22 million veterans in the United States. Only about one third of them seek help for problems that are related to their time in service. War experiences are not normally a topic of conversation. They are kept in the back of the mind and, most of the time, are something to be forgotten. Family, friends, the civilian population really don't understand the problems and experiences of the veterans; they do not want to understand them because they are painful and they cannot relate to them.

Those of us who live with these problems are in a small, unique group. Most of us never say anything to anyone. We keep it inside and many times it grows and festers until it comes out in a very negative way. It affects us, our families, our friends, our community.

This booklet is written for all of us who have served in the military and feel we are alone in our thoughts and fears.

There have been great strides to improve the treatment of Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The symptoms are basically the same even though one is caused by trauma to the brain and the other is caused by experiencing a traumatic event or events, usually in a combat situation.

I wrote this for those men and women who for whatever reason have never asked for or have never sought help for this problem. I hope they realize they did nothing to cause this nor did they do anything to deserve this. It occurred because of the job they chose to do, the result of that job and the unfortunate consequences of that job.

They served in the Armed Forces of the United States of America.

Chapter One – THE ELEPHANT

We, as humans, try to look on the bright side of situations. As time goes on, we try to remember the good and forget the bad. There are times however that this thought process makes the problem worse. Many times the result of not confronting problems only creates new ones.

When some men and women come home from war, they have changed. They are different – they will always be different. We must accept these differences. Some will be better or worse depending on their experiences. Adjustments to civilian life will be based on trauma, injury, and memories that have been imbedded in their minds during the ordeal. There is no fast rule that can account for reactions to these experiences. Everyone is different so therefore, reactions are different. Sooner or later, these memories will affect their thoughts and possibly their actions in civilian life and the best way to address them is to confront them. Pretending they did not happen, rationalizing that they aren't so bad; or worse – pretending they never happened – is not productive and will only put off the inevitable negative reaction. The problems should be dealt with in reality and understood in a compassionate and caring manner. Each soldier sees the problems differently and no one else can judge the understanding of the individual. They do exist. The events did occur and have to be dealt with. Unfortunately, these problems have occurred to a small percentage of people in our society. There has, up till now, been very little research, treatment, or method of delivering this treatment to these men and women.

Fortunately, things are changing. Psychology, psychiatry, and pharmacology are confronting the problem. Realistically, the medical profession and ancillary professionals are working to create programs that will help these men and women recover from their experiences and to be able to live productive lives back in the civilian world. The solution is twofold. The Veteran must understand who he or she is and how war has affected him or her. He must confront the demons and learn to control them in a reasonable manner and therefore be a positive influence to society.

The civilian world should understand and have compassion for these men and women. They cannot begin to fathom what they have experienced and the memories this faction of our society

must carry the rest of their lives. What they should understand, is to appreciate what these men and women have given so that society can exist free and unencumbered from tyranny and oppression. Fortunately, these men and women have sacrificed a part of their lives so that most of us will never know the dark side of war, the loss of individual rights and the oppression of a power that only wants to put society into submission. There is no free lunch, nothing comes without a price and these men and women are willing to pay that price, even to the point of ultimate sacrifice. They have done their job. It is up to us to do everything in our power to provide a recovery process so they can re-enter life and become productive in the civilian world. They have earned our respect, our adoration and our appreciation. Our obligation to them can be nothing less.

A majority of us have been raised with a sense of duty to our country. Our moms or dads, uncles, aunts, etc. have served in the military for the usual reasons. Our country went to war and they answered. We feel an obligation to give back to a country that has given us so much. These rights and freedoms and opportunities must be protected so our children and grandchildren can have the same chances we have had. We also understand the dark side of humanity. There has always been a group that wants to control at someone else's expense. Their rise to power must accompany a fall by others. Someone must prevent this from happening.

Chapter Two – WHO ARE WE?

After high school, there are a lot of possibilities that are available to us. Some may decide to enter the work force right away, develop a skill at a job and improve our skills and 'move up the ladder.'

Others decide to enter college or technical training to improve our marketability so that we can enter the work place at a higher skill level and hopefully achieve a better life earning more money, prestige and responsibility to better provide for our family and ourselves.

A small portion will decide to enter military service. This decision is a choice for various reasons. We may be unsure what our final path is and we want to enter a profession that can give us some maturity, some guidance and different means to achieve our goals, even though they are not totally clear but can get us on the right track. We are not sure where we are going but we know we want to end up somewhere. These are the men and women who join the military. They know they will get training in an area they are interested in, they will immediately be earning a paycheck and at the end there will be financial assistance for further education if they choose to pursue it. A career is possible in the military and the path can be accomplished by way of enlisted or officer. The possibilities are numerous and achievement can be determined by hard work and determination. No matter who you are, no matter what your financial condition is when you enter the military, everyone starts out at the same place and can go as far as he or she is willing to apply themselves.

These individuals have some basic characteristics in common. First they are more realistic than the civilian population. They understand that only you can achieve, only you can persevere and only you can succeed. They understand that no one will do it for you, you are responsible for the results and the achievement is yours and yours alone.

The other trait of men and women serving in the military is that they serve others. No matter what branch, what job, officer or enlisted, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Everyone must make his contribution to the best of his ability and success or failure is determined by many, not by a few.

After the decision is made, the first act of the person is to take an oath. This is a binding contract between the individual and the United States of America. Most of us take this oath at the beginning of the journey and even though this is the first and most important step, it may not be as meaningful as it should be. We are looking past this to our time in basic, our first experiences with excitement, fear of the unknown, etc. However as time goes on, reflection of that oath becomes more and more meaningful. We finally realize that we will defend the constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic. As training continues and we finally complete this phase, the reality hits us. We are the ones that stand in the gap. We are the ones that protect our citizens at home. And we are the ones who answer the call when trouble comes. I guess **we are '911.'** The country calls, we answer. That is our job.

Chapter Three – PERSONALITY OF SHEEP DOGS

In the world there are three types of people. There are sheep. These account for over 90% of the population of the world. They are born, grow up, get married, have children, grow old and die. They mostly relate to their own world and provide for themselves and their families. These are good people. Under most circumstances, they would never intentionally hurt anyone and even if it was an accident, they would be sad and remorseful.

There is a small percentage of the population who are wolves. Hopefully we don't see them very often in our life but we hear about them every day. These people exist at the expense of others. Their achievement comes at the sheep's expense. They are ruthless, cunning, and intelligent. They come to murder and destroy and will continue until they are stopped.

Then there is the sheepdog. His only job, vocation or profession is to protect the sheep. He is alert, vigil and always prepared. We call them firemen, policemen and others who are among us but remain unnoticed unless trouble occurs. They are also called our military. They are active duty, Reserve and National Guard. Their only goal is to protect and defend. They are constantly trained and educated with new techniques, but they are always ready.

Throughout their lives, even after they have been discharged from their military duties, they are still prepared. The oath they took doesn't go away. Their training is always there and if asked, they will answer the call. In times of trouble, no matter how large, they will always respond.

Chapter Four – WHAT IS THE 6TH COMMANDMENT?

There has been a misconception about this commandment that has perpetuated since its original writing. The original word that was used from Hebrew was 'murder.' As time went on, this word was changed from 'murder' to 'kill.' The definition has changed the dynamics and has affected mankind for thousands of years. Whatever the reason was, it has affected mankind since this word was re-translated. In simple terms, the word 'murder' is a premeditative action. The word 'kill' is a response.

If someone breaks into your house, it is a premeditative act. They want to rob you, hurt you, or worst of all, take your life. In defense of these actions, you have every God given right to 'kill' these persons who want to do you harm. In legal terms, this is called justifiable homicide. Even though feelings of guilt and remorse are normal, one must understand that defending yourself and your family is acceptable in God's eyes and the eyes of the law.

There is good and evil in the world. There always has been and always will be. When someone says they want to murder you, there is no negotiation. The line has been drawn in the sand and one side will prevail. When we are faced with this decision, action must be taken. Since only one can survive, it is your action that will determine the outcome. Every person must make this decision before it happens. If you don't, the time it takes to decide may cost you your life and also those you love and are responsible to protect. Hopefully this will never happen in your lifetime and the majority of us will never have to make this decision or react to it. However, if you feel you cannot take a human life under any circumstances, then you must accept your fate and also the fate of those for whom you are responsible and accept the consequences.

Those of us who volunteer for military service, no matter what branch it may be, must ask ourselves if we can take another human's life. No matter what our specialty is or what area in the military we are assigned to, the reality of killing another human being may confront us. It is said that everyone is a soldier when the situation occurs.

Defending the Constitution of the United States, our family and those to the right and left of us is paramount to anything else. We know many stories of men or women giving their lives for the greater good without any hesitation or reservation. Medal of Honor recipients usually have saved many lives at the risk of their own for the greater good and have killed numerous people so that their fellow soldiers can continue to survive.

Chapter 5 – WHAT DO WE DO AFTERWARDS?

The war is over. We come home and deep down inside, we know our lives will never be the same. What happened was real. The feelings are real, and we certainly cannot pretend that it did not happen. Pretending is over - we cannot adjust our thought process like it was before. This will affect us forever.

The one important fact that should always be remembered is that the other person is dead and we are alive. Survivor's remorse makes no sense. It really doesn't. You went to war. You killed another human being who certainly wanted to kill you. If no one was willing to do this, your family would no longer exist. Your country, as you knew it, would no longer exist and your life would certainly never be the same.

We can accept what we did. Take credit for a job well done. Look at our country, our family, our friends, and realize that their lives are still the same and we were the ones that allowed this to happen.

If we allow pain and guilt to overcome us, we are in trouble. Some of us are angry at the attitude of those who did not serve and don't quite understand why they don't feel the way we do. It's simple. We did what we did so they will never know what we know. That is why we freely took the oath. It is not supposed to be fair. It's just the way it is. We carry the burden so that our families will not have to.

Some of us do try to escape. We use drugs, alcohol, violence, solitude so we can pretend the reality never happened. No matter what method or a combination of methods we use, it will not, nor cannot change what happened. Sooner or later, we must accept what we did, be proud of what we did, and adjust our lives among those who never experienced what we experienced. Isn't that the reason we enlisted in the first place?

We must accept that life will never be as fast as in combat. The adrenaline rush will never be as great and there is nothing that we will experience that will be as intense, as

important or as critical as what happened in our past. If we look at the experience truthfully, we are better people for it. Our value system should be different. Tangible things are just that. Character, ethics, morals and responsibility are above anything else. We should have learned that through our experiences. No matter who we were before we enlisted, we are better people because of it. We should be the example to our wives and husbands, our children and our society. No matter how crazy things get, we are the foundation that people turn to when times get rough. We are the cool heads that prevail. We are the ones that protect, lead and defend in times of adversity. Ask any Marine. They are made, not born. No matter how society may see us, no matter how they relate to us, no matter if they affirm our action or not, we know who we are and what we value. We are the sheepdogs of America.

Chapter Six – DREAMS

We all have them. We dream almost every night. We may not remember them the next day, but they always occur. Coming home from war, things change. Some things change forever. Once we are asleep, we have little control over our dreams. Unfortunately, the only treatment is medication that puts us into such a deep sleep we do not dream. The next day however, there is a down side. To recover from these meds takes time and our ability to function the next day is diminished. If we are driving, using machinery, or an activity that requires mental alertness, there is a problem.

Triggers that occur during our lives can make matters worse. A sound, a smell, a news report can trigger these thoughts and they carry over during sleep. We may be improving in our outlook of life, but a negative stimulus can set us back if we don't deal with it at the time it happens.

Thinking positive thoughts before we go to sleep can possibly reduce the nightmares. But we must remember they are only dreams. They are not real. It may wake us up, it may cause interruption of our sleep, but once we realize it is only a dream, we can accept it and realize we are not on the battlefield. We are safe in bed, surrounded by the people who love us.

From the time we are born, maybe even before our birth, our personality is determined by what we see, hear and learn. Our experiences make us who we are. Returning from war, we have changed. We have seen, heard and done things that we never thought we would have experienced. We cannot change the past; we have to accept what has happened and move on. We need to remember in a positive way or we will relive the nightmare while we are awake and while we are asleep.

Drugs and alcohol may dull the pain for a while, but we will still have the memories the next day. We did our job, we miss our comrades who did not come home, but we can't change the past. Our only consolation is that we have made the world a better place by protecting our

country, our family and ourselves from an evil that no longer exists. By living in the past we devalue the sacrifice others have made so that we can live safer, more secure in a society in which our children and grandchildren can grow and flourish.

Coming home is okay. Survival allows humanity to go on. No one goes through life without tragedy. We, as defenders of freedom, understand this. We give society a chance.

When we wake from a bad dream, our first thought must be, "It's only a dream." Realizing where we are is all we need to accept the fact that we are safe, secure and also that our family, friends and country are not feeling and experiencing these nightmares. These thoughts should be sufficient to go back to sleep in a proper frame of mind.

Chapter Seven – FORGIVENESS MECHANISM

No matter who you are, you can only have two beliefs. You either believe that there is power greater than yourself or you don't. Going to war, many of us soon realize that you can only do the best you can and the rest is up to someone else. We are fallible, we make mistakes and in war, these mistakes can cost lives. Whatever happens, it happens. You can't go back, you can't change the past. Asking forgiveness is fine but if we cannot forgive ourselves, nothing is accomplished. Many times we are put into a situation that we may have to kill innocent people, namely women and children. There are even times they are the enemy and we must kill them to save ourselves and our men and women around us. We chose to enlist in the military, and so did they. Age or gender does not absolve you from deciding to go to war. Decisions have consequences and everyone will live with them.

We have all heard and read the story of the flood when God had Noah build an ark and destroyed the earth by water. I am sure there were people that died who were good but God decided that this was the only way to start over. I guess you can say this was the ultimate collateral damage. To take on the guilt and pain for any action can only destroy you. There is no end and spinning your wheels over it will lead to nowhere. Let it go. You are forgiven and your life will continue.

Dwelling on the past only creates utter confusion. We all need forgiveness. No one is exempt. Being human has its limits and going to war stretches those limits as far as they can go. Freedom is very costly. We do it to protect ourselves, our family and our way of life. Asking God to forgive us is a smart decision. We are human. He is God – end of story. We accepted the responsibility of enlisting in the military and put our lives on the line to protect and defend. God does forgive us. We must understand and forgive ourselves.

The suicide rate among returning military is 3 to 5 times the civilian rate. The reason is obvious. Being human, we have limits. War can stretch those limits beyond our capacity to deal with them. We have two choices. We can try to understand or rationalize what has

happened and fail miserably. When the mind works on the mind, all it creates is utter confusion. We want the memories to disappear, but they won't. We want the past to leave us alone, but it doesn't. We want the pain to stop, but it continues. Without a plan, the situation continues. It goes on and on and on. Some of us cannot deal with the feelings, the emotions, or the memories. Drugs and alcohol numb the pain temporarily, but the pain is still there. We take the only way out that is left, we kill ourselves.

We must ask forgiveness. We must ask for help. We are responsible to get better. God does forgive us but we may still need counseling and guidance to forgive ourselves. We went into combat with men and women on our right and left. We didn't do it alone. Getting better when we come home takes men and women on our right and left to make the transition to a better, guilt free, productive life.

Chapter Eight – THE LAST CHAPTER

Returning from combat makes you unique, very unique. You are a very, very, small percentage of the population. No matter what is going on in the country, politically or economically, you are unique. Your problems are different and so, do not expect other people to understand them. Your family, friends, co-workers, haven't a clue. They never will. I guess it comes down to one thing. Vets help Vets. Not the government, not the social organizations, no one. The only one that can help is someone who has been there, experienced what you have, or someone who has been professionally trained in helping Veterans and their unique experiences.

The idea that you are fine; it will go away; or just suck it up, is a lie, untrue, nonsense. Your experiences are so different, so stressful, so horrible that there has to be communication between you and someone who can help.

You signed a contract with the United States of America. You put yourself, up to and including your life, to protect and defend so that the 90 to 95 percent of the country wouldn't have to. The country in turn would take care of any mental or physical problems that resulted from that service.

It is not charity. It is in the contract. You have every right to any help you need to get back to being a productive member of society. You deserve this. You are not asking for a handout. Don't let anyone tell you differently. As I said before, we are human and therefore we have our limitations.

Today, a lot has been done to repair our injuries. From artificial limbs to reconstructive surgery, many with physical training can be almost totally rehabilitated.

Mentally, we have made great strides in healing the mind. We have programs for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), and other psychological traumas that we experienced in the military, combat or non-combat related.

In my opinion, the best place for treatment, both mental and physical, is the Veteran's Administration (V.A.). They also help families of Vets to deal with the adjustments of their returning loved one.

If you have a problem with someone or something at the V.A., ask someone else. Do not quit. Get an answer. There are a lot of us out there who want to help.

To suffer in silence is unproductive for yourself and your family and does not help with the problem. You must open your mouth. You aren't as tough as you think you are. Remember, you are only human. No one goes through life without help, no one.

Chapter 9 - WHERE WE WENT WRONG

This problem is not unique in the modern world. In fact, this problem has been with us since the beginning of time.

Wars have been fought for a lot of reasons. Whatever the reasons, the fact remains people have been killing each other for a long, long time. One of the first battles that was recorded occurred when Joshua and the children of Israel fought the battle of Jericho. This was not a battle of victory or defeat but a battle of total annihilation. It was fought with sword and shield and one man watching another die directly in front of him.

After the battle, those that were involved, the observers of the battle, those that gave aid to their wounded comrades, and certainly those who were directly involved in the battle itself did not return to the camp where the rest of the group was located. They went away for seven days for a cleansing process. This was not just to clean themselves from the blood of battle but to decompress. They could not return to their wives and children until they completed this process.

As time went on, America was founded and we were involved in World War I, World War II and the Korean War. Even though there was not a time of cleansing and decompressing after each battle, the return home was different than today. These men returned home by ship. It took around 30 days to return to the States. During that time, they relaxed, talked, played cards and were among other men with the same experiences. They ventilated amongst themselves. They justified, they rationalized, they came to terms with what they had just experienced. Even though some had problems upon their return, the majority returned to their wives, children, and jobs and entered the civilian world with positive feedback and a pat on the back for a job well done.

We now move forward to modern day. We have the major wars of Viet Nam, Desert Storm, Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan. In 48 hours we go from the battle field to civilization.

We have not decompressed, we have not had time to digest and understand what we have been through. We are back with our families, friends and community. We are expected to transfer from the horrors of war and combat to a civilian world who has no clue as to what we experienced. We are confused, lost, and do not know how to handle ourselves and this world that has become foreign to us.

We drop back inside ourselves, we play the tape of our most horrible experiences over and over. It becomes imbedded inside of us and we see no way out. Our family, friends, community do not understand. They ask us to transfer ourselves from one world to their world in a blink of an eye.

We may be home immediately after war and for a while, it's great. We pretend for a while but the past has not been laid to rest. We don't understand the confusion in our own minds and no one in our immediate family does either. Because we transfer from combat to civilization in record time, we have not had time to decompress, We have not had time to understand the process of change form war to peace and we start down the road that isn't good for anyone.

I am what others do not want to be,
I go where others fear to go,
I do what others fail to do.

I ask nothing for those who give nothing,
And reluctantly accept the thought
Of eternal loneliness...should I fail.

I will see the stark face of terror,
Feel the stinging cold of fear,
And enjoy the sweet taste of a moments love.

I will cry, pain, and hope...but most of all,
I will live times others would say
Were best forgotten.

But at least someday I will be able to say
That I was proud of what I was...
A "Soldier".