



2/503d VIETNAM Newsletter

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PTSD, me? No way! That's bullshit!!

A typical combat soldier during the war in Vietnam would find himself today in a firefight in some rice paddy, jungle or mountain range. Two days later he was walking the streets of San Francisco with the dirt of the battlefield still on his skin. No one was there to welcome him, to thank him; no one there to defuse the angst built-up inside from a year or two or more of combat....nada, not a soul. Many of us kissed the tarmac at the airport – we welcomed ourselves home.

For years our government failed or refused to recognize and treat the unique systems of PTSD, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, suffered by countless veterans of our war. These symptoms include but are not limited to:

- **Gross impairment in thought processes or communication;**
- **Persistent delusions or hallucinations and grossly inappropriate behavior;**
- **Persistent danger of hurting one's self or others, including periods of violence or the threat of violence;**
- **Intermittent inability to perform activities of daily living - paranoia;**
- **Disorientation to time or place, and memory loss, exaggerated startle response;**
- **Deficiencies in work, family and/or social relations, judgment, thinking and/or mood - sleep apnea;**
- **Suicide or homicide ideation; obsession with rituals, panic attacks, depression, and nightmares;**
- **Hyper-vigilance, overly and abnormally aware of your safety and surroundings and the safety of your spouse and children, but in a smothering way.**

Lifelong stressors the survivors take from their war experience go well beyond the list above. These stressors may lay hidden and dormant for many,

many years, choosing to raise their ugly heads at the most inopportune times in the lives of these former warriors. Whether called shell shock, battle fatigue or PTSD, they are all an evil gift given to those who warred. And, one of the most guileful of these stressors is guilt.

This guilt can come from many different quarters. What act did I commit which plagues me today? What act did I not commit which could have saved lives? Could I have been better, braver? Do I really wish to focus on the reality of the uninvited war our nation and I imposed on other people? And the most insidious of all...why did I live when others did not?

Perhaps good buddy, Jim Healy A/2/503, said it best when he spoke of surviving one particularly fierce battle our unit was in which occurred in February of 1966. For years after the battle Jim asked himself:

“Why was I spared injury when so many brave and better men around me were killed or wounded?” “The only answer Healy has been able to come up with is:

“Just pure luck. Neither bullets nor shrapnel swerve to avoid hitting the ‘good’, nor do they change direction to seek out the ‘bad’. They just simply fly in their trajectory and hit whatever may be in their path. While being good at your job may give you the slight edge, the determining factor is luck. That’s what makes combat death seem so arbitrary, random and unfair.” (Vietnam magazine).

For over three decades I thought claims of PTSD were bullshit, something guys used to *get a free ride*. I thought that until one day I realized I was infested with the illness. Post Traumatic Stress from our experiences during the war is more common than you might think. The illness doesn't discriminate either....it is not exclusive to old RTO's, but can affect even the most senior military leaders. You needn't be an RTO or a former POW to have this bug festering inside. Not long ago a retired General from the wars in the Middle East announced publicly his battles with PTSD. Also, I know of a number of 2/503 officers fighting that enemy and receiving ongoing psych treatment after filing and being awarded VA disability. PTSD is a battle wound, but it's a wound hidden inside, out of view of most others, oft times not recognizable by the carrier – again, I was a carrier for forty years before confronting that devil.

The question before you, my brothers, is, *“Do I suffer from PTSD?”* I can almost hear your reply, *“No way!!”* That's the standard retort, my friends, particularly by otherwise intelligent and reasoning vets. It was the initial reply by a former 2/503 Bde Colonel I know who successfully filed a VA claim for the illness; as well as a chopper pilot buddy, two 2/503 company commanders, and a 173d Colonel, a career surgeon with the Brigade. So, the point has been made....even the most senior of our military leaders are not immune, and whether you were a General or a Private, nor are you.

So, now what do you do if you or your spouse think you might be a candidate for this illness? The first thing you do is to get over the thought *“I joined the army, did my service, and nothing is owed me.”* Now, that's a tough one, one which took me two years to get over. And the second initial step is a willingness to look deep within you with someone guiding you who can make sense of it all, namely, a psych specializing in the illness. Many of us were fortunate to find just such a person.

By bald ass luck we came across Dr. Scott Fairchild who has his own psych practice here in Melbourne, FL. Doc Scott is a former LTC with the 82nd Airborne and conducted much of the early work on PTSD for the army at Walter Reed. He is a nationally recognized authority on the illness, helping vets from the current wars but more often than not, helping Vietnam vets.



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Here's what I'd like you to consider. Call Doc Scott or a non-VA psych in your area who specializes in treating PTSD, and schedule a sit-down with him or her. Given the fact Doc Scott is a trooper and genuinely cares for vets will make it easier for you to totally open-up your thoughts and feelings to him – something which is essential if that monster lurks inside. Contact info is below.

There seems to be a consensus the VA is not your friend, at least as you go through the claim process. Once in the VA system, however, their care is equal to or better than anything provided on the outside, and I've heard countless favorable remarks about VA care givers, post the claim process period.

“The real source of veterans' problems is not the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, the Board of Veterans Appeals, or the VA's General Counsel Office...The veteran is under the impression that all that is required of him is to file a claim form and the VA will do the rest....Big surprise!

Approximately six weeks later the veteran receives his first letter from the VA. He is confused. It is asking for hard evidence that the injury or disease did in fact occur. Talking out loud to himself he asks 'what evidence...it's all in my military records.' The telephone counselor told him over the phone not to worry, the VA would get his records...Surprise number two! He receives a second letter three months later. This time the letter is brief, stating 'claim denied'” John D. Roche, The Veteran's PTSD Handbook

For you brothers who don't know where to turn or how to start the process, I hope this helps some. If you believe you also may be infected with PTSD, or if you have physical problems which may be tied to your military service or service in Vietnam, please consider the following:

1. Request all your service and medical records from the Army Military Archives in St. Louis, MO;
2. Document for yourself and the VA every illness you have or think you may have;



3. Call-up on the internet everything you can find on VA claims and PTSD;
4. Talk with buddies in your area who have been through the process, especially those who've recently been through it;
5. Do not file the claim with the VA yourself. Select one of the vet organizations to represent you, i.e. DAV, VFW, AMVETS, American Legion, etc;
6. If possible, get a thorough and complete physical examination from a private doctor to support your claim;
7. Find your own civilian Psych, preferably ex-military, who specializes in PTSD treatment, or call Doc Scott;
8. Recognize the process can be stressful and easy to walk away from. You've done harder things, you can do this;
9. Control all your paperwork and don't miss any appointments, and don't be overly chatty with the VA reps; and perhaps most importantly;
10. *Never give up.*

Contact info for Doc Scott is:

Dr. Scott Fairchild, Psy.D
(LTC, 82nd Airborne, retired)
Baytree Behavioral Health
321-253-8887
Melbourne, Florida

Retired Chaplain's Corner

First, I was with the 4th Battalion, but it was 2d Bat brothers who found me hiding here in Wyoming five years ago, and pulled me back into the 173d brotherhood. I was overwhelmed with PTSD and with no sense of family or where to turn for help.

My wife gave me the choice of the highway or the VA, so I decided to follow her advice and seek out help – living under a bridge in Wyoming's cold winters was not appealing. All the while Lew Smith and I were into email dialogue with a couple other 173d vets when we stumbled on to Dr. Scott Fairchild at a vet gathering in Melbourne, Florida.

With great effort I traveled to Florida to meet with Doc Scott, a former LTC with the 82nd Airborne who has his own psych practice there. I visited with the All-American and came away with a glowing

review of this caring doctor's competence. My children rejoiced upon hearing of my decision to seek help and that *Geronimo* was heading to Florida for that very purpose.

A year or so later the VA determined me to be totally disabled with PTSD, and I was able to retire as the Pastor of the same church following over 30 years of service. Most in my congregation had no idea their Pastor had served with the 173d in Vietnam as one of the very few school-trained snipers.

During the decades I served as a wounded healer, I sought God's healing myself, yet to no avail. I did find solace in words of the Apostle Paul who also sought help for his *thorn in the flesh*. Paul spoke of God allowing him to carry his affliction as it would make him a humble man, and more pliable for service. Most all of the combat vets I know are humble men....especially men of the 2/503d Airborne.

So, don't despair my brothers; your own healing will come to you in ways you never imagined. Now one of my best friends, Lew Smith, is an atheist....God works in mysterious ways as He performs His wonders. Our God is an awesome God...don't give up.

Rev. Mike McMillan (Ret)

4/503d, '69/'70

mcmilln@tctwest.net



L-R: Pastor Mike McMillan and the Heathen

Do You Really Want To Know?

Do you really want to know what it's like
being a Vietnam vet?
Do you want to know about war?
Do you want to know about fear?
Do you want to know about death?
Do you want to know what it's like seeing someone's
head explode?
Do you know fresh brains look slimy,
pink and white?
Are these the things you want to know?
You ask me how many people I shot and killed.
You ask me how many dead bodies I've seen.
Should I count them for you?
Do you want to smell the smell of death?
Why do you want to know these things?
Do you want to know of my friend who intentionally shot
himself in the foot while on LP to get out of combat, then
died from shock?
Is this what you want to know?
Or, do you want to read the letter
I wrote to his mother
telling her how her son died a hero?
Perhaps that's what you want to know.
Do you want to know about awaking in the jungle to tracer
rounds zinging beneath your nose and above your head
and hearing the screams
of those hit by those rounds?
You surely must want to know that.
Do you want to know how still and quiet
20 dead young men are
lying elbow-to-elbow under ponchos?
Are these the things you want to know?
Do you want to hear about the screams
"We're Americans! We're Americans!",
as we shot our own men coming in
from night patrol?
Do you want to know about the one we killed?
Do you want to know what it is like living with paranoia as
your daily companion?
Do you want to know about the dreams
and sleepless nights?
There are many of them you can ask about.
Do you want to know what the chill feels like in hearing
"Fix bayonets!" when surrounded by bad guys
and fearing being overrun?
Would you like to feel that chill?
Or maybe you want to know how to drive at over
100 mph late at night, screaming,
with no one to hear your screams.
Would you care to take that drive?
Do you want to hump through thick jungle all day staring
at the eyes of a dead young man carried by two other
young men, those eyes never leaving yours?
Of course, that must be what you want to know.
Are these your questions?
I can answer these and more,
if you really want to know.

A 2/503d Sky Soldier

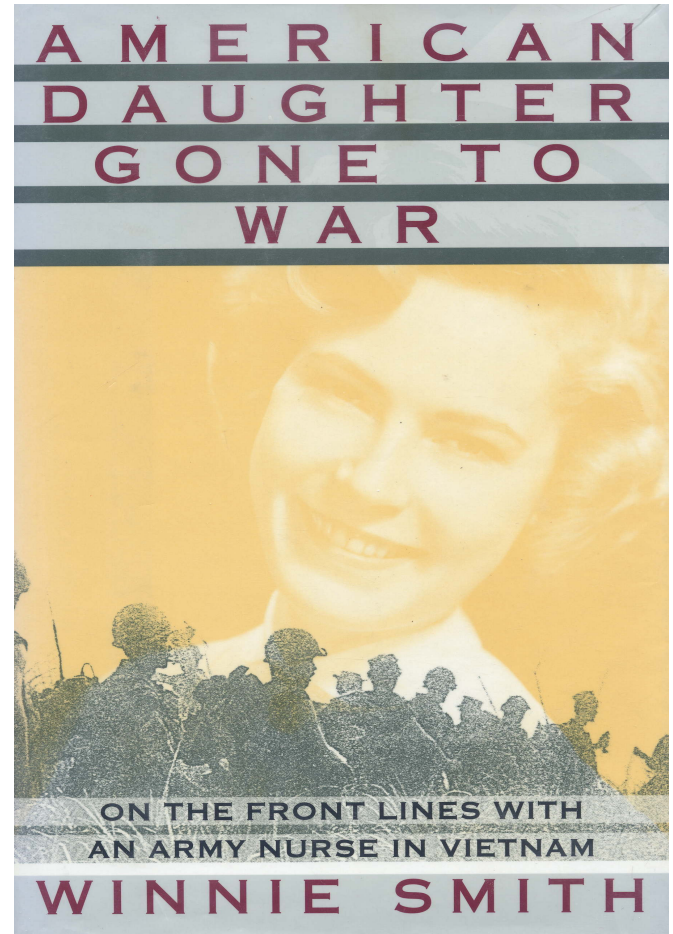


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Winnie Smith, no relation, was my nurse at 3rd Field Hospital in Tan Son Nhut in late '66, as she no doubt was for many of you. Following the war she authored this book. The excerpt from her book below, perhaps, is one of the best descriptions of a Vietnam war veteran ever written.



"For us the subject is not history; it's a condition of our lives. In a country where youth is adored, we lost ours before we were out of our twenties. We met our human frailties, the dark side of ourselves, face-to-face, and learned that brutality, mutilation and hatred are all forgivable. At the same time we learned guilt for all those things. The war destroyed our faith, betrayed our trust, and dropped us outside the mainstream of society. We still don't fully belong. I wonder if we ever will."

2/503d Brothers... Where Are They Now?

Jerry Wiles



Jerry served with B/2/503 as a machine gunner during the *Battle of the Slopes* in 1967, where he was awarded the Purple Heart. Today, Jerry lives in Cleveland, TN where he and his wife Harriet operate their own KOA.

Bob Carmichael



Bob is a former LTC who served as the 2/503d's battalion XO and CO in 1965/66, and is the recipient of the Silver Star and Purple Heart among numerous combat awards. On his second tour in Vietnam he served as battalion commander with the 25th Infantry during Operation Crook. Today, Bob is retired in Austin, TX with his lovely bride, Exie, who has reluctantly taken over duties as his permanent RTO. She made it to E-6 once, but he keeps busting her back to E-3.

Short Story About My Good Friend

Assigned as his RTO in December 1965, I found myself at Bob Carmichael's feet on the floor of a Huey on 2 January 1966 (prescribed position for RTO's of Field Grade officers). We were part of the initial assault force heading to LZ Wine in the rice paddies of the Mekong Delta during Operation Marauder. As we neared the LZ, and this being my cherry mission, I must have looked terrified. Bob, noticing this leaned down and yelled over the drone of the chopper blades, "*Don't worry Smitty, this LZ is secured!*" He barley got the words out of his mouth when the roof above our heads was torn apart by incoming fire! It turns out the armored unit



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tasked with securing the LZ got stuck in the mud some clicks away and never got there before our assault. Now, there's a moral to this story: If you ever find yourself back in combat with a paratrooping Major from Texas, don't believe a goddamn thing he says!! Today, we laugh about it...well, *he* laughs about it. Smitty Out

Jack Ribera



Jack, recipient of the Purple Heart, served with A/2/503 in 1966, when he was wounded by a mine. His wounds were so severe he was carried as KIA, and today his name appears on *The Wall* in Washington, DC. This good man and good

trooper survived and is doing well in Durham, CT, where he lives with his loving wife Peg.



L-R: Mike Sturges and Jack Ribera, A/2/503, in 2001 visiting the battle site in Vietnam where they both were severely wounded in August 1966.

Stories of the "Bravo Bulls"

Vietnam Story: Part V.....A Great Kiss

by Larry Paladino

When 'Playboy' magazine's 'Playmate of the Year' for 1965, Jo Collins, arrived in Vietnam, the company she came to see was in the boondocks. Back in November '65, Lt. Price sent a letter to Hugh Hefner of 'Playboy', along with a \$125. check from eager Bravo Co. G.I.'s. Price reasoned that since a 'Playboy' bunny was supposed to deliver the first copy of a lifetime subscription, why couldn't she deliver it to Vietnam?



My function, when the unit was not in the field, was that of company clerk. My assistant, PFC Richard Childress of North Carolina, and I argued over who would type the letter. We split the duty, knowing that we would be instrumental in getting a beautiful, round-eyed American female to come to Vietnam. We felt sure 'Playboy' would not pass up this opportunity for publicity. It didn't. Jo Collins arrived at Tan Son Nhut Airbase, outside of Saigon, on Jan. 11, and was greeted by Lt. Clarence Johnson and several "B" Co. men who had stayed behind from the last search and destroy mission because of wounds.



Co. "B" was flown by helicopter from the Ho Bo Woods area near War Zone D to our base camp on Jan. 13. 'G.I. Jo' was there to greet us as we came off the choppers. I stuck close to the CO, Capt. Les Brownlee, because I was one of his RTO's (radio telephone operators).



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As it turned out, he patted me on the back and said, "I want you to greet Miss Collins for the company". I said OK and proceeded to shake her hand. "No, no," said Capt. Brownlee, "that's not what I mean".

Then it dawned on me. This sweaty, grubby G.I. straight from trudging through steaming jungles, sitting in polluted rice paddies during heavy Viet Cong attack, and sleeping in dirty foxholes in the same set of fatigues for 13 days, put his arms around Playmate Jo Collins and gave her a mad, passionate kiss.



After both of us recovered, one of the 'Associated Press' photographers said, "Do it again, I need more pictures". He then took my name and address and said the pictures would be in every paper across the U.S. (They must have missed Detroit, none of my relatives ever saw them).

(This is one in a series of stories Larry wrote about serving in Vietnam with the 2/503d which appeared in his college newspaper in 1967).

OPINION



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I've been on the receiving end of countless emails from many but particularly from one of our former 2/503 buddies, spewing disdain for our president and virtually everything he's done and is attempting to do; and, virtually, stating not one positive thing about the man.

Of course, it is my friend's right to voice his opinions; this is not about that right, a right he fought for as a multi-tour combat vet.

To add some balance to the debate, I replied to him, prompted by his latest missive questioning President Obama's birthplace.....

Hi Cap:

He's generally pursuing the platform he espoused during his campaign on which a vast majority relied to elect the man. I've found fault with his decision to not pursue those in the former Administration and their minions who trampled all over our Constitution and Bill of Rights, too many such acts and people to list here, but topping that list is the megalomaniacal former vice president, and a president seemingly under his direction.

While President Obama has yet to involve us in an unjustifiable and unlawful war, that alone in my book makes me a fan. He and his handlers' decision to escalate the Afghan debacle is a huge mistake in my view and will likely end as our little debacle in Southeast Asia ended, leaving death and destruction in our wake. Right or wrong in this case, he does give serious weight to advice from his military leaders. His (again) formally outlawing torture gives him high marks. His decision to close Guantanamo and prosecute evil doers and release the innocent is just, and is consistent with the righteous nation we like to believe we are. His tax on my cigarettes to help offset some of the cost for medical care for kids was a worthy act, altho the cost for cigarettes is now a sumbitch! Rather than alienate nearly every allied nation with chest thumping, his reasoned approach to rebuilding alliances is highly respected from these quarters, and I suspect will pay dividends over the years ahead. With regard to vets, I haven't seen nor heard one example of him working against us....everything points to the contrary. The Stimulus Program initiated under the Bush/Obama banners is a tough one; in the mid or long term it will be proven to have worked or, we'll see Ms. Palin or one of her ilk taking over in '12. I have not read the thousand page health care reform bill. I do believe, however, the strongest and wealthiest nation in the world should not allow nearly 50 million of our citizens to go without while the politicians on both sides line their pockets with massive P's from insurance/pharmaceutical/medical/nursing homes/etc., as those enterprises rack in literally billions in profits. Profit making is good for everyone, but not at the expense of people dying and losing their homes.

By the way, I very much enjoy my VA benefits, Medicare and Social Security in spite of it smacking of Socialism.... do you? I wonder if those yelling down the politicians as they attempt to explain and debate the program would be in favor of giving-up these Socialistic benefits? I wonder how many will continue screaming against a Federal health care program when they themselves lose their jobs and their insurance and, perhaps, their homes with it?

Obama is not the Second Coming. He is a bright young man who will make mistakes, yet fess-up to those mistakes, hopefully correcting them. If we could get rid of some of those old farts in the House, both Dems and Reps, replace them with younger, fresher, newer, smarter minds, with term limits, then maybe there would be greater hope for a brighter tomorrow for this country we both fought for and love. Of course, until term limits become a reality we'll have to continue to deal with their old and failing ideas and ideals.

Should the young Mr. Obama drag this nation down to the pits of Hell as many of you on the Right profess he will, then we vote his ass out in a few years, most on the Right can say *Amen*, and then we'll give it all back to the Republicans for another go. He is powerful, no doubt, but no single man is *that* powerful. I think Mr. Nixon learned that as well.

Obama is clearly a progressive and an activist, achieving more in six months than was accomplished in the preceding eight years. Some of what he achieves will be good for the people of our country and people of the world, some, most likely, will not be good. Seven months is too early to render a grade.

I also know for a fact, much of the angst expressed from the Right is driven by early-learned hatred for and fear of anyone not white (I was raised that way myself, but years later became an adult, and a veteran who survived war thanks to G.I.'s representing all colors). That is sad commentary and speaks poorly for us as a nation.

As you're a fair and balanced guy, as are Messrs. Hannity, Beck and O'Reilly, you're welcome to share these thoughts with your buddies.

Luv ya bro,

Former Republican,

Smitty Out

Reader comments, pro and con, are welcome.
Please include your name.



~ *Medal of Honor* ~

Charles J. Watters
Major, U.S. Army

Citation:

Chaplain (Major) Charles J. Watters, Company A, 173d Support Battalion, 173d Airborne Brigade, distinguished himself by gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life during an assault in the vicinity of Dak To, Republic of Vietnam, on 10 November 1967. Chaplain Watters was moving with one of the companies when it engaged a heavily armed enemy battalion. As the battle raged and the casualties mounted, Chaplain Watters, with complete disregard for his own safety, rushed forward to the line of contact. Unarmed and completely exposed, he moved among, as well as in front of, the advancing troops, giving aid to the wounded, assisting in their evacuation, giving words of encouragement, and administering the last rites to the dying. When a wounded paratrooper was standing in shock in front of the assaulting forces, Chaplain Watters ran forward, picked the man up on his shoulders and carried him to safety. As the troopers battled to the first enemy entrenchment, Chaplain Watters ran through the intense enemy fire between the two forces in order to recover two wounded soldiers.

Later, when the battalion was forced to pull back into a perimeter, Chaplain Watters noticed that several wounded soldiers were lying outside the newly formed perimeter. Without hesitation and ignoring attempts to restrain him, Chaplain Watters left the perimeter three times in the face of small arms, automatic weapons, and mortar fire to carry and assist the injured troops to safety. Satisfied that all of the wounded were inside the perimeter, he began aiding the medics applying field bandages to open wounds, obtaining and serving food and water, and giving spiritual and mental strength and comfort. During his ministering he moved out to the perimeter from position to position, redistributing food and water and tending to the needs of his men. Chaplain Watters was giving aid to the wounded when he himself was mortally wounded. Chaplain Watters' unyielding perseverance and selfless devotion to his comrades were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Army.