The Psychological Injuries and Toll of War

World War I, World War II, and the War in Vietnam
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AIS provides a diverse and inclusive environment that fosters intellectual discovery, creates and transmits innovative knowledge, improves human health, and provides leadership to the world on stress related topics.
Harnessing Post-Traumatic Stress for Service Members, Veterans, and First Responders

Combating Stress

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The psychological toll of war is immeasurable. No one returns home unscathed and one’s former self cannot be found hanging in the closet. In the Spring 2019 issue of *Combat Stress*, we pay tribute and homage to the Veterans of the other Greatest Generations and the other wars - World War I, World War II, and the War in Vietnam.

Historically, the term combat stress has undergone many revisions, from Soldier’s heart and nostalgia, to shell shock, and battle fatigue. Regardless of the terminology, these speak to the issue of the emotional casualties of war, too often unnoticed and disregarded. Many wounds only bleed internally and each of us who have served on the battlefield will necessarily walk through fire, time and time again, paying a price for military service that cannot be calculated... and many of us would likely die to do it all over again.

We at Combat Stress are very honored to bring to the banquet table of military and Veteran authors, three “authentic” pieces, written from the firsthand perspective of two Vietnam Combat Veterans, both by their own hand and by interview. These are stunning in their realism. Never forget that some, if not many of us, really do awaken every morning to the smells of napalm and mortar fire. We are so very grateful to pay homage to Dr. Art Schmitt, U.S. Navy Retired and clinical psychologist, for his poignant revelation of the realities of jungle warfare from the perspective of a helicopter pilot. For our Veteran Spotlight Column, we also honor SGT Keith Brown, U.S. Army, for his moving expose’ of the life of an American Soldier in the jungles of Vietnam. In this endeavor, I have been fortunate to honor my own father’s Naval service during World War II, Coxwain Eugene J. Platoni, for the very first time, and to reveal the coverup of his horrific and tragic death as a direct result of his military service.

We believe that every Veteran has a story and in fact, many stories that yearn to be told. It is up to all of us not just to listen, but to truly hear with our hearts and minds in order to assist the overcoming of the agonizing isolation that is the struggle of so many suffering souls. We offer numerous accolades to those who have had the courage to come forth and to reveal their innermost for this issue.

We are most fortunate to publish the very unique contributions of Dr. Duane Nix, retired U.S. Navy chaplain, who has chronicled the excruciating experiences of World War I chaplain, Reverend G.A. Kennedy, and the terrible struggles faced in dealing with the carnage of war and a crisis of conscience with his own faith. This article speaks extremely poignantly to the moral injuries inherent in war and the lifetime of toil the sufferer is borne to follow.

It is truly providential that the acclaimed Shad Meshad, world renowned for his seminal book, Captain for Dark Mornings, for the founding of the National Veteran Foundation, and for his lifetime of ardent advocacy for Veterans, agreed to contribute to this issue. His pivotal article, stunning in its realism and its revelation of the devastating impact of the War in Vietnam, captures the essence and the toll of all wars on the psyche. This is one of our most unforgettable contributions of all time.
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**LATEST RESEARCH:** The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, “Cranial Electrotherapy Stimulation for the Management of Depression, Anxiety, Sleep Disturbance, and Pain in Patients with Advanced Cancer”

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**REFERENCE**

My experience of combat stress began as a social work psychiatric officer for the U.S. Army in 1970. It has continued throughout a career as a counselor for Veterans and their families and as an advocate for all Veterans. While I have been in some combat situations, most of my experience has been witnessing and dealing with the effects and aftermath of combat stress over the last forty years.

As a member of ROTC on my college campus, when I graduated in 1966 with a degree in social psychology, I was a commissioned 2nd Lieutenant in the Infantry. I was fortunate to be able to continue my studies in graduate school, even though the Vietnam war was claiming many of my high school and college friends. I earned a master’s degree in psychiatric social work, graduating in 1968, and went straight into the Army.

The military, realizing from the Korean War that combat stress was a real thing, determined that mental health officers were needed in the war zones. By the time we were in Vietnam, a few (two to be exact) mental health teams consisting of psychiatrists, social workers and psychologists were formed and in place.

I accepted a transfer into the Medical Service Corps, then traded places with another officer who had orders for Vietnam. People thought I was crazy, but the crazy part lay ahead of me. I was young and invincible. This was my generation’s war. I had already lost classmates. Sitting out the war was not an option for me.

We landed before dawn. Coming in over Cam Ranh Bay, we could see lights flashing from some distant fight. I was almost ecstatic at the sight of it. Anxious about what would happen, but up for it. Vietnam was waiting for me… There was a war going on. My generation was fighting it. I was not going to miss it…

As the AOD — administrative officer of the day — one was in charge of the hospital from 1700 hours to 0700. We sat in the director’s office, watched the field telephones in case there were any casualties coming in… and called Da Nang if any supplies ran short. It was Triage that brought the war right to me… working there through just one night, my whole perspective changed… I was writing a letter when the phone rang at 21.55 hours.

…”Whiskey One, this is Red Bird Seven. We have mass caz… I repeat mass casualties.”

“Red Bird Seven… What is your ETA?” I managed to ask.

…”about fifteen minutes. We’ve got three
Chinooks loaded and we’re comin’ in, so get ready.”

…Suddenly an explosion of colors and noise as the doors [to Triage] burst open. Instantly the room filled with the warm smell of blood. The dead and wounded piled on the first cart — a dark green mass with red blotches.¹

The ensuing chaos of sorting the living from the dead and dying marked me. I could not articulate what I felt — probably a mix of sadness, guilt and rage. But there was no time to process it. Triage introduced me to war.

The craziness was amplified by the fact that we only had two psychiatric teams, comprised of approximately fifteen to twenty mental health professionals, in country to serve the needs of 500,000 Soldiers. Many of them were raw recruits — young, green, and certainly not trained for what they were facing. Ninety-five percent of them were draftees. The Army had relaxed its intellectual requirements. Recruits who could not think on their feet were a danger to themselves and everyone else.

But no amount of training, basic or specialized, could have prepared any of us for war in the jungle. When I arrived in Vietnam, morale was low. There were problems with drugs. Tension between blacks and whites was high. Some men were so desperate to escape Vietnam, they would do anything, even use a live grenade.

One morning, a nurse came running, screaming to me. I followed her out the door. An M.P. (Military Police) ran toward us, pointing to the ammo dump near the compound’s perimeter. He was shouting that someone was going to blow up the dump. A Soldier stood before the dump with three grenades strapped across his chest and another one in his hand, the pin already pulled.

When I got close enough, I could see that his eyes were heavy-lidded, as if he were on drugs. An hour later he collapsed, still threatening us. I lunged to catch the live grenade before it hit the ground. I lobbed it over the perimeter fence, and we all hit the dirt. The grenade exploded in the air.

The only thing we had to offer this Soldier was Thorazine. For some, a few days away from the bush was all they needed. For others, we had neither the resources nor the time to provide the kind of treatment they required. All of them needed to escape the
war. We did not see a whole lot of psychotic disorders, but we saw a lot of violence issues.

The stress of combat releases an adrenaline rush, a call to quick action, to counteract fear and confusion. **When the actual stressors abate, they leave in their place indelible memories and hypervigilance, so that troops imagine danger where there is none. Also, combat normalizes responses that are life-saving in war, but disastrous in civilian life.** Vets suffering from combat-caused PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) frequently self-medicate with alcohol or drugs, or both, which brings its own set of problems.

**Case in point:** a decorated Army ranger who served in Iraq in the early part of the war, came home and found himself trying to assimilate back into civilian life. Missing the excitement and the camaraderie he had grown used to in the military, he began drinking heavily. One night, he went out to a bar. A stranger’s casual remark felt insulting to him and before he could think, he had drawn his pistol and was holding the man in a choke hold. Putting the gun barrel to the man’s head, he pulled the trigger. The gun didn’t fire; the chamber was empty.

Police were called, and this young Vet was arrested and charged with attempted murder. Called to testify in the sentencing part of his trial, I introduced evidence of his combat experience. The judge released him on condition of his receiving treatment. He entered a residential treatment program in Los Angeles for a year. I stayed in regular touch with him and treated him for PTSD. After that year, the National Veterans Foundation hired and trained him for our information and crisis hotline. He was a tremendous resource because he could identify with combat Vets trying to normalize and reintegrate into civilian society. In his case, something trivial or inconsequential had triggered a combat response. We see that often. Luckily for this Vet,
PTSD was identified as a factor and was brought to bear during the sentencing part of his trial. Not so fortunate was a highly decorated combat Veteran (Marine and Army) who served as a chopper pilot in Vietnam. He came home from Vietnam and after a time, married a woman whose former husband had been abusive. Violating a court injunction not to see his former wife, the ex-husband savagely beat her and her teenaged daughter and raped them both. This Vet took matters into his own hands. He is still serving a life sentence without parole for premeditated murder, not a crime of passion, which carries a maximum penalty of ten years. His case went to trial before PTSD was recognized as a diagnosis in the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders). Nothing of his honored military career was introduced at his trial. Worse, this was after the horrific images from My Lai hit the press. Public perception of Vietnam Vets held that they were all crazy and dangerous.

Two young Army Vets, having returned from Iraq, came to work with us at the National Veterans Foundation. One had unexplainable rages, a common reaction. The other experienced debilitating dreams that robbed him of sleep. Both felt like they were in downward spirals. This is the point where transitioning Vets tend to look for ways to self-medicate. These two Vets were seeking treatment and were open to different modalities, trying many before finding one that worked.

**Combat stress implants hidden triggers which can surface years later.** An Army combat Vet returned from two tours in Iraq and used his VA education benefits to earn a degree in computer science. He found a good job after graduation and worked successfully for five years in his field. When a very close relationship broke apart, it totally unmoored him. Within only a few months, he was single, homeless, driving around in his car with his dog and his shotgun, when he called our Lifeline for Vets (the National Veterans Foundation’s crisis and information hotline). How he came so close to becoming a suicide statistic, after what looked like a successful transition, may seem like a mystery; but we see this all the time. It is the result of untreated combat stress.

A Vet from Operation Iraqi Freedom talked about a vivid memory of the moment he had fired at an insurgent to save the life of his friend.
The Vet describes what happened as “not our side shooting at their side, but me alone, killing with an almost surgical precision.” The image stays with him still. He talked about the level of confusion, panic and fear overridden by the knowledge that: …you can’t just freeze. You have to do something. It comes down to knowing when to fire and when not to. I most admired the squad leaders who remained calm; who waited and did not fire injudiciously. You have to maintain a clear mind. If you are lost in the chaos, you become a liability.

In combat, all your senses are heightened. It feels like you have gained extra arms, like an octopus. And each arm has its own set of senses. Everything takes on meaning and intensity. Things become so real, they are completely surreal. At times, the experience of combat is out-of-body, especially when you think you are going to die. Everything slows down. Seconds become hours. Even at night, what you see becomes brighter. It changes you permanently.

Here is this same Veteran, writing about the experience:

Combat is analogous to surgery. Like a steady-handed surgeon, the biggest challenge is to excise the threat with skill and a sober mind. Much like a tumor, blockage, or aneurysm, an insurgent is treated like a threat to be removed. It is simply bad form to fire towards a target indiscriminately, with tunnel vision and no discipline. To know when to pull the trigger and when not to, and to be in control of all your senses – which are heightened during combat – is the biggest challenge. However, with training and frequent exposure to firefights, it is possible to develop that skill. And like the scalpel, forceps, and clamps available to a surgeon, you only have so many rounds in your weapon. As a practitioner of death, you have to make them count.

Karl Marlantes recounts an incident in Vietnam in his book What It’s Like to Go to War (Atlantic Monthly Press, 2011). He came face-to-face with an NVA soldier who had cocked his arm back to throw a grenade:

…He stopped. He looked right at me. That’s where the image of his eyes burned unto my brain forever, right over the sights of my M-16. The mind captures single-frame images
out of the blur of confusion and chaos, to release years later or to create an inescapable, searing barrage of images that play out over years. To say the aftermath of combat stress is unpredictable is to underestimate what happens. A Vet can feel like there is no safe time or place. That kind of hypervigilance is hard on the body and the mind. It totally disrupts any kind of flow and can lead to other serious medical conditions.

Every combat Veteran fights two wars: first, the war itself; second, the transition out of the military back into civilian society. No one returns from war unchanged. And no one returns to the exact same family and life because civilian life is not static. It had been changing the entire time the Veteran was away. That becomes a lot of moving parts.

Combat stress added to that often breaks a marriage, a friendship, destroys a career, marks young children and adolescents.

We encourage Vets suffering from combat stress to be open to trying new ways to deal with PTSD. Frequently, more than one modality is employed at the same time. The key is to be open to new methods and to be persistent in utilizing them.

Mental health care is under-utilized at the VA (Veteran’s Administration). It is easier to treat combat Veterans with pharmaceuticals; but drugs only mask the pain (not to mention the possibility of developing drug dependence). They do not treat the underlying causes. The ripples of untreated combat stress spread out from the Vet to affect family, friends and community, like ripples in a pond when a stone is cast into it. We pay a very high price.

Some of the effects of combat stress include insomnia, flashbacks, low self-esteem, painful or unpleasant emotions and unexplained rage. There are many more modalities to treat combat stress today than were available in the past. Among them are:

- TFT (Thought Field Therapy)
- EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)
- Instant Emotional Healing
- Acupressure
- Acupuncture
- Hypnotism
- Psychotherapy
- NLP (neuro-linguistic programming)
- TIR (Traumatic Incident Reduction)
- Cognitive Processing Therapy
- Virtual Reality
- Prolonged Exposure Therapy
- Stress Inoculation Therapy
- Pharmaceuticals
- Marijuana
- Breath/Body/Mind
- Exercise
in America for the aftermath of war.

In a study conducted by the Veterans Readjustment Counseling Center (Vet Center) program, approximately 60 percent of Vietnam Veterans got by and moved on, depending on their economic status, their racial status, whether they were from a strong family, and the amount of combat they had experienced. Vets who saw less combat were better able to move on; not that they were not scarred and not that it did not take two or three years for them to regain some traction in civilian life.²

A full forty percent really struggled. They returned from war with severe readjustment issues. Approximately half of them were dealing with what we now know as combat-related PTSD. Real help was unavailable when they came back - no Vet Centers, no counseling centers. It was not until later in the 1970's that programs like the Vet Center program became available. Many of those 40 percent never really recovered because they were never treated, and many today still have never been treated for their PTSD. A few of them have never even tried to access their VA benefits. Oftentimes they were never informed that benefits existed and that they were eligible to receive them. This remains true even today.

It appears to me that this very same statistic (40 percent) holds true as this pertains to the two longest-running wars in our history, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. There is one important distinction: when Vietnam Veterans returned, what we now call PTSD was not even a known or accepted diagnosis. Not until 1980 was the term included in the DSM (the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III)).

Veterans open to trying a different range of modalities or a combination of them, seem to have the most success. One size never fits all. We see this in the range of calls we receive on our crisis and information hotline, our Lifeline for Vets.

Many of our calls are for information on accessing VA benefits. Our grid of resources is nation-wide, so that a Vet calling in receives information based on his or her location. For a Vet who is suffering from combat stress, being able to obtain quick answers goes a long way toward defusing the anxiety that could build to a more serious problem.

The crisis calls, and there are plenty of
them, require a different kind of attention. The most critical skill for responding is the ability to establish rapport and trust as quickly as possible.

Oftentimes that requires an hour or more of conversation with a distraught Vet, and this is just the first call. After that, there are follow-up calls over the next several days, as we connect local service providers to the Veteran in crisis. This is why we call it the Lifeline.

Treating combat stress begins with **listening to a Veteran.** It can be casual conversation or a focused crisis conversation. Treating someone over the phone is a skill unto itself. You must listen with your ears, heart and mind. You physically lean in to the person on the other end of the line. You listen to what is being said and what is left unsaid. You hear the silences. It takes patience and compassion and it saves lives.

If we were better at preparing our young men and women for war, and especially at de-briefing them when they come home to us, there would be fewer crisis calls, and the suicide rate would readily reflect that. The military has recognized the importance of helping Vets to transition out of the military. The TAP program (Transition Assistance Program) offers an introduction to civilian life, but this is grossly insufficient. Even though TAP is mandated, Veterans too often slip through the net. Reservists and National Guard Service Members are frequently never even informed of these benefits.

I have been working to abate the effects of combat stress for more than forty years. Society’s learning curve seems to be excessively long regarding the lasting effects of war and the long-term costs – financial of course, but more importantly, of suffering and loss of human potential. These escalating after-effects of war...
extend so far into the future, it is extremely difficult to envision an end to them.

Those of us who work with Veterans know that combat stress is costly. Unrecognized and untreated combat stress can be deadly.


ABOUT THE AUTHOR

For more than 45 years, NVF Founder and President Shad Meshad has worked as a therapist for Veterans and an advocate for Veterans’ rights. After receiving his master’s degree in psychiatric social work from Florida State University, he enlisted in the Army in 1970 and served as a counselor for U.S. soldiers in Vietnam.

Upon his return to the United States, Meshad founded and directed the Vietnam Veterans Re-Socialization Unit at the VA Hospital in Los Angeles, California. It was the first program of its kind, focusing on the readjustment problems of Vietnam Veterans. During this time, Meshad was among the first to study the disorder now known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, or PTSD.

In 1978, he worked to develop and lobby for the National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Bill. In 1979, he founded the Vet Center Outreach Program, which now serves veterans in more than 300 locations across the country.

In 1980, Meshad was nominated for the first Olin Teague Medal of Service Award. In 1982, he published a memoir of his experiences in Vietnam, Captain for Dark Mornings. In 1985, he founded the Vietnam Veterans Aid Foundation, which was later renamed the National Veterans Foundation.

He has served on the faculty of the International Critical Incident Foundation, as President and Board Member of the Association of Traumatic Stress Specialists and on the Board of Directors of the Green Cross Project.

In the wake of the catastrophic events of September 11, 2001, Meshad was called upon by the U.S. government to help train the critical incident and trauma teams at Ground Zero.

Today, Meshad consults and teaches stress reduction and anger management techniques to mental health, law enforcement, and critical incident professionals through Quantum Performance Institute, a firm he established in 2001. He continues his work with veterans in the Los Angeles area, helping them through the process of healing and readjustment. Shad raises awareness about the issues returning Veterans face at his regular blog at the Huffington Post.

http://videos.nvf.org/ShadMeshadBio.html
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The American Institute of Stress is an executive producer of Body Electric: Electroceuticals and the Future of Medicine, a documentary film aimed to revolutionize the way we think about health and the human body. This 68 minute movie, by British producer/director/writer Justin Smith, is available online and on DVD for purchase through AIS.

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Introduction

The year 2018 marks the centenary of the end of the First World War. For the past four years, Great Britain and Europe have held numerous observances of the events of that war on the battlefields of France. Numerous academic conferences have focused on various aspects of the war, exploring the events that led up to the war, its conduct, conclusion, and aftermath. I’ve been fortunate and honored to have participated in one such conference, conducted by the International Network for the Study of War and Religion in the Modern World, held at the Armed Forces Chaplaincy Center, Amport House, Hampshire, England and chaired by Michael Snape. The gatherings are held each July and I have had the privilege to attend three of the sessions: 2014, 2016 and 2017.

As a retired U.S. Navy Chaplain and retreaded academic, my own interest and work focuses on religion and war, particularly on the instrumental use of religion to promote war aims.

In 2014, and at subsequent conferences, Reverend Stuart Bell presented papers on the life and writings of the Reverend G.A. Studdert Kennedy, whom he described as the most renowned chaplain of the First World War. Stuart’s work has been published in a number of venues and has resulted in at least one book, a critical and annotated edition of Studdert Kennedy’s The Hardest Part, containing the chaplain’s reflections on the war and his combat inspired theology of the Suffering God. I must admit that I was captured by Studdert Kennedy’s work, his prose and poetry. As a retired military chaplain, I felt a kinship with him and could identify with some of the experiences recounted by Reverend Bell. I purchased The Hardest Part and The Unutterable Beauty (his collected poetry) and read them for devotional purposes. While a bit dark at times, I discovered a deeply committed Christian man, who had served faithfully in war and experienced traumatic psychological and spiritual wounds as a result of his experiences. Even though he lived in a very different culture and time, his writings spoke to me from across the years. In 2017, I wrote

Wounded Spiritual Warrior of the Great War¹: Chaplain G.A. Studdert Kennedy

By Dayne E. Nix, Ph.D., CDR, CHC, USN (Ret.)

“For the Voice of the Lord, as I ’ears it now, Is the voice of my pals what bled, And the call of my country’s god to me Is the call of my country’s dead.”²

“All that such men can do... is to touch a few lives with a great love, to open a few eyes to a splendid vision, and often to break his own heart in the process.”³

“...This is a fairly faithful and accurate account of an incurably religious man under battle conditions.”⁴

Spring 2019 AIS Combat Stress www.stress.org
Reverend G. A. Studdert Kennedy (M.C.), also known as “Woodbine Willie”, Chaplain in the B.E.F. in the First World (© Illustrated London News Ltd. / Mary Evans)
Dear Stuart,

Thank you for your very timely response and the two attachments. I awoke this morning around 0330 local time and saw your email. Against my better judgement, I opened both attachments and began reading. I was rewarded for my effort, as both of your articles addressed my interest and questions regarding Studdert Kennedy, his context and work.

Your placement of Studdert Kennedy in a theological and historical context is insightful and your charting of his spiritual odyssey from patriotic idealist to a pacifist (disillusionment?) is excellent. Being neither a theologian nor a historian, I approach him more from a devotional perspective. As you may recall, I served in the military for 29 years, and as a chaplain for 24. Either fortunately or unfortunately, I was never directly involved in combat, although I did spend six months in the CENTCOM theater (Qatar, Kuwait, and Afghanistan). My introduction to carnage was the 1997 KAL Flight 801 airline crash in Guam, in which I participated with my ship’s crew in the recovery of the victim’s bodies. I assisted with that process for one day, then conducted debriefings of the three hundred members of my crew for the next number of weeks (formally) and the next months (informally), listening to everyone’s experiences on the crash site. The goal of that process was to help the responders deal with their often-horrific experiences. Later, I served as chaplain to many in the post 9/11 world – offering whatever I could to those returning from combat, dealing with terror, etc.

One of my most rewarding duties as a chaplain was assisting in the conduct of returning warrior retreats (over four years and 40 retreats), presented for both our Military Members and their spouses. The three-day retreats were intended to provide information and resources for those returning from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Part of the weekend was a round-table discussion including both Warriors and their spouses. The discussions were enlightening and, hopefully, helpful for all involved. One of the takeaways for me was the ubiquitous comment that “only those who had been involved in the combat there could really understand” and speak to their experiences. We agreed, but countered that all of us, working together, could address the problems they were facing.

For me this is the real power of Studdert Kennedy. He experienced the carnage of war and was forced to deal with the myths that we as Christians hold about life, often unintentionally (or intentionally) communicated from the pulpit and the Sunday School rostrum. His answers resonate with those who have experienced the questions and disillusionment that come from the really horrific experiences of life. While his answers may not square with the theologians who reflect in their “ivory towers,” they do speak to the Soldiers and the widows who faced the realities of war head on. I am afraid that our generation, and succeeding generations, unacquainted with realities of generational slaughter experienced in WWI and WWII, will fail to understand Studdert Kennedy’s message. Perhaps only his generation could fully understand that message, the Veterans and families who accepted him as one of their own; but his message does still speak to today’s combat Veterans, to survivors of terror,
to the families bereft of loved ones as a result of whatever contemporary horror.

There is a greater danger that contemporary churchmen and theologians will (or have already) resurrect the theologies that led to such disillusionment with God, faith and the church. There will always be “wars and rumors of wars.”

Young men and women will march with their idealisms and sense of indestructibility into the jaws of contemporary and future battles. Those who emerge will ask similar questions, feel similar disillusionment, and risk getting lost in the vast industrial bureaucracy of national security. Unfortunately for them, much of Europe and the United Kingdom are considered “post-Christian,” no longer finding value in the message of Christianity, opting instead for the promises of psychology and mental health. I believe that Studdert Kennedy’s message, that of a suffering God who knows and shares our pain, still has application in today’s world. It is the responsibility of chaplains, churchmen, and mental health professionals to work together to heal the inescapable wounds that our world inevitably inflicts upon us. As we pursue our responsibility as spiritual healers, the insights developed by Studdert Kennedy in the cauldron of the Great War can assist us in bringing about spiritual health for today’s victims. A welcome by-product of our effort may be the preservation of Studdert Kennedy’s message for posterity.

Best Wishes,

Dayne E. Nix

If it is not clear from my email letter to Reverend Bell, I am confident that the work of Chaplain Studdert Kennedy (also known affectionately as Woodbine Willie) illustrates both the conditions that define combat stress injury, as well as the psychological and spiritual responses to the trauma of war. In this paper, I will discuss the combat conditions experienced by Chaplain Studdert and that contributed to his combat stress and psychological injury, the immediate spiritual and psychological dissonance that resulted from his exposure to war, his experience of moral injury, and his attempts to resolve that moral injury and guilt through a non-sacramental process of reconciliation, characterized by a commitment to sacrificial service. Before I begin this discussion, it is important to briefly summarize the contemporary understanding of combat stress and its related conditions that have enabled me to more fully understand Studdert Kennedy’s life and work.

Combat Stress, PTSD, Moral Injury and Spiritual Trauma

The world of Studdert Kennedy was unfamiliar with the concepts of Combat Stress, Combat Injury, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). However, that world was too familiar with the effects of industrialized warfare on its troops. “Shell Shock” was the diagnosis resulting from the intense shelling by artillery and mortar batteries upon Soldiers in the trenches. Later it was noted that even those who had not been subject to artillery barrages experienced the same symptoms. In the final tally, more than 80,000 Soldiers were diagnosed with shell shock during the war. So significant were the effects of industrial scale warfare on the troops, that the British Expeditionary Force took steps to reduce the impact of extended duty in the front trenches, introducing a rotation system that limited direct exposure to combat to between four and ten days. Military leaders, however,
often had little sympathy for the Soldiers thus afflicted, urging them into “no man’s land” and its machine guns with calls to glory, and, if need be, threats of death.\textsuperscript{11} In spite of the official recognition of shell shock, the psychological injuries were often considered nervous reactions or failures of character.\textsuperscript{12}

Today we know that PTSD is a psychological condition that can be treated, and that lack of treatment can result in long-term disability. We also know that not everyone exposed to combat trauma develops PTSD. There is a great deal of research currently being conducted on resilience and why some Service Members develop PTSD and others do not.

The American Psychiatric Association lists a number of criteria for diagnosing PTSD in its Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). While PTSD is widely accepted as a diagnosis resulting from exposure to trauma, another approach seeks to avoid the stigma associated with a psychological diagnosis and classifies the psychological response to combat trauma as a stress injury or wound that, similar to other wounds, can be healed with appropriate intervention and treatment. Charles Figley and William Nash take this approach in their edited work, Combat Stress Injury.

Figley and Nash suggest that combat exposes its participants to physical, cognitive, social and spiritual stressors that, like all stressors, are cumulative over time. Individuals address these combat stressors through normal coping strategies, consciously or unconsciously, adapting to their environment. The cumulative nature of combat stress can, however, overwhelm a Service Member’s coping skills and result in combat stress injuries. Exposure to traumatic events, the danger of one’s own death, the experience of carnage, and the horror associated with combat may result in traumatic injury, with resulting psychological symptoms. These symptoms may include hyper-vigilance, flashbacks, guilt, loss of faith, isolation, emotional numbing, and dissonance, defined as shattered belief systems.\textsuperscript{13} One of the benefits of this approach is that military leaders can take steps to minimize the effects of combat stress and address combat stress injuries by accessing available combat stress control and mental health services in the combat theater for their Soldiers.

Researchers note at least two additional conditions that may afflict those who take part in war, moral injury and spiritual injury. A brief understanding of each is important if we are to understand Chaplain Studdert Kennedy and the impact of his war experiences on his life. Moral injury is recognized by the Veterans Administration and is described on its website. “Like psychological trauma, moral injury is a construct that describes extreme and unprecedented life experience including the harmful aftermath of exposure to such events. Events are considered morally injurious if they “transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.”\textsuperscript{14}

Service Members can experience moral injury as a result of the very nature of war itself. The taking of a human life, whether combatant or non-combatant, can result in a significant moral impact, especially as society demands respect for all human life.

Robert Grant, in his The Way of the Wound, prefers to highlight the spiritual response to trauma, rather than seeing it as a separate and unique diagnosis, such as spiritual injury or Post-Traumatic Spiritual Disorder.\textsuperscript{15} The experience of war trauma may cause individuals...
to question their faith or the nature of God. He addresses the spiritual dimension of trauma through an approach adapted from Evelyn Underhill, a contemporary of Studdert Kennedy’s.

“Trauma initially drives most people either towards or away from the Spirit. Trauma respects nothing. Childhood images of God are often the first to go because they are a mixture of personal hopes, disappointments, and fears... the way of the wound demands that images of God emerge out of personal experience and critical reflection…”

The work of Dr. Jonathan Shay is also important in helping us understand the impact of war on its participants. In his works, Achilles in Vietnam and Odysseus in America, Shay demonstrates that the experiences of war and returning from war are timeless, that Soldiers and Sailors of all ages have experienced similar psychological and spiritual responses to combat. Whether Achilles in Troy or Studdert Kennedy in France, participants in combat throughout history have experienced similar responses to the stress of war; their responses are universal human responses. It is on this basis that I am confident that Studdert Kennedy's responses to his combat experiences as a chaplain in the trenches of France during the early twentieth century have application and insights for us one hundred years later.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate and demonstrate the lasting impact of combat stress on the life a chaplain, both during the war and after his return home. I do not propose to demonstrate that Studdert Kennedy experienced shell shock or PTSD. As far as I am aware, he was never diagnosed with a psychological condition. He was, however, exposed to the stress of combat, with a resulting impact to his psyche and spirit, most likely giving rise to combat stress injury, moral injury and spiritual trauma. Like most of us, he was a survivor and coped with his experiences to the best of his ability, living out his life after war as a productive member of his society. He died in 1929, only ten years after the conclusion of the war, having exhausted himself through overwork. This was most likely due to his psychological and spiritual war injuries. His early death was deeply felt by his wife and children and was a great loss to society as well.

My research has focused primarily on Studdert Kennedy's published work, which is extensive. He published at least nineteen books of prose and poetry between 1918 and 1929, with many books enjoying multiple printings. As a public personality he chose to live out his personal struggles on a public stage. In his speeches, both during and after the war, he mused deeply on the challenges of his time and recorded his thoughts for the reading public, transposing his emotive public speeches into published prose. He also translated his private reflections into poetry, which he used to “spice up” his public presentations. I have found his poems to be particularly effective, often arousing personal emotions, even tears as I prepared this manuscript.

I will use Studdert Kennedy's own words extensively in order to convey his thoughts and emotions as completely as possible. I have also spent a good deal of time researching the press of his day, which reported on his speeches and provided large excerpts from his presentations. They provide the added benefit of first-hand accounts of his oratory style and the responses of his audiences. One reporter commented that his speeches were both “racy” and eloquent and that he could make his audiences both cry.
and laugh almost at the same moment. Unfortunately, the humor has lost much of its context between this century and the last. Fortunately, the tears remain.

The Great War: Environmental Stresses – Physical, Cognitive, Social, and Spiritual.

The combat environment and its inherent stresses contribute to the possibility of combat stress injury and the development of PTSD. The physical, cognitive, social and spiritual stresses of combat accumulate over time and can ultimately lead to crisis in the life of those immersed in war: the fighting Soldier, combat leaders, medics, physicians, mental health professionals, or chaplains. We are familiar with images of the First World War: muddy trenches, water-filled shell holes and barren battle landscapes. Few today have direct experience of those conditions. Chaplain Studdert Kennedy’s poetry and prose paint a graphic and often too realistic picture of his own experience of those conditions and fully illustrate the various dimensions of combat stress. His poem, “His Mate,” effectively illustrates the environmental conditions that were ubiquitous throughout the war zone.

• The Physical Environment – The physical environment always contributes to the stressors experienced by our military personnel engaged in battle. Cold, ice and exposure to the elements compounds the challenges they face. In this poem, the environment is characterized by rain and mud, through which the chaplain was forced to slither in order to escape the ever-present enemy fire. He does not comment upon his own drenched and muddy condition but demonstrates great sympathy for the “sodden dead,” many of whom were “water-soaked in flooded shell-holes, reft of common Christian prayer.” It’s probable that the chaplain, in his night rounds in the midst of battle, had dropped at least some of those bodies into those same shell holes to preserve them from the shell fire. He now was seeking to retrieve them in order to perform his pastoral duty, to bury them with the thousands he had already placed in the cemetery. The constant rain only served to accentuate the overwhelming emotion, “God, what sorrow and what rain!”

• Cognitive – The constant danger of death on the battlefield is a significant stressor. In the poem, the chaplain conducted his grim business of collecting the dead for burial while the machine gun bullets were still chattering around him. There was the very real danger of his own death in the conduct of his duties. He was forced to crawl about on his belly as he performed the sacramental rites, even reciting the burial for the dead service face down in the mud. He and his mates were helpless to interfere with or stop the constant barrage of shell-fire that endangered them. Even the conduct of a burial service offered no protection, as a German shell punctuated the end of the hasty service with the explosive destruction of the body. The chaplain and Sergeant emerged miraculously unscathed, gazing at a “crimson clot of blood.” It is almost as if the body of “His Mate” has experienced a sudden, explosive transformation to glory!

• Social Isolation – The social isolation of the chaplain is a striking element in this poem, although he does not comment on this subject directly. A chaplain is, by the nature of his role, a solitary figure. The military operates in units...
“There’s a broken, battered village
Somewhere up behind the line,
There’s a dug-out and a bunk there
That I used to say were mine.

I remember how I reached them,
Dripping wet and all forlorn,
In the dim and dreary twilight
Of a weeping summer morn.

All that week I’d buried brothers,
In one bitter battle slain,
In one grave I laid two hundred,
God! What sorrow and what rain!

And that night I’d been in trenches,
Seeking out the sodden dead,
And just dropping them in shell holes,
With a service swiftly said.

For the bullets rattled round me,
But I couldn’t leave them there,
Water-soaked in flooded shell-holes,
Reft of common Christian prayer.

So I crawled round on my belly,
And I listened to the roar
Of the guns that hammered Thiepval,
Like the breakers on the shore.

Then there spoke a dripping sergeant,
When the time was growing late,
Would you please to bury this one,
‘Cause e’ used to be my mate?”

So, we groped our way in darkness
To a body lying there,
Just a blacker lump of blackness
With a red blotch on his hair.

Though we turned him gently over
Yet I still can hear the thud,
As the body fell face forward,
And then settled in the mud.

We went down upon our faces,
And I said the service through,
From “I am the resurrection”
To the last great “adieu.”

We stood up to give the Blessing,
And commend him to the Lord.
When a sudden light shot soaring
Silver swift and like a sword.

At a stroke it slew the darkness,
Flashed its glory on the mud,
And I saw the sergeant staring
At a crimson clot of blood.

There are many kinds of sorrow
In this world of love and hate.
But there is no sterner sorrow
Than a Soldier’s for his mate.”

His Mate
- fire teams, squads, platoons, companies, etc. A soldier always has a “buddy” or comrade to support him in his duties, someone to “have his back.” As is evident in this poem, much of the chaplain’s duties are served in a one-to-one relationship; in this case, to the dead, where he was isolated by his role and identity.  

Studdert Kennedy was roaming the battlefield, seeking out the dead in order to transport them to the cemetery. On another battlefield, as he set up an aid station he mused, “…how I hate being alone. It’s rotten. One pal makes all the difference.” This social isolation and overwhelming sense of duty can contribute to a sense of carrying the world’s ills on one’s solitary shoulders, a malady to which Studdert Kennedy, with his immense sense of empathy and commitment to his Soldiers, was evidently prone.

**Traumatic Injury** - One of the most significant contributions to combat stress on the battlefield is the ubiquity of trauma and death. “His Mate” focuses directly on the huge scale in the number of deaths. The poet reflects on the fact that, “in one grave I laid two hundred.” We can reliably assume that he had ministered at many more similar graves. How many more thousands must he and other chaplains have buried by the time of his writing this poem? The poet reports his dangerous excursion throughout the muddy battlefield, seeking more bodies to bury. The sheer numbers were numbing. To emphasize the grief that Studdert Kennedy experienced, “His Mate” focuses on the loss of one Soldier. A sergeant mourned for a lost buddy and in doing so, we can grieve for all the Soldiers and their wives, children, mothers and fathers of all those lost in war. For Studdert Kennedy, the loss was a personal one, as he would also experience the loss of a mate in 1917 when his own chaplain servant was killed while conducting a task the chaplain had assigned him.

“On the last Sunday in June 1917, the Advanced Dressing Station in which I was working was blown in and everyone in it was killed except the doctor, two stretcher cases, an R.A.M.C. sergeant and myself. Among those killed was Roy Fergusson, my servant, a splendid lad of nineteen years, with whom I was great friends. He went out after the first shell had broken the end of the station to guide some walking wounded to a place of safety and was killed instantly. I found him leaning against a heap of sandbags, his head buried in his hands and a great hole in his back. Poor old Roy, I thought I had saved his life when I sent him on that job…”

Studdert Kennedy’s poetry and prose records the loss of many Soldiers and their mates on the battlefields of the Great War. A brief survey of his writings reveals numerous memories that would accompany him back to England once the war was over, seared into his memory. Many years later, he would report that the memories of the Great War were often more real and striking to him than events that had occurred only the day before. In his works, he records the following:

- The discovery of the body of a German soldier on 7 June 1917, and he was struck by how young, weak and “non-monstrous” he appeared.
- Reports that he had carried in many wounded and noted that he was covered in the blood of the wounded men, June 1917.
• Peter, in a kneeling position facing the front lines with a fatal bullet wound in his forehead, June 1917.  
• The death of the Soldier who he criticized for his selfish prayers, killed in a sudden explosion by friendly fire.  
• The death of his own servant, Roy Fergusson on 24 June 1917.  
• His own narrow escape from death in the destruction of the advanced dressing station where he was working. Most present were killed.  
• The “Mate” he referred to in the poem of the same title, June 1916.  
• The hundreds he had buried in a single grave.  
• The thousands killed when the mines at Messines Ridge were exploded, to which his spirit rebelled, June 7, 1917.  
• The disemboweled mother and beheaded child he referred to in his poem, “Der Tag”.  
• In speaking against prostitution, he resorted to rhetorical excess when he exclaimed that the men should rather “disembowel the women and throw their bodies in the mud” rather than engage them as prostitutes.  

The constant presence and exposure to trauma and death and the chaplain’s responsibilities in dealing with the wounded and the dead inevitably wears on the spirit. These images remain deeply in the memory and intrude on everyday thoughts, with unwanted flashbacks occurring with even the slightest reminder of war, often with no obvious trigger at all. They show up in dreams and nightmares, often awakening their victims in a cold sweat. For Studdert Kennedy, they also showed up in his poetry, written prose and public speeches, offering a window into his emotions and thinking process. He was unable and, perhaps, unwilling to leave the war and its images behind him, offering as it did some of the most intense and significant experiences of his life.  

• **Spiritual** – Ultimately, the real challenge of the war for the chaplain was a spiritual one. In “His Mate,” we hear the cry from the depths of his soul as he reflected upon his duties, burying the dead from the recent battle, “God! What sorrow and what rain.” He had no time to cry for each Soldier he buried, but the rain assumed the task for him.  

It is evident from Studdert Kennedy’s poetry that the stresses of war had resulted in a crisis of spirit. He was deeply grieved by the war and its losses. He also became increasingly disenchanted with the war as it raged on. But Studdert Kennedy, and the Soldiers with whom he served, could not take time to grieve or address the internal crises they faced throughout the war. They only had the resources to fight their immediate battles, for the enemy would not relent. They were forced to fight to victory or perish.  

…I don’t cry out against any of it, not even the rum ration; I’ve had it myself. We had to stop mad dogs that ran amuck…. We stood at the altar of death with the wine cup in our hands and cried to our comrades in hell; “the world is mad and meaningless, and all the Gods are dead; your brothers lie around you crying in their agony, but heaven does not heed; your duty is to kill and kill, to carry flaming death and dire destruction with you as you go, to wipe your bloody bayonet clean, then make it red again.”  

The war brought about a significant change in the life of this chaplain. His prewar innocence was destroyed by the war and it posed very real challenges to his faith. After his 1917 experiences
at the Messines Ridge, he informed a friend, “You know, this business has made me less cocksure of much of which I was cocksure before. On two points I am certain: Christ and His Sacrament…”

After the war, he reflected on the long-term impact of his war experiences and the intensity of the emotions he suppressed.

“...For me and for a good many others this work of destruction was finally accomplished during the past four years in a brutal, cruel, and merciless fashion. To a sensitive spirit these years of war have been a perpetual torture chamber in which he has often had to have his half-beliefs, which were like parts of his body, torn away from him without even being allowed at the time to utter a cry of pain.”

The concluding poem in his More Rough Rhymes of a Padre, “Missing, Believed Killed,” published in 1919, sums up his spiritual condition at the end of the war. The scripture he quoted is intended to convey the resurrection hope of Christianity and the victory of Christ over the grave. Instead Studdert Kennedy’s poem indicates a complete loss of that hope.

“O Grave where is thy victory, O death where is they sting? Thy victory is everywhere, Thy sting’s in everything.”

I believe that Studdert Kennedy experienced a crisis of faith as a result of his experience of war. The carnage, the lost mates, the sorrow that he, as a sensitive soul immersed in the horror of war, experienced daily caused him to question his spiritual foundations. Yet, he stuffed his feelings in the interest of encouraging the morale of his Soldiers. Looking back on his experiences, he related that his faith was often on the verge of foundering, that the flood of blood and sorrow was like a tidal wave that threatened to overwhelm his very belief in God. In the last book he personally published, he reflected back on his spiritual condition:

“...There were times when I could not have helped anyone, because I was forsaken of God. I thought Christ was dead, that He had never lived... I was just sick, sick to death of the sin and wickedness of it all...”

As demonstrated in this section, the physical, cognitive, social, traumatic and spiritual stressors of the combat environment accumulated and caused a nearly overwhelming personal crisis for Studdert Kennedy. Ultimately, he did not reject his faith in God or succumb to the intense challenges posed by the war. His experiences raised great questions, but his deep questioning also discovered answers – his faith remained unshaken. He was changed, however, and so was his understanding of God. He realized that he held many illusions and “half-beliefs” which were adequate for a peace-time England but were inadequate for the bloody trenches of France and Belgium. The spiritual dissonance brought about by the war required a resolution. He found that resolution in the insight that God suffered beside him and his beloved Soldiers.

Spiritual and Cognitive Dissonance: God and War

The Sorrow of God
But it ain’t the same out ’ere, ye know.
It’s as different as chalk fro’ cheese,
For ’arf on it’s blood and t’other ’arf’s mud,
And I’m damned if I really sees
'Ow the God, who 'as made such a cruel world,
Can 'ave Love in 'Is 'eart for men,
And be deaf to the cries of the men as dies
And never comes home again.
Just look at that little boy corporal there,
Such a fine upstanding lad,
Wi'a will uv 'is own, and a way uv 'is own,
And a smile uv 'is own, 'e 'ad.
An hour ago 'e were bustin' wi' life,
Wi' 'is actin' and foolin' and fun;
'E were simply the life on us all, 'e were,
Now look what the blighters 'a done,
Look at 'im lyin' there all uv a 'eap,
Wi' the blood soaken over 'is 'ead,
Like a beautiful picture spoiled by a fool,
A bundle o' nothin' --- dead.
And it ain't only 'im --- there's a mother at 'ome,
And 'e were the pride of 'er life.
For it's women as pays in a thousand ways
For the madness o'this 'ere strife.

And the lovin' God 'E looks down on it all,
On the blood and the mud and the smell,
O God, if it's true, 'ow I pities you,
For ye must be livin' I' 'ell.
You must be livin' I' 'ell all day,
And livin' I' 'ell all night.
I'd rather be dead, wiv a 'ole through my 'ead,
I would, by a damn long sight,
Than be livin' wi' you on your'eevenly throne,
Lookin' down on yon bloody 'eap
That were once a boy full o' life and joy,
And 'earin' 'is mother weep.
The sorrows of God must be 'ard to bear
If 'E really 'as Love in 'Is 'eart,
And the 'ardest part I' the world to play
Must surely be God's part.
For the voice of the Lord, as I 'ears it now,
Is the voice of my pals what bled,
And the call of my country's god to me
Is the call of my country's dead.
This poem represents a key change in thinking for Studdert Kennedy, communicating in poetic form his understanding of God forged in the crucible of combat. War has a profound impact upon all its participants. Combatants must face the reality of killing and being killed while innocent non-combatants often face the unwelcome danger of becoming “collateral damage.” One of the ever-present dangers of combat is what Psychologist William Nash terms, “damage to core beliefs about the world and one’s place in it.” Persons of faith subjected to the death and carnage of combat may discover that their belief system contains myths or even falsehoods. It is not unusual to question God and one’s spiritual foundations, even God’s existence or love. Nash suggests that combat survivors may experience “shattered belief systems” and spiritual or cognitive dissonance, the revelation that experienced reality conflicts with dearly held beliefs. Healing of combat trauma requires that survivors engage a process to address dissonance and reconstruct or repair those belief systems.

Chaplain Studdert Kennedy faced two significant elements of dissonance as a result of his experience in the Great War: his understanding of God and his views on the utility of war, especially of the First World War. He addressed this dissonance by reconstructing his beliefs in a way that enabled him to survive psychologically and spiritually while also effectively ministering to the Soldiers of the British Expeditionary Force.

In his poem, “A Sermon,” Studdert Kennedy illustrated the contemporary theological understanding of the sovereign God held by traditional early Twentieth Century churchgoers. It was this understanding of God that seemed so incomprehensible to those fighting in the trenches of France and that offered so little peace to those back home. Studdert Kennedy mused that he, himself, had often responded with this rationale in comforting his parishioners. The poem describes in painful detail the human impact of war and assumes the questions that naturally arise.

A Sermon
My Brethren, the ways of God
No man can understand,
We can but wait in awe and watch
The wonders of his hand….
O Weeping Mother torn with grief,
Poor stricken heart that cries,
And rocks a cradle empty now,
"Tis by God’s will he dies,
His strong young body blown to bits,
His raw flesh quiv’ring still,
His comrades’ groans of agony,
They are God’s Holy Will.
He measures out our Peace and War
As seemeth to Him best,
His judgments are unknowable,
Remember that – and rest….
He has some hidden purpose sure
For all this blood and tears,
It is His Will – be still – be still,
He is the Lord of years…

Studdert Kennedy’s poem destroyed the traditional line of thinking with one simple quatrain.

O, by thy Cross and Passion, Lord,
By broken hearts that pant
For comfort and for love of Thee,
Deliver us from cant.
Studdert Kennedy's actively supported and taught this traditional understanding of God when he became a chaplain and preached in the rear areas in support of the National Mission of Repentance and Hope immediately after his time at the Somme in 1916. His sermons were later included in his book, Rough Talks by a Padre. He later regretted the content of his preaching and came to see the traditional view of God as a destructive myth.

“At the time, staggered by the immensity of the evil, I simply did not think; I submitted. Now, after three years of it, I believe that this teaching is liable to be utterly misunderstood and does but give occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme. Never again, I believe, will men bow down and worship this majestic tyrant who sits upon a throne and wields as weapons pestilence, disease, and war. Such a vision of God rouses in the best of men, not reverence, but revolt; not loyalty, but contempt; not love but bitter hatred.”

The path by which he came to his conclusion, by which he reconciled the brutality of war with a loving Eternal Father, was a process that occurred between 1915 and 1917 and his early experiences serving the Soldiers in France, both in the trenches and behind the lines.

For a chaplain teaching God's love and attempting to bring a measure of peace and hope to the Soldiers under his care, the impact was devastating. He acquitted himself honorably during his experiences of combat, with his faith in God and the assurance of heaven sustaining him as he accompanied his men “over the top” into no man’s land to establish aid stations for the wounded. While he survived his three direct experiences of combat, his spirit was wounded by the reality of war and the utter cruelty of modern weapons. The two engagements his units fought in 1916 and 1917 were characterized by horrendous casualties. His unit at Gommecourt (1916) experienced eighty percent casualties. His experiences at the Messines Ridge, recorded in The Hardest Part, were likewise bloody and nearly resulted in his own death. His faith in God and commitment to Jesus Christ provided him the resources to survive both psychologically and spiritually, but both experiences were to have a lasting impact.

Studdert Kennedy came to understand and argue that there were two ideas of God in history, the first being a false viewpoint, that of a Darwinian God who created the principle of survival of the fittest. This was the God of the Prussians and their militaristic view of power, that “might makes right.” This vision of God was also promulgated by the British Church hierarchy which considered the Great War and its mayhem a judgement upon humanity for its failure to obey God and to love one-another. This was the God who willed war, as well as the suffering that accompanied it. Studdert Kennedy's experiences of war moved him to reject this Darwinian concept with the deepest possible emotion. In his speaking and writing, he clearly articulated the hatred he felt for what he believed was a false concept of God.

“...War is evil. It is a cruel and insane waste of energy and life. If God wills war, then I am morally mad, and life has no meaning. I hate war, and if God wills it I hate God, and I am a better man for hating Him; that is the pass it brings me to. In that case, the first and great commandment is, “Thou shalt hate the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and Him only shalt thou detest and despise.”
Studdert Kennedy’s faith was challenged by his experiences in battle. The carnage, the lost friends and mates, the sorrow that he as a sensitive soul immersed in the horror of war experienced daily as he stuffed his feelings in the interest of encouraging the morale of his Soldiers. Looking back on his experiences he related that his faith was often on the verge of foundering, that the flood of blood and sorrow was like a tidal wave that threatened to overwhelm his belief in God. The questions posed by the Soldiers he served also dogged him, “How could a loving God allow the rivers of blood and continual tragedy that engulfed the armies of the Great War?” A sudden revelation in the midst of battle brought the light required to answer his and his Soldier’s questions?

In The Hardest Part, he recounted many of his experiences at the Messines Ridge in 1917 and briefly mentioned tripping over the body of a young German Soldier as he searched for a position in which to establish an aid station. The dead German Soldier appeared weak and young, hardly the image of a deadly enemy. Later, in his 1925 book, The Word and the Work, he recalled that the event had a much greater meaning for his faith and played a significant role in resolving the spiritual dissonance he was facing regarding his understanding of God.

On June 7th, 1917, I was running to our lines half mad with fright, though running in the right direction, thank God, through what had been once a wooded copse. It was being heavily shelled. As I ran I stumbled and fell over something. I stopped to see what it was. It was an undersized, underfed German boy, with a wound in his stomach and a hole in his head. I remember muttering, “You poor little devil, what had you got to do with it? Not much great blonde Prussian about you.” Then there came

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light. It may have been pure imagination, but that does not mean that it was not also reality, for what is called imagination is often the road to reality. It seemed to me that the boy disappeared, and, in his place, there lay the Christ upon His Cross, and cried, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these my little ones ye have done it unto me.” From that moment on I never saw a battlefield as anything but a Crucifix. From that moment on I have never seen the world as anything but a Crucifix. I see the Cross set up in every slum, in every filthy overcrowded quarter, in every vulgar flaring street that speaks of luxury and waste of life. I see Him staring up at me from the pages of the newspaper that tells of a tortured, lost, bewildered world. Ever and always I can see set up above this world of ours, a huge and towering cross with great arms stretched out East and West, from the rising to the setting sun, and on that Cross my God still hangs and calls on all brave men and women to come out and share His sorrow and help to save the World.\textsuperscript{54}

In addressing the emotional, spiritual and intellectual challenges he and the Soldiers of the B.E.F. faced on the battlefields of France and Belgium, Studdert Kennedy advanced a resolution that challenged a number of accepted theological formulations. He came to view God as the Suffering God who experienced His own trauma resulting from the suffering of His Son. He could therefore feel the pain of the men and women immersed in the shock and trauma of war. The chaplain who accompanied his flock into combat, who tended to their wounds and prayed over their mangled bodies strengthened their spirits with these words, “...For every wound a man receives there’s a wound in the heart of God, and every cry of agony finds echo in God’s soul.”\textsuperscript{55}

He also addressed the theological problem posed by the war in reference to God’s omnipotence and sovereignty, “Why doesn’t God stop the war?” The chaplain answered, “The truth is, that history drives one to the knowledge that God cannot be absolutely Almighty...”\textsuperscript{56} Instead he suggested that God is the God of progress, and that progress is the result of the Suffering God who chooses to work within history alongside imperfect human beings. “It has been a broken, slow and painful progress marked by many failures, a Via Dolorosa wet with blood and tears.”\textsuperscript{57} Instead of a triumphant all powerful sovereign God who drives history and the wills of men according to His own transcendent will, the chaplain suggested that God leads men along a path that meanders between success and failure, that is marked by suffering and love. “If the Christian religion means anything, it means that God is Suffering love, and that all real progress is caused by the working of suffering love in the world.”\textsuperscript{58} He concluded that the human response must be to believe in and support the work of God’s suffering love by faithful and sacrificial service.

“...War is the crucifixion of God, not the working of His will. The Cross is not past but present. Ever and always I can see set up above this world of ours a huge and towering Cross, with great arms stretched out east and west from the rising to the setting sun, and on that Cross my God still hangs and calls on all brave men to come out and fight with evil, and by their sufferings endured with Him help lift the world from darkness into light.”\textsuperscript{59}

Studdert Kennedy’s theological ruminations...
enabled him to resolve the spiritual and cognitive dissonance that had plagued since the beginning of the war. His understanding of the Suffering God enabled him to authentically offer comfort and guidance to his military flock. But a second dissonance afflicted him, one that is unfortunately (or fortunately) experienced by many chaplains. Put succinctly, a chaplain must answer the question regarding peace and war, how can a person dedicated to the peace of God serve in an organization dedicated to war. We often rationalize this problem by explaining that chaplains are there to serve the needs of the Soldiers who must fight and are deprived of their access to religious services when deployed in the service of their country. Most understand, however, that their presence in the military presents a very real conflict in the minds of many.

As noted earlier, when war broke out in 1914 Studdert Kennedy, like many other Englishmen, was convinced of the rightness of Great Britain’s entry into the war. The Germans were certainly conducting a brutal and unjust war, characterized by the “rape” of Belgium and endangering Britain’s ally, France. He encouraged his parishioners to enlist or pray and requested his own assignment as a chaplain in the British military.

His early chaplain duties included encouraging the troops in YMCA centers, serving at the Battle of the Somme, and then embarking on the Mission of Repentance and Hope as he preached the Christian message to the troops. His activities also included preaching at various training centers and accompanying a bayonet training team, often engaging in antics with members of that team. His message throughout this period, recorded in his Rough Talks by a Padre, was complete support for the war effort and belief that God supported British war efforts.

In August 1914 God called in a voice like thunder. He called to England across the narrow stretch of sea, “Come out, Come out! Come out from home and comfort. Come out to right the wrong. Come out and share my sorrow and help save the world.” God called, and England answered. Thank God England answered and simply said, “I come.”

In June 1917, Chaplain Studdert Kennedy was assigned to the 17th Brigade of the 24th Division assembled as part of the Second Army assembled at the Messines Ridge in preparation for the third battle of Ypres. This was his second assignment in the trenches. The British had tunneled under the German lines and placed nineteen mines totaling 454 tons of explosive. These mines were detonated at 0310 on June 7th, with the blasts causing nearly 10,000 German deaths with 7,500 missing, most killed and buried by the mines. In The Hardest Part, Studdert Kennedy recorded his mixed response to the explosions, observed from his position in the British trenches.

“We’re all laughing. We’re enjoying it. That’s the stuff to give ‘em. It is a glorious sight, one silver sheet of leaping flame against the blackness of the trees. But it’s damnable, it’s a disgrace to civilization. It’s murder, wholesale murder... damn all war! They have wives and kiddies like my Patrick, and they are all being torn to bits and tortured. It’s damnable. What’s that Lad? Shout a bit louder. It is, you’re right, it is the stuff to give ‘em...”

The dissonance he felt is summed up in a concluding sentence to this reflection. As he and the troops awaited the beginning of the battle
in their trench, he had noticed the birds and the beauty of God’s creation.

…God’s fruits, singing birds and splendid beauty, flowers and fair summer skies, golden mists and – bloody slaughter! What is a man to make of it?”  

It was here that Studdert Kennedy began to doubt the morality of the war. Later, he revised his estimate and evaluation of the war and of war in general. Writing in the Hardest Part, in 1918, he concluded that war is appealing only to those who have no experience of it.

“…War is only glorious when you buy it in the Daily Mail and enjoy it at breakfast table. It goes splendidly with bacon and eggs. Real war is the final limit of damnable brutality, and that’s all there is to it. It’s about the silliest, filthiest, most inhumanly fatuous thing that ever happened. It makes the whole universe seem like a mad muddle. One feels that all talk of order and meaning in life is insane sentimentality.”

Studdert Kennedy continued to serve honorably in France and Belgium until November 1918 and the Armistice. After the Armistice, he remained in France until March 1919, serving the Soldiers who remained to guard the peace after the conclusion of hostilities. The war had challenged him psychologically and spiritually, creating dissonances in his mind and spirit that demanded resolution. His religious convictions were tested by the war, but it also facilitated a life-changing answer that would energize his post-war ministry. His support for the war and British war-aims had also been challenged, with the development of an opposition to all war and the utility of force to attain peace. He clearly communicated his new-found pacifism when he published his first postwar book, Lies, in October 1919.

“…Why be blind any longer? Has not the light of the last four years been strong enough? I have seen it in the ruined villages, in dead men’s faces and their staring eyes; I have read it in the misery of that weird wasted land of wire and lonely graves beside the Somme - the Truth. No good can come of any war except the end of war.”

War’s End: The Long Transition Home 1918-1921

Marching Song

“I can hear the steady tramping of a thousand thousand feet, Making music in the city and the crowded village street, I can see a million mothers with their hands outstretched to greet, For the Army’s marching home.

I can see a million visions that are dancing overhead
Of the glory that is dawning where the sky is burning red,
Of the Britain to be builded for the honour of the dead,
For the Army’s marching home.

I can see the broken women choking back their scalding tears,
Oh? The barren, empty greyness of their lonely, loveless years!
But their duties to the living and they’ll only give them cheers,
As the Army marches home.

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I can see the crowd of children of the crest of yonder hill,
I can hear their little voices cheering, cheering loud and shrill,
’Tis that they may grow to beauty that our flag is floating still,
As the Army marches home.

There’s a crowd of wooden crosses in the wounded heart of France,
Where the cornfields used to glisten and the blood-red poppies dance,
Can’t you hear the crosses calling us to give the Christ a chance,
Now the Army’s marching home.

O? We’ll build a mighty temple for the lowly prince of peace,
And the splendor of its beauty shall compel all wars to cease,
There the weak shall find a comrade and the captive find release,
When the Army marches home.

Of men’s hearts it shall be builded and of spirits tried and true,
And its courts shall know no boundaries save the boundries of the blue,
And it’s there we shall remember those who died for me and you,
When the Army has marched home.”

A Man Changed by War

The Great War concluded with the Armistice on November 11, 1918. Chaplain G.A. Studdert Kennedy transferred home and was ushered out of the service in March 1919, nearly five months later. The experience of war changes people and, by all accounts, he was a changed man. The accounts of war contained in his books and poetry, especially the early ones published in 1918 and 1919 reveal a man who has been profoundly influenced by his experiences. His writings are filled with vignettes of his experiences, his thoughts under fire, and the adjustments, both spiritual and psychological, that enabled him to survive with his faith intact. William Purcell describes him as both a sadder and wiser man upon his return.

“...The man who disembarked at Folkestone on March 21st, 1919, was a very different person from the eager, ingenuous priest who had gone out at Christmas of ’15. Like the wedding-guest after his encounter with the Ancient Mariner, he was a sadder and wiser man… Like so many of his generation, he returned to civilian life embittered, above all conscious of the many, the very many, who did not come back at all.”

Whether or not Studdert Kennedy experienced “Shell Shock,” the First World War term for what we now recognize as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), he certainly suffered from the effects of combat and post-traumatic stress, with resulting spiritual implications for his life. As discussed earlier, his three experiences in the front lines with the troops exposed him to the rigors of bloody and dangerous conflict. His writings clearly relate those experiences and the lasting impact they had on his memory. In his last book published just six months before his death, he recalled his early morning excursion behind a sergeant during the Battle of the Somme, in 1916. Writing in 1928 he commented, “I can remember this night much more clearly than any single night last year.” He continued,
“…Before the dawn broke, the Sergeant was dead, and many other mother’s sons with him. But the question remained clearly formulated as a question in my mind and burned all the more deeply into it because of the horror of that night. That is the way with war. It shouts and bawls its questions at you. It throws them at you stark, raw, quivering, and all shot through with pain…”

Combat Veterans universally report a similar response to combat and the vividness of combat memories. Contemporary research into the impact of combat stress and psychological trauma reveals that individuals suffer from a number of common complaints: heightened startle response, intrusive flashbacks and dreams, depression, sleeplessness, damage to core beliefs, feelings of shame or guilt, and a continuing sense of grief. Linda McClenahan, commenting on the experience of spiritual trauma in combat Veterans, reports that individuals often experience intense sadness about life, and guilt or shame related to the violation of personal moral codes (moral injury), and emotional numbing.

As mentioned earlier, I have no evidence that Studdert Kennedy suffered from PTSD, a clinical diagnosis that did not exist in his time. It would not be surprising if he did, considering the nature of his war experiences in France. It is safe to say, however, that the war impacted him significantly and that impact is reflected in his writings. Because of his stature as a public speaker and author, he also lived out his response to the war on a public stage. William Purcell comments that many of Studdert Kennedy’s post-war friends and acquaintances considered him a war casualty.

“…There were those who met him in these years who judged him to be definitely off-balance, as were so many who came back from the war to find what was left almost intolerable. If others were bitter, so was he; if others had been sorely tried, so had he. And the pain was made all the more acute by the uncomfortable capacity, common to those of deep sensitivity, to identify himself with the sufferings of others. True, the agony did not now come from encounter with the physical brutalities of war so much as from the spiritual mass-casualties, who staggered back into civilian life, as often as not to find themselves unwanted.”

Based on the evidence contained in his writings and the observations of his close friends, it is safe to conclude that that Studdert Kennedy should be counted among those spiritual mass casualties. He felt guilt and grief over his participation in and support for the war and sought forgiveness for that participation through a public confession. He lived out his life in a flurry of activity that could be interpreted as a public penance for his war guilt. He also suffered from vivid dreams and nightmares and filled his writings and speeches with war images.

**Moral Injury: Guilt and Grief**

After the conclusion of the Great War, Studdert Kennedy had clearly come to the conclusion that the war was wrong and that it could not bring about a lasting peace. This realization and his participation and support for Britain’s war aims resulted in what we understand today to be a moral injury. There is evidence that he experienced guilt and remorse as a result of his actions that contributed to the trauma and death suffered in the war, of having...
“bloody hands.” As a non-combatant he was not responsible for sending any Soldiers into combat. He had, however, encouraged the men of his own parish to enlist in the military and had preached to thousands of British Soldiers to boost their morale. He did so because, at that time, he saw the war as a necessary evil. In one of his war speeches, delivered to the assembled troops in France, he commented, “...War may be a necessary evil at the present stage of our development, but all the allied nations are agreed that it is an evil, and that we must not sit down under its necessity, but must work, plan and scheme to eliminate it. To us it is an axiom of life that peace is a blessing, and war a curse... We want a lasting Peace and mean to get it. It is a War against War... You may ask what we are fighting for, and I say: The Freedom of the Peoples, the Honour of the Nations and the Peace of the World...”

He had signed on to support the war effort in 1915 and did so in the full and complete belief that Great Britain was fighting a just war against a foe that meant to do great harm to all of Europe, including England. Like other members of the clergy at the beginning of the war, he encouraged the people of his church to support the war fully, either by enlisting or by concerted prayer. After the war, he admitted that he did so only after much prayer and reflection.

“...When I went into my study in August 1914 to decide what I, as a Christian minister, was to do about this business, I went in to one of those horrible hours of my life. I believed then as I believe now, only not so clearly or completely, that war was a disaster. I did not believe it quite so clearly and completely then because I, like many others, had a kind of hope and faith that war would have a purifying and uplifting effect upon the character of the nation as a whole, and that out of this valley of the shadow of death we should come a nobler and a purer people. I know now that this was a delusion, and that war is not merely waste of life, but is degrading and brutalizing to the spirit of man. But I decided to play my part in the war rather than protest against it, because I believed that, disastrous as it was, it was forced upon us, and that if we refused to accept the challenge a greater and more awful disaster would fall upon us - not merely upon us as a nation, but upon the world as a whole.”

As noted earlier, his viewpoint began to change after his experience at the Messines Ridge in June 1917, after he had observed the early morning explosion of nineteen subterranean mines that destroyed the German trenches and killed thousands of German soldiers. The following combat operations resulted in the deaths of thousands of British Soldiers as well, including his own military attendant. His conscience was seared as he observed the explosions and reflected of the resulting carnage.

Two more war experiences may had weighed heavily upon his spirit and possibly resulted in a perception of his own hands being bloody. The first was the death of his military attendant during the Messines Ridge Battle, on the last Sunday in June of 1917.

In his book, The Hardest Part, Studdert Kennedy remembered Roy Fergusson’s death. He related that he had sent Roy on a mission that he assumed would guarantee his safety during a particularly dangerous artillery barrage, escorting the walking wounded back...
to a place of safety. Instead, Roy was killed by the shell fire. Studdert Kennedy took the death particularly hard and recorded his reflections on his friend’s death and the reality of eternal life as he escorted his friend’s body to a place of burial. His reflection, recorded in The Hardest Part, ranged widely over various theological issues, but he finally found comfort in the promise of the resurrection. He concluded the chapter with a farewell,

“...Good bye, Roy, Old Chap... Some day we shall meet. Some day she (his mother) and I will recognize you in a new and glorious body, quite different from this poor broken flesh, and yet in difference still the same, because there will be shining in it and through it the gallant, splendid spirit that is Roy; best of Soldiers, best of servants, best of pals.”

A second experience that may have weighed on Studdert Kennedy’s conscience was the advice he gave to Theodore Hardy regarding a chaplain’s ministry to the Soldiers in the trenches. Hardy was a gentleman over fifty years old who was intent on serving the Soldiers at the front. Studdert Kennedy, having recently returned from the Battle of the Somme, was evidently energized by his war-time experiences.

“He asked me to tell him what the best way of working up there was. I said: ‘Live with the men, go where they go; make up your mind that you will share all their risks, and more, if you can do any good. You can take it that the best place for a padre (provided that he does not interfere with military operations) is where there is most danger of death. Our first job is to go beyond the men in self-sacrifice and reckless devotion. Don’t be bamboozled into believing that your proper place is behind the line; it isn’t...’ I remember walking up and down and saying this very fiercely, because I was full of it. ...the more padres who died in battle doing Christ-like deeds, the better for the church. Most of us would be more use dead than alive!”

Hardy followed Studdert Kennedy’s
guidance fully, undertaking the most dangerous of tasks in support of his troops. He was beloved by the troops and miraculously survived nearly to the end of the war, receiving multiple military awards, including the Military Cross (M.C.), the Distinguished Service Order (D.S.O) and the Victoria Cross (V.C.). Unfortunately, he was killed in action in 1918, just prior to the Armistice. Studdert Kennedy’s part in the deaths of these two colleagues compounded by the ubiquitous presence of carnage and the accumulated stresses of war certainly placed an almost unbearable weight upon his conscience and spirit.

Another indication of Studdert Kennedy’s state of mind after the war is his reflection on the events that resulted in his award of the Military Cross in 1917, at the Messines Ridge for heroism under fire. His award states accurately that he had moved the wounded to safety and brought aid to them in spite of mortal personal danger. Dismissive of his own heroism as a result of his psychological and spiritual state, he later reported that the facts of the situation were anything but heroic.

“...A young soldier was wounded in the aid station, (but there was no morphine to treat his pain.) “The pain - the pain - my Gawd - the pain. For Gawd’s sake gimme something to stop the pain.” There was no morphia. That was the horror. Someone must go for it. I went. I went because the hell outside was less awful than the hell in. I didn’t go to do a heroic deed or perform a Christian service; I went because I couldn’t bear that moaning any longer...”

These experiences weighed heavily on Studdert Kennedy’s mind and spirit. His 1919 poem sums up his emotional response to the war.

Experience dictates the counterintuitive insight that one of the most challenging problems in fighting a war is the requirement that combatants return home after its conclusion. After the Great War, Studdert Kennedy returned home to his wife and young family and found great popularity and influence as a public speaker, building on his war-time popularity with the troops. He was appointed as a Chaplain to the King and received a new church appointment that would allow him to continue his public speaking ministry without extensive church responsibilities. His wartime experiences, however, resulted in a pervasive gravity and sadness that remained throughout the rest of his life.

Studdert Kennedy was also deeply disappointed with post-war Britain, a condition he shared with other Veterans. They had anticipated that the rivers of blood spilled on the farmlands of France would purchase, if not a utopian world order, at least one that would provide jobs and a living wage for the Soldiers who returned from the war. Post-war Britain suffered a serious economic crisis that resulted in widespread hardship for the working classes, now composed of many of the Soldiers and poor that Studdert
Kennedy had served all his life. His public speaking and writing provided him a platform from which to voice his disappointment, to encourage reforms as well as to process his own psychological and spiritual wounds. An important psychological and spiritual process he would face, along with other Veterans, was a necessity for reconciliation.

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Reconciliation 1921-1929

“The Nation’s War Lie”
Woodbine Willie’s Act of Penance
November 11, 1921

“An ‘open confession to God’, which, he said, he felt was due from him as an act of penitence because he did not rise high enough and become brave enough during the war was made by the Reverend G.A. Studdert-Kennedy (“Woodbine Willie”) at the Central Hall, Westminster, London last night… He appealed to the troops during the war and encouraged them to fight on the ground that they were fighting for freedom and honor. He knew now that it was nothing of the kind. There was no freedom and there was no end to war. We had lied as a nation and besmirched our honor. We had broken our promises and gone back on our word in half a score of cases. We seemed to be further from peace in many ways than ever before…. What he should have known and what they all should have known, was that there was no freedom to be won by the sword, no honor to be vindicated by it, and no peace to be got out of it. It could only lead to more and more terrible disasters. In an impassioned plea to those who might have lost dear ones, he asked for forgiveness for their enemies, for they knew not what they did. They were mad, he said. He himself was mad. They were all mad out there. He appealed to all to concentrate their whole thoughts and minds on the frustration of force.”

November 11, 1921 marked the three-year anniversary of the end of the Great War. The date was to be marked by nation-wide remembrances and a great gathering at the Cenotaph, the great stone war memorial in Central London. Attended by the King, Parliament and thousands of Veterans and civilians, the highlight of the day was the observance of two minutes of silence to honor the dead. Studdert Kennedy is reported to have participated in those observances and was also scheduled to speak that evening at London’s Central Hall, a Methodist institution located directly across the street from Westminster. His speech, as reported in the popular press, was different than any he had delivered before, although its content was hinted at in his 1919 work, Lies. It was, as he characterized it in the speech, his “open confession” for his own guilt related to the war.

Jonathan Shay, in his 2002 work Odysseus in America, discusses his work with Vietnam War Veterans suffering from PTSD and reminds us that the return from war has historically been accompanied by rites of purification for the acts committed and blood shed during war. In his work, he recounts how the ancient Greeks, Romans and the medieval Christian church applied these rites to both individuals and entire armies in order to prepare them for re-entry to peace-time society. He also notes that modern militaries have forgotten that tradition, with warriors often returning directly from war to families and home with little time for adjustment. He suggests that including
the religious act of penance in a Soldier’s post-combat transition would provide spiritual as well as psychological benefits.

“...My clinical team has encouraged many of the Veterans we work with to avail themselves of the sacrament of penance. When a Veteran does not already know a priest, he trusts to hear his confession, we have suggested priests who understand enough about combat neither to deny that he has anything to feel guilty about nor to recoil in revulsion and send him away without the sacrament.”

More accurately called the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the religious act involves confession, assignment of penance, and absolution by the priest. As an Anglican Priest, Studdert Kennedy was well versed in the practice of this essential element of the Christian faith. It is evident that the 1921 Remembrance Day speech served as his very public confession for his own “blood guilt;” his public support for the war and encouragement of the troops in their personal encounter with death. The frenetic activity that marked his life from 1921 to 1929 may be considered his own self-imposed penance, a sacrificial public service that took him away from his family and exhausted him physically. One wonders if he ever really granted himself absolution, or even if that is possible. The two years leading up to “the speech” were marked by celebrity and dimming hopes for the post-war world that he had dreamed of during the war. It is important to consider these years briefly in order to provide a context for the 1921 event.

Studdert Kennedy’s return to England was accompanied by an almost immediate demand for his speaking services. Always able to fill a church, he had achieved national recognition as “Woodbine Willie” during the war, beloved by the troops to whom he had ministered and recognized widely as the author of his book of war poetry, Rough Rhymes of a Padre, which enjoyed numerous printings. His prose publications were a reflection of his well-crafted public speeches and he used both as vehicles to “think aloud” and expound on issues of the day. His speeches were often reported in the daily press, with some reporters providing verbatim transcripts of large portions of his content. They also described his speaking style, which was a bit unusual for a priest. The Lancashire Daily Post, reporting on his return to his parish in Worcester on August 26, 1919 commented,

“...Without exception, he was the best-known chaplain in the B.E.F. Soldiers would tramp miles to hear him, a compliment by no means usual for “Tommy” to pay. Woodbine is an Irishman and is endowed with the gift of being able to make his audiences cry and laugh almost at the same moment. He gained a wonderful insight into the conditions under which the troops lived in the trenches by living there with them in the front line.”

Another paper reported that he “delivered a vigorous speech in a racy style...” while the Northampton Mercury commented that Studdert Kennedy “was characteristically outspoken” and delivered a speech that contained “other utterances unconventional and not often heard from a pulpit (that) somewhat startled a few of the staid church-goers.” Nearly all commented on his wit and ability to hold an audience’s attention for speeches that often lasted an hour or more.

The content of his speeches reflected the content of his books and poetry. During this period (1919-1921) he focused particularly
on his opposition to war, the failure of the peace and desire for social change under the guidance of the suffering Christ, content that is familiar from the content in his 1919 work, Lies. At the Leicester Church Congress in October 1919, he asked “why they who had smashed the German army in five years couldn’t build a million houses in six months?” At Rugby he commented that the world needed a lasting peace and that “peace could never be brought about by the force of armaments.” He continued by denouncing the efforts of the Versailles Peace Conference and concluded that “War is the most damnable and degrading evil that ever was.” In April, Studdert Kennedy commented that he could see no “hope of a new world” and concluded that the “reform of the world must begin with the reform of the individual,” all under the auspices of Christ.

Studdert Kennedy’s prophetic voice was not reserved only for social issues and politics but was also directed at the state of the church. At the 44th Session of the Rochester Diocesan conference in June 1920 he criticized the clergy and bishops as the opponents of progress and commented, “I am prepared to burn every theological book that I read before the war – I would burn the whole blessed lot,” he said. “They give a wrong idea of God.” Interestingly, the article reports that the Bishop responded to Studdert Kennedy’s critical address, commenting that, “…the speaker seemed to set up a kind of imaginary church, and to have mistaken the church of his grandmother’s time for the church of today.”

Throughout 1920 and most of 1921, the newspapers reported that Studdert Kennedy continued with the same prophetic voice, commenting on unemployment, the Trade Unions, the need for peace and the dire nature of war. His 1921 Armistice Day speech was widely reported. The speech serves as a logical conclusion to the trajectory of the cultural and political sins he identified in his 1919 book Lies. In that work, he identified many who were culpable for the sins leading to and resulting in the war. The speech reflected a crisis in his own conscience, one in which he recognized that he himself had promoted the lies and bore some responsibility for the war, some blood guilt. The speech also served as a catharsis as he publicly identified his own part and confessed it in a venue that would ensure a national audience. (The Nottingham Journal synopsis is recorded above.)

The speech served to reveal Studdert Kennedy’s spiritual struggles to a national audience. It also served another purpose, to call the nation and its leaders to repentance. In essence he acted like an Old Testament Prophet, calling upon England to pause and reflect upon her own sins in the war and to reconsider her ways. His message reflected his conviction that Britain must reject her “faith in force” and discover a moral path to peace and prosperity. His speech was indeed noticed, but not with the positive result he intended. Some called it hurtful to Veterans, others noted its harmful impact on war widows and orphans. His fellow Veterans may have understood his intent, for many were suffering unemployment and the lingering after-effects of war, what we now know to be PTSD. Some may have wondered, “Why bring religion into it.” Others looked on in pity considering Studdert Kennedy’s speech as evidence of a weakness of character. One
author took this approach in an article titled, “A Momentary Aberration.”

“Much is likely to be heard of the extraordinary address delivered yesterday by the Reverend G.A. Studdert-Kennedy. In his Remembrance Day address yesterday, he made what may be called a public act of contrition” for what he said during the war…. Anyone who knows Mr. Kennedy’s writings, either in prose or verse, must be aware that he is a man of very powerful emotions. In such men, moods of elation alternate with moods of profound despondency. It is easy to imagine such a man, when the black hour is upon him, looking around upon the world as he sees it today and crying out in his haste. Especially is that true of a highly-strung nature after contact with the horrors of war, and after being badly mashed up in it physically. Probably no one will regret more than Mr. Studdert-Kennedy himself that he let such a despairing cry escape from the arena of his own spiritual conflict….”

There were, of course, other responses. Some saw Studdert Kennedy’s confession as an attack on Christian support for the war and of the necessity for resort to arms in the face of tyranny and armed oppression. Reverend H. Woodward, also a former war chaplain, responded in a letter to the editor, “Some modern Englishmen seem to know better than God and Christ, and are anxious to try the experiment of allowing wickedness to have its full fling on earth.”

G.G. Swann commented that Studdert Kennedy’s words were not helpful, that maligning the motives for going to war would not “help to heal the wounds inflicted by it.”

Mindful of the reception his London speech had received, Studdert Kennedy attempted to explain his thinking in another speech he delivered two weeks later at Sheffield Cathedral, on November 27th. His speech was printed under the title, “Futile Victory: Padre’s Regret for War Propaganda.” In the speech, he explained his thinking that militarism is only encouraged by a military response, that the future would hold only more conflict if Britain continued the attempt to conduct its affairs with its “faith in force.” In the speech, he confessed that he had lied to the troops in encouraging them to fight for victory, as well as his promise that their efforts would bring peace.

“…I led them to suppose that a crushing victory would inevitably bring them freedom, honor and peace, and in saying that I repeat that unconsciously and unintentionally I lied to them when I should and could have known better had I been simply faithful to Christ… that no positive good can be gained by force – freedom cannot be won by it – honor cannot be established by it – peace cannot be maintained by it.”

In doing so, we have an indication of a moral injury sustained by Chaplain Studdert Kennedy, an injury experienced when one transgresses one’s own deeply held moral code in the support of combat or war. His confession on the national stage is his very public effort to find personal forgiveness and reconciliation.

These speeches marked a turning point for Studdert Kennedy, solidifying his opposition to the use of force that he maintained for the rest of his life. It may also have served as both confession and catharsis as he considered the war and his part in it. The research on PTSD and combat trauma indicate that individuals must work through their war experiences, and that
finding forgiveness for war acts is an essential part of finding healing for the psychological and spiritual wounds of war. William Nash comments, “overcoming guilt and shame depends on forgiveness.” If Studdert Kennedy’s London Speech served as a confession, members of liturgical church traditions understand that penance naturally follows. Acts of contrition are often required of penitents by priests, and acts of sacrificial service can serve as penance, a source of spiritual healing for moral injury. Studdert Kennedy believed strongly in the principle public service and committed his post-war life to it. This public service may have also served as a means of penance for his sins committed in support of the war.

Sacrificial Service as Practice and Penance

Chaplains serving in the military often feel a sense of inadequacy about their role and the activities expected of them. Commanders often have no idea what to do with a chaplain or how to utilize their services effectively. Many military leaders with no religious or spiritual inclination would rather not have a chaplain at all. I have often heard ship’s Commanding Officers comment regarding a new chaplain’s arrival, “I’d prefer another watch-stander.” The commander at my very first command informed me at our first meeting, “I’m not going to evaluate you on your preaching or bible studies, but on what you do over and beyond those religious duties.” This kind of attitude can serve as the source of great insecurity on the part of chaplains.

When assigned to a war context, that insecurity can be increased exponentially. Questions of “where should the chaplain serve” or “will I get in the way of combat actions and get people killed” are common. Such insecurity can result in chaplains taking herculean efforts to find acceptance with their units. Chaplain Studdert Kennedy addressed this very question when he advised the newly-arrived Chaplain Theodore.
Hardy regarding his own philosophy and practice after serving at the Battle of the Somme, “Our first job is to go beyond the men in self-sacrifice and reckless devotion.”¹⁰²

One immediately recalls Studdert Kennedy’s rather suicidal guidance to Hardy, that he should always work as close to the front lines as possible. But the guidance to “go beyond the men in self-sacrifice and devotion” is remarkable and characteristic of those who are often looked upon by warriors as unnecessary or extraneous. Most notably, Studdert Kennedy was correct, for by such service and work he earned the respect of his Soldiers, and more importantly, gained a hearing for the spiritual message he sought to communicate.

The self-sacrifice and duty he recommended in the trenches was extreme. Although some have noted the relatively brief nature of his assignments there, those assignments involved searing experiences that accompanied him the rest of his life. Those experiences included serving as an “inexperienced undertaker” carrying and burying the dead, complaining of his aching shoulders and wishing for the body of a more robust man. He recounts being covered in the blood of his Soldiers and of discovering and burying the body of a friend. He recounts his own mixed reaction, exaltation and horror, at the sheer magnitude of industrial grade warfare and the thousands of lives sacrificed in an instant. He writes of the mothers, wives, and children of those he ministered to, and empathized with the tears they would shed upon receiving his letters, offering Christian comfort for their loss.

Studdert Kennedy acted with the same sense of self-sacrifice and duty when he was not assigned to support the Mission of Repentance and Hope as a speaker and he engaged that duty with the same energy with which he had supported the combat troops. Upon receiving this assignment, he responded that he would prefer to stay with the men at the front. His request was denied,

“...He heard me out, and then said; ‘it doesn’t matter what you want. As you have been given by the Lord Almighty the gift of the gab you have to do as you are told. He said I was not much good except for talking. So, for ten days I preached three times a day to an audience varying from 500 to 1,500 but before the proceedings ended I had an attack of the “go wrong with my wind-box’ - My temperature rose to 103, and between the wheezes I preached.”¹⁰³

Upon his return home from the war, Studdert Kennedy continued the frenetic activity that had characterized his war service. He was unable or unwilling to rest, energized by his message and the need he saw in post-war Britain. Like many returning from war, he may have been addicted to the adrenaline rush that accompanies combat and the exhilaration of surviving near death experiences. He rationalized his activity, both in the war and after, as the universal duty of all citizens of Great Britain and presented his sacrificial service as an example to all. He communicated this philosophy of duty in his first postwar book, Lies, identifying “a driving sense of duty”¹⁰⁴ and self-sacrifice as the great responsibility of all members of a democratic state, “who are ever thinking of their rights and never of their responsibilities.”¹⁰⁵ Characteristic of his post-war literature, he illustrated this peace-time issue
with a battlefield recollection.

“But if this great Truth is to be worked into our lives as members of a democratic state it must be combined with another truth for which Christ stood – the truth that the secret of life is service… If the man of superior abilities is not a public servant he is a parasite, and more unworthy of his manhood than an ignorant and drunken pauper… he is like those enormous bloated flies that buzz round the dead on a battlefield. Filthy things, clothed in gorgeous colors, their bright green wings flashing in the sun as they seek the choicest morsels of the swollen and disfigured dead.”

Studdert Kennedy practiced and exemplified this ideal of service and duty as a Christian responsibility. He felt that Christians, bishops, clergy or laity were far too content to stand on the sidelines and let others take the lead in the affairs of the day. “We must have a red religion which burns and blazes and calls men – calls them to service, renunciation, and sacrifice.”

Beginning in 1921, Studdert Kennedy given the opportunity to continue his life of sacrificial service with the Industrial Christian Fellowship. He agreed to serve as their public representative and conducted crusades throughout Britain. The goal of this organization was to share the gospel of Christ alongside the working men and women of Britain. The organization also became involved in the labor disputes that were all too common during the 1920s. He found that he was perfectly cut out for this work, for the working classes were the Soldiers he had served in the war as well as the poor he had served in Worcester.

“…Further, and this concerns the Industrial Christian Fellowship, he delivered exactly the Christian social message which the age demands. He saw the difficulty of the age, and, without ever being platitudinous, he told both rich and poor their faults. He poured contempt on those who talked as though it were an easy matter to settle our modern problems under either a capitalistic or socialist order of society. The way out is not easy, and there is no way but the way of Christ.”

Studdert Kennedy continued his life of self-sacrificial service and duty throughout the 1920s, dashing about the country in trains, preaching or speaking at a men’s group, church or public venue where he could communicate the message of the Suffering Christ as it applied to the economic and social challenges of the day. He would then dash home to visit his family, where he now had three children, only to dash away for another public engagement. He was cautioned by friends regarding his hectic pace, but he ignored them, assuring them that he was up to the challenge. Subject to frequent bouts of asthma (possibly made worse by being gassed during the war) and fatigued by his constant travel, Studdert Kennedy died in Liverpool on March 8, 1929 at age 45. At the time of his death, he was traveling to another speaking engagement.

“When I last saw him, I told him he could not go on for long at the pace he was working, making lightning journeys north, south, east and west to deliver half a dozen sermons or speeches at each destination, with never a moment’s thought for himself; but he laughed my fears away… He died at the height of his power through reckless attention to duty and refusal to give in though he was gripped with illness and pain.”
Conclusion: A Survivor of the Great War

“Christian laughter always hovers just on the brink of tears, for God in Christ has redeemed them both and wedded joy to sorrow, and real peace and pain.”

As I conclude this examination of G.A. Studdert Kennedy, I am reminded of another chaplain of the Great War, the Reverend Harold Spooner. I had the honor of examining his personal papers in the archives of the British Imperial War Museum in 2017. The Reverend Spooner served with the British Indian forces in Mesopotamia where they battled the forces of the Ottoman Empire, allies of Germany. In late 1915, the British Indian forces retreated to Kut al Amara and were besieged there from December 7, 1915 until April 29, 1916, at which point they surrendered. They endured privation and daily attacks by Ottoman forces, including significant artillery and mortar shelling. Chaplain Spooner was noted for his bravery, his prayers for the wounded uninterrupted as the hospital where he served was shelled by the enemy. He was also responsible for the burial of the dead, laying out and mapping the extensive cemetery that was required. On the day after Christmas in 1915, he recorded his attempts to reach the troops to conduct worship services while braving unrelenting sniper fire. His efforts were frustrated due to combat conditions, although he did offer spiritual comfort to one of the men.

“…Met poor Captain Buchman of the 119th. He was looking dreadfully worn out and no wonder. His regiment had been through all the fighting at the fort and he was the only British officer left. The Turks had broken in and suddenly appeared on top of their trench hurling bombs, etc. Poor Johnny Hadden had his head blown next to him and young Woods arm was taken off, the elbow all sticking out. The sight was sickening. I asked him to come to Holy Communion in the chapel next day and to breakfast with me. He said he would much like to.”

As I read this diary entry, I was struck by Chaplain Spooner’s commitment to his religious duties in the midst of battle as well as his pastoral care for Captain Buchman. Chaplain Spooner would have certainly ministered to the wounded Woods at the hospital, comforting him with a visit and prayer. (He seems familiar with Woods’ wounds, providing a particularly graphic description.) Especially noteworthy is the chaplain’s invitation to the Captain as it reflects the essence of military pastoral care, to put him in touch with the eternal while also restoring a bit of normalcy in an otherwise horrendous situation. His actions also reflected that well-known British “stiff upper lip” and “keep calm and carry on” philosophy made famous in the Second World War.

Chaplain G.A. Studdert Kennedy’s actions in the Great War were every bit as brave and selfless as those of Chaplain Spooner at Kut al Amara. He also ministered in the midst of trench warfare and encountered his own share of “mud, blood and smells!” As I’ve spent over a year with Studdert Kennedy’s work, however, I am struck by the passion with which he conducted his ministry. Whether due to his Irish ancestry or his particular personality and character, it is a passion that bathes his life and work with a pathos that is hard to resist. His discussion with the deceased Soldier, Peter in April 1917 is a good example of the pathos which characterized his ministry.
“...The church of Christ has ceased to be the pillar of cloud and fire which leads the pilgrim Peter along the way of social righteousness and has become a weak and inefficient ambulance brigade which picks up the wreck and ruin of a cruel and mechanical civilization. That’s all I am, Peter, an informal and incompetent undertaker, with tears in my eyes and sorrow in my heart...”

Chaplain Studdert Kennedy survived the Great War, physically, psychologically and spiritually. I believe he emerged as one of the war’s walking wounded, “embittered, above all conscious of the many, the very many, who did not come back at all...” I am confident that his experiences in the First World War affected him deeply and lastingly. His personal faith, tempered by his war experiences and struggles, enabled him to emerge from the war as a survivor with a mission, to actively oppose the nation’s “faith in force” and to continue his efforts on behalf of the welfare of common people. His role as a “missioner” and champion of the Industrial Christian Fellowship (ICF), beginning in 1921, facilitated both aspects of that mission and provided him a national stage from which to communicate his message.

I have documented the evidence which points to some of Studdert Kennedy’s psychological, moral and spiritual struggles as he dealt with his experiences of combat stress and trauma. I have also described how he addressed those experiences by energetically wrestling with the human and theological imperfections that were revealed through his experience of the crucible that is war. He did not emerge unscathed, but he did emerge as a survivor, realizing that he could not rely upon his own strength alone. His spiritual and theological struggles were indicative of his need for external sources of strength to fortify and complement his own impressive internal resources. The answers he found sustained him both psychologically and spiritually. Those external resources may include comrades in arms, psychologists, medical personnel, chaplains, and God. We also cannot ignore the benefit of contemporary understandings of combat stress, trauma and PTSD, a benefit that was denied Studdert Kennedy and his compatriots. Education is a necessary resource to help us build the resilience that will enable us to survive the inevitable experiences of trauma.

My personal “take-away” from my reflection on Studdert Kennedy’s life and my own experience of trauma is the conclusion that a strong personal faith presents both a danger and a resource when dealing with combat stress, moral injury and PTSD. It presents a danger because combat and its associated elements pose real challenges to a person of faith. Many of the beliefs by which we live and conduct our lives are inherited from family or adopted without serious reflection. Combat stress and trauma often throw those beliefs into question or even reveal them as myths, without foundation or ineffective in the face of the traumatic experiences of war. When this occurs, it can cause spiritual devastation and the loss of faith. But faith can also serve as a source of resilience in the midst of trauma, as it shines a light in the darkness that can guide us to a new,
more accurate understanding of God and life, stripped of the myths and misunderstandings that misled us in the first place. We can emerge from the process, like Studdert Kennedy, with a lasting hope tempered by a personal acquaintance with life’s suffering. Perhaps this is wisdom.

"Peace does not mean the end of all our striving; Joy does not mean the drying of our tears; Peace is the power that comes to souls arriving Up to the light where God Himself appears."115

1. World War I.
5. I was not present in Guam when the crash occurred but arrived a day later. I subsequently spent a number of days on the crash site, providing a chaplain presence for members of the crew of my ship, the U.S.S. Frank Cable (AS40). Those days were intense, with reminders of the crash victims and even bits of bodies stuck in the mud of the site. On one of those days, the senior person present asked for volunteers to go into the portion of the fuselage that had burned and had been too hot to enter to retrieve victim’s bodies. There were very few ship’s crew present and as I looked around I recall thinking, “I really don’t want to do this.” Still, I felt bound to assist my crew-mates, so we all suited up and spent the next number of hours, as Studdert Kennedy calls it, in hell, although a different hell than he experienced.
6. The full crew of the ship numbered nearly 1300, only 300 actually participated in rescue and recovery at the crash site.
7. Matthew 24:6, the Bible.
8. Email, Dayne Nix to Reverend Stuart Bell, dated May 16, 2017.
9. Studdert Kennedy was affectionately known as Woodbine Willie due to his passing out Woodbine cigarettes (fags) to the troops on their way to the front.
11. Studdert Kennedy reflected on this reality in one of his chapters in Lies, “If a man is honest he will acknowledge that in time of war there were two great forces which kept him fighting… death with honour and death in disgrace.” Studdert Kennedy, Lies, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1919) pp. 61-62.
12. Note the published reaction to Studdert Kennedy’s public confession in which an editor attributed S.K.’s comments to “a momentary aberration” and his “highly strung nature.” Yorkshire Evening Post, Nov. 12, 1921, p. 4.
15. See the works of Linda McClenahan and Tim Mallard. “Spiritual injury is the intra and inter-personal damage to souls brought on by significant trauma, including the rupture to foundational religious beliefs and attitudes, the inability to healthfully participate in an immanent human faith community, and the temporary or permanent loss of a transcendent relationship to God (Manifested particularly in questions about forgiveness, doubt, meaning and hope.)” Tim Mallard, https://provicencemag.com/2017/02/twin-wounds-war-spiritual-injury-moral-injury/ accessed 1 Sept. 2018.
18. Studdert Kennedy, Rough Rhymes of a Padre, pp. 68-71. The reference to Thiepval places the event at the Somme offensive during 1916, 1 July - 18 Nov. which resulted in more than 1 million dead and wounded.
19. Studdert Kennedy’s reports of his experiences in France are characterized by rain and mud. He reports that his first service upon his arrival in Dec. 1915 had 400 members of the B.E. F. gathered for Christmas prayers, standing in formation in the pouring rain, ankle deep in mud. (By His Friends, 116). In his Rough Talks by a Padre, he reflects on his first experience of battle in the trenches. The rain was unnecessarily and unexpectedly a factor, “Great heavens, how it rained, and just when we did not need it to rain. Fine dry weather would have saved many a British mother’s son. It need not have rained either, it was not winter, it was the end of June 1916. Fine weather would have been seasonable and reasonable, and this flood was neither, it was just cussedness.” Studdert Kennedy, Rough Talks by a Padre (London: Stocker & Houghton, 1918), pp. 17-18.
20. As a non-combatant, members of the unit may question the chaplain’s presence in the front lines, since he serves no direct combat role.
22. In the Battle of the Somme, the British and French lost 500,000 men, the Germans 600,000. Many more chaplains were conducting the same burial services as Studdert Kennedy.
23. Royal Army Medical Corps
34. Studdert Kennedy, The Hardest Part, pp. 4-5
37. Studdert Kennedy, Lies, pp. 119-120.
40. Studdert Kennedy, More Rough Rhymes of a Padre (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1920), p.88. This verse reverses the idea of Christian victory in the Apostle Paul’s I Corinthian’s 15:55-56 “…Death is swallowed up in victory. O death where is your victory, O death where is thy sting. The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”
41. Studdert Kennedy, The Warrior, the Woman and the Christ, p. 311.
42. Studdert Kennedy, Rough Rhymes of a Padre, p. 17.
44. Grant, The Way of the Wound, p. 11.
60. The existence of U.S. chaplains has been litigated in court with their presence accepted due to the rationale presented above. When I attended Duke University in 1993, there was a poster circulated around campus by an antiwar element that asked the question, “How are chaplains and prostitutes different?” The poster answered, “They aren’t.”

63. Studdert Kennedy, The Hardest Part, pp. 4-5.
64. Studdert Kennedy, The Hardest Part, p. 6.
69. Purcell, Woodbine Willie, pp. 151-152.
70. Studdert Kennedy, The Warrior, the Woman and the Christ, p. 18.
71. Studdert Kennedy, The Warrior, The Woman and the Christ, p. 18
74. Purcell, Woodbine Willie, pp.155-156.
75. David Gooderson email to Dayne Nix, 6 Aug 2018. David Gooderson has researched the work of Studdert Kennedy extensively and wrote a play in which he charts some of Studdert Kennedy’s post-war experiences. He reports that, “After the war he suffered from terrible nightmares…”
76. “Like psychological trauma, moral injury is a construct that describes extreme and unprecedented life experience including the harmful aftermath of exposure to such events. Events are considered morally injurious if they “transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.”
80. Mozley, By His Friends, pp. 138-141.
82. Studdert Kennedy, More Rough Rhymes of a Padre, p. 80.
83. Nottingham Journal, Nov. 12, 1921, p. 3.
88. Northampton Mercury, April 23, 1920, p. 3
91. Northampton Mercury, April 23, 1920, p. 3.
93. Studdert Kennedy, Lies, p. 20.
94. Yorkshire Evening Post, Nov. 12, 1921, p. 4.
96. Sheffield Daily Telegraph, Dec, 17, 1921, p. 3
99. Sheffield Daily Telegraph, Nov, 28, 1921, p. 6. Studdert Kennedy, is also somewhat prophetic in his comment, “Germany is not conquered and never will be conquered, and the fear of her is still and will continue to be a burden under which Europe must groan…”; Ibid.
102. Mozley, By His Friends, pp. 166-167.
103. Purcell, Woodbine Willie, p. 124.
104. Studdert Kennedy, Lies, p. 64.
105. Studdert Kennedy, Lies, p. 66.
106. Studdert Kennedy, Lies, pp. 77-78.
108. Mozley, By His Friends, pp. 172-173.
109. Mozley, By His Friends, p.201.
112. Studdert Kennedy, Rough Rhymes of a Padre, p. 17.
114. Purcell, Woodbine Willie, p. 152.
115. Mozley, By His Friends, p. 171.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dayne Nix has taught for the Naval War College since 2001. He has taught Joint Maritime Operations since 2009 and was recently promoted to full Professor (2018). He also taught National Security Decision Making in the CDE program from 2007 - 2009 and taught in the War College’s elective program from 2001 - 2004.

He holds a B.A. degree from the University of Colorado in international affairs, the M.Div. from Denver Seminary, the Th.M. degree from Duke University, the M.A. degree from the Naval War College (with distinction) in national security affairs, and the Ph.D. from Salve Regina University.

CDR Nix is a retired U.S. Navy chaplain and previously served in the U.S. Marine Corps as a communications officer. He has received numerous military awards, including four Meritorious Service Medals.

He is the author of the recently published, The Integration of Philosophy, Politics, and Conservative Islam in the Thought of Muhammad Iqbal (Mellen Press) and “American Civil-Military Relations: Samuel P. Huntington and the Political Dimensions of Military Professionalism” (Naval War College Review, Spring 2012) as well as other articles and conference papers.

He recently facilitated the development and delivery of “Religion and Security in World Affairs,” a conference jointly hosted by Georgetown University’s Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs and the NPS Center for Stabilization and Reconstruction Studies in Monterey. He is currently working with the Naval War College and the Berkeley Center to present a similar conference at Newport in the Fall of 2012.

Professor Nix has been married to the former Linda K. Page for forty-seven years. They share four children and ten grandchildren.
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of handwriting analysts and becoming intensely involved in every Atomic Veterans organization in the country, the only conclusion to draw was that his death was unequivocally service-connected and that he was the victim of a decades-old coverup. Most of his service records were decorated with line after line of crossed out text in heavy black ink. That can only mean one thing.

When given the opportunity to speak to the President’s Advisory Committee on Radiation Experiments in 1994 about my father’s radiation exposure and the plight of atomic Veterans, I was given 12 minutes to speak and was silenced after only 4 minutes by the moderator. I kept on speaking, but the monitor purposely turned off the microphone. Shortly after this event, our home was broken into twice. The only items in disarray were the dry-cleaning bags covering my military uniforms, which were left on the floor in a pile. I later found that all of the declassified records pertaining to my father’s military service and his death had been rifled through…. just enough for me to take notice and to give the appearance of a veiled threat in order to silence me. The government has failed miserably in this endeavor.

My father was a poster child for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, decades before the diagnosis of PTSD was a known entity. He suffered greatly with the psychological damages caused to him by his military service throughout the European and Pacific Theaters and during the D-Day Invasion at Normandy. The horrors of war that befell him at such a young age were met with an absence of coping skills for a young kid abused by his parents and the Catholic church and in the face of what was then referred to as shell shock. At the age of only 19, he was one of the very first Americans to cross the Rhine River into Germany, landing on Juno Beach (6 June 1944). My father, who had never learned to swim, became a Navy SEAL, previously called Scouts and Raiders, and served undercover as a British Army officer. He left the Navy as a highly decorated Chief Petty Officer, despite being busted down for his antics; no doubt more than once.

Diagnosed with some type of neurotic disorder during his post-war hospitalization at the VAMC located in Montrose, NY, there was very clearly no adequate treatment available.
in the mid to late 1940’s for war Veterans, save for highly sedating medications designed to do no more than anesthetize. He managed his demons with the use of alcohol, like thousands of our baby boomer generation fathers, and violent encounters with my mother and me, as well as anyone who made the mistake of getting in his way. He lived the remainder of his life, overwhelmed by triggers for the tremendous and horrific traumatic events to which he had been repeatedly exposed, likely far worse than anything we faced in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Despite the fact that he had received a full academic scholarship to Syracuse University, my father’s parents refused to allow him to accept this chance for a bright future. They were Italian immigrants from the old country, who did not believe in the value of education. In response to this grievous error on their parts, my father had dropped out of high school during his senior year and ran away from home to join the U.S. Navy. He never returned to obtain his high school diploma and began his post-war career climbing telephone poles for New York Bell Telephone with a salary of $25.00 per week. With the encouragement of my mother, a school teacher from the age of 20, he labored to educate himself, later becoming one of the most successful real estate agents in New York State.

I loved him wholly and dearly but hated who he was for the entirety of my life, never appreciating the knowledge that his own combat stress had come to invade his soul with severe psychological injuries stemming from WW II that infected his entire life and that of everyone close to him and around him. This also very likely hastened his death. I suppose this is how I ended up in the psychology business. I probably have my father to thank for that.

And now I walk in his same footsteps with the plague of wars on my own soul.

My father and I made our peace five years before his horrible and untimely death in 1983. I had put him on notice that tolerating his abuse had come to an end. We somehow made it through these times and final years with enormous mutual love and respect. He celebrated the fact that I had joined the U.S. Army, receiving a full scholarship to complete my doctorate in psychology. I pinned my very first medal on him as he lay in his casket. In my mind, Gene Platoni remains one of my primary personal heroes, for all that he had to overcome to walk the earth and to survive the demons that ate away at his soul.
Eulogy to Eugene J. Platoni
Delivered by his daughter, Kathy
March 3, 1983

It is not enough to say that Gene Platoni was a decent man, a giving and caring father, and a loving husband – although these are wonderful and rare traits. There was something so special and unique about Gene Platoni, that even these admirable qualities are insufficient to accurately summarize him as a human being.

I guess what most impressed me about my father were his enthusiasm for living and receptivity to grow as a person. Never a static individual, Dad strived always to learn – about his loved ones, the changing world, and himself. This led to constant modification in how he dealt with people, life, and his own persona. You could see him grappling with problems and situations in new and enlightened ways as time went by. As he learned more and more, he saw the values of flexibility and change. One essential element about my father remained a constant, however, his integrity never varied. It remained intact. Always deal from the truth, he believed; it’s your most loyal ally and best defender.

The pain of the loss of someone so young and vital makes one seriously question the existence of any justice in life, or even God Himself. How could we believe in a God who snatched him from us too soon? When something so tragic as this happens, we must ask ourselves, is it all worth it? Perhaps the best person to ask was Gene Platoni himself. For Gene, every hour gave every day a reason. Life was personified in Gene. He was always so much more alive and vibrant and excited than most of us are about the business of daily living. It was in his time of need that this became obvious. When our friends, his friends, all of you heard that Gene needed help, no matter how you found out, you gave in a way totally unexpected. Everyone at Mt. Sinai Hospital was amazed at the response when the call for blood went out. In Gene’s name, you probably more than replenished the blood bank. This was the find of response Gene evoked in people. It was as if all the giving for all the years that Gene had become know for, seemed to be repaid in one time of need. I remember his tears and how he was touched so incredibly by blood donations received from all over the country, as hundreds of friends responded to our requests. He felt guilty about taking too much and not giving enough. And that was Gene. Giving too much. The doors to our home revolved 24 hours a day. You could always call on Gene. He thrived on it.

All the while he fought his illness so valiantly, shocking physicians and nurses with his remarkable mobilization of the will to live and surviving long past even the administration of the last rites, we believed he would make it. It was just like Gene to repeat over and over that he was the luckiest person alive. It was the last thing he shared with his friends. Was it all worth it? I think yes, for all of you made it worth it for him. I thank you. He thanks you.

Gene Platoni loved life so much, that the tragedy of his passing is even more magnified. The older he got, the better he became as a human being. The older he got, the younger he grew. Nobody could ever claim that life had passed him by. In his short time on this planet, he seized as much as possible out of living. He attacked life with a passion and a fury, eager to grab the pleasurable, deal with the painful quickly, and get on with the joy he received from
living. My father didn’t just dance the foxtrot. He would grab my mother and together they would rumba, cha-cha, lindy and mashed potato away the hours - or the entire evening. My father didn’t just order a polite glass of wine for he and his dinner companions - carafes of vino were the order of the day. Food was not something you consumed half-heartedly as a means of survival. Gene treated left-overs like a formal banquet.

Gene Platoni taught us all a lesson on how to live. He wasn’t on earth for very long, but those he touched remember him. He made his mark. He left us no choice but to laugh, giggle, raise our eyebrows to the ceiling, and dive under the table with embarrassment on occasion. You couldn’t be indifferent about my dad. His enthusiasm and zest for life were contagious. This would be a much better, safer, and happier place were there more Gene Platoni’s. He is gone now physically, but what he gave remains in each of us for eternity.

Noel King
Ed Hart, M.D.
CPT Kathy Platoni, Psy.D.
Testimony for the President’s Advisory Committee on Human Radiation Experiments
November 15, 1994

Distinguished Committee Members;

My name is Dr. Kathy Platoni. I am a licensed clinical psychologist and a Major in the United States Army Reserve. I am speaking today on behalf of both my mother, Sydell Platoni, myself, and as the voice of my beloved father. I wish to express sincere thanks and gratitude to Mr. Bill Griffin, Iowa Coordinator for the National Association of Atomic Veterans, Ms. Jean Ralph, and the National Association of Radiation Survivors for the long-awaited opportunity to bring to light the truth about our relentless twelve-year battle to uncover the facts regarding the death of my father, Eugene Joseph Platoni.

My father’s life was stolen away in his prime. Eugene J. Platoni died on February 28, 1983 and after 5 months and $500,000 worth of the finest medical treatment available. The magnitude of the loss we have experienced has not diminished with time, nor can it be adequately explained or understood by 4 file cabinets filled with medical literature and unclassified documents pertaining to his Naval service during World War II. The cause of his death, angio-immunoblastic lymphoma, a condition so horrific and rare that it cannot be found in the medical literature to date, remains an enigma and a question mark that will not allow us to seek closure in our lives. His autopsy listed eighteen separate diagnoses as the cause of death: autoimmune hemolytic anemia, angio-immunoblastic lymphoma, Serratia sepsis, transfusion hepatitis, upper gastrointestinal bleed, pneumonia, subphrenic abscess, fluid overload, disseminated intravascular coagulopathy, tachycardia, septic shock, anasarca, pleural effusion, ascites drainage into pleural space secondary to trauma at thoracentesis site, anemia, Jacksonian seizures, clinical depression, and acute renal failure.

The immediate cause of death was reported as cardiopulmonary arrest secondary to immuno-blastic lymphoma.

What is most bizarre about my father’s disease processes is that he maintained a state of perfect health until the onset of diffuse adenopathy, Coomb’s positive hemolytic anemia,
and cold agglutinins with drop in hematocrit. He was walking and running 5 to 7 miles a day and living an extraordinarily zestful lifestyle for a man of his age. Despite the course of his multiple illnesses, his blood type changed 3 times, from O, to B, and back to O. He underwent more than 65 blood transfusions, daily plasmapheresis, hemodialysis, bone marrow biopsies, 6 full blood exchanges, a splenectomy, a cervical node biopsy, tracheostomy, endotracheal intubation and ventilation, thoracentesis, and IV chemotherapy. He suffered brain death 2 weeks prior to his death, which was indicated by Jacksonian seizures; violent convulsions that traveled down the left side of his body and up through the right side repetitively. By the time my father became comatose, he had suffered massive internal bleeding, development of a large cell lymphoma, and his immune system was ravaged by an immune deficiency process, not unlike that of AIDS. The only early precursor of what was to devastate us for the rest of our lives was my father’s diagnosis of chorioretinitis in 1965, a probable early symptom of radiation-related systemic disease, which involved partial and temporary blindness and that remitted spontaneously.

Without reservation, I believe that my father’s exposure to radiation during World War II is responsible for his untimely death, as formidable diseases such as angio-immunoblastic lymphoma do not occur in a vacuum and without the strong likelihood of exposure to known or unknown carcinogens such as atomic radiation. Were this not the case, lymphomas would not have been approved for inclusion for compensated radiation-related illnesses under Public Law 100-32, which was passed in May of 1988.

It is also likely that I would have been born with a thyroid gland trailing a tail behind it, had my father not been exposed to radiation. I have undergone 52 surgical procedures within the last 17 years, (59 as of 2019) beginning with the loss of 32 teeth simultaneously at the age of 23. I have had my skull reconstructed from anterior to posterior pelvic bone 4 times due to bone deterioration disease, in addition to implantation of a surgical steel Ramus frame in my mandible and transplantation of full thickness abdominal tissue grafts to rebuild the roof of my mouth. I have had my skull and throat muscles...
realigned and wired together from the orbits of my eyes, out to my ears, and down to my throat, so tightly that a straw would not fit in my mouth.

I was diagnosed with polycystic ovarian disease in 1983 and after removal of a third ovary and a dermoid cyst, the latter of which consisted of hair, a tooth, and bone. I was diagnosed with trophoprivic hypothyroidism in 1984, after over 100 blood tests performed at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. I suffer from advanced osteoporosis, so that my bones have disintegrated to the degree that they are indistinguishable from that of an 85-year-old woman. I suffer from osteoarthritis in every joint in my body. There is no family history whatsoever, on either the maternal or paternal side, of any of these diseases or conditions from which I suffer. This should not be a surprise, as the contamination of one’s genetic composition can readily result in such congenital defects and malformations if toxic exposure has occurred in one or both parents. There is more than sufficient evidence in the medical literature to support this statement, particularly among the offspring of radiation victims.

We cannot remain in blissful ignorance any longer about the consequences of radiation exposure. Even fallout emitted during our government’s atmospheric nuclear testing has exposed individuals to deadly radiation that remains actively harmful 50 years after the fact. There is no shortage of cancers among these individuals, their children and grandchildren, but they have gone unrecognized and our government has remained free from responsibility for inflicting harm against millions of innocent individuals. Still, the burden of proof remains a legacy that radiation victims and their survivors must bear, often an infinitely impossible task. To continue to accommodate this state of affairs is unconscionable. I will take my battle to discover the truth to my grave, but my longevity remains a questionable entity. More than one atomic survivor has died under unexplained circumstances during the process of discovery. On several occasions within the last 10 years, I have discovered listening devices on my personal telephone.

Within the contents of my 4 file cabinets are documents and correspondence from the Defense Nuclear Agency, the Department of Veterans Affairs, Congressman Hamilton Fish, Senator...
Bob Graham, Congressman David Hobson, the Veterans Operations Center, the Organization of Navy Scouts and Raiders, the producers of 60 Minutes, the National Academy of Sciences, Center for Atomic Radiation Studies, the National Association of Atomic Veterans, Citizens Against Military Injustice, the National Association of Atomic Veterans, Congressman Tony Hall, Senator Paula Hawkins, the Health and Energy Institute, Disabled American Veterans, United States Navy Armed Guard, The U.S. Naval Institute, Veterans’ Administration, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Tin Can Sailors, and last and most importantly, the National Association of Radiation Survivors. Available help has been in no short order; however, the answers are not yet forthcoming, and the truth remains an unknown, shrouded in darkness.

There is more than sufficient documentation to demonstrate that my father’s service records were altered. He often told the tale of his ship being in the waters off the coast of both Nagasaki and Hiroshima during the atomic bombings of August of 1945. His service records clearly indicate otherwise. He may have been listed as the “casual” aboard one or more naval vessels, as he was a member of the U.S. Navy Scouts and Raiders, an early counterpart to today’s Navy Seals. There is no record of his whereabouts between July 22, 1945 and September 29, 1945. Another of his service records indicates that he was received aboard the U.S. Tadcen at Shoemaker, California, on July 22, 1945, that he reported aboard the U.S.S. Adair on August 2, 1945, and that he was transferred and also received aboard the U.S.S. Adair on September 5, 1945. Another of his abstracts of service lists my father aboard the U.S.S. APL #23 from September 9, 1945 through September 19, 1945, with a transfer to the U.S.S. APL #11 on September 29, 1945. There are no indications in any of his records regarding the APL #23 or where this vessel was located. There are no records of his whereabouts on one particular abstract of service from August 2, 1945 through September 9, 1945. Dates listed on the U.S.S. Adair ship’s log are clearly crossed out in black on August 17, 1945 through September 2, 1945. An extensive review of my father’s naval records provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs states that my father reported aboard the U.S.S. Adair (APA #91) in San Francisco on August
2, 1945, arriving at Eniwetok, Marshall Islands, on September 5, 1945. He was then assigned aboard the U.S.S. APL #42, where he served until September 29, 1945. He was then reassigned to a Rescue Ocean Tug, the U.S.S. ATL #11 until March 20, 1946. At the conclusion of his Pacific Tour, he was transferred to an intake station in California, for separation from the service. It does not require a vast amount of intelligence to imagine the word “coverup” as the underlying rationale for these questionable findings.

According to Mr. Art Kassner of the Wisconsin Chapter of the National Association of Atomic Veterans, the length of time that my father spent aboard the U.S.S. Adair can be explained by the fact that this vessel, as well as the Appalachian (AGCI), broke convoy and received a special star award, quite possibly for participation in the landing of occupational troops. Many of the casuals unlisted aboard the U.S.S. Adair were discharged at Eniwetok, the period of time unaccounted for between August 2, 1945 and September 5, 1945, and the very period in question. This information may provide the rationale for my father’s radiation exposure. Neither can we rule out the possibility that he was used as a “guinea pig” in a multitude of radiation experiments. In reality, the latter has not been a secret for decades.

I believe that the evidence to demonstrate a coverup of my father’s military service is rather compelling. I seriously doubt that my father would have fabricated his whereabouts during the bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, nor would he have had any reason to have done so; yet his records indicate that he came no closer than over 2,500 miles to the main Japanese Islands. Finally, my father’s Naval service medical records indicate that his blood type was B. On his marriage license dated August 16, 1951, his blood type was listed as O. Prior to the time of death at Mount Sinai Medical Center in New York City, his blood types were listed as O, B, and O on 3 separate occasions.

My father died a slow and terrifying death. Yes, he was very afraid to die. This is the stuff of which nightmares are made, particularly mine. There is no just compensation for the loss of a human life which has been given for their country, yet our country has seen fit to simply deny that his death was related to his military service. There is no greater honor than to serve, but Gene Platoni’s death has become only a travesty of justice. The punishment he suffered for such noble deeds has been the most embittering experience of my life. So is the fact that I have never and will never bear children because of the congenital defects with which I was born. I would never even consider bringing children into this world, knowing what medical life has been like, and that I might pass on this legacy of horror to my children. The truth is that my father was deliberately exposed to nuclear weapons and deadly radioactivity as a member of the Armed Services. His life ended too soon and left my mother a young widow. There continues to be repeated denial that my father was ever exposed to ionizing radiation in any form during World War II, whether by radiation experimentation, during atmospheric atomic testing, or as a result of exposure subsequent to the atomic bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. This elaborate attempt at concealment has been unconvincing because of gaps, cross-outs, and conflicting information throughout my father’s service records. The Atomic Energy Commission, the Department of Defense, the Defense Nuclear
Agency, and the nuclear power industry have repeatedly attempted to convince the public that radiation was not and is not dangerous and that dose reconstructions were accurate, preventing legitimate claims of Veterans and their widows from being recognized and awarded. Those special dose reconstruction “bibles” pawned off on the American public are a perpetration of lies that perpetuate our blissful ignorance. The grim reality is that the human casualties stemming from atomic radiation exposure are immeasurable and the truth of the matter, buried far within a web of deceit and lies. I ask no renumeration for all that the Platoni family has lost, only that the truth be recognized, and my statements validated. Please do not let my father’s death have been in vain.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kathy Platoni, Psy.D. has been a practicing clinical psychologist for more than 37 years and maintains her private practice in Centerville, Ohio. In service of her country and as an Army Reserve clinical psychologist, she has deployed on four occasions in time of war. As a survivor of the tragic Ft. Hood Massacre in November of 2009, she is an ardent activist for reconsideration of this shooting incident as an act of terrorism to assure that the wounded and the families of the deceased are awarded long overdue benefits and was very instrumental in the awarding of the Purple Heart Medal to the Fort Hood wounded and to the families of those who lost their lives on that tragic day.

Dr. Platoni is a graduate of the School of Professional Psychology of Nova University (now Nova Southeastern University) in Davie, Florida. She held the position of Army Reserve Clinical Psychology Consultant to the Chief, Medical Service Corp for six years and is a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. Dr. Platoni retired from the U.S. Army with the rank of Colonel in October of 2013. In 2015, COL Platoni was sworn in as a member of the 4th Civil Support and Sustainment Brigade, Ohio Military Reserve; back in uniform for her 38th year, this time as Brigade Psychologist for State Defense Forces. She also serves as the Dayton SWAT psychologist and Mental Health Advisor to the Dayton Hostage Negotiation Team.

Two landmark books, written and edited by Dr. Raymond Scurfield and Dr. Platoni on the subject of war trauma, Expanding the Circle of Healing - Trauma in Its Wake and Healing War Trauma - A Handbook of Creative Approaches were published in 2012. She serves as Editor of the Combat Stress publication and publishes regularly in Google News, Apple News, and Lemonwire about subject matter pertaining to wartime service, the Fort Hood Massacre, and the moral injury of war.
Naval Personnel wanted to send me to an aircraft carrier. My options were floating on a ship or flying helicopters. There was no contest there! I chose helicopters. Little did I know that there was some kind of conflict prevailing in the Far East. Having completed helicopter training, I was assigned to a helicopter squadron, home ported on the USS Yorktown, which was on the way to Hong Kong. The ship's captain informed us that we were going to stop at The Gulf of Tonkin for a short stay. Upon arrival, we realized there was some kind of battle ensuing. We were informed that we would never see land. Two days later, however, we found ourselves in Da Nang.

During our supposed short stay in the Gulf of Tonkin, I rescued two downed jet pilots. It was the first time that I had rescued anyone who had been shot down. On returning them to the USS Yorktown, these pilots told me that if I made it to Da Nang, that I must make a stop at the White Elephant Officer's Club, where I would find a bottle of booze with my name on it. Very sadly, years later, I was unable to remember those rescues, which was very traumatic for me. Many years later and with the use of EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing Therapy), I was able to remember one of these rescues.

The ship and squadrons, a Marine jet fighter, along with HS-4 our Helicopter Anti-Submarine Squadron, lingered for some time off the coast of Vietnam. We would go into Da Nang on occasion to make clandestine booze runs and so that senior officers could play golf. This was the first time that I had set foot on Vietnamese soil. While the USS Yorktown was lingering off the coast of Vietnam, we could hear the explosions from off shore, still believing that there was
no war going on and that we would be leaving for Hong Kong in a little while. In the meantime, we would fly the rescue helicopter cover for air strikes that were going on inland on enemy targets. It was 5:00 am and I was preparing to take off on a pitch-black morning. As I was about to lift off, the aircraft experienced a transient electrical signal. The main rotors pitched back and severed the tail from the main fuselage of the helicopter. It was completely demolished. In addition, it destroyed three jets parked by the island from the shrapnel of the wreck. No one was hurt on the deck or in the helicopter, except I had some minor injuries. My blood is still somewhere on the ship’s deck from this accident that happened so many years ago. Many years later, when I had given a copy of my first book, A War With No Name, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: A Survivor’s Story, for a silent auction at a USS Yorktown reunion, a gentleman who bought the book happened to be the captain of one of the Marine jets that had been riddled with shrapnel. He had a piece of my rotor blade on a plaque in his office from this accident that occurred fifty years prior.

The next time we were actually in Vietnam, the Bureau of Naval Personnel called and assigned me to Naval Air Station, Guam. Asking for attaché duty in Norway or Germany, they assigned me to fly the search and rescue helicopter in Guam. Because of so much multi-engine time, I was checked out in the four-engine airliner type aircraft that was being used for long flights from Guam. That was going to be great, since the job also included flying everyone off the island to Hong Kong, Japan, Thailand and other exotic places for their rest and relaxation… but the next thing I knew, I was sent to Saigon to fly logistic flights up and down the coast. During these deployments to Vietnam, we would fly twelve-hour days, with the cockpit at 110 plus degrees. Our combat uniform was shorts, tee shirt, head band and a pistol affixed to our hips. On one of our trips, we flew a total of 144 hours within three weeks. These trips were fairly uneventful, with one exception. On one of these flights, a Vietnamese woman was trying to board the aircraft. She was wearing a maternity dress and looked suspicious. One of my crewmen said, “Something doesn’t look right.” Having her searched, we found that she had dynamite strapped around her waist. On other flights, we took a few hits from stray bullets from the Vietcong enemy soldiers along the daily route. Fortunately, nothing serious occurred, except one of our passengers was hit in the derriere by a stray bullet. At the end of the runway at Nha Trang, there was an enlisted club. We would get a case of beer and ice it down for later consumption, though it was tempting to open one on the grueling trip. When we returned to Tong Shu Nhat Airport in Saigon, it took almost an hour to taxi to our parking spot in that dust bowl. As soon as we pulled off of the runway to taxi to the parking spot, I shut down the two outboard engines and popped open a beer. After this tour, we were getting the idea that there might be a skirmish going on and that we actually might be involved. Then things began to take on the caste of a real war. Later on, the crew was awarded an Air Medal for flying into enemy territory.

Several years later, I called the Bureau of Naval Personnel again to see what my next assignment would be. They told me that an Admiral in Da Nang had specifically asked me to be the Officer-in-Charge of a detachment
of brand-new Huey helicopter slicks, as they were called, because they had no armament. Telling them that I had already been selected for promotion to Commander and had one Air Medal and two tours in Nam meant that I did not have to accept this assignment. Still, they tried to convince me that this would be good for my career. Finally agreeing, I informed them that I wanted to go to Fort Rucker for weapons training. They denied this request because the Admiral wanted me there in Da Nang immediately. Initially I went to Binh Thuy, the main headquarters for the squadron, and flew slicks that were assigned to the Helicopter Attack Squadron Three HAI-3 for several months. These helicopters were assigned to fly logistical missions in the Delta. Then the Admiral changed his mind and did not want the detachment. There I was, stuck for the duration, thinking I would never see the war that was not there in the first place. Being assigned as the Administrative Officer, writing medals for the real combatants flying over enemy territory, it became evident to me that something really was going on in-country. The Viet Kong kept shooting at us, but we had very little armament to defend ourselves while flying those slicks.

On Christmas day in 1969, I was assigned to take a Chaplin to ten jungle outposts to perform Christmas services. They also loaded a huge number of Christmas trees onto the aircraft to go to Saigon at the end of my trip. At the first jungle stop, a young man walked by my chopper and saw the Christmas trees. I told him to take a couple because they were more deserving than the palace guards in Saigon. Every stop I made, I gave out a few Christmas trees for the guys in the jungle outposts. At the end of the day, I had given away all of the trees to the guys in the jungle, who truly deserved to celebrate Christmas. It was the first time in my life that I had been to church ten times in one day.

When I arrived in Saigon, a truck pulled up and the driver asked me if I had any Christmas trees for them. I told the driver I had not seen any trees. The driver looked in the cabin of the helicopter where there were tree needles strewn all over the cabin floor. The driver looked at me with a glow in his eyes and walked away smiling, because he knew what I had done.

On one of my trips, I was delivering one of the combat troops to an outpost in the jungle. He came on board with a duffle bag that was moving around. I asked him what was in the bag. He said in a very matter of fact and calm voice, “Kit, my pet boa constrictor.” It was then I decided that I would no longer take any passengers that had moving parts with them along for the trip.

Managing to get assigned to a functioning fighting detachment, I was able to get weapons-trained in one week, which made me very elated and ecstatic. Then on returning to Binh Thuy, they needed a Commander to replace an Officer-in-Charge of a detachment, way down at the southern tip of Vietnam at Sea Float. This was
named because we lived on twelve barges in the middle of the river. Solid Anchor was the land base adjacent to the river.

On the first day on detachment, we were flying on patrol, covering the armed river boats. It was a bright sunny day, with clear skies. We happened upon a Vietnamese fishing boat. While circling around them at low altitude, all of a sudden, they started shooting at us with numerous, high caliber rapid firing machine guns. I immediately told my wingman to switch frequencies, since we were in one of the few "no fire" zones. We could not allow anyone to know where we were flying, particularly the enemy.

We rolled in and destroyed the sampan, killing all eight of their crew members. Four of them fell into the river and the river turned red around the bodies. That was the first time I had ever killed anybody. The mission and its outcome did not bother me until years later, which eventually became one of my frequent flashbacks and recurring dreams. The "Seawolves", Helicopter (Attack) Light Squadron Three HAL-3, was also living on twelve barges, tied together near the village of Nam Khan at the southern tip of Vietnam. The Gun Boat people and the U.S. Navy SEALS were also living on the barges. Living with SEALS for a year was a real "trip". They were funny at our off-duty drinking parties and more than professional to fight alongside. We never knew when one of them would yell, "Skivvy check!". Then we would all have to drop our pants. If anyone had skivvies on, they would throw them off the barge. That was "not cool" at all, since there were sea snakes in the river. Then, at night, the Viet Cong would swim under the water with bamboo shoots to enable them to breath under water, with explosives to blow up the barges. We had men stationed at the four corners of the barges, dropping concussion grenades in the river. On the morning after, we would find the Viet Cong bodies on shore. The sound of the grenades reverberating off the hulls of the barges still lingers in my head to this day.

Our mission was to cover the river boats (PBR's) and cover the SEALS on their insertions. When the bell or telephone would ring on the ship, we knew that it was for the helicopters to be in the air, all within two minutes, pilots and crews having to arise from a dead sleep. On the intercom we would hear, "Scramble the Seawolves!"

On occasion, we would fly off old-World War II boats. The ships were used for boat maintenance and to house and arm our helicopters before scrambles. On the first day on board the ship, we came aboard with our smelly, dirty flight suits. The sparkling clean ship’s crew hated our dirty jungle clothes. At meal time, the Captain announced that the person who had the puck, a small bell in front of them, would say grace. It happened that the puck was in front of the pilot we called “Animal”. He looked down and said, “Oh crap! I have the puck.” The ship’s crew would scowl at the dirty pilots. That was just the first day on board. We usually spent a few days on board and were actually given clean sheets and real food. I was senior to the Captain, so I got to have the Admiral’s cabin, which was a little larger than a postage stamp. Movies were shown in the ward room for the crew. After a movie was shown, I would take the projector down to my cabin. We locked the doors and watched “Paint Your Wagon” four times one night and partied all night long. Many years later, I ran into the Skipper of that ship. We exchanged
amenities and I walked away. He smiled and told me, “I knew that you guys were drinking down there,” which was taboo on a Navy ship.

The powers that be built their beautiful base, with all of its amenities, and stationed the helicopters and crews outside of the base on the helicopter pad in tents. It was many years later that we found out the base had been built on ground that had been defoliated with Agent Orange. Later in life, I would know the significance of this major oversight when I developed chronic lymphatic leukemia (CLL).

Coping with the dismal situation that we found ourselves in, I would lay in the tent and listen to Dionne Warwick until falling asleep. It drowned out the sound of mortars and other gun fire throughout the night. Turning on Dionne Warwick and Burt Bacharach music on my recorder, I could not hear the sounds that were echoing in the night.

My crew got smart and got crabs, the seafood kind, from the Vietnamese villagers at night in the nearby town (probably Vietcong). We flew out to the Navy ships near us and traded the crabs with the Philippine stewards, who gave us ice cream in trade. We traded the ice cream with the Navy Seabees for wood. This is how we built the two structures that we lived in instead of tents. We built a twenty-foot bar, after which the SEALs came down with their flame throwers and scorched a beautiful picture on the front of the bar. We swapped with the Australians for an air conditioner and a refrigerator. The corpsmen would come down and put body bags under our hooch for the Dust-Off helicopters to pick up. I was not at all happy about this, so I threw the body bags in a jeep and drove them back to the base Commander’s dwelling and put them in front of his house. It was years later that I was overwhelmed with guilt about disrespecting our dead heros.

We had great coping skills when we were on duty flying. We flew twenty-four hours on and twenty-four hours off. On our days off, we drank. On the days we flew, we took speed. Speed was easily dispensed to us by the flight surgeon. When the phone would ring, we were in the air from a dead sleep, shooting within two minutes, and instantly, the “Seawolves” scrambled into flight. To this day, when the phone rings, I am immediately transported back to Nam. Now, the constant advertising calls are more than I can handle, but these “robo” calls have helped me to desensitize from the impact of my nightmares and to distinguish this from my reactions to the phone ringing, day or night. Prior to the “robo” calls when the phone rang, I would instantly return to Vietnam and flashbacks would return.

One of my disturbing flashbacks stems from the night that the flight surgeon and my crew were dispatched to pick up the wounded. It was a pouring down monsoon rain during a pitch-black night. We had to hover over a rice paddy to pick up the wounded. The flight surgeon was
tending to a wounded Marine and the blood was spattering on the instrument panel. We were under intense fire and mortar attack. Somehow, we managed to fly out unscathed, but we did not realize the damage to the aircraft until the next morning, when we counted one hundred bullet holes. How we made it back without being shot down was only a miracle. Unfortunately, this outstanding flight surgeon was later assigned to the Philadelphia Naval Hospital, only to be killed by a drunk driver in front of the hospital.

One night we had received “intel” that Solid Anchor, the main base, was going to be overrun. Immediately making the obvious decision, we moved the helicopters out further into the jungle so that we could scramble in case the overrun took place. Waiting there in the dark, this was the only night in Vietnam that I was truly frightened. It was relatively quiet, with gunfire and mortar sounds in the distance. It was very eerie, however, because we could hear things moving in the jungle. All of a sudden, we could hear the barrage of mortars and gunfire taking place closer in to us. Then, we scrambled and put in three or four strikes at the enemy in a matter of minutes. The “Seawolves” had suppressed the takeover and the enemy went away defeated. The next day, the formerly unfriendly base personnel welcomed us to breakfast for the first time in months - almost throwing palm fronds down in front of us for saving their asses.

The “Seawolves” were either flying off the barges, the ship, or from Solid Anchor. When the aircraft was fully loaded, we would have loaded fourteen rockets and a fifty-caliber machine gun out the right door behind the head of the pilot in command. The door gunner, on the left side, would have two sixty-caliber machine guns and would be hanging out the door firing. The copilot would have a grenade launcher pointing out the left window. The Huey helicopters that we were flying were old retreads borrowed from the Army, which were under-powered “dogs” with one engine. On a hot no-wind day, it would be a struggle to get the helicopter in the air. When the low-RPM bell would ring, it indicated that the rotors were losing speed and meant we were not going to be able to get in the air. This also meant that we had to lighten up the bird as quickly as possible. When the bell started banging away, the door gunners would pull the pins in the two rocket pods and eject them into the water. The door gunners would throw every piece of fire power out those doors. If we were lucky, the helicopter would “lose some weight” quickly, so that we would skim the water and be able to pick up enough lift to maintain flight. The aircraft would skim the water or trees, depending on where we were taking off. If we were unable “to lose that weight” fast enough, we would crash and roll up into a ball. The crew was pretty efficient at executing this maneuver so that we would make it into the air safely.

One day we were flying off of the ship, putting down a strike on an enemy village. The crew could tell they were Viet Cong (VC) because they were furiously trying to shoot us out of the sky. The ship’s ordnance (artillery) could reload the helicopter with ammunition and rockets and be back in the air within two minutes. One day, when we had suppressed the fire enough so that we had the enemy under control, I decided to give the ship’s ordnance man the thrill of his life and take him on a strike. He armed the helicopter and I called the Captain of the ship to ask him if
this was permissible. He gave us the thumbs-up from the Captain’s window and off we went. The fire team, consisting of two helicopters, flew into the enemy territory and opened up with a barrage of fire. The ship’s ordinance man was wide-eyed and could not believe what we could do with all of the armament he had loaded aboard the helicopter. When we returned back to the ship, he jumped out and was shivering with either fright or delight. He was amazed at what went on in a real fire fight and would never forget the power he was unleashing when he loaded us up to go to the fight.

After my Navy career, I managed to get three good executive positions, which were lucrative. Next, I started my own human resources business. After three executive positions, which were mass chaos, it seemed time for it. But the war with no name followed me regularly. One day, I was looking at my cliff notes from my 808 combat missions and my three tours in Vietnam. Starting to analyze the stops along the way, I began wondering why my first two marriages failed and why I abused alcohol. Why was I having nightmares and flashbacks of my horrible experiences? There was something horribly wrong. I began wondering why I was remembering and seeing things that reminded me of fighting and flying. Why was I frightened by certain sounds? Why did the phone ringing take me instantly back to Vietnam? Why did I see all the blood and guts again? Why did I remember certain instances and not others? Why did I remember handling body bags, showing no reverence or respect for them? The memories compelled me to write it all down and put those memories in a book to help me cope and to try to dispense these horrible experiences.

In writing my first book, “A War With No Name”, I tried to figure out why I was successful doing some things and a failure in accomplishing other tasks. I added to the name, “A War With No Name, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: A Survivors Story.” The “conflict” in Vietnam did not have a name. Never once during my tours in Vietnam, did I hear the word communism or communists. Who was the enemy we were fighting so fiercely that put my men in grave danger in such despicable situations and terrible conditions? As I wrote the book, some of these thoughts became self-evident and others were forgotten. It then came to me, that it was cathartic to chronicle these events and then maybe, just maybe, I could help others cope with their similar plights. After all, I had become a psychologist by this time and must have learned something in my studies along the way and through my long and difficult journey to obtain my doctoral education in this field. I had received three degrees simultaneously through my 808 combat missions, along with a career that I loved so much.

Deciding to market this book and to conduct a book signing at some hero’s reunion, a woman came up to me and asked me why I had not written about the families of the Veterans who experienced the same horror show. I told her that this book had taken ten years to write and that I was through with book writing forever. At home that night, I thought about what she had said. Putting my head on straight, I came up with some additional remarkably cathartic ideas. Starting to write, “The Man I Didn’t Know, the Stories of Families of Veterans Who Suffer from PTSD,” might just help others to cope as well. Mocking up
the cover, I started writing furiously and gave incredible credence to what this insightful woman had suggested for me.

After many years, I finally decided to attend a reunion of the “Seawolves,” thinking that this might help me shed and corroborate some of the feelings I had experienced over the years. While attending the reunion of the most highly decorated squadron in the Navy, during the police action in Vietnam, Helicopter Attack (Light) Squadron Three, HAL 3, as it was affectionately called, opened up some doors that helped me to cope with the fallout and aftermath of this war. The reunion made me realize that not only were these men fighting and flying with me, but they were my life long brothers.

The telephone ringing, especially at night, and having almost recovered successfully from the ravages of Chronic Lymphatic Leukemia (CLL), the results of Agent Orange exposure, have all had their impact on my heart, head and soul. The pictures of Ho Chi Minh Airport (formally Tan Su Naut Airport before Communism), with the burnt ground where the Agent Orange was stored some fifty years ago, still shows the devastation of what Agent Orange did to the people of Vietnam, leaving me with tremendous guilt. These pictures were used in my third book about PTSD. The loss of 58,2790 heroes in the war with no name, still fills me with sorrow and grief. It always will.

When I sell my book at Patriot’s Point, I can hear what seem to be the sounds of mortars outside the gift shop. Now I hear the sounds and know that safety is near. One day when I was selling my book, the owner of Helicopter Ride, Robert Gootman, came in and looked at my book signing display. He told me that I was a real hero and that I could fly in his helicopter anytime I wanted. So, afterwards, when I am through selling my books and sharing war stories, I go fly around Charleston in Robert’s helicopter. Nervous on the first flight, it became a very pleasant experience without any negative consequences. Asking this young pilot how much flight time that he had, he proudly stated 350 hours. Then I told him I had accrued 7,400 hours, 808 combat missions, and three tours in Vietnam. In addition, I also informed him of a rule that I could not adhere to in Vietnam. It was the following: “You go out to the helicopter or aircraft and count the number engines and divide by two. If it doesn’t come out even, don’t go.”

The one thing that helps me handle my PTSD occurs when almost anybody of any age and gender or nationality shakes my hand and thanks me for my service. I choke up every time someone shows this degree of respect and reverence. What happened this particular morning said it all. I had just hitched a ride on the helicopter at the USS Yorktown. When I returned, there was a young woman and a ten-year-old boy, getting ready to take their
flight. The young man (because of this incident, I reclassified him from boy to man) came up to me. Standing there in my flight jacket, with my various patches adorning the jacket, he proudly shook my hand and handed me a dollar bill to thank me for my service. Being flabbergasted about this wonderful and heartfelt gesture made my heart flutter and almost stop. Not knowing what to say or do, I was taken aback and thanked him, but made the grave error of not accepting the dollar. At that moment, I flashed back to Sacramento, when I stepped off the plane from Nam where protestors were spitting at me and shouting obscenities. As I walked away, I experienced three emotions in rapid succession. I was overcome with emotion and tears came to my eyes. Then I flashed back to the ten-year-old Vietnamese boy who had tried to shoot me out of the air fifty years ago. Then the guilt hit me hard because I was so overcome with emotion. I was speechless and did not know how to respond. Then the guilt hit me over the head again because I was not smart enough to accept the dollar he so proudly gave me. Tears welled up all the way while driving home. The exposure to this patriotic young man made for an unbelievable experience and made it all worthwhile.

My daughter wrote this poem many years after my return from Vietnam. It touched my heart deeply because I never realized the extent or impact of my absence.

The Father Who Wasn’t There

The ship would come in.
The band would play.
He would bring gifts.
A new toy. A stuffed animal.
Not what I needed or wanted.

He wouldn’t be home for long.
I never really knew him.
I became lost. Trouble was my middle name.
Looked for love in all the wrong places.

Couldn’t find my way.
No one to guide me.
It’s been hard not having a dad.
Regrets are many.

There is still time to know my Dad.
So far, I have learned,
my Dad is like many parents,
you do the best you can with what you have.

My Dad is a fighter, not in the war but in life.
He doesn’t give up.
He sacrificed a lot to fight for others,
so it is only fair that I understand and share him with the war that took him away for so long.

He is back now,
and I am proud of him as a person.
Yes, it has been painful.
It has caused tremendous grief in my life.

But I wouldn’t change a thing
because my Dad saved a lot of lives in the war.
But the best part is, my Dad survived
A War with No Name.

By Melody Schmitt
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Art Schmitt served three tours in Vietnam, flying 808 combat missions. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, Bronze Star, two Single-Action Air Medals, and 21 Air Medals, serving command and staff positions worldwide as a U.S. Navy fixed wing and helicopter pilot for a total of 7,400 flight hours.

Dr. Schmitt's duties included serving as a flight instructor for students from both South America and Europe, participation in NATO exercises throughout Europe, and teaching Harrison H. Schmitt, Apollo 17 Astronaut, to fly helicopters (the last living man to walk on the moon). In addition, he taught Owen Garriott of Skylab 3 to fly helicopters. While still in the U.S. Navy, Dr. Schmitt transitioned President Nixon’s Marine Helicopter Squadron and taught the one pilot assigned to fly the presidential helicopter, the SH-3, Sea Knight.

Dr. Schmitt was awarded Sikorsky Aircraft’s rescue citation for rescues while stationed in Guam. He also managed the flight schedule and participated in hurricane Camille evacuation of 10,000 people after disaster struck Biloxi, Mississippi in 1969.

Dr. Schmitt served as team leader for one of Admiral Zumwalt’s newly instituted human resource management programs in San Diego. Following this, he was selected for a one-year sabbatical to complete his master’s degree in psychology. He was then assigned as Executive Officer, Navy Alcohol Rehabilitation and Training Center, San Diego.

Dr. Schmitt is a graduate of the University of West Florida, receiving his BA, in counseling psychology. He received both his MA and Ph.D. in counseling psychology from United States International University.

Dr. Schmitt’s employment includes holding the positions of psychologist, FACES, Family Alcohol Counseling and Education Services, San Diego; Vice President of Human Resources, Del Taco Fast Food Restaurant Chain, Vice President of Human Resources, Chi Chi’s restaurant chain through national expansion across the United States, Vice-President Human Resources, Evergreen International Airlines. President and CEO, Business Team Builders, Human Resources Management Consultant.

Dr. Schmitt has authored:

- A War with No Name, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, A Survivors Story, Booksurge Publisher, 2003.
- We Thought We Were Invincible, True Stories of Invincible Warriors, Author House Publisher, 2008.
- The Propinquity Effect, How Relationships have Enhanced my Life, Author House Publisher, 2009.
- Eyes To The Sky, Dream Catcher, My Life in the Air, CreateSpace Publisher, 2013.
- Poems Tell The Story, A Chronicle of War, Trauma, and Abuse, Through the Eyes of a Poet, CreateSpace Publisher, 2014.
- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Causes, Consequences, Coping. CreateSpace Publishler, 2015.
- Stress Management for Executives and Real People, CreateSpace Publisher, 2016.
- Executive Chaos, My Life in the Corporate World, CreateSpace Publisher, 2017.
Interviewer: Let’s start with the basics. First of all, thank you for your service. Thank you profusely. What is your name and what was your branch and rank in the military?

SGT Brown: My name is (former) SGT Keith Brown, United States Army.

Interviewer: Many Americans today don’t fully understand what it was like to live in a time when there was a draft. Were you drafted, or did you enlist? Either way, what were your feelings about entering the military? How old were you?

SGT Brown: I was drafted into the U.S. Army at the age of 19. Two of my family members had served in the military, one during the Korean War and one, who was stationed stateside at Fort Knox, KY. I felt that it was my time to serve.

Interviewer: When you received your orders sending you to Vietnam, what was going through your head? How long was your tour of duty?

SGT Brown: Once I had received my orders for Vietnam, all I could think about was whether or not I was going to make it back home. I really didn’t want to go to Vietnam, but I knew that it was my duty to go. Towards the end of my tour in Vietnam, I extended my term of service to get out early. I was there for fourteen months.

Interviewer: Where were you based in Vietnam? What were the living conditions like? How long was your tour of duty?

SGT Brown: My first duty station in Vietnam was at Cam Ranh Bay. As soon as we got off the plane, we made our way to the mess (chow) hall, without being issued weapons. It was then that the hospital was hit. All of the new guys ran for the bunker. Only one Soldier had a weapon and I tried to take it away. I was absolutely sure that I wasn’t going to make it out of there. That very same day, we boarded a ship for Ben Wa, where I spent the duration of my tour of duty. I was assigned to the 1st Cavalry Bear Cat Air Mobile Division. My MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) was Supply Sergeant, but in the real world of the military, they tell you what you’re going to be doing and you just forget about your MOS. “Now you’re just going to be a Grunt” (Ground Roving Unit, Non-Trainable), is what they told us. I was eventually promoted to E-3, and then from E-4 (Specialist) to E-5 (Buck Sergeant). I was later busted down to E-4, but I didn’t care. Rank became unimportant. I just wanted to go home.

Our hooches (living quarters) were Quonset huts. We slept on small bunk beds and each of us had only about four feet of living space, stacked two bunks high. This was a claustrophobic experience.

I ate a whole lot of C-rations while in Vietnam. (The C-ration is a canned, pre-cooked, wet food ration. These were issued to U.S. military land forces when there was no availability of mess halls or field kitchens. They were dispensed to U.S. forces long after the Vietnam War and are still available for purchase online. Heaven only knows why anyone who did not have to, would ever chose to eat one…. crap-in-a-can.) The best part of them were the P-38’s. (The P-38 is a small, portable can opener, originally issued to U.S. Armed Forces in C-ration...
packs from World War II through the 1980’s. The editor still wears one on her dog tags, saved from delectable C-rations dispensed during boot camp in 1981 at Fort Ord, CA. This has accompanied her to war four times. I am still looking for one. (As a means of thanking this Veteran for taking the time and pushing through the anguish in order to conduct this interview, he will be presented with two P-38’s. These were also referred to as B-52’s, as there were presumably at least 52 uses for them.)

Interviewer: Can you describe what it felt like mentally when you were in Vietnam? What were your greatest fears and challenges? Did you have any “down” time? Were you able to stay in touch with loved ones back home?

SGT Brown: Mentally, I just didn’t want to be there. I guess I never should have been in Vietnam in the first place. I became paranoid very quickly and always kept a close eye on my surroundings, just like I do today. This is why I have PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). I lived in fear of being ambushed, harassed, and attacked hourly. I still do.

One of my greatest challenges was getting enough sleep. Sleep hours were few and far between. My other challenge was trying to kill as many of the enemy as I could. My third greatest challenge was to try to keep my head together so that I could do what I was trained to do.

If I was lucky, I got one day off a week where we could still stay inside the camp, but I was still nervous all the time. I had a choice to go to Australia for “R&R” (military slang for rest and recuperation or time off from wartime duty), but too many guys got killed….so I refused the offer and just hung with my Army buddies.

I wrote letters home now and then when I had a chance. Mom and Dad always wrote me back. (This is a mainstay for those in the wartime theater and often the very thing that gives Soldiers and other Service Members a very reason to survive, both then and now.)

Interviewer: Did you enjoy the Soldiers in your unit? Your chain of command? Are you still in touch with any of the members of your assigned unit?

SGT Brown: I enjoyed some of the Soldiers in my unit, mostly the ones around me. None of us enjoyed the “newbies” and would just as soon as had them in front of us so we didn’t get our heads blown off. (FNG’s or the new guys were known to have posed unnecessary risks when first arriving in country. This remains true in any wartime deployment, even today.) I didn’t really care for the officer in my chain of command. They always got the best of everything.

I am no longer in touch with the members of my unit. I just never did stay in contact. I just went straight to the VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) when I returned. (Former SGT Brown has dedicated his life to saving the souls of countless Veterans through his tremendous commitment to the VFW of many years’ duration and by assuring countless Veterans obtained services through the Dayton VAMC. He is what a true American hero looks like.)

Interviewer: What would you say was the most challenging part of being at war? What are you most proud of?
SGT Brown: The most challenging part of being drafted and sent to war was trying to keep my head focused on the mission and not lose sight of what I needed to do to survive.

What I am most proud of, when it comes to my Military Service, is firstly, just getting to come home. Then there was SGT Rivera. We had “incoming” (enemy artillery fire, mortars, rockets, indirect fire, RPG’s etc.) that hit the water bladder and set his leg on fire. I ran towards him to try to catch him. He was screaming in pain, running all over the place on that flight line. The captain and I put the fire on him out by covering him up to put him out of his misery and pain. I felt bad because I couldn’t catch him at first. He was a track star on that flight line. I won’t take credit for saving his life. (It is clear that SGT Brown did just that…. saved his life.) Then there was the time that I flew from LZ to LZ (Landing Zone, usually as this refers to helicopters such as Huey’s, Chinooks, or more recently, Blackhawks) to take the troops in and out of country. I volunteered to carry body bags to the ships. That’s your brother. Don’t take too long to carry them, because there wasn’t much left.

Interviewer: What was life like after returning home? Was it a smooth transition back to the civilian world or did you encounter obstacles?

SGT Brown: My homecoming was NOT a smooth transition. I landed in Oakland, California. Protestors were lined up, calling us baby killers. There was no welcome home. I had changed. I was not the happy go-lucky guy that I was when I left. I didn’t want to discuss Vietnam. I still don’t. I wouldn’t let my family pick me up at the Dayton International Airport. I took a cab home. I was still crying and unable to say anything. When I got to my home, my family and friends were there. All of my buddies came out to the house. I’m still buddies with those who are still alive. Fourteen months in Vietnam was more than enough.

I’m still very paranoid. I still have nightmares. I’m temperamental. It doesn’t take much to get me going. I can try to reason and to look at the pros and cons, but people don’t understand what you’re trying to tell them.

Thank you very much for allowing me to tell my story.
Quality Sleep Pre-Deployment is Critical to Mental Health in Service Members

By Danielle Boyd and Emily Chambers
When you think of insomnia among Service Members, you probably think of it as an affliction that results from deployment – something that plagues Veterans when they return home from combat. And while it’s true that deployment and its aftermath can wreak havoc on sleep, new research is shedding light on a different phenomenon: Service Members who suffer from insomnia before they deploy are more likely to struggle with mental health issues when they return home from their mission.

A study published in the journal *Sleep* surveyed soldiers at intervals prior to, during, and after their deployments to Afghanistan. Even after researchers adjusted for factors such as stress and traumatic brain injury, they found that Service Members who had suffered from insomnia in the months prior to deployment were 55% more likely to suffer from PTSD and 67% more likely to have suicidal thoughts upon returning home.

How can we use this information to better care for our country’s military men and women? Sanford Nidich, director of the Center for Social and Emotional Health at the Maharishi University of Management in Fairfield, Iowa, commented on the results of the study, stating that “effective treatments, easy to practice, transportable, and compatible with the military culture…should be considered for military personnel who may face deployment.” We couldn’t agree more!

Alpha-Stim® is a handheld medical device clinically proven to treat insomnia, may just be the ideal remedy for Service Members with insomnia. Not only is it effective, easy to use, and portable, it is already an integral part of the U.S. Navy’s pain management program, and the William Beaumont Army Medical Center’s holistic approach to care.

Because Alpha-Stim is not a drug, there is no risk of addiction or lasting side effects – allowing Servicemen and women to perform their duties without interruption or impairment. Nine out of ten users experience longer, better quality sleep. On top of that, Alpha-Stim also treats anxiety, depression, and pain.

Already trusted and relied upon by the U.S. Military, Alpha-Stim is also backed by over 100 independent clinical research studies. In one study, after only 5 treatments with Alpha-Stim, Service Members with insomnia reported an additional 43 minutes of sleep,¹ while in another study, the number of subjects rating their quality of sleep as “poor” dropped from 60% to 5%.²

While deployment is inevitably difficult both physically and emotionally, being able to get consistently high-quality sleep before deployment could drastically improve Service Members’ odds of a smooth transition home. Treating pre-deployment insomnia won’t necessarily prevent mental health issues down the road, but preventative care may be a stride in the right direction for our men and women in uniform.
