

How To Surrender To God

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Webster's Dictionary defines 'surrender' as: "To deliver up; yield to another; to resign; to relinquish" and in the military, the word 'surrender' is like a dirty word. In the Marine Corps, there is a unit that had to surrender its colors (flag) at the beginning of WWII. Because of the disgrace of that humane act, that unit's flag have never come back home to the shores that they served. In boot camp (rookies) we were taught about the Geneva Convention and to only surrender to the enemy if we were able to evade capture and had no means to defend ourselves. With this type of conditioning of duty, pride and honour, no wonder it is hard for the Vietnam Veteran to surrender his/her life to Christ Jesus.

I am a Vietnam Veteran. I served with the Marine Corps in country from February 1970 until January 1971 with a 105 Howitzer Battery . When I went to Vietnam I was a luke-warm Christian. Before I went, I had a heart-to-heart with my Grandfather who was a Baptist minister. My spirit was bothering me about the Sixth Commandment, "Thou shalt not kill". He convinced me that I was not responsible for performing my duties as ordered by my government and that soothed my spirit for the moment.

Coming home never really happened. I physically returned to the United States , but emotionally I died. Since I was already dead, there was nothing I could do to myself that would hurt me. With this mentality, I proceeded to drink the world dry. You see, I had a problem – and it wasn't alcohol. I couldn't sleep at night because of the nightmares, guilt, anger and rage, depression, suicidal thoughts, flashbacks and intrusive thoughts.

Less than a year from my return, I met and married my young and naive, present and only wife. We have two sons. The reason we are still married was not because of anything I did. The Lord knows I did everything imaginable that could and would end a marriage. I was unable to keep a job, because of my attitude and anger. After about 20 years of this behaviour and several hospitalizations in the Veterans' Affairs system psyche wards, my wife was contacted by a Point Man Ministries representative. She was told about a conference called, 'Operation Dust Off' for Vietnam Veterans and their spouses in Virginia Beach, VA by Point Man and CBN. My wife told me that she felt that this was something we needed to try

We went to three of these conferences. Each time we would be filled with hope in our lives. We would attend the seminars that would have excellent speakers. In these seminars they would speak of surrendering your troubles to the Lord. As good as these speakers were, not on told us how to surrender.

Returning home, we would be on fire for the Lord for a few weeks. But the fire would dwindle due to the lack of fuel, as we returned to the same atmosphere that we had left. In hindsight, I did not stay in the Word of God to know how to keep the fire burning. Nor did I fellowship with other Christians to grow in my new freedom. The door was left wide-open for the great deceiver to stroll in and rob me of the truth.

In 1995, my wife and I attended a Point Man conference in Mansfield , which was extremely spiritual for me. There was something different. The Holy Spirit was definitely there. For the past three years we had been under conviction to start a Point Man Homefront Outreach in our area. Satan was able to convince us that we were not good enough to do God's work. But, here we received a great revelation – "cannot" is one of satan's lies. God says all things are possible for those who believe. With the help of the Holy Spirit you do not have to believe that lie. By not believing the lie there is room for

you to surrender your past to God and believe the truth. The Truth – there is a God, He sent His only begotten Son to die for every sin. We are all born sinners, but there is something we can do about it – surrender!

Postscript by Fred Grigg:

In the Bible book of John, Chapter 3:1-21, the writer tells of a discussion that Jesus had with an extremely religious man named Nicodemus – he was a member of the Jewish parliament of the day; had been raised under the strict religious code of a group called the Pharisees – he was more religious than perhaps you or I could ever be!

Jesus flatly told him that even with all his religious studies, religious practices, and his long years of experience as a leader in his country, that he would not see or even enter the Kingdom of God unless he was Born Again! (see verses 3-8). Yes, you have probably hear the words ‘Born Again’ used in many different contexts in the media – the ‘born again’ football team; the ‘born again’ car model; the ‘born again’ career of an actor, etc. Well, Jesus did not use the words in any of those contexts. In fact, in the original Greek language that the account was written, the words, ‘born again’ really meant, ‘to be regenerated from above spiritually’ – it is from the inference in that statement relating to ‘re-generation’ that it translates into English as ‘Born Again’.

So, you may ask, what do I have to do to be ‘regenerated spiritually?’ Probably the most simple thing you could possibly ever do in the light of ‘surrendering’ in the way in which David Parker did in the foregoing article. He did it, I did it and so have thousands of others. No, it is not something that you can do without the help of God’s Holy Spirit. It is only by making a quality, meaningful and final decision that you want to surrender your life (and the mess you and others have made of it) to the Lord Jesus Christ. No, it does not mean that you will become a ‘namby-pamby goody-

two-shoes' church-goer dressed in a suit carrying a large Bible under your arm on Sundays (that's 'churchianity' not True Christianity!). What it does mean is that you will become, in time, the person you were really meant to be. You will get to understand that you are loved, accepted and forgiven by a loving God. You will get to understand what purpose you have to fulfill in being here on Earth. You will become a better husband, a better father and someone who really knows where they are going in life.

No, your present and past problems won't disappear overnight – but, you will find the ability to work through them and overcome them. Everything in the 'garden won't be rosy' but you will have the ability God can give you to face and handle the storms that life dishes up to everyone – Christians and non. How do you become a Christian that is truly regenerated in your heart by the Holy Spirit? You can contact Point Man Ministries for help, or, you can start right now by praying a prayer similar to the following:

“Father God, I come to you in the Name of your Son Jesus Christ. I have no answer to the things that have troubled me in life. I need your help to become the person that you want me to be. Holy Spirit, I open the door of my heart and ask you to come into my life. Create in me a new heart and renew a right spirit within me. Forgive me for all the things that I have done that were wrong (name them one by one – we all know what's right and what's wrong). Cleanse me of all my sin (sin is simply falling short of what God wants you to do) and set me free from the bondages of my past. Please help me to make things right in my life – my relationships that I have damaged (wife/husband/children/parents etc). Take authority in my life and help me to be guided and led by you forever. I ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen”.

If you prayed the above prayer from the bottom of your heart and really meant what you prayed, why not contact us and let us know. We would appreciate your contact and perhaps we can

assist you in your desire to serve the True and Living God.

The War at Home – Iraq War Veteran's Wife

MY HUSBAND'S SAFE RETURN FROM IRAQ WAS JUST THE BEGINNING OF MY FAMILY'S BATTLE

When my U.S. Navy SEAL husband, Mark, returned from Iraq with only a broken leg, I praised God he was home safe and sound. In the months following his homecoming, however, I sensed his leg was the least of our concerns. Although Mark recovered physically, his soul still walked with a limp. His unseen wounds, caused by war-zone experiences, slowly but surely infected our marriage, our children, and our family life.

MARRIED TO A STRANGER

The first change I noticed in my husband was a disruption in his sleep patterns. Nightmares menaced the few hours he did sleep, causing him to awaken, sometimes startled, sometimes shouting, always drenched in sweat.

During his waking hours, Mark avoided discussions about the war and television newscasts. He kept to himself and seemed to have trouble concentrating or remembering things.

Months later, Mark's moods became unpredictable. The kids and I walked on eggshells. I noticed certain sights, sounds, and smells had the power to transform a fun family outing into a day I'd rather forget. Mediterranean foods, hot weather, sand, the smell of smoke or burning oil, the sound of low-flying aircraft, a slamming door, or the whine of a vacuum cleaner

made his heart race and catapulted him to another place and time.

UGLY SHOWDOWNS

Discussions that previously caused minor tension, such as tight family finances or discipline of the children, combusted into major, ugly showdowns. Simple home repairs and the normal clutter of a busy, growing family, which never bothered him before, seemed to overwhelm him. Mark became more aggressive behind the wheel and was easily offended by other drivers.

My husband's changing personality and surprising behavior played games with my mind and heart. At first, I was confused; I was never sure what would happen next. Home life was highly flammable. I didn't know whom I could trust with my breaking heart, where to find help without dishonoring or upsetting my husband, or how to approach the topic with him.

INVISIBLE FORCE HELD HIM CAPTIVE

Then I got angry at him—for hurting my feelings, for emotionally scarring the children, for embarrassing me in front of others, for denying the existence of a problem, for refusing to get help. Also I was angry at the invisible force that held my best friend, my lover, and my children's father hostage.

At times I wrestled with guilt. If I were a better wife, I would handle this crisis with more grace, forgiveness, and tenderness, I reasoned. Frankly, I was sick and tired of it and wanted to walk out. Divorce crossed my mind a few times, something we promised 20 years ago would never be an option.

STEPS IN THE GRIEF PROCESS

I learned later my confusion, anger, and guilt were all steps in the grief process. But why was I grieving? I thanked God every time I read the newspaper that Mark had made it home alive. What right did I have to grieve? Yet I was grieving a very real loss, the loss of the man I fell in love with and

married.

BEYOND THE FRONT LINES: Medical studies, military surveys, and the media all report our family's struggle isn't unique. The spouses and families who love and live with these vets fight from unfamiliar foxholes against an enemy no one prepared them to face—post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). For men, combat exposure ranks second only to sexual abuse as the leading cause of PTSD.

NOT ALL WOUNDS ARE VISIBLE

The U.S. Army reported in 2004 that of the nearly half million troops who've served in Iraq or Afghanistan since 2003, one in six returning soldiers showed signs of acute stress. Today, more than 3,000 U.S. deaths later, that percentage is rising quickly as troops deploy, return home, and redeploy. Most soldiers who say they suffer combat-related anguish don't seek help from their loved ones, much less from professionals, fearing they'll be seen as weak or unfit for service and promotion.

Daily confusion, anger, guilt, and grief didn't add up to the kind of life I knew God intended for us. And though smaller than the tiniest mustard seed, my faith began to challenge the mountain standing in our way. I took some important steps toward healing for myself and on behalf of my husband and children:

CALLING IN REINFORCEMENTS

I went to God. More frequently on my face than on my knees, I called on the Lord. I relied on my Savior to intercede for me and on his Holy Spirit to pray for me when I couldn't find the words. While my human tendency in my pain was to pull away from God and other believers, I committed to guarding my one-on-one times with God and to continue to worship and fellowship with his family—come what may. I called in reinforcements.

I asked the inner circle of my closest, most trusted sisters in Christ to pray for us without ceasing. "The church needs to wake up to these problems and provide the intensive care that is available through the gifts and power of the Holy Spirit," says Gary Sanders, founder and president of Military Missions Network, an emerging association of churches, parachurch ministries, and military chaplains that are coming together around the world to reach military members and their families for Christ.

FINDING TRUE FREEDOM

I got godly counsel. My husband wouldn't get help, so I did. My counselor helped me to see my situation objectively. She assured me I wasn't losing my mind. She gave me the tools I needed to interact at home in healthy, life-giving ways. According to Cory Cathcart, chaplain of Naval Special Warfare Group Two in Norfolk, Virginia, "Traumatic events are like cancer cells; they do not go away on their own, but must be addressed and confronted. Although many try to self-medicate their PTSD with alcohol, drugs, or excessive exercise, it's only by the power of God in and through counseling, prayer, and dialogue that there is ever true freedom."

UNDERSTANDING MY HUSBAND'S PAIN

Given the choice between merely minimizing the impact of PTSD versus trusting God in agreement with other believers for complete healing of my vet and family, I chose the miraculous over the minimal. I went to my counselor regularly for more than a year. My research gave me the information and perspective I needed to better understand my husband's pain, its source, its logic, and its potential.

"Military wives and families can learn to recognize PTSD and be better prepared to handle its effects in three ways: by acquiring information, by networking with others in similar situations, and by finding a mentor," adds Cathcart. "An older, more experienced wife who's already walked this road can help a younger woman know what to expect and how to

prepare to face the effects of combat stress.”

KEEPING THE HEALING PROCESS IN GEAR

I worked toward oneness. Satan’s plan is simple: to separate believers, isolate them, and squelch their ability to glorify God. Christian marriages and homes are the devil’s bull’s-eye. I’ve learned to dress in the full armor of God before my feet hit the floor each morning. I try to work toward unity with my husband until my head hits the pillow. I guard our date nights. I flirt with him. We make love more often than I feel like it. Romance and physical intimacy continue to keep the healing process in gear and running more smoothly.

I participate in “wait” training. I do my part, and wait on the Lord. He says, “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). I’m doing all I know to do. The rest is God’s to sort out. I know he has the desire, power, and will to work all of this for our good because we love him and, I believe, are called according to his purpose. God wisely selects the tools he wants to use to make us like his Son. If the effect of painful war memories is one tool God chooses to chisel Christ’s likeness into our lives, then he can be trusted to give us the grace we need to stay on his workbench.

THE ONGOING BATTLE

The U.S. [and its Allies] continues to fight the War on Terror. So we on the home front need the proven wisdom of others who’ve lived through similar experiences, the practical advice of specialists and, most importantly, the God-given promises necessary to protect our marriages, families, and communities from the destructive potential of a soldier’s unseen wounds.

“The Lord is a warrior; the Lord is his name” (Exodus 15:3). God knows a warrior’s heart and can make it whole again. He also recognizes the cry of the warrior’s wife because he has a Bride himself whom he knows intimately and loves dearly—us. He’s able to care for his Bride’s needs and present her to God one day complete and spotless. He can do the same for this

earthly warrior's wife—in his perfect time.

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Visit her website: www.hopeforthehomefront.com

Children of War Veterans Deprived of Their Childhood

WHAT GOES AROUND COMES AROUND!

“Many children of Veterans with PTSD are deprived of a carefree childhood. Real emotional closeness is difficult for many of us, and in our homes we are over-protective and over-demanding. Our children grow up afraid they will never measure up to our expectations, and we tend to emphasize achievement as ‘the golden rule’.

I attest to being instrumental in forcing my teenage daughter into maturity at a young age. I wanted her to ‘get an early start’ on life. It boiled down to my lack of patience in living with her, with what I thought were useless years of childhood. She finished high school at the age of fifteen and was into a career school at sixteen. The problem is this: We have difficulty accepting child-like behaviour because we’re afraid it leaves our kids too vulnerable.

When our family members see us isolating ourselves and numbing our emotions, they begin to believe that this is the way life is supposed to be lived. The wife forgets how to laugh, and our children grow up afraid of making any loud and sudden

noises, which are a natural part of growing up. As a result, they begin to avoid intimate contact because they quickly learn that they invariably get hurt when they get close to someone they love.”

This is an excerpt from the booklet, ‘Nam Vet – Making Peace with Your Past’ by Chuck Dean.

Over the last three CBN Conferences in Virginia Beach , it has become increasingly clear that there is a real need for Point Man to begin expanding our realm of ministry. The area of neglect has been information that will help veterans and their wives understand exactly how their children have been affected by PTSD in the home.

In the book, ‘Vietnam Wives’ by Matsakis, we found a list of common psychological or behavioral problems in children of Vietnam Veterans suffering from PTSD. They are:

1. Low self-esteem (83%)
2. Developmental difficulties in school (79%)
3. Aggressiveness (77%)
4. Impaired social relationships (69%)
5. Symptoms similar to those of the Veteran (65%)
6. Feeling responsible for the Veteran’s emotional well-being (57%)
7. Ambivalent feelings towards the mother (42%)
8. Preoccupation with power and death (28%)
9. Nightmares, daydreams, or other forms of preoccupation with events which were traumatic to the Veteran (22%)
10. Hatred of people from other countries, especially those from where they served (14%)

11. Self-mutilation (10%)

Another area of hardship is when children either become step-children to a Veteran, or a Veteran divorces and keeps his kids and remarries a woman who has absolutely no idea what she is dealing with. The step-child issue is one that can be difficult to deal with without the grace of God in your life. Before Chuck and I had the Lord in our lives, I had no idea at all with 'his' kids. We each had our own kids when we married, and since we each had custody of our children we automatically had a houseful! I never did let go of the attitudes of 'yours' and 'mine'. His kids were always a pain to deal with, one was over-emotional and ec we had caused centric and the other was quiet and brooding (mine of course were the perfect children!) I was always so into my 'own thing' I didn't give much thought or attention to the wounding in their lives which was manifesting in their words and actions.

The more I would ask the Lord to change my heart in every area, the more He would give me compassion, understanding and love for the children. As I sought the Lord to help me care more for my husband's and children's well-being than my own (with no thought as to whether they were his kids or my kids) I began to really SEE the wounding, pray over and break generational curses when needed, repent for the wounding we had caused, seek their forgiveness and then witness real victory.

Although the Lord has healed Chuck of his PTSD, there is still a lot for us to deal with as far as the children are concerned. The wounding has been deep and God shows us different areas one at a time to open up, to get the infection out, pour on the healing balm of Gilead, and sew back up with the Word of God.

I believe that for many Veteran Couples the beginning of the road to recovery is being confronted with the mess we've made

of our children and crying out to God to help us straighten them out. As we begin to reach out and minister to our own children, instead of being so engrossed in our own problems, true restoration begins. Beginning to deal with the by-product of a dysfunctional family may not be an enjoyable venture, but as we seek the Lord's grace and mercy and healing virtue in the lives of our children as well as the family as a whole, we begin to see the awesomeness of our God.

Philippians 1:6 says, "...that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion". God would not put you on the path of recovery (through articles like this one, Homefront Meetings, conferences, etc.) if it were not His will for your family to receive His healing! As we begin to seek Him for the healing of our children, let's remember what it says in James 1:2-5, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him". In faith, we must cry out to God for wisdom. Hebrews 11:6 says, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him".

It is time for us all to give up! We can't do it without the Lord – just look at the mess we've all made on our own! Whether you have a relationship with Jesus already or not, let's right now pray a prayer of total surrender to the Great Commanding Officer – surrendering not only ourselves, but our husbands, our kids, and our families as a whole...

Dear Lord – I've tried for too long to do this on my own and I know that I can't do it anymore without you. Right now I CHOOSE to surrender my life and my will, my husband _____, and my children _____ and our family as a whole into your care. Forgive me for trying to live my life

apart from you and denying your love for me through your Son, Jesus Christ. I pray for wisdom and understanding of your will and your Word as you guide our family through the healing you have for us. Show me, through your Holy Spirit, the wounding in my children. Lead us, by your Holy Spirit, through the healing process, that we may give You the honour and glory. In Jesus Name I pray, AMEN.

For the Women in a War Veteran's Life

PTSD – THE SHARED RESPONSES

The wives/partners/mothers/sisters who have a Vietnam Veteran loved one to care for, often suffer from what I have called 'The Splash Effects of PTSD'. The following responses are all to often found in these overlooked and forgotten ones in a Veteran's life.

Pre-occupation With the Veteran

- Constant tension and anxiety because she never "knows what he'll do next".
- Critical or self-righteous, adopts a martyr attitude because of "what he has been through".
- Continual manipulation of the Veteran and/or circumstances to "be in control" in a situation that is really out of control.

Isolation: May have few friends, or be unable to relate to

friends as she would like to because:

- the Veteran has alienated them with his attitude in the past
- the Veteran has isolated the family and/or is jealous of them relating to others
- she has alienated friends because of her constant “family hassles”
- the friends and family she does have are always telling her to “get rid of him”
- Constant thoughts of leaving the Veteran with very high and low points centred on the thoughts “because he needs me” or “he won’t be able to survive without me”
 - Fear of leaving the Veteran because of what he may do to himself and the family – feelings of being trapped.

Emotional Starvation

- Sexual problems, feels that she cannot be truly intimate with her Veteran
- Low self-esteem
- Escapes into a fantasy world – TV, thoughts of having affairs, compulsive buying sprees, overeating, etc
 - May lean on children, friends, or mother too heavily for emotional support.

Depression

- Sense of helplessness and hopelessness, “sick and tired of trying”
- Sets self up for disappointments
- A low self-esteem that results in poor personal

appearance, untidy and unkept home, etc.

Anger and Other Related Emotions

- Resentment and bitterness develop over the years, not only towards the Veteran, but others as well
- Withdrawal from Veteran and family emotionally
- Constant fear and anxiety
- May provoke or instigate fights or arguments with the Veteran, or “takes it out on the kids”

Over Responsibility – YOU, The Enabler: In an attempt to keep the family stable, you may take over the financial and other responsibilities as well as being both the “wife” and “mother” roles, leading to such traits as:

- Think and feel totally responsible for others
- Perfectionism
- Feel safest when giving
- Nagging or silence
- Peace at any price
- Doing things out of a sense of duty
- Feelings of anxiety, pity, guilt and the need to “help” husband and others
- Constantly harried and pressured, time pressure
- Takes blame for husband and children for ‘the spot’ they are in
- Feelings of anger, victimisation, unappreciation and being used

Guilt

- Guilt for having married the Veteran, having the children, or if the Veteran leaves
- Constant financial stress – never knowing how they will be able to pay mounting bills, how long he will work for this time, or be able to keep his job
- Feeling that “it’s my fault” – and thinking, “If I were a better wife he would be different”
- Feels guilty about just about everything
- Fear of rejection
- Feels that “if one more thing happens, I’ll go mad”
- Over-commitment leading to constant time pressures

Emotional Explosion, or Projection

- Kids may become severely withdrawn or demanding, disobedient,
- hyperactive and even agitated.
- Children may have taken over responsible roles to try to balance the family.
- Children may have no friends, or less friends because of negative home
- environment, leading to their own loss of self-esteem.
- May try to find fulfillment in other worthy causes, including getting over-involved in club, children’s activities, or other “worthy” organisations

Denial: that...

- she or the children have problems... “after all, in spite of the circumstances, look how well I have kept it all together”.
- the husband has a problem, or totally blames the Veteran

for all the problems.

- the Lord Jesus Christ, or anyone else can help her husband or her family. “I have tried everything that I possibly can already and there is absolutely nothing that works”.

How PTSD Expresses Itself in Daily Life

THE DAILY EXPRESSION OF PTSD

The following lists just a few of the delayed stress responses that occur in Veterans suffering from PTSD. They may sound familiar to you and the people closest to you. But, you and they may even, without realising it, deny these reactions when they appear, or manifest. There are other telling clues that you may be suffering from PTSD. Let's run through a number of the reactions, looking at a few specific ways that they might be expressed in your daily life.

Intrusive Thoughts and Flashbacks

Do you find yourself 're-playing' combat experiences in your mind, trying to find a different outcome to what actually happened?

Do everyday experiences such as these trigger flashbacks: the sound of a helicopter? the smell of urine? the smell of diesel fuel? the smell of mold? the smell of Asian food cooking? green tree lines? dull rainy days? or seeing Asians in the street?

Anger

Do you take your anger out against inanimate objects or your loved ones?

Are you subject to a quiet, masked rage which frightens you and those around you?

Are unable to identify or handle things that frustrate you?

Is your anger unexplainable or inappropriate/excessive to the situation?

Do you believe that God abandoned you in Vietnam ?

Isolation

Do you have very few, or no friends at all?

Do you, or have you isolated yourself from family members – either emotionally or geographically? Do you have a ‘leave me alone’ attitude about your loved ones, or feel that you need no one in life?

Do you think about becoming a ‘hermit’ and moving away from your problems – going bush?

Do you believe that no one can understand you or would even listen if you tried to talk about your experiences?

Anxiety and Nervousness

Are you startled by loud noises like fireworks, vehicles back-firing? Do these sounds propel you into a state of combat readiness? Are you uncomfortable when people walk closely behind you or sit behind you? Are you generally suspicious of others? Do you feel that you can trust no one?

Emotional Constriction

Are you unable to talk about your personal emotions to any one?

Do you find it impossible to achieve intimacy with your wife, family or friends?

Have you been accused of being ‘cold’ or lacking ‘feeling’ towards your kids when they have an accident and are hurting?

Do you repress your feelings?

Depression

Do you often feel helpless, worthless and dejected?

Do you usually feel insecure?

Do your good feelings seem undeserved?

Are you sometimes unable to handle it when things are going well, and you try to sabotage your seeming success or well-being?

Do you often feel that life is not really worth the effort?

Do you feel that your life has been foreshortened?

Do you often wish you had never heard of Vietnam ?

Substance Abuse

Do you use alcohol or drugs (pharmaceutical or illicit) regularly?

Do you smoke continuously, regardless of knowing the harm that you are doing to yourself?

Do the smokes or drugs seem to 'numb' your pain, memories, or relieve guilt?

Do others tell you and do they think you rely upon liquor or drugs too much?

Conclusion

All or some of the foregoing symptoms of PTSD may have hit you pretty close to the bone?

In fact, we may have just tripped your wire! If so, stop reading now, close the site after bookmarking it, and come back to it when you're ready to continue. You may even feel pressured or that your feelings are writhing inside you. But, stay with us, because there is a way out.

The Characteristics of Post

Traumatic Stress Disorder Through the Ages

Characteristics in Veterans of War

The Vietnam experience differed from previous wars and subsequently opened the door for the Vietnam era Veteran to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), either chronic or delayed. Some of the differences are as follows:

A 'Tour of Vietnam ', for most Australians, lasted for 12 months. This caused a change of commitment to the war from that of 'winning' to 'staying alive' for 365 days! Thus, the war became a highly encapsulated event for each unit, and in many instances [particularly for REO's, or Re-inforcements] an individualised war. There was no continuity between those who preceded or followed – particularly for Air force and shore-based Naval personnel.

No matter where one was, all of Vietnam seemed hostile; the enemy was all around. Australian troops were often forced to kill women and children combatants. The enemy struck by ambush and booby-traps and were rarely seen. Military objectives were secured, often with the loss of mates – killed and wounded, but not held; the only observable outcome was the 'body count'! Vietnam was a political war and the lack of 'intention to win' was seen and felt among combatants and support troops as early as 1963 – 10 years before Australia 's involvement ended!

Vietnam was, for Australia, a young man's war as most who served were aged between 19 and 25 (the average age of the WWII serviceman was 26). Whilst struggling to survive in the hell of Vietnam , back home students all across the country were actively protesting against the war. Even the families and friends of those serving grew increasingly weary of the

Six O'clock News by having the horrors of the war being thrust into their lounge rooms. Many Veterans (and in some cases even those servicemen based in Australia who had not yet served in Vietnam) were degraded, attacked physically, and even spat upon when they returned home!

With the advent of jet travel, many servicemen found themselves standing at deserted major airports in the early hours of the morning, less than 24 hours after being in a 'firefight' or on the receiving end of a rocket attack. They were told to go on 10-days leave and then report back to base. Many (particularly the Conscript!) to be immediately discharged and told to 'go get a job', as though they had just returned from a vacation – no counseling, no guidance or anything to help them adjust back into society!

Recent statistics show that an alarming number of Australia's Vietnam Veterans are currently suffering from PTSD.

Intrusive Thoughts and Flashbacks

Replaying combat experiences in their minds, searching for alternative outcomes.

Flashbacks triggered by every day experiences: a helicopter passing overhead, the smell of urine, the smell of diesel fuel, the smell of mold, the smell of Asian food cooking, green tree lines, popcorn popping, rainy days and Asian refugees simply walking down the street.

Guilt – Suicidal Feelings and Thoughts

Self-destructive behaviour:

picking hopeless physical fights, single-car accidents, compulsive blood donors

Self-inflicted injuries to 'feel' pain – many 'accidents' with power tools

High suicide rate

Financial suicide.

As soon as things are well off, doing something to lose it all, or just walking away from it

Survivor's Guilt –

When others have died around them they ask, "How come that I survived when others more worth than me didn't?" (This pertains mainly to medical personnel)

If any of this information has struck a nerve, or if it would seem to describe someone you know and love, please contact your nearest POINTMAN Outpost immediately. The Point Men of POINTMAN INTERNATIONAL MINISTRIES have dedicated themselves to the comfort and aid of their brothers in arms. POINTMAN is comprised of Vietnam Veterans (and those from more recent conflicts) from all branches of the Armed Forces. The majority of our services are free, because you have already paid the price!

SYMPTOMS ASSOCIATED WITH PTSD

Depression

Anger

Anxiety

Tendency to react under stress with survival tactic

Emotional constriction

Loss of interest in work and activities

Survivor guilt

Hyper-alertness

Avoidance of activities that arouse memories of traumas in a war zone

Suicidal feelings and thoughts

Flashbacks to Vietnam

Fantasies of retaliation and destruction

Cynicism and distrust of government and authority

Concern with humanistic values overlaid by hedonism

Alienation

Negative self-image

Memory impairment

Hypersensitivity to justice

Problems with intimate relationships

Difficulty with authority figures

Emotional distance from children, wife and others

Self-deceiving and self-punishing patterns of behaviour such as an inability to talk about war experiences

Fear of losing others

Tendency to fits of rage

Denial of any social problems, or even denial of active service in the Vietnam War

Characteristics of PTSD in Recent & Older Conflicts

Since this article was written, the world has experienced and witnessed further conflicts such as the Gulf War, the War in Iraq, the continuing War in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Then there was the Islamic terrorist attack on the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York. Experience and research has proven that all wars and traumatic world events leave behind them a trail of human wreckage, not only from physical injuries, but emotional and behavioural disorders, of which PTSD is only one! It has also been demonstrated that in the

generations that follow an affected person, that their children will often 'inherit' the same, or similar problems.

It would seem that TV News programs serve up an "obligatory dose of shock and horror" each and every day! With the advent of the portable TV camera, journalists are now equipped to bring traumatic happenings right into our homes, on a scale never been seen before! Which means that loved ones of those who serve, often 'see' what conditions and circumstances their family member may, or might be going through, with it having a profound impact on them, succumbing to anxiety and depression! Some counselors are terming this sort of problem as being, "The Ripple Effect of PTSD".

The one thing in common with all who suffer the effects of PTSD is that they are often the last one to realise that they have a problem! Many, just like the Vietnam Veteran, live in denial and do not, or will not, accept that there is "something wrong with them" and seek help. More often than not, without realising it, they will turn to alcohol, illicit drugs and pharmaceutical drugs, for solace, in an attempt to 'self-medicate' the pain away! This in turn, leads to financial problems, relationship problems and all too often the breakup of the marriage and family.

HISTORICAL FACT

The effect of war and conflict is an historical fact. In the time of Alexander the Great, during one of his many military campaigns, at a place called Thermopylae, one of his generals, very obviously, succumbed finally to what we now call PTSD! He could not longer perform his daily duties and could not lead his troops confidently into battle. He was labelled. "...a coward" and Alexander, in front of all his Army, had all the general's goods, including his weapons and armour, piled at the front of the parade, burnt, and had the general stripped of his rank and drummed shamefully out of the army!

Sadly, men who suffered from PTSD in the Boer War, World War I

[WWI] were shot for being 'cowards'! Even in World War II [WWII] the famous US General Patten, when visiting an Army Field Hospital, on seeing a soldier hospitalised with no apparent physical injury, angrily slapped him over the head with his gloves accusing him of being a malingerer, yelling, "Get back to the Front"!

THE LAST 100 YEARS +

From Service Records, soldiers who with hindsight, succumbed to PTSD during WWI, were written up as suffering from, 'Shell Shock'. Then, came WWII where it written up as "War Neurosis". From the Korean War it was given the 'label' "Combat Fatigue" and in 1982 it was first named PTSD!

Today's Armed Services, In an attempt to try to lessen the effects of PTSD, have created a role for trained counselors [psychologists etc.] to be "embedded" with troops in their Area of Operations, so they can be there as soon as possible after an engagement to speak to those who may have been exposed to the horrors of war, that are recognised as being of such an intensity that, if not addressed urgently, would lead to the men and women who had been traumatised, falling victim to severe PTSD.

What Is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)?

The Nation of Australia, in the year 2010, has almost forgotten the deaths of more than 500 of our young men in the Vietnam War and countless thousands since. To put it bluntly, approximately 36 tons of bone and flesh; 1,540 pounds of brain

matter; 600 gallons of blood! It was our country's longest war (1962-1973). Many more hundreds have since succumbed to their war-caused disabilities. Many have taken their own lives believing in their minds that life wasn't worth living; to end the hell they were living within; that they had been robbed of a life that they could have reasonably expected to live if they had not been sent to war. Good soldiers – bad politicians!

ADRENALINE – Friend or Foe?

Adrenaline is a necessary for life stress hormone allowing the 'super-functioning' of our body during extreme stress or danger. Properly functioning adrenal glands, not only give us the 'edge' in life-threatening situations, but also play roles involving protein, carbohydrate, electrolyte and water metabolism in our bodies.

THE EDGE – Fight or Flight?

The two hormones secreted by the adrenal glands, adrenaline and noradrenaline, function to give our bodies a patterned response to danger. Adrenaline is associated with our 'flight response' and noradrenaline with our 'fight response'. These two stress hormones act quickly to prepare our bodies to respond to danger or stress. The brain receives increased blood supply and its accompanying oxygen (hyper-alertness), heart rate increases to keep skeletal muscles and the brain well supplied with blood, although the tendency to bleed from a wound is decreased. The eyes dilate, lungs become more efficient and white blood cells increase to counteract infection or injury. Digestion and other non-vital functions are slowed.

The hyper-alert mind quickly gathers and analyses all available sensory information (sights, sounds, smells, memories, training) and a decision is made...fight or flee! In a matter of seconds the body has moved into 'high-gear', ready to deal with the danger. The adrenaline charged person now has 'The Edge'! This stress does not stop with the individual, but

will in fact give the whole team 'The Edge', linking them together in their common danger or goal. This linking is akin to an electrical current allowing the group to function with little or no verbal communication, and as a 'whole' under extreme stress or danger. 'The Edge', the adrenaline charged stress response is the friend of the soldier...it can mean his survival.

STRESS DISORDER – Pseudo-addiction:

For a war Veteran, whether loading bullets, jet fuel, on patrol, or in direct support, 'The Edge' meant the difference between success and failure, gaining your objective or losing your ground...between life and death! The soldier becomes dependent on adrenaline to cope with the stresses and dangers of war.

For many, this daily dependance on the 'rush' of adrenaline with its hyper-alertness and mental clarity made life without 'The Edge' dull, boring and even confusing. This pseudo-addiction was undeniable as many soldiers in their early 20's returned home from Vietnam with grey hair, drawn faces, withdrawn personalities and with what is now called that infamous '1,000 yard stare'.

Even today, many Veterans seek only the 'high risk', 'high danger' and 'high stress' lifestyles that will keep them on 'The Edge', but with a price...The adrenal glands are not treated for constant stimulation. Over-stimulation and release of these stress hormones disrupt the Immune System, and probably contribute to the high incidence of heart disease, high blood pressure and peptic ulcers now seen in Veterans – higher than their civilian counterparts! Dependance on adrenaline (pseudo-addicrtion); seeking to stay on 'The Edge', now moves this natural stress response over to the foe side of the sheet.

TRIGGERS – A Blast from the Past:

The role the adrenal glands play in survival is so vital that

they seem to have 'hair-triggered' response. The brain does not reason, or analyse a danger before the adrenaline is released. It seems that any form of sensory information can 'trigger' the release of adrenaline, including imagined or remembered information. In other words, the brain won't tell you the 'danger' that caused the adrenaline to be released was from a 25 to 30-year-old memory until all that 'fight/flight' is pumping through your system.

These 'triggers' can be on a conscious level, such as the sound of a helicopter, the night sky, pouring rain etc., or a 'trigger' may be on a sub-conscious level, such as expecting others on your team (family) to read your mind (hyper-alertness) during a stressful situation (like running late) and they don't!

Once the 'trigger' is pulled there is no going back. The hormones are off and running – they must run their course. This uncontrolled 'trigger pulling' and subsequent pumping of 'fight-flight' hormones through the body moves this abnormal stress response to the foe side of the sheet.

ADAPTATION – The Key to Victory:

Adrenaline and noradrenaline, although vital to our health and survival, can also work against us through uncontrolled over-stimulation. Society, family and circumstances does not allow the natural responses of 'fight-flight' to the triggered release of these stress hormones. The victory over these 'life-saving' turned 'life-destroying' responses comes through adaptation. Adaptation is the key to victory over adrenaline stress-related disorder, and understanding is the key to adaptation.

Author and counselor Stephen Arterburn, in his book "Healing is a Choice" (Thomas Nelson Inc. 2005) counsels on page 89, that if our mind is causing us distress, then the sooner we get help the better! He quotes from NEWSWEEK, September 27, 2004 an article by Josh Ulick in which he says that, "...the

body can harm itself if we do not relieve the problems of our past and conflicts". Arterburn then explains how a chemical reaction takes place that sets our bodies into action, and that if we don't know how to respond to it properly it can cause all sorts of health problems.

He explains what happens when we are under threat, "First, the hypothalamus gland secretes a substance called CRH that stimulates the pituitary gland. The pituitary gland secretes the ACTH molecule, which travels to the adrenal gland. The adrenal gland releases cortisol, a hormone that helps keep blood sugar up and give the body extra energy to act." He illustrates that if you were a caveman attacked by a rhino, this would be good. When the rhino is chased off, the levels fall. But, if you were an office worker you probably would become distressed through not knowing how to deal with it!

He says that the adrenal gland also excretes epinephrine, which increases heart and breathing rates, the better for fighting and that blood pressure increase rise also sending more blood to the legs and arms for more energy. His reasoning is that the effects of lingering stress from the past can be quite damaging. He says that immune system becomes weakened and that high blood pressure, stomach ulcers, digestive problems and skin problems and etc., can result! His advice? Deal with it as soon as possible to avoid the adverse side effects that can really damage us for life.

Understanding PTSD, is to understand how the war experience is continuing to be fought or resolved in a Veteran's mind. Understanding adrenaline triggers is understanding how the war experience is continuing to be played out in the Veteran's body. Family, friends and support groups are vital to 'trigger evaluation'. The Veteran must feel safe, supported and loved. Point Man Outposts can provide these needs for recovery and the restoration of self-worth.

SURRENDER – Disarming Your Triggers:

'Triggers' are dangerous to your health as well as to your relationships with loved ones, friends, fellow workers and with God. Understanding 'your triggers' adaption, and tools such as 'Trigger Charts' will give you a measure of victory over some aspects of stress disorder.

To completely render harmless your 'triggers', you must surrender them to God. This above all else is the option that has had the most success over the years. It doesn't work to fight your 'triggers', or to run from them, asking God's help in 'disarming your triggers' gives you the 'Real Edge'!

Contact your nearest Veteran Counselling Service office in your area to find the mates and support you need to gain victory over your 'triggers' and find 'Peace with your past'. Remember, the Bible promises, "...and, the PEACE of God shall guard your HEARTS and MINDS in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:7)

What's a War Veteran's Woman to Do?

Today, thousands of War Veterans and their families suffer from what is called Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and the battle after their war rages on within them. The wives and families of Veterans are often referred to as "The Silent Victims"! If you are one of these "Silent Victims" and you thought you were the only one, please know and understand that you are not alone and there is hope for all of us.

Have your children ever asked, "Why does Dad act like he does?". Do you ever feel that you were acting like a football

referee between your children and your husband? Are you feeling like like you're single, although you are married? Does it seem as if all the problems and stress are yours to shoulder alone each and every day? Has your husband isolated himself from you and the rest of the family?

At this point you might be thinking, "My husband didn't fight in Vietnam, but he was involved in Iraq". [or, Afghanistan, Somalia, Rwanda, or some other more recent conflict?]. However, no matter what conflict your loved one served in, the scars, visible or invisible, are very much the same. Many wives have made comments similar to those following:

"I can't reach him in his thoughts, or understand what he went through, but I can stand beside him".

"My husband's a Veteran and I'm proud of him. I support him in his efforts to deal with his memories and his pain, but frankly, do the kids and I have to live with the war every day of our lives?"

"When I married my husband, I knew that he had served in Vietnam (or wherever?), but I wasn't prepared to have our children and myself trained to be 'soldiers and prepared to fight the enemy', I'm not even sure who the 'enemy' actually is!"

"I love my husband, but he's driving me nuts! I thought when he joined one of the Veterans' groups that he might be able to talk things out with his mates and get this war thing out of his system. I must admit that he is not the angry, depressed bloke he used to be, but now he wants to help all the others that struggle with their war problems. He wants to be involved in anything and everything connected with war. I guess I was hoping now that he seems to be getting over a lot of his problems, maybe we could put the war behind us and we could get on with our lives".

"I really and truly love my husband and I'm really proud that

he fought in the War. He believed he was fighting for freedom and democracy. I know that he went through some pretty rotten stuff while he was there, but why can't he see that I'm hurting too? Can't he understand that all I want to do is come alongside him to support and encourage him...and yes, in my own way, share his pain. We are supposed to be 'one' in our marriage, but I feel like war is his mistress!"

ON THE HOMEFRONT

Have you ever wondered how different your life, your marriage, or your husband would be if it weren't for the war? Have you heard yourself sharing similar things about your husband as those above? Have you ever wondered if wives of other Veterans experience what you do in your marriage, or are you just an isolated case? How can we support and understand what our husbands, sons, brothers and loved ones went through and what war does to a person?

My husband got some counseling recently, but is there any place where I can get help for my problems too? Is there anyone who understands what Veterans' wives, families and loved one's live with each day? Can anyone hear our pain and loneliness over the roar of our loved one's cry?

Obviously, we can't experience war in the same way they did. We can't get inside their heads or under their skins so that we can see, feel and smell the memories, nightmares, pain and anger lived and re-lived on an almost daily basis. We can, however, learn to understand, support, and recognise 'triggers' which touch their very souls and often take them unwillingly back in time and space to a circumstance where over and over again, they re-live what they so much would like to forget.

Help!!! If you, or someone you know, wants to be helped, encouraged, or just interested in learning more please contact us.

Part of Me is Still in My War Zone

“Part of me is still in Vietnam (or Iraq, or Afghanistan, or East Timor)!”

“WELCOME HOME!”; Those two words resound throughout the Australian war veteran community and everywhere we go. Since the Vietnam Veterans self-organised “Welcome Home Parade” in 1987 wherever Veterans gather, the words “Welcome Home” seem to have become bywords that they use to attempt to put a bridge over the vast chasm that still exists between Australia and her faithful War Veterans of that era. Because it meant so much to them, the Vietnam Veterans’ are now saying, “Welcome Home” to our younger War Veterans! Nothing about war ever changes!

Over the years many Vietnam Veterans have felt, either secretly or openly, that they have unfinished business in South-East Asia. They were not allowed to win the war, they completed their year of duty and while the war was still going on and victory was not in sight, they left! They returned to a hostile Australia, but not really home. What they thought would be home just wasn’t the same anymore. Everybody expected them to just forget about Vietnam and return to work, or get a job and get on with life as if nothing had ever happened in the time they were in Vietnam !

Many of them tried to get help for their emotional problems and ‘hidden wounds’ from the war – many were simply told to, “Pull yourself together man and get a life”! However, the Australian Government proved [it still does to this day!] to be a giant headless and heartless system moonster that is

opposed to spending any money and time on anything but physical wounds.

They failed to realise that having survived, when others didn't, would be a problem to them for years to come. Or, that the problems of self-medication with drugs [pharmaceutical and illicit] and alcohol – which was simply to try and numb the pain and drown the memories – had anything to do with their service in Vietnam .

Because they lacked warmth in their 'coming home' many Veterans isolated themselves from society. A large percentage still won't even admit they were ever in the Armed Services during that time period. Many of them remember those who lost their lives in Vietnam, but what they really needed to know was that there are thousands just like them who never really came home in spirit, mind and soul – and they are our real Aussie MIA's – Missing in Australia!

Most are still prisoners of a war that they don't even realise is still raging on within them. They will never find their way home with the 'weapons' that our society has to offer them to fight with. You may be an Aussie MIA reading this now?

Well, you don't have to be a hermit-like, trip-wire Veteran living out in the bush by yourself to be Missing in Australia. You don't even have to be a homeless Vet, or one going through a DVA/VVCS approved program for stress or drug and alcohol related problems. You can be a successful, respectable businessman with a good family life and yet still be Missing in Australia. All can look good on the outside but inside there is an unexplained gnawing going on. It could be a simple thing like numbness of feelings, or not being able to get close to others...including your wife and kids.

Missing in Australia is the self-imposed act of stuffing a bunch of bad memories away without resolving them first and then denying that they affect your life anymore. Coming home

from the war may have meant putting it all behind you and glossing it over it with a thin coat of veneer for looks only. It could be like putting a bag of dirty washing in a wardrobe and trying to forget that it's there, but after 30 years or more, you really know it's still there! It begins to give off a rotten stink forcing you not to avoid it any longer. Well, washing day has arrived and "Coming Home" in a true sense is cleaning up one of the most significant times of our lives...the Vietnam War Era [or, any other subsequent war era for that matter]. Are you ready?

A couple of thousand years ago Jesus Christ appalled so many "respectable" people because he ate with despised people, prostitutes, drunkards and sought out the social rejects of society to embrace and love them. One day He even looked up this little wimp of a bloke (yes, he was a public servant working for the Roman Government of the day!), who was a hated tax-man, and guess what? He went home with him AND CHANGED HIS LIFE!

Now it is of historical fact and record that Jesus Christ was executed by hanging on a cross, but it is also on the historical record that He came back to life three days later, and is still alive TODAY! If you need and want to finally come home from Vietnam, or any other war or traumatic event you may have experienced during peacekeeping service overseas, you first have to invite someone to come "home" with you – and that someone is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is alive today and is waiting for you to open the door of your heart. HE WILL COME HOME WITH YOU AND IF YOU LET HIM, HE CAN CHANGE YOUR LIFE!

Life After War

LIFE cannot be explained. When we touch it, we know it is life. But how? Not by thought or feeling or even a sixth sense. We just somehow know that life is there. Well, it all has something to do with first being able to recognise death. Through our experiences in war, we Veterans develop a new slant on life because we so often saw a new slant on death. How could we ever tell someone about death who had never seen it the same way we had? After Vietnam we knew life in a different way after having known death. Life's values have taken on a new complexion that others can't understand and we can't explain, so we just give up and 'bottle it all up inside'.

It has been said that once you have been to war you always know the sound of the devil's footsteps – and they are always right behind you! This is more true than one would expect...As a youngster, we probably grew up in a Christian home. We always heard about how evil will come to steal, kill and destroy, but we never related it to living and dying especially in a place like Vietnam and the subsequent wars. If we would have been told that the devil was causing all the death and destruction wherever we served in a war zone, when we were there, we probably would have scoffed and laughed at the person who told us and say they had been watching too much on TV! To most of us it was the 'Pollies', the enemy, and us causing it all, nobody else!

While in a war zone we were constantly told to know and understand our enemy as much as we could, in order to wage effective war against him – and to protect ourselves. We were always trying to figure out what kind of weapons and tactics he could use against us. But, there was one thing we never had to figure out, which we were 100% sure of – that our enemy wanted to kill us!

During the Vietnam War, no matter how bad the enemy manipulated the war protesters back home (remember when the mail didn't get through and how you dearly wanted to 'Punch-a-Postie?'), the black marketeers, the clamoring prostitutes, the drugs you either took or were offered and everything else? But, above all the enemy's main weapon was DEATH! With this one weapon the Communists held our Nation's attention for over a decade – and we came home from Vietnam thinking that we knew all there was to know about death.

Like the communists in that war we need to really see the nature of the devil's attacks upon our lives today. If we are still plagued by flashbacks, nightmares, depression and the myriad of other war-related problems, you can rest assured that it certainly wasn't the Vietnamese people who were causing it – because they are thousands of miles away (yes, we know that many live in Australia now – but they aren't waging war with us are they?! Our real enemy has to be much closer, and he is!

The devil, or Satan, is using his ultimate weapon against us right now, and it is death! Some people might tell you that he will attack you through sin (and he probably will). We've probably been hearing about sin all our lives and that is perhaps a pretty good thing to focus in on. But even when the question of sin is settled, and even if the things of the world have no attraction for us any longer, Satan still has power over us by always holding the threat of death up in our faces. It seems that no matter what we do we think that he will win in the end.

But, there's something you need to know as a Veteran soldier. There is a way to combat the enemy and his awesome weapon, but you first need to know that there is a war still going on that you need to be involved in. It's the war between life and death. God represents life, Satan represents death. However, fortunately we have the freedom to choose which side we want to be on; because they are both volunteer armies.

If you choose God's army, here is what you need to know. God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to die before mortal man, so that they could then see him rise from the grave completely victorious over death.

Yes, after Jesus died He came back to life and put an end to the seemingly endless power of death that Satan had over us. When we join God's Army, by calling out on the Name of the Lord Jesus, Acts 2:21 says that, "...everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.", and do so with an honest heart, we then share in the Lord Jesus' victory of life over death.

Invisible War Wounds Killing at Home

Diggers* are being left to pay the ultimate price for emotional damage sustained in war zones, writes Samantha Healy.

THE SUNDAY MAIL February 27, 2011, p51:

AUSTRALIAN families, friends and communities have buried 23 soldiers killed Afghanistan since 2002. Each one was hailed for heroism, remembered for their larrikinism and commended for dedication to their mates and mission. But there is an even sadder often silent statistic that is forgotten – the number of soldiers, sailors airmen and women who have ended their lives for reasons that command a full military funeral of a fuller public acknowledgement by politicians. New [Department of] Defence figures show that 31 enlisted Defence personnel have, or are believed to have, committed suicide since 2005. Of those, 10 were in Queensland – the highest among the

states, seven suspected suicide cases in NSW and six in the ACT. The suspected suicide deaths of two other Queensland soldiers earlier this year are also being investigated by the coroner but are not included in the figures at this stage.

Young Diggers president Jarratt believes the number of confirmed suicides is just the tip of the iceberg with many more going unaccounted for once they have been discharged from the defence forces. "Look at Vietnam. The number killed was far outweighed by the number who took their own life in the years after their service," Mr Jarratt said. "We call it the invisible wounds of war, people dying not in combat but as a result of combat, years later." He warns the problem will get worse as more young soldiers embark on multiple deployment to wars where their enemy is not always easily identifiable. In 2009, Professor David Dunt of Melbourne University's School of Population Health compiled a report on suicides in the veteran community for the Federal Government. Titled Review of Mental Health Care in the Australian Defence Force and Transition Through Discharge, the report looked at the risk of self-harm, the contributing factors among ex-service members who have committed or attempted suicide, the extent of suicide in the veteran community and lifestyle or other factors that may be contributing to suicide. It made recommendations on its findings. The acclaimed professor, who was given unprecedented access to the files of Defence and Veterans Affairs, found that suicide data was "harder to quantify" once defence personnel had left the ADF.

The 2009 report found that the ADF had done well in supporting mental health research but "less well" in supporting ongoing recording of mental health clinical data (client characteristics, contact type, diagnosis, quality-of-life measures etc) which is routine in public community mental health services. "On the one hand we need better statistics and analysis but on the other hand the programs we offer should be as effective and accessible as possible. We owe that to them."

Prof Dun told The Sunday Mail. "We need to apply a report card to each recommendation made, to make sure they are not bogged down in bureaucracy, that they are working and still apply."

While suicide statistics among enlisted personnel are kept by Defence no one is adequately monitoring suicide among veterans after they have been discharged. The Sunday Mail asked the Department of Veterans' Affairs about suicide rates among veterans and was told that they were unable to provide any "comprehensive data". This is despite the department commending Prof Dunt's inquiry into suicide rates among veterans in 2009. After the report's release, DVA said it was "committed to supporting veterans at risk of suicide and increasing the awareness of members of the veteran community about "suicide prevention".

There is no argument that DVA provides a range of services to assist veterans at risk from suicide but without adequate data about the rate of suicides among its own clients it would be near impossible for DVA to determine the success or failure of its programs and initiatives.

A DVA spokeswoman said it was difficult to obtain suicide statistics for several reasons. "DVA estimates there are currently around 370,000 surviving current and former members of the ADF, of whom currently only some 185,000 receive services from the department," the spokeswoman said. "In most cases it would be difficult to determine the reasons why a person has committed suicide, and it may not necessarily relate to their service. For legal and/or privacy reasons, when a client dies DVA cannot inquire about the cause of death unless it has a direct bearing on entitlements for their dependants."

Mr Jarratt said Young Diggers, run by veterans, was assisting Defence personnel who recently returned from Middle East battlefields who were getting into trouble with the law, self-medicating or struggling to adjust to civilian life. "Calls to

us have quadrupled since those Brisbane troops came back in October ... a lot just want to talk, a lot are sounding off and getting angry, some are just confused. "They feel they can't talk to their mates for fear of being seen as weak, or their families because they don't understand. "They don't even feel comfortable talking to their superiors for fear of being stripped of any further deployments."

One of the young soldiers being assisted by Young Diggers is re-enlisting with the army because he feels "he can't make it in the civilian world" and will be re-deployed on his third tour later this year. "That is the irony. Even the most screwed up of them are back in their comfort zone back there (in conflict). When you take them out of that zone they can't cope," Mr Jarratt said. Young Diggers also launched a new online toolkit called "Suicide -The Invisible Wounds of War" last week giving Defence personnel and their families a place to access information about combat stress, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicide. The group said such stresses affected 10-30 per cent of troops who had served in active combat zones. "The military, especially the army, is getting better. The navy is not," Mr Jarratt said. "We have to do better. They served for us and now their lives depend on it."

If you or someone you know needs help call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or visit www.youngdiggers.com.au or www.dva.gov.au for a list of places available to help.

* Aussie slang for 'Soldiers'