

## Combat Veterans and PTSD

Rarely in military history has so much nonsense welled up around returning US combat veterans than PTSD and Vietnam...and now Iraq War I and II.

PTSD is only too real. Long periods of intense combat, maiming wounds, extreme cold or disorientation, prolonged exposure to artillery and mortar fire, malnutrition and extreme thirst, isolation on the battlefield, and poor leadership---all will accentuate the problem.

Most of our current combat troops fortunately are in excellent physical health, have superb leadership, are supported better than any military in history with medical care, contact with their loved ones, known tour lengths (even though some are extended short periods), plentiful food/water, home leave from the battle zone, superb equipment, and only intermittent exposure to high intensity indirect fire and IEDs (with the exception of some infantry/armor/special ops units and some periods of fighting such as Falluja, etc---which experience combat at an intensity the equal of WWII). These combat troops are the toughest, most disciplined, and bravest men and women we have ever had in uniform.

In my view, most real combat troops who return from defending America are strengthened by their experience. They come home with a deep sense of trust and love for their fellow soldiers...and they are grateful to return to a country where they and their families are safe from injustice...and equally appreciative of the richness and safety of their physical lives. Hot showers, privacy, loved ones, protection from the elements, and freedom take on an enhanced, special meaning. In my view, for most of us ---this gratitude for America never fades.

I recently gave a talk at a large conference on the "returning veterans and their families." The first conference speaker was a young Reserve soldier who had recently returned from seven months in Iraq. He talked about the trauma of his tour. He was a mechanic, did a very good job apparently, was positive about the experience, did not extend his enlistment to stay with his buddies, had on occasion been in a FOB which was mortared, had volunteered for road patrols, and he once convoyed down a road where only days earlier a buddy of his had been killed by an IED. That was his exposure to combat. I was curious at his selection to speak. We have had 22,000 troops killed and wounded in this conflict. I have visited and been overwhelmed by the inspirational courage and strength of our terribly wounded young soldiers and Marines at Walter Reed and Brook Army Medical Centers. Many of them have struggled with bitter physical wounds...and associated combat stress problems.

It is very important that the medical community, our political leadership, and our VA system keep their focus on those who bear the real burden of this dangerous war...and not

be forced to divert precious medical and economic resources to deal with extortion and political hysteria.

We must keep a scientific and caring focus on these brave returning veterans. Having been wounded in combat three times during four combat tours---and as the father of an infantry soldier now again deploying into battle--- I feel strongly that we owe our courageous troops total support for those who are truly damaged by combat.

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