

Themes of Betrayal In Wartime Oral History

ABSTRACT: Most often to a greater extent than other phenomena, the psychohistory of a nation is shaped by its wars, and no nation exceeds the United States in this regard. Equally from among World War Two, Vietnam and the Middle East Wars, this essay draws from documentary interviews with dozens of combat veterans, a military psychiatrist and a concentration camp survivor. Their oral history is illuminated and discussed in terms of a sense of betrayal and its basis. The germination and perpetuation of felt betrayal, individually and collectively, is portrayed and analyzed in light of similarities and differences of the wars, associated geopolitics, and varying domestic social climates across the three generations.

INTRODUCTION

He is passionately fond of hunting and war; he enjoys all the most strenuous forms of bodily exercise; he is accustomed to the use of weapons and from childhood has been ready to risk his life in single combat.

—Alexis De Tocqueville

This essay presents the stories of select combat veterans from within a comprehensive oral history project founded by the author and developed as the basis for a university class entitled, *The Combat Experience*. The class has been held continuously for six years at James Madison University, and is funded as a one-semester guest lecture at the University of Virginia. Other universities have expressed interest in the course, offered in military science departments but available to the general student body. Veterans from the project come into class as guests at semester's end. The oral history subjects are procured by the author via numerous channels, but most often through the media or being referred to comrades by those already interviewed. The author conducts and edits all audio-visual interview material independently. From the hundreds of hours of dialogue about the stories of dozens of veterans across 75 years and three major

wars (with the Korean War also covered in class), many sub-themes emerge. This paper examines the theme of betrayal. Given space constraints, only a few of the cases can be presented in detail, yet the reader is encouraged to bear in mind that the theme illuminated through these relative few are representative of the many.

NEVER FORGET, NEVER FORGIVE

Pearl Harbor

Entirely unlike its previous major wars from the Revolution onward, the United States' entrance into WW2 was abrupt on account of being attacked at Pearl Harbor. In *Day of Deceit*, Robert Stinnett draws on decades of research and previously classified documents asserting Pearl Harbor was neither a hapless lapse of American intelligence nor a brilliant military coup by Japan. His treatise argues that the U.S. government had a plan to provoke Japan into war which it had been implementing for several years before the attack, and that President Roosevelt and select staff had knowledge of the imminent attack but did not warn the base.¹ Many other researched accounts align with Stinnett's.^{2,3,4} That the U.S. command was in fact unaware of the attack is doubted by many of its survivors.

Along the infamous Battleship Row, the crew of the USS Oklahoma suffered the second most casualties. The role of paymaster cultivated an exceptionally broad familiarity with the ship's crew. Transactions were face-to-face each payday, a brief but regular interaction imbued with its positive flavor. As paymaster and being somewhat older than the majority of sailors, Roy (The Swede) Boreen had a quasi-paternal relationship with them. Of the attack, he recalls: *Being stuck between staying below to avoid the strafing and bombing on deck, or getting out of the hatches so you wouldn't drown. Ultimately, the crew started jumping in the water to escape the burning and exploding ship: The ship was already sunk enough that it wasn't too far down to the water. I looked up and saw their planes coming over like a flock of ducks. I had about a dozen men just behind me when I jumped, and as soon as I hit the water I swam right back behind a ballast to hide, completely soaked in heavy oil. The others all came off the side right after me, but by then a Zero had spotted them. There wasn't much distance between the ships so the Zero came in real low making a pass down the alley and opened up. Slaughtered 'em all right in front of me. I could see the pilot clear as could be, just grinning like a opossum in you know what.* At age ninety-five, asked his current perspective on the atomic bombing of Japan, his answer was emphatic: *I still think it's the best darn thing that ever happened.* Of the Japanese people in the years since: *I can't stand any of 'em. And it made me so mad I about got sick having to*

look at 'em having such a good ol' time with their cameras when I went back for the 50th anniversary. What has been your thinking on whether or not the attack was known in advance by the U.S. high command? *I got to thinking they had to know. How do you send that big a fleet and air force over all that distance and keep it a total secret from the biggest military in the world? No way, no way. How has that belief affected you over the years? Nothin' I could do about it so I've just had to live with it. I'd of ruined the rest of my navy career if I'd of been talkin' about what this country did wrong by Pearl Harbor, so I just stuck to my feelings about the enemy.*⁵

Rather than coming to reconcile themselves to the events of the day of infamy, the theme of relishing revenge was consistent across the several survivors interviewed. Among them was Lester Silva, incredibly the sole sailor out of a crew of several hundred aboard his frigate, who was wounded. Moreover, his vessel was very much an outlier in not being hit by any torpedoes or bombs. Of his thoughts on that outcome, he could only say: *I've asked myself that damn question a thousand times. On the atomic bombings: I thought it was the most precious thing ever. Has that feeling changed at all over time? No! As to the Japanese since the war: Never wanted anything to do with 'em and never laid a finger on anything Jap made. Because the products were less quality or because of Pearl Harbor? Pearl Harbor. Nothing Jap, no way. And beyond those lasting feelings about the enemy, did you come to think at the time or over the years that the U.S. high command may not have been totally unaware that the attack was coming? I came around to thinking that we had to have had some good idea about it. The United States knew it couldn't just keep sitting out of the war and needed a good excuse to get in. What better? How have you coped with having that belief? Well, I guess I haven't. I mean, I'm too patriotic to have ever let myself feel hate toward my own country. But to think our own people could let that happen? It's always been too much to dwell on.*⁶

Paul Moore, another survivor of a sunken ship, most vividly recalls: *the screams...bodies flying through the air... most of all swimming my way to shore with all the dead bodies and body parts floating around me. As to the atomic bombs: They got exactly what they deserved for what they did to us on December 7. And more. What about the fact that the vast majority of victims were civilians? Didn't matter then and doesn't matter now. Why? Jap was Jap. Have you bought Japanese products over the years? Nope. Never. And never let none of my family bring any in the house neither.*

Do you believe the attack was truly a complete surprise? *No. The higher ups must have known something. How so? Because the aircraft carriers were all put out on maneuvers just before the attack, and for the first time in a long*

time. Another answered: *How could they possibly have spent all that time coming all that way with all that air force and navy and our intelligence never picked up even one sign of 'em?* And another: *I've always bet them in Washington had to know.*⁷

Clearly then, as the two nations at last symbolically reconciled through their presidents' pilgrimage to Pearl Harbor on its 75th anniversary, a representative sample of servicemen survivors remained in an utterly antithetical frame of mind.

THE HOLOCAUST: SURVIVOR AND LIBERATORS

The victims' sense of betrayal underpins another of World War Two's most significant events. Irene Weiss was thirteen when she was taken to Auschwitz. She described being unable to process what she beheld, for instance: *when I was put in a work house (sorting confiscated possessions by value) I could now see the smoke coming out of the huge chimneys next door. When I asked a woman who had been there a while when I would be reunited with my family she answered; You see that smoke? That's your family.* She further described the genocide: *they were rushing in over 400,000 Hungarian Jews in a couple of months and the incinerators became full, so they started herding others into open burning pits, and I watched the women and children going into them at night, screaming and screaming.* As to how she coped, if at all: *Your mind shuts off. You see it, but you can't really believe it. So as I see the line of people going in, maybe on the other side they are going out.* And finally: *You just have to die yourself, in your mind.* Not until two years later, when aboard ship en route to New York, did her mind actually accept the experience: *I'm looking out on the water and asked myself—why am I going to America? And then at last I had to admit, it was only because it really happened.*

The survivors of Auschwitz were not "liberated." Rather, they were evacuated and relocated in death marches that their captors abandoned as the Russian and then American armies closed in. Once free, Irene's group could only wander the countryside until finally getting a transport into Czech territory.

Watching people from Africa and the Middle East immigrate into Europe on television over seventy years later, she compares: *At least the world cares about them. And, most of them have been getting asylum. With that comes food and shelter and medical help. Nobody cared about us. We were on our own.* How do you think it was possible for the Allies to have not intervened all that time? *They were only concerned with their actual war operations. With taking territory. It's proven that of course they knew what the*

*camps were. There are so many aerial photographs they took. They bombed a munitions factory only five kilometers away. They could so easily have bombed the tracks to Auschwitz. That's all they had to do. That would have stopped it.*⁸

One did not have to be in the role of passive victim for the Holocaust to take its toll. U.S. servicemen were enormously traumatized in the course of liberating the camps. However, when asked if they subsequently received any form of psychological counseling, invariably they did not. Allen Rotruck vividly recalled his platoon forcing German officials at gunpoint to dig hastily buried camp victims from the ground with their bare hands. Many of the disinterred were small children, and he was haunted in dreams for well over a decade: Did you ever have counseling offered through the veteran's administration? *No. Nothing like that was available. I came back to remote West Virginia. And not even any form of debriefing by the army at the time of the liberation operations? No.*⁹

Another veteran, Kyle Coleman, was reared on a tobacco farm in Virginia before service. He memorialized his war experience photographically. With no prior experience, he bought a camera in Belgium early in his tour, and through extreme diligence kept it and the film clean and dry over 282 days of continual combat. He took photographs at Buchenwald, but without any chance to get his film developed until he was in the Philippines, awaiting an invasion of Japan later aborted by the atomic bombs. The consequence was that both the process of taking the photographs and then having them as 8x10 enlargements in a carefully constructed album served to enhance and reinforce the haunting visions his comrades had only beheld through the naked eye. As with virtually all WW2 veterans, no psychological intervention was forthcoming, and in this case even when sought: *I had a lot of trouble getting over it after I got back, but got turned down in late '46 when I applied for the mental stress benefit. What was bothering you the most, the battle memories or the camp? The camp. Why do you think that was when you had so much more exposure to battle? The people in the camps were innocent. No way to defend themselves and they hadn't done anything. I couldn't believe what I was seeing, what had been done to all those innocent people. All the old ones and women and children. Starved and burned alive. Children. I just couldn't believe that could be possible. Most of all you've been haunted by the children? Yes, the children. And the smell. A dead person smells a whole lot worse than any animal.* He suffered symptoms of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for approximately twenty-five years. *I got turned down and never got any help, so I just had to take it.* The nightmares of Buchenwald returned at age 90, just after his wife died from Alzheimer's disease. I interviewed him sev-

eral years after that, and as a result successfully advocated for mental benefits through the Veteran's Administration, retroactive to when a neurologist diagnosed him with PTSD in 2012. *So I had to go seventy years without help or benefits.*¹⁰

As is most often the case, the core emotional wound of war was to his soul, and thus not one amenable—particularly in one so elderly—to medication or extensive talk therapy. Therefore, to address the spiritual wound, I arranged for a rabbi to meet with the very aged Christian veteran. A modified version of the ritual purification of Tum'at HaMet (impurity of the dead) was performed. The power of suggestion within that singular interaction—concurrent with the belated assignment of mental disability benefits—provided, at last, some sense of both validation of and relief from the emotional torment for which his government had declined help for decades.

THE VIETNAM WAR

Unlike veterans of prior American wars, those returning from Vietnam commonly experienced denigration for their service. Service was mostly compelled by the draft, particularly for non-officer troops. The experience of Vietnam veterans fell entirely short of World War Two's profound legacy of purpose and victory. John Loving, a highly decorated Vietnam veteran and author of two related books, asserts the problem derived from "too often blaming the warrior rather than the war."¹¹ Overtly, the issue was for the very great part a function of veterans' interactions with their young peers. Unlike well-publicized college campus demonstrations and encounters, there is much less awareness of the devaluation experienced by the returning combatant veterans from within the family unit. Given the extreme animosity toward the war, shaming of the returned veteran by those he was closest to was a not uncommon problem. The following vignettes portray this in starkly different forms.

A terribly wounded army platoon lieutenant, Joel Chase, was hospitalized for a year stateside. He recounts the moment the wife he had married shortly before deploying first came into his room: *She stands there and the very first thing she says was, you're not a hero, you're just another baby killer.*¹²

Jerry Martin, another wounded platoon lieutenant, had enlisted in the marines and was selected for officer candidacy. In '66 and '67 the need for fresh troops was urgent, with training and deployment therefore very rapid. Soon, he was leading infantry through the heaviest combat of the war. Casualties, particularly within the marine infantry, escalated egregiously. His physician father had been in a non-combatant role in WW2,

and was highly critical of his son choosing to enter the marine corps to fight in a war that he, the father, regarded as unworthy of risking one's life for, particularly when getting a deferment was a viable option: *So after I got wounded and then well enough to go home, the one thing I couldn't wait to do was get in the Falcon I'd left covered on blocks in the barn and take off on a sunset drive around the lake with a couple of beers. So a couple of hours after I got back I told my folks I wanted to go out and get my car ready. And my father says with complete complacency, "I sold it." I was shocked and asked him why he could have done that. And he said after I was wounded and given how bad the war was going, he didn't know whether or not I was going to make it back home, and so he "couldn't just let it sit there and depreciate."*¹³

For the fighting troops, extremely intrusive operational constraints—later termed in the Middle East Wars as 'Rules of Engagement'—came to be during Vietnam. In this regard, front-line troops were increasingly "commanded" via layers of rear echelon, and ultimately from the other side of the world in Washington D.C. For the troops, the intrusion and constraints were entirely impractical, undermining their functioning and enhancing exposure to risk.

World War Two—and even Korea—had been strictly traditional front-line engagements, with the enemy in uniform and the goal to take territory moving forward. Vietnam lacked all of those classic elements of warfare. What was it like to be fighting under those conditions and terms? *It sucked.* Ronald Granitz, a Marine corpsman recalled: *we would go through a village and get in a firefight going in or going out, and end up circling back through that same village a few weeks later. And this happened again and again.* So is it accurate to say you weren't getting anywhere or really going anywhere, and you were more vulnerable each time you came back to the same place? *That's exactly right.* What about actually fighting the enemy? *You didn't know who they were.* And further: *You don't forget the smell of your buddies getting blown up, no matter what. But it haunts you even worse when it ended up being for nothing.*¹⁴ Asked about both the Rules of Engagement and fighting the war per se, marine infantryman Adolphus Stuart declared: *They made it impossible, man. How do you win a war without taking territory? You don't. It's impossible.*¹⁵

The fighting troops became imbued with the deepest sense of betrayal on account of being severely constrained in the capacity to either "win" or at least best fend for their own survival. Concurrently, they became increasingly and even solely to blame for the inevitable atrocities inflicted upon civilians. Indeed, while the high command stretching back to Washington was ordering carpet bombing, the court-martials,

criminal convictions and career ruinations were consequences suffered by the combatants and their immediate field officers.

As already intimated, returning Vietnam veterans found no relief from their sense of betrayal after leaving the battlefield on the other side of the globe. Rather, their return to “the world” led to being ostracized throughout society. What was encountered at home had been well buffered during deployment by several factors, with those being 1) the significant distance from the U.S., 2) the very time-limited overseas experience, 3) the consuming nature of a combat tour, and most importantly, 4) the immersion within the combat unit, wherein the identification and attachments are not uncommonly proclaimed to exceed any—including primary family—on the civilian side.

At the airport upon returning, on college campuses upon enrolling, and virtually anywhere in the attempt to reintegrate into society at large, veterans of this war very often experienced the anti-thesis of the heroes’ welcome broadly enjoyed by their WW2 counterparts a generation earlier. While the core commonality between the veteran generations was the lack of psychological services to facilitate re-entry—with the formal diagnosis of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder still non-existent—the entirely positive reception returning WW2 veterans received of course helped mitigate the mental consequences of the combat experience. For Vietnam veterans, betrayal and any general emotional malaise was terribly enhanced by being ostracized...*after putting my life on the line for a year to help keep the free world safe from more communist takeover.*¹⁶

Psychiatrist Marvin Firestone recalls his three years of residency at Walter Reed military hospital in Washington, D.C. from mid-1965 to mid-1968, the period when the war dramatically escalated militarily and became much more unpopular. Reflecting on his roughly eighty patients during the period, he opines that their post-service feeling was one of disillusionment and confusion for being sacrificial pawns in a war that lacked strategic goals. Gradually the feelings of betrayal became equally apparent. *They felt they needed to dissociate from being identified with the military once they left the hospital. And by '68 that wasn't just an issue for those who had fought. On a whole other but related level, we on medical staff were advised by command not to wear our uniforms outside the hospital.*¹⁷

THE MIDDLE EAST WAR

A conflict on two fronts that came to be duly regarded in one breath, the origins of the Middle East War (MEW) were identical to WW2 as a response to a catastrophic homeland attack. That core similarity ended

after a brief pursuit of the enemy in Afghanistan to Pakistan. From there, the MEW mutated into a Vietnam-like conflict. To begin, the enemy was an amorphous terrorist organization, Al Qaeda. Yet with Al Qaeda neither a nation nor even a specific entity in a distinct locale, the U.S. counter-attack became an engagement with the much larger and geographically rooted force of the Taliban, which sheltered Osama bin Laden and other key operatives of Al Qaeda. Adding to the ambiguity was the fact that the Taliban had condemned the 9/11 attack on the United States. Thus, once at war, U.S. forces were on the soil of a neutral nation in an ideological conflict with a force that had not only not conducted the homeland attack, but also—however insincerely—condemned it. The Taliban were overwhelmed within two months, ending any justification for further operations other than a limited aftermath occupation.¹⁸

The feelings of betrayal harbored by MEW veterans can be aptly portrayed at each key phase of their war experience; the process of being deployed, while in combat, and upon coming home.

Marine infantryman John Peck incurred a very significant blast-related traumatic brain injury (TBI) from an improvised explosive device (IED) in his first tour in Iraq. Beyond a period of loss of consciousness and impaired cognitive functions—as well as the range of physiological symptoms—a magnetic resonance image (MRI) of the brain showed tissue damage. He underwent months of rehabilitation stateside. In the civilian realm, a positive brain scan suffices for qualifying for disability and invariably tips the scales in favor of the injured in legal proceedings. In the military at that time, there was both a comparative lack of a proper protocol for evaluating and treating TBI and a major build up of troops in Afghanistan. Thus, rather than being disqualified from further active duty, he at last passed the cut-off score on the same rudimentary mental test he had been taking for nearly a year. On that basis he was given the option to re-enlist for combat duty, which he accepted, and was re-deployed to Afghanistan. Barely a month later, while sweeping for IEDs in an enclosed space, he lost all four limbs in a blast. Declared clinically dead three times during the sub-acute phase of his recovery, he now functions with a remarkable degree of independence...*As I was getting over the first brain injury, all I could think of was just getting back in the fight, otherwise it would feel like the bad guys beat me...Then after the second blast, when I finally got the point where I could think about stuff, I got to wondering; hey, how the hell come a doctor didn't say they couldn't send me back after how messed up I got the first time? I know a lot of marines getting seventy or even a hundred percent disability, and they aren't ever as bad off as I was the first time*

*I got blown up. So now I'm like, what was up with that? It shouldn't have been my choice. I was just another gung-ho marine. I found out if it had been the same thing in sports, say boxing or the NFL, it would have been, nope, sorry bub, you're mandatory retired. I'm not saying being brain damaged was the reason I tripped that IED and got my arms and legs blown off. But I am saying, I shouldn't have had the chance for it to happen.*¹⁹

Perhaps most impossible for MEW veterans to reconcile was the effect of Rules of Engagement (RoE) on their combat experience. Conditions were more difficult for troops than in Vietnam; virtually all of the Iraq war took place in urban centers versus in the remoteness and concealment of the jungle, and the electronic age assured that any and all acts were digitally captured and readily disseminated. In regard to the latter factor, a gruesomely exquisite example of the difference is illustrated by the case of a platoon leader in Vietnam who extracted the gold tooth of a killed enemy with his service knife (the taking of anatomical trophies was common). Upon learning later that day a journalist (omnipresent compared to WW2) had photographed the incident, the officer commandeered a helicopter to the journalist's quarters, seized the camera and exposed the film. In contrast, any untoward conduct in Iraq or Afghanistan was almost sure to be digitally captured, if not by a journalist then by the cell phones of innumerable civilian onlookers. Increasingly as the MEW wore fruitlessly on, the fact of the world watching in virtual live time, in combination with the conditions of troops literally rubbing elbows with civilians as they patrolled, influenced the RoE.

As a result, American troops were oppressively unable to function and their risk of harm was enhanced in parallel. The viewpoints of combatants of WW2 and Vietnam speak for them. Hershel "Woody" Williams, a legend of the Marine Corp's Pacific campaign: *I've read official documents of those Rules of Engagement, and they make absolutely no sense in terms of being at war. They only make sense in terms of trying to win over a civilian population.* Otherwise as to the specific fighting conditions, a veteran of jungle warfare in Vietnam opined about the fighting conditions of the Middle East: *See over there in the 'Nam, they had to come to us. And if we didn't smell 'em first, maybe some monkeys would start screamin' and that'd put us on alert. But those guys over there now? Walkin' around the streets day in day out and into alleys and up staircases kickin' doors in? No, sir. That's givin' you a hundred percent chance of gettin' killed.*²⁰

Marine infantryman Stephen Canty described an episode from Afghanistan that, in his embittered estimation, most succinctly illustrates what he and his comrades considered the unendurable idiocy of the RoE.

On routine patrol through a town—so often in the seemingly aimless pursuit of *Intel* leads—his squad came under fire. Inasmuch as they had come under direct attack, the RoE allowed the squad to return fire. Identifying the source as a second floor window across the way, one of the marines fired an RPG (rocket propelled grenade). By then more than a minute had lapsed, and after their return fire exploded within the house, they heard the wails of women and children. Soon a man came running toward them holding a small child mutilated by the round. Very shortly as all looked on, the child died. Typically, the insurgents who had fired on the squad did so while in close quarters with innocent civilians—ideally children—and then immediately fled the scene. In this case, one of the apparently two insurgents had been intercepted after fleeing from the house by a companion squad that had heard the reports and moved rapidly toward the scene while making radio contact with the engaged squad. In the course of the capture there had been a brief exchange of small arms fire and the insurgent received a minor flesh wound. Escorted to the location of the expired child, his guilt further evident by the fresh gunpowder residue on his fingers, radio command directed that the insurgent's wound be field dressed. Moreover, in spite of its comparative slight nature, he was then medivaced out per the terms of the RoE: *And so there you have the whole fucking insanity of it all. There's a dead five-year old kid. There's my closest buddy completely freaking out losing his mind because he feels like he just murdered a little kid and his father's sitting there screaming and crying. But the Hadji who just a minute ago was trying to kill us and set the kid up to be killed at the same time is being given first priority medical aid by us and then taken from us for further official medical eval. Toad (the Marine comrade) ended up committing suicide after he got back. After month after month of that kind of shit, killing that kid put him over the edge. Is it any wonder I spent a couple of years after I got back walking around with a 9 mil (a handgun) just hoping someone would mess with me? How did you finally come down from that urge? A lot of weed.*²¹

Another veteran of the marine infantry, Paolo Albavera, operated a .50 caliber machine gun in Iraq, and well portrays the theme of betrayal after coming home. He was born in Mexico and motivated to join the military as a means of affirming his sense of citizenship. In combat, he suffered a blast-related brain injury. On another occasion, his patrol vehicle was behind another directly hit by an IED. Semi-conscious and barely able to breathe because of toxic smoke, he groped his way down the roadside gully toward the cries of a comrade. After reaching the other he began to lift him. When the body lifted much too easily he paused, regaining some of

his senses in the shock of the moment, for he realized he was holding only a torso and head: *I don't know. I guess he was so charged with adrenaline he hadn't died yet. But then he did in my arms after another half minute or so, but still yelling and crying.* Returning stateside with the double diagnosis of TBI and PTSD classic to the MEW, he eventually received treatment. He was driving an hour to see the nearest Department of the Navy eligible psychotherapist, who augmented his treatment with biofeedback he could do with a portable unit between sessions. The veteran reported making progress: *I was definitely coping better. But then after my PTSD was processed as severe and permanent, I was automatically discharged from the Marine Corps. And because of that, they said I was now the V.A.'s problem, not theirs. So I couldn't see my therapist anymore.* What about the biofeedback? *They took that away, too. I had to give the unit back.* After a comparatively perfunctory intake interview with an individual provider, he was placed on an enormous wait list for group sessions. The veteran faded into the realm of the untreated. He regressed as a result: *If it weren't for my wife and kids, for sure I would have ended up at least in jail but probably dead.*²²

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Across three major wars, each separated by a generation and with characteristics both markedly different yet similar, there is a common theme of betrayal felt by the combatants. Their thoughts and feelings are mirrored by a civilian survivor of a concentration camp during the Holocaust.

Where our culture regarded the WW2 veteran heroically as savior and winner, the Vietnam veteran was broadly perceived as the absolute antithesis. The MEW veteran then evolved into an ambiguous synthesis of the two themes; “thanked” for their service, yet for a war that—understandably—gradually came to be disapproved of, which was neither won nor ever winnable, and for which a miniscule fraction of the populace could even name a location associated with a battle. Indeed, while seventy-five years later the great battles of WW2—D-Day, the Bulge and Iwo Jima—remain common knowledge, in contrast even at the time they were fought, the major battles of the MEW could be named by few stateside beyond their fleeting saturation in the media. Although the Vietnam war was similar to the MEW by nature of having stateside opposition, the much greater intensity of opposition to the war and the active participation of so many citizens in demonstrations led to heightened awareness of war activity.

As with Vietnam, along with the prolongation of the conflict, lack of identification with the geography and indigenous people and their society

contributed to the general obliviousness of Americans to the details of the MEW. Indifference to the more recent war was also influenced by advances in media. The 21st century American now had options to consume a plethora of sophisticated media, with hundreds of television channels to choose from along with the internet. During WW2, comprehensive newsreel war updates invariably played before the feature film in movie theaters across the land. During both Vietnam and the MEW, consumption of war news was entirely a choice; and, in the MEW era, merely one among hundreds.

A final core factor very significantly contributed to the relative ignorance and indifference of the citizenry toward the MEW. Both WW2 and Vietnam were wars of conscription, and of course for WW2, there were a vastly larger number of troops relative to the general population. In stark contrast, veterans of the MEW volunteered, and compared to the WW2 were a much smaller portion of the general population. Less than 0.5 percent of the population served in the armed forces at the peak of the MEW (similarly in Vietnam), compared with more than 12 percent during WW2. Sharply segregated from the larger society and with their enlisted ranks very disproportionately recruited from the disadvantaged, both Vietnam and MEW troops became an insular sub-culture, and one quite poorly re-assimilated post-deployment.

The pervasiveness of the societal influence of a war can also be measured in its economic impact. WW2 dominated America's economic output, while at its peak, Vietnam rather remarkably accounted for 45 percent of federal expenditures. The MEW never accounted for as much as half that level. Finally, where during the Vietnam era a considerable majority of members of Congress had served in the military, in the MEW era, at most only 20 per cent had.²³ As opined by a former Special Operations paratrooper, the catch-all phrase of thanking MEW veterans for their service "alleviates their civilian guilt for never having had any skin in the game of the wars."²⁴

MORAL INJURY

In his seminal work, *Achilles in Vietnam*, the psychiatrist Jonathan Shay developed the concept of moral injury as an underpinning of the emotional spectrum of combat trauma. Derived from dialogue with his veteran patients in light of Homer's narrative of Achilles in the *Iliad*, Shay defined moral injury as a betrayal of what's right, by someone who holds legitimate authority (e.g., in the military—a leader), in a high stakes situation.²⁵

Clinical psychologist Laura Kerr's discussion on the parallel of developmental and military moral injury draws from Betrayal trauma theory (BTT).²⁶ She asserts that "when we fail to recognize the moral impact of war on veterans, they experience a double bind similar to children who must depend on those who abuse them." The theory posits that interpersonal violations perpetrated by individuals who victims care for, depend on, or trust will be processed and remembered differently than when inflicted by individuals with whom victims do not have a close connection. Similarly, Zurbriggen reviews how memory impairment has been documented among a variety of populations including survivors of child sexual abuse and combat veterans. That analysis synonymously discusses Betrayal Blindness as active when one has been dependent on the betrayer for physical or emotional survival.²⁷

A perspective more aligned with family systems theory is offered by Whelan, who outlines how the military is an institutional contradiction.²⁸ Embodying characteristics of both a traditional family and a modern bureaucracy, it idealizes loyalty and brotherhood while also functioning within an impersonal system of operationally effective rules and regulations. Particularly in a war zone—and as discussed for Vietnam and MEW veterans—those rules and regulations can be highly dysfunctional as an outgrowth of the chaos of the campaign. Within this dysfunction, betrayal manifests in two layers: first, there are the operational conditions that create the emotional wound; secondly, as portrayed in the oral histories, there is a process of being readily replaced and then ultimately feeling disregarded by the larger military family.

In his memoir *War Is Betrayal*, Chris Hedges covers a systemic, multi-generational experience of emotional trauma predicated on what he labels the Persistent Myths of Combat.²⁹ Hedges portrays the military as enticing young Americans working in fast food restaurants or Walmart's to fight and die for war profiteers and elites. He states "The allure of combat is a trap, a ploy, an old, dirty game of deception in which the powerful, who do not go to war, promise a mirage to those who do." Bearing in mind the WW2 veterans interviewed in the present essay, Hedges says: "After World War II, thousands of families struggled with broken men who, because they could never read the approved lines from the patriotic script, had been discarded."

Given the military and civilian unity during WW2 and the pride felt for a profound and purposeful victory, for WW2 veterans to feel any sense of betrayal would provoke significant cognitive dissonance if not outright guilt and shame. One must also apprehend that at the time, it

was taboo for males to acknowledge weakness. For all intents and purposes, men were not reared with the expectation of processing or expressing negative emotions. Psychotherapy was still the exclusive domain of Freudian analysis of civilians in the demographic upper echelon.

The oral history project has revealed such post-war WW2 phenomena as four rural West Virginia brothers all returning to the family farm after heavy combat in the army and marines, yet never uttering a word among themselves about their experiences in battle.³⁰

Along with the societal norm for maleness, more simply, grief is not expected to be associated with victory. Therefore, millions of WW2 veterans soldiered stoically on through their post-war decades of civilian life. John Wilson, a university psychologist and expert on PTSD in veterans, described a phenomenon of the lifting of repression in the oldest veterans. When Stephen Spielberg's film *Saving Private Ryan* was released, World War II veterans flooded the V.A. for help: "It reached the point where the V.A. had to create a crisis line for these thousands of WW2 vets," Wilson said.³¹

In their nature and timing, such American-made war movies entirely reflected the social reality. The development of the diagnosis of PTSD was an outgrowth of the Vietnam war and established within five years of its ending.³² Thus, for the very first time in America's serial history of major wars, recognition of and concern with combat mental trauma as well as recognition of difficulties in post-war social reintegration became a field of study and basis for dedicated, systematic intervention.

Given the heightened awareness and interest of the general population in the plight of Vietnam veterans, it followed that, soon after the war's official ending in 1975, the film industry galvanized into action. *The Deer Hunter* came out in 1978 and *Apocalypse Now* in 1979. Entirely unlike the post-WW2 genre of films depicting heroic combat victory void of emotional suffering, this initial pair of Vietnam War films focused almost entirely on the anguish born of minds warped by the combat experience. The next decade produced two further major films about the Vietnam War in quick succession; *Platoon* (1986) and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). Indeed, both of those productions were in a similar vein as the prior two.

While WW2-based cinema was otherwise well known in the decades after the war for glorifying combat victory as fought by the then prototypical All-American male, a stark contrast was a film produced in the war's immediate aftermath. *The Best Days of Our Lives* (1946), which portrayed three servicemen struggling to adjust to civilian life, was a major

success in the U.S. and Great Britain. While surely sharing the core theme of the human consequence of war, in due contrast to Vietnam War films, *The Best Days of Our Lives* was not made at a time when there was an anti-war climate. The next major feature film about WW2 that featured tragedy and suffering—versus conquest of an evil inhumane enemy—was not produced until 1998 (*Saving Private Ryan*), more than a half century later. Clint Eastwood's two complimentary films of the Pacific theater, about the battle of Iwo Jima, were not produced until over sixty years after the war ended. By then the U.S. was deep into yet another war, fought now by the grandchildren of WW2 veterans. Eastwood's *Letters From Iwo Jima* was told from the perspective of two good friends serving in the Japanese forces, watching helplessly throughout various battles as their comrades are killed. This equal humanization of the enemy is on the other end of the spectrum from the American attitude toward the Japanese during the war. Then, the Japanese were considered sub-human, and it was routinely accepted for troops to take anatomical souvenirs from their dead. This extended beyond the battlefield all the way to the White House, when Congressman Francis E. Walter presented President Roosevelt with a letter opener fashioned from a Japanese soldier's arm bone.³³ Furthermore on the home front, tens of thousands of Japanese-Americans had been interned in veritable concentration camps per FDR's executive order. Dead German soldiers were very rarely desecrated for anatomical trophies, nor were German-Americans interned.

Given these phenomena in light of all else discussed, it becomes clear why WW2 veterans lacked any basis to acknowledge or work through feelings of betrayal or any other emotional trauma derived from their combat experience. For their generation, alcohol abuse and displaced anger had to suffice until the country was finally primed by, and had first attended to, the consequences of the later occurring war of Vietnam on its combatants. For many WW2 veterans, by then reaching the twilight of life, the decades of their war trauma being ignored could itself be felt as another layer of betrayal.

Another perspective on war-derived betrayal is illustrated in the recollection of a veteran of Hitler's army. Werner Sensbach was twice deployed to the horrific slaughter on the Russian front, and badly wounded. Upon word of Germany's surrender, he recalled a close comrade breaking into convulsive sobs: *This man had been a school teacher before the war. Now he was saying to me that he had to live with the fact that he had betrayed his students in convincing them that Hitler was the savior of Germany, because now he knew it was all a big lie; Hitler was really our complete and total ruination.*³⁴

To be sure, post-deployment feelings of betrayal in Vietnam veterans were freely expressed. A combination of bitterness and shame compelled this posture. A pair of journalists who co-authored a volume derived from interviews of forty-seven survivors of a combat unit summarized their subjects' collective consciousness after returning stateside: "He had done what his country had asked of him. Now the country was saying he had been wrong, and he was angry."³⁵ The development and formal establishment of the diagnosis of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in 1980, only five years after the war ended, reflected the focus of psychiatry and psychology on the matter of veteran mental health in parallel with the nation's angst caused by the war. Yet in spite of what would therefore seem to have been a watershed in the helping and healing of veterans, precisely because of the profundity of their felt betrayal, many Vietnam veterans avoided bringing their service to light. For example, I had a classmate in a graduate psychology program in Berkeley in the mid-80s who concealed his service history of a dozen years prior. Upon my finally learning of this and asking why he had not told me a year earlier, he stated flatly: "*Because this was the most anti-war place in the country. Suddenly I'd be the dartboard for everyone's projections of right wing, psycho, baby-killer. No thanks.*"³⁶

The escalation of the Iraq war provoked a very significant elevation in Vietnam veterans seeking psychological services. As further opined by Dr. Wilson, the similarities in the wars caused this; neither war had a front-line, there was often uncertainty identifying the enemy, and world and national opinion was increasingly critical.³⁷

Surely such feelings included the re-opening of anger and despair from betrayal. In a media forum with six comrades making the same assertion, a Vietnam era marine corps platoon leader paralyzed from the chest down offered that "*I'm not bitter because I got shot. I've been bitter because I put so much faith in my government only to realize how betrayed I was.*"³⁸

Whelan suggests that for MEW veterans, perhaps the most salient thread became their cynicism. This feeling derived from coming to believe that their war was a charade, as gradually nobody really cared, and troops were on their own. This created a collective sense of neglect, leading to the dangerous effects of the combination of military betrayal and civilian isolation.

In a letter entitled "Stop Thanking Me for My Service," a former U.S. Army Ranger wrote that rather than being thanked for their service, it appeared increasingly clear the appropriate sentiment should be, "*I'm sorry American leadership carelessly sacrificed your lives for no good reason.*"³⁹

The arc of betrayal and its effects on the individual combatant are instructive for understanding the evolution of distrust toward traditional warfare now well-established in the American psyche. This collective outlook is expressed in the assertion of a veteran of the MEW: “*Actually winning a war is now just a very 1945 concept.*”⁴⁰ Extensive polling by Gallup revealed that, within a year and three months of the Iraq war’s inception, a majority of Americans considered it a mistake. However, it wasn’t until over three years after the inception of the Vietnam War that a majority called it a mistake. Popular negativity toward both wars intensified as they dragged on, and a later survey found attitudes toward Iraq by 2007 had become remarkably similar to those toward Vietnam by the summer of 1970.⁴¹ This confluence of the thoughts of the participants and spectators of the wars is captured in the comment of political scientist John Mueller: “*What we arrived at as the war ended was the same feeling of No more Iraqs’, just as after Vietnam the syndrome was ‘No more Vietnams.’*”⁴²

Betrayal is of course but one among many psychodynamics inherent in the combat experience that interact with and influence the psychohistory of American society. The similarities and differences of this process in other nations are likewise ripe for analysis.

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