Stars and Stripes Veterans News

# Stars and Stripes Veterans News

## Welcome Home

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This newsletter is written by combat Veterans to assist all who may benefit.

As disabled Veterans we are dedicated to helping others on our journey toward recovery.

We will share our experiences, provide helpful resources and offer our insight on various issues while connecting with our readers.

The Stars and Stripes Veterans News provides patients in the Traumatic Brain Injury Program the opportunity to write, edit, and publish for therapeutic purposes. The views expressed in this newsletter are not those of the VANJHCS or its staff.

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## Marine Corps League Donated Printer

On December 21, 2015, Dave Katz and Tom Miller from the Marine Corps League donated an HP M252DW color printer to our Newsletter Group at Lyons VA. We are very grateful to receive this printer because now we can print out our newsletters and distribute them to Veterans that do not have the Internet. We distribute these newsletters around the hospital as well as mail them to homes. ***This newsletter means a lot to our group because it helps us to help others.***

The members of our newsletter group work very hard and we are very passionate in writing articles due to the fact most of the articles are 100% true stories. We hope that other Veterans can relate to the articles and know that they are not alone. Our newsletter not only is about us, but how our loved ones deal with our situations at home while we are serving as well as when we come back home. Many thanks to the Marine Corps League for helping us out.

If you are reading this newsletter, we thank you for taking the time to read the articles. We hope that all continue to pay it forward.

***AJ***

***Pictured above from the bottom going clockwise:***
***John Welgos, Ingrid Minicapelli, Otto Espenschied, Suzanne Roscher, Thomas Miller and Dave Katz***

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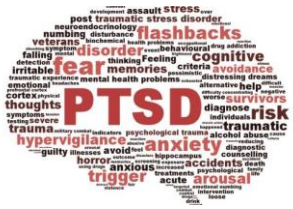
## Seeking Help




I believe highly in seeking help when it comes to dealing with my PTSD and TBI. If I didn't seek help when I first started having the symptoms, I would have been in the ground dead. Like most combat Vets that came home, I didn't have the symptoms associated with PTSD. I didn't even know what PTSD was. It wasn't until I had a mental break that all the symptoms hit me like a brick wall.

I was taken to the VA and was put on a locked unit until I was coherent. From there I was put in the PTSD Unit at the Lyons VA. It was a place where I felt calm and was surrounded by other Vets with the same problems so there weren't any trust issues. There was one doctor that made a huge impact on my treatment. When you talk to her, you can really see how much she cares and wants to help. Once I was done with the program, I went to the Vet Center in Ewing where I met another great Vet that is a counselor. He is a Vietnam Vet with PTSD. He was a great counselor and he really understood me and was able to relate. I was also given the opportunity to have two really great case workers; Carol Cashin and her coworker who would set up my appointments and call to just check in with me. Then there is my speech therapist Suzanne Roscher, without her my life would just be a huge unorganized mess. The cognitive strategies I have learned from her are very useful daily. If there is one thing to take from this article it is if you are suffering from PTSD or TBI, please seek help and fight for your care. It will turn out a lot better in the end.

***Ilde Millan Jr.***
***2nd Battalion 2nd Marine Division***
***"Warlords"***

## Tears

Tears have snuck out, from my swollen eyes
Careful to conceal, as to hide my disguise
Is it all right to feel sorrow and shame

Natural I guess, what causes such reactions,
Guilt it is, I confess
What other feeling will crumble a man
I know too much to even think again.

What if you hide it well
Is it self-defeating or just lucky as hell…
What if you are always crying inside
Obviously something on your mind
Something you obviously deny

All in all, like the emotion that drives
We all must live and we all must cry
All in all, like the tears in our eyes
We must let it out or die inside.

***Ojo Loco***

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# Just for Today

*Just for today:*
*I will live through this day only.*
*I will not brood about yesterday or obsess about tomorrow.*
*I will not set far-reaching goals or try to overcome all of my problems at once.*
*I know that I can do something for 24 hours that would overwhelm me if I had to keep it up for a lifetime.*

*Just for Today:*
*I will be happy.*
*I will not dwell on thoughts that depress me.*
*If my mind fills with clouds,*
*I will chase them away and fill it with sunshine.*

*Just for Today:*
*I will accept what is.*
*I will face reality.*
*I will correct those things that I can correct and accept those I cannot.*

*Just for Today:*
*I will improve my mind.*
*I will read something that requires effort, thought and concentration.*
*I will not be a mental loafer.*

*Just for Today:*
*I will make a conscious effort to be agreeable.*
*I will be kind and courteous to those who cross my path and I'll not speak ill of others.*
*I will improve my appearance, speak softly and not interrupt when someone else is talking.*

*Just for Today*
*I will do something positive to improve my health.*
*If I am a smoker, I'll quit.*
*If I am overweight, I will eat healthy—if only Just For Today.*
*And not only that, I will get off the couch and take a brisk walk, even if it's only around the block.*

*Just for Today:*
*I will gather the courage to do what is right and take responsibility for my own actions.*

*SP5 Otto Espenschied*
*9th Infantry Division*
*"Old Reliables"*

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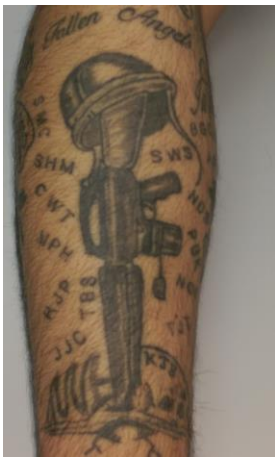
## My Tattoos

Have you ever walked by a Veteran or active duty service member and noticed they have military-related tattoos? And have you ever wondered what they mean or what they mean to that individual? For most of us Veterans, we get them to show our pride for our branch of service. For me, it was the eagle, globe and anchor of the Marine Corps (see below). I wanted something to remind me of my dedication and love of the Corps. Then there are some who get a tattoo as a remembrance of those who have fallen in combat. Personally, I have one of a soldier's grave with the initials of everyone who fell during my deployment to Iraq (see below). Others may get their MOS (Military Occupation Specialty) or a unit they were in tattooed on them, which I also have "0311" which is infantry rifleman and "2/2" for Second Battalion, Second Marines Division (see photo). Another tattoo I have which some Veterans have is of the American flag for my love of this great country on my right hand. Then I have the POW/MIA silhouette on my left hand to remember those who have been prisoners of war and those still missing in action (see photo). So the next time you see a Veteran with tattoos, go up to them and ask them politely if they have any military-related tattoos and if the will share their story behind them. And if you don't know whether they are a Veteran or not, here's a tip: We are usually found wearing some kind of military apparel.



***Ilde Millan Jr.***
***2nd Battalion 2nd Marine Division***
***"Warlords"***

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# To Save A Veteran's Life

Imagine living with the memory of a friend whose life you might have saved. The events of this story are factual. The names and specifics will be altered to protect his family.

Bob was wounded in Viet-Nam and sustained a traumatic injury losing a body part. His traumas became his ever present demons. The Veterans Administration was faced with his reoccurring scars of what is now known as "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder." Sadly the medical profession slowly evolved to recognize, diagnose and treat PTSD. Help for my friend was self-medicated in the form of alcohol. He often acted out with threats of violence. Those of us who were friends or concerned co-workers regularly covered for Bob thinking his problem was the drinking. We didn't know about PTSD or its symptoms. We knew Bob to be a good man who served his country honorably as a Marine in combat. Married with a family who suffered in silence when he was under the influence of alcohol. They continued to love him as husband and dad. "I wish I knew then what I know now." My father, a World War II Veteran, my brother and I, both Afghanistan Vets, all suffer from PTSD.

Bob ended his suffering unexpectedly by committing suicide with friends watching in horror. Bob's family continues to suffer, they never deserved to lose Bob and suffer throughout their lives. "If they only knew then what they know now!" Now we all know . . . or do we . . . more Veterans have died from suicide than the war itself. Don't let our understanding go unheeded. Act when you can. A friend/family member getting treatment has a chance at coping and saving their loved ones from sorrow and guilt. We can't bring back Bob and change the past. We must recognize the symptoms so we can help save others before it's too late. Doing nothing is the easy way out of a bad situation. Consider the potential guilt it may bring.

Now that you know what you are dealing with you can find help for that person that you care for because the potential alternative creates lifelong trauma for those you left behind.

***MSG John Welgos (Ret)***
***USASF***

# I Enlisted For The Wrong Conflict

I enlisted in the U.S. Army in 1968. My enlistment bonus was $0.00. I went to Vietnam in December 1968. I served in the 9th Infantry Division at Dong Tam and Tan Am. There was very little living plant life. The United States government sprayed 8,800 gallons of Agent Orange on Dong Tam and 6,600 gallons on Tan Am. Tan Am was less than a quarter the size of Dong Tam and so the Agent Orange concentration was much higher there. Sometimes things go from bad to worse. Most of my time in Vietnam I was an E-5. Let's add it all up: E-5 pay, overseas pay, family separation allowance, combat pay, and a housing stipend for my wife. Total slightly less than $3,000 for the whole year. My on duty hours totaled over 4,ooo hours for the year. I earned less than 75 cents/hour. Minimum wage back in the "World" was $1/hour.

Finished my enlistment stateside and became a civilian "without a health care in the world." I have PTSD which affected every relationship but of course I knew I was sane and the World wasn't. There was no follow up by the army or the VA unless I was proactive. No knowledge of risks; no need to be proactive. The PTSD certainly was a major factor in the failure of my first marriage and it was also becoming a problem in my second marriage.

Now comes the bad news/good news. In January 2009, I was diagnosed with non-Hodgkins lymphoma. I underwent several months of chemotherapy and was in remission by the end of April 2009. The same day my wife was diagnosed with breast cancer. She had chemotherapy and surgery. Her active care ended in November 2009. Everybody was fine! February 2010 my non-Hodgkins lymphoma returned. I have been in treatment ever since. Slowly my treatments are getting further apart. Now I only get treatment every 3 months. I get PET scans regularly to see if my cancer has returned. The chemo affects my memory, energy level and even my sense of well-being. Now I am a 100% disabled Veteran. I get monthly benefits and my wife also gets a monthly benefit. I can get a number of other services. For example I can get some care through a "Home Health Aide" but it is extremely limited. An aide can help me bathe, dress and mobility. Sounds great! Sounds better if I served after 9-11-2001.

Taking the information from the Department of Veterans Affairs brochure section titled "Overview Of Services": **Caregivers of eligible Veterans of all eras may qualify for:**
Skilled nursing; Home health aide; Home Based Primary Care; Veterans Directed Home & Community Based Care; Medical equipment; Home modification; Vehicle modification; Aid & Attendance; Support groups; Up to 30 days of respite care per year; Education and training on Caregiving. **Caregivers of eligible Veterans Seriously Injured on or after September 11, 2001 may qualify for:** All of the services available to Caregivers listed above: Plus Monthly Caregiver stipend; CHAMP VA health care coverage; Mental health services; At least 30 days of respite care per year, including during required training; Travel, lodging and per-diem as required during training; and Travel lodging, and per-diem during Veteran medical appointments.

***SP5 Otto Espenschied***
***9th Infantry Division***
***"Old Reliables"***

# Smoking Guns

Why are politicians so anxious to disarm America? It seems in the news that every death attributed to firearms is blasted across every media outlet available. A gun violence death is covered on the news religiously. The bodies are shown in graphic color with close-ups of the grieving relatives.

Every day, there are significantly more deaths attributed to smoking. No close-ups of grieving relatives. No politicians are interviewed. No politicians demanding we the outlaw of cigarettes.

I have not lost any relatives or friends to gun violence. The only violent deaths due to guns that had an effect on me were when I was in Vietnam in 1969. Cancer deaths that personally affected me by smoking, include my mother, one step-father, father-in-law and two aunts. Watching my aunt slowly dying from smoking was harder and more painful to watch than anything I witnessed in Vietnam.

Why the pressure to eliminate guns and the LACK of pressure to eliminate smoking? The answer is simple: TAXES. If I bought ten guns in my lifetime at $500 each, I would have to pay less than $500 in taxes. I would also have the guns, which could be resold. If I bought a pack of cigarettes at $3 a pack every day for 50 years, I would have spent at least $54,000, which forgive the pun, “had just gone up in smoke.”

Guns can be used for sport, safeguarding family and self, hunting game for food. Smoking can be used to cause serious, often fatal illnesses to self and family, damage to property and home fires caused by carelessness. Even life insurance is more expensive for smokers. The insurance companies charge more for smokers because on average, they have a shorter life span. If it shortens peoples’ lives, it probably causes more medical issues prior to death.

***SP5 Otto Espenschied***
***9th Infantry Division***
***“Old Reliables”***

# Alone In My Head

Demonstrative lessons to be learned
Abstract minds needlessly burned
Tortured by their insight
And shunned in return

Popular opinion has its power
Power of the masses
Views that are usually ours
But the only ones taught in life's classes

We are the ones
The free thinkers
The outspoken few
We are the ones
Who fall into obscurity
Who study the past and reveal something new

Too afraid is the general public
Who are comforted by rules
But there will come a time
When they'll realize they were the fools

There's so much misunderstood
So beautiful and real
There's so much disregarded
Just so they can feel

Set in their ways
Held back by fear
Alone in their box
Not wanting to hear

Hear what could be
What could awaken
Possibilities of hope
But too much would be shaken…
Their fragile, content minds
Their assimilated demise
Rest assured, they're humiliating lies.

The one that they cherish
Those with faith
Faith in something
Which has no face

No backbone or reason
No illusions to breathe in
So sad have we become
Just to think we fit in.

***Ojo Loco***

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If you have any questions or concerns or would like to receive future publications of this newsletter, please contact us at: Suzanne.Roscher@va.gov.