

## Combat will change you

**Bill:** My name is Bill and I served in the Marine Corps, served in Vietnam, I was in the Marine Corps for three years, nine months and twenty days. I was in Vietnam from '67 to '68. Certainly, killing human beings changes you. I remember the first time I killed two NVA and that was on the strip and I was elated actually. I didn't smile or laugh or anything, but I was inwardly elated that I finally killed the enemy, and little did I know that now I would be feeling actually remorse or sadness.

I asked for a college cut to get out of the Marine Corps and I received it and I attended Ohio State very briefly and I couldn't find my mind wrapping around academia, I couldn't, couldn't concentrate, couldn't study, and I really couldn't focus on the whole thing, and I couldn't understand what was wrong with me because I always, I felt nervous, I felt, I was tapping my feet all the time, I couldn't sit down and I had my head had a swivel on it, I was always watching everybody, and whenever somebody came into a room or something, my head was, I was watching them before they saw me, and I couldn't understand why I was like that. Anger was something that would, I would come from zero to sixty and fighting and if I thought somebody was irrational, I became completely irrational and a lot of fighting and a lot of.. I didn't have time for fools. I always said to myself and I thought nobody understood me. I thought I was alone, and really, actually for the most part, I was alone.

After my bypass, I talked to a psychiatrist. He talked to me for about five minutes and he said, "Bill, you have PTS." I said, "well, how in the hell would you know?" I said, "you've talked to me five minutes and you can diagnose me?" And he says "well, I've done this before." So, I looked at him, and he was very, he stared at me right in the eye and he didn't flinch and I said "well, maybe there's something to this." So, he assigned me a psychiatrist, assigned me a therapist, and I started taking, taking therapy sessions and going to groups and talking about this and I found that well, I have all these symptoms. By virtue of the PTS, what is called post traumatic stress, it happens years after you come back from Vietnam, and if you stay busy, you may not think about it for twenty to thirty years. But it's going to come back and bite you right in the you-know-what.

I think these young warriors, the OIF and OEF warriors have a really difficult problem now. They've got so many deployments, but when they come back, they don't have that respite from the war because they have to stay in training, they have to stay in the mode of going back and fight that war, they know they're going back, so they stay in that mode, which severely imprints them as far as combat stress and PTS, and they're, they're not getting the help from the mental health clinicians. They're not getting the help, and hopefully this message here is going to get out and make a difference. I can tell you the VA has stepped up to care for the Veterans, and I just hope that the education and the word gets out to these combat Veterans, because I had a general one time, General Kelly, who told me he was the chief of the S, special operation forces, and he said "Bill, if anybody tells you that they're never changed by war, they're lying." If you are a human being, then war is going to change you, it's going to impact you and it will change you. Get some help. I don't care if it's at the VA, hopefully it's at the VA because they have some great programs. Don't listen to your buddies saying the VA is screwed up. They're not that screwed up. You're the one who's screwed up and you need to go get some help. And if you can't get it yourself, find some Veteran as a mentor, as an advocate for you. For example, American Combat Veterans War, that's what we do, is we guide you through what we call the VA maze. Now, it's not a maze because they



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want it that way, it's a maze because combat Veterans make terrible advocates for themselves. So, guide your way in there, if you want to, if you want the, if you're a current warrior, you go to the vet center. The vet center is anonymous in their reports to the VA and to the military, so, don't deny that you've got some problems. I mean, you're feeling the way for some reason. You need to ask for help.



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