

## Group therapy to overcome PTSD and stress

**Ari:** I'm Ari, and I served in the Army, went to Vietnam in 1967, served with the 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry, 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade Headquarters Recon. I had the direct experience of fighting two wars, one in the field against the Viet Cong, and the other back in base camp against racism in the military. It was very real in the warzone, and so it was two aspects of stress.

Coming back from Vietnam I wasn't prepared for my stressors, to see, hearing firecrackers go off and reacting as if I was in the field, you know, dodging, ducking under things, stuff like that, but it was the stressors around the sounds and vulnerability of the community in which I readjusted to, you know, and gang warfare and all that type of stuff. So in my transition I had this—in that my anger was very deep, and it was very acute at the time, and so when I was offered two jobs, one in the post office and one as a police officer, of course the police officer was too much like military so I didn't want to go there anymore, and so I went to the post office. In the post office I found out that they were shipping money from a military post in Germany to be burned in Washington DC, and so through my contacts in the post office I found out about it and I liberated that money, and I subsequently was incarcerated for that, you know, about four months later.

That's where my life began, in prison, because I had enough time to get away from the rigors of that transition, to begin to be more introspective about myself and what happened, and to become disciplined. When I was living in Little Rock I filed a claim for PTSD at the VA regional office. Gave me a quick interview and dismissed me because again, at that time PTSD was not in the diagnostic manual for mental health. I told myself my diagnosis is tied towards my anger around having to fight those two wars, and it took about four years to get that through in that language in my medical records. I held my ground and I finally got the diagnosis.

The therapy that I received and the counseling that I received was pretty much with other veterans, groups counseling with other veterans who was of—in the same war era that I was, so we could sit down and talk to each other about that, and that was the primary therapy for Vietnam veterans, is group dynamics, group counseling, and my subsequent management in terms of counseling and therapy was with engaging with a psychiatrist at the VA and talking through the situation.

Veterans, please, involve yourself with other veterans. Talk to each other, share your experiences. That's the best therapy you can get anywhere. We can use the VA and VA hospitals as resources for us to repair ourselves. Go to the VA and receive that assistance that you earned, the benefits that you earned. It makes your transition much more smoother, alright? And less stressful.



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