



The Demons of War are Persistent

My name is Schade: I am a Vietnam Veteran
with PTSD*

By A.W. Schade

share it

Some manage the demons onslaught successfully

Others ignore the stealth domination of their soul

*Many consider themselves cowards, should they
acknowledge the demons existence*

*Countless live in denial and loneliness; protecting a
warriors pride*

*Millions survive in destitution and through social
disconnection*

*The most vulnerable, too often think about, or choose
to 'end' their lives*

*Sadly, most will interweave within these emotional
conflicts throughout their lifetime*

*AW Schade, USMC;
Vietnam; 1966/67*

The following is my story



Prelude

Forty years have passed since my deployment as a combat Marine in Vietnam. Like many Veterans of war, the 'Demons' have persisted to haunt me over a lifetime of tears, altered persona, and secretive fears.

The purpose of this story is to help Veterans of all eras recognize, there is no longer a need to fight the 'Demons of War' alone. Today, the Veterans Administration and civilian medical communities understand the psychological transformation that haunts Veterans of war. It is no longer a dishonor, nor are you less of a warrior if you seek medical assistance from within or outside the Military. It has taken me more than two years to complete this personal message. It forced me to muster memories of my past, albeit grudgingly, and glance back through the cloak of shadows I have fought alone for so many years.

Therefore, please take a few minutes to read this story -- before your future becomes a reflection of mine, and thousands of other Veterans past. For the 'Demons of War' will intensify in your mind, and if not confronted early their determination to control your way of thinking will persist throughout your lifetime. Until, they eventually imprison your soul.

“Friends and family gather to celebrate another joyful holiday. Nonetheless, encircled in the cheerful atmosphere I am often melancholy, as vivid memories of lost friendships and battlefield carnage randomly seep from the vulnerable partition of my mind; a secret place I concocted decades ago to survive in society. Thoughts I silently struggle to keep inaccessible for fear of unleashing the worst of war's nightmares, which continue to blockade my endeavors to reminisce of the innocence and joy of my pre-war past.

Although this story is of one warrior, it pertains to countless more. For entrenched within our spirit, humanity has sought expedient motives to send the young to war. My pledge to God, Country, and Marine Corps was Forty years ago, or more. At eighteen, like many others, I adorned the timeless stench of death and carnage, in the jungles of Vietnam.

As a young unproven warrior, I consented willingly to the ancient rules of war. Too naive to understand the twisted 'Demons of War' had already begun a lifelong quest for possession of my soul.

My journey began as many others, a bus ride to New York's legendary Induction Center at 39 White Hall Street. We went through lines of examinations, and stood around for hours. We had no choice but notice one another's bare asses, before we had the chance to learn each other's name. Nor did we know so many of us would remain together, building deep-seeded bonds of friendships through Parris Island, Camp Pendleton, Okinawa, to the deadly battles in the theatre of war -- Vietnam.

We argued and fought among ourselves, as brothers often do. Yet, we never lost sight of the bonds we had as friends, United States Marines, and the indisputable commitment we lived by, to always 'cover each other's back'.

Aware of our destination we partied hard in every port, covering each other's back in countless bar room brawls. In confidence, we spoke about our hardships, growing-up, family, girlfriends, and future plans. As well, the dreams of going home again and the years of lasting friendships we faithfully agreed to share.

We transferred to a converted WWII aircraft carrier, which carried helicopters not jet planes, to transverse the coast of Vietnam to deploy by helicopter into combat zones from the DMZ, DaNang and the outer fringes of Saigon.

Within sight of land, we heard the roar of artillery and the familiar crackling of small arms fire. We loaded into helicopters to descend into the confrontation. With ambivalence, we assured ourselves that we were young, invincible warriors eager to engage in the battle. Indoctrinated in training, we knew the South Vietnamese people needed us, as we found many of them did. Our mission was to save the lives of the innocent and banish the enemy into Hell.

The helicopters plunged from their soaring formation to hover a few feet off the ground where we nervously leapt, some fell, into the midst of heated battle. The enemy was ready and sprung a deadly assault upon us. I was unaware that was the moment my psyche began to change, as I became engrossed in the shock, fear and 'adrenaline rush' of battle.

It was surreal! Nevertheless, not the time to ponder the finality of



killing another human being, the sight of friends shot dead, the rationale behind the illusionary ethics of war, or absorbing the inherent fury of men slaughtering one another. Nor, was it time to grapple with the thoughts of Demon seeds being sown.

When the killing ceased and the enemy withdrew, I remained motionless, exhausted from the fighting. With only a moment to think about what occurred, shock, hate and anger surrendered to the gratitude of being alive. However, time was not a luxury. I had to find out which brothers did or did not survive. As I turned to view the combat zone, I witnessed the reality of war; dreams, friendships and plans are fleeting thoughts for combatants.

We knelt beside our brothers, some dead, many wounded and screaming in pain -- while a few lay silently dying. As I moved about the carnage, I noticed a lifeless body, face down, and



twisted abnormally in jungle debris. I pulled him gently from the tangled lair, unaware of the warrior I had found. Masked in blood and shattered bones, I was overwhelmed with disgust and primal obsession for revenge, as I realized the warrior was my mentor, hero and friend.

I shouted at him, as if he were alive: "Gunny you can't be dead, you fought in WWII, and Korea.

Wake up! Wake up Marine; I need you to fight beside me!" Tears flowed down my face as I held him close and whispered he would not be forgotten. I placed him gently in a "body bag", and slowly pulled the zipper closed above his face, engulfing him in darkness.

Our extraordinary brothers, Navy Corpsmen, worked frantically to salvage traumatized bodies. We did our best to ease the pain of the wounded, as they prayed to "God Almighty". "With all my heart I love you man," I told each friend I encountered. However, some never heard the words I said, nor aware of the survival guilt inside me.

When our mission was completed, we flew by helicopter from the jungle to safety on the ship. Yet, none of us rested; we stayed up most of the night remembering faces and staring at empty bunks of the friends who were not there. I prayed the sun rose slowly to delay the forthcoming ceremony of the dead.

Early the next morning we stood in military formation on the aircraft carrier's deck; temporarily suppressing my emotions as I stared again upon the dead. Rows of military caskets, identical in

design with an American flag meticulously draped over each of them, made it impossible to distinguish which crates encased the closest friends of mine.

As TAPS played tears descended unrestrained upon my face, and for the first time I understood, I did not have the chance to say goodbye. I pledged speechlessly to each of them that they would never be forgotten: A solemn promise I regretfully failed to keep, except through years of nightmares or hallucinations.

Combat is vicious, rest is brief, but destroying the enemy was our mission. We fought our skillful foes in many battles, until they or us, were dead, wounded, or withdrew when overwhelmed.

Engaging enemy troops in formidable battles was horrific. Even so, memories of 'guerrilla' warfare in jungles and villages were equally, if not more, agonizing to accept or build psychological boundaries around them.

Nonexistent lines of demarcation, the constant struggle to identify which Vietnamese were friend or foe, and the tormenting acknowledgement that a woman or child might be an enemy combatant that had to be dealt with accordingly, was often overwhelming.

Weary, I was not aware of the progressive change in my demeanor. In time, I thought I adjusted emotionally to contend with the atrocities and finality of war. I acquired the stamina to endure the stench of death, eliminate enemy combatants with little or no remorse, suppress memories of fallen companions, shunned forming new deep-rooted friendships, and struggled to accept the feasibility of a loving Lord.

I fought proudly alongside unacknowledged heroes, and led others into battle. Yet, never detected the nameless demons, embedding themselves inside me.

My tour of duty complete, I packed minimal gear and left the jungle battlefields of Vietnam for America. Never turning to bid farewell or ever again wanting to smell the pungent stench of death and fear. Within seventy-two hours, I was on the street I left fourteen months before; a street untouched by war, poverty, genocide, hunger or fear. I was home -- yet, alone. Aged psychologically beyond my 19 years and emotionally confused, I had to adjust immediately, from a slayer, to a so-called civilized man.

Except for family members and several high school friends, returning home from Vietnam was demeaning for most Veterans. There were no bands or cheers of appreciation from the country so



many gave their lives to serve. Instead, many were shunned and ridiculed for fighting in a war that our government assured us was a crucial and honorable cause.

As well, family, friends and often myself, never truly understood the changes that transformed me in fourteen months from a teenage boy, to a battle hardened man.

I was not able to engage in trivial conversations; nor, take part in adolescent games many friends still played. For them, life did not change and the realism of struggle was a job, or the unbearable pressures of college. It did not take long to realize they would never understand, there is no comparison between homework, and carrying a dead or dying man.

The media played their bias games, downgrading the military and never illuminating the thousands of Vietnamese saved from mass execution, rape, torture, or other atrocities of a brutal Northern regime. Nor, did they highlight the stories of American 'heroes' who gave their lives, shattered bodies and emotional self-sufficiency to save innocent people caught in the clutches of a controversial war.



For years, my transition back to society was unclear, as I struggled against unknown Demons and perplexing social fears. I abandoned searching for surviving comrades or engaging in conversations of Vietnam. Moreover, I fought alone to manage recurring nightmares, in a cerebral chamber I code-named -- "Do not open, horrors, chaos and lost friends from Vietnam."

However, suppressing dark memories is often not to be. As random sounds, smells, or even words unleash nightmares, depression and seepage of the bitterness, I still fight to keep locked inside me.

Today, my youth has long since passed me by and middle age is drifting progressively behind. Still, unwelcome metaphors and echoes of lost souls seep through the decomposing barrier I fabricated in my mind, so many years ago. Vivid memories of old friends, death, guilt and anger sporadically persevere.

No end, no resolution, nor limitations to a time, demon voices that began as whispers, have intensified over decades in my mind. "Help me buddy!" I still hear them scream, as nightmares joust me from my slumber. I wake and shout, "I'm here! I'm here my friend", and once more envision their ghostly, blood soaked bodies.

Even today, I wonder if more Marines would be alive, had I fought more fiercely to reach them, before so many of them myself, as visions of lost reappear at inappropriate consciousness as I they did not survive. More conflicting torment I feel myself - I am thankful it



died. "I had to kill!" I tell friends and foe hauntingly times. Guilt consumes my question why I had, and dreadful, however, is the when I acknowledge to was others, and not I.

This story has one helping hand. Regardless your memories are similar yours. I never recognized had matured. Disguised assumed anxiety, loneliness, depression, alcohol abuse, nightmares and suicidal thoughts, were traits that haunted every man.

purpose, to extend a of the war you fought, to mine, and mine to how suddenly the demons and deep-rooted, I

To all past and current warriors, I rise and applaud your valiant stand. Nonetheless, to control War's Demons takes time, and the battle is much harder should you challenge them alone.



So do not wait to seek medical assistance, as older Veterans had to do. For far too many warriors were less fortunate than me, and even you. PTSD is real my friends, and easily recognizable. Yet, if not confronted in early, can ruin relationships with your spouse, children, family, and career.

Remember, you will always be warriors and heroes to us all. But many will be overpowered by the demons", and lose ownership of their soul!"

It is up to you to win this battle, as I know many of you will. Only this time family, friends, VA, outside professionals, or peer groups such as Vets4vets.com, Disabled American Veterans (DAV), „will have your back“!

Semper Fi!

*PTSD can result from many forms of trauma, yet the warning signs can be the same; depression, nightmares, anxiety, anger, loneliness, paranoia, survivors' guilt, are only a few.

[January 2010] AW Schade; a Marine, Vietnam 1966/67, retired corporate executive and author of the award winning book; *Looking for God within the Kingdom of Religious Confusion*. He can be contacted at; awschade@gmail.com or www.awschade.com]

Resources

Veterans Administration (VA) www.va.gov

Vet Center www.vetcenter.va.gov

[VA National Center for PTSD \(Excellent Resources and Info\)](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/) www.ptsd.va.gov/

VETERAN ORGANIZATIONS

Veterans of Foreign www.vfw.org

American Legion www.legion.org

AMVETS www.amvets.org

Disabled American Veterans (DAV) www.dav.org

Iraq Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA) www.iava.org

Iraq War Veterans Organization (IWVO) www.iraqwarveterans.org

Marine Corps League www.mcleague.org

Military Order of the Purple Heart www.purpleheart.org

Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA) www.pva.org

Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) www.vfw.org

Veterans of Modern Warfare www.modernveterans.com

Women Veterans of America www.womenveteransofamerica.com

PEER TO PEER GROUPS

Vets4Vets <http://www.vets4vets.us/>

Coalition for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans www.coalitionforveterans.org

America Supports You www.americasupportsyou.mil

Black Military World www.blackmilitaryworld.com

Coming Home Project www.cominghomeproject.net

Give an Hour www.giveanhour.org

Grace After Fire www.graceafterfire.org

Helmets to Hardhats www.helmetstohardhats.org

Hire Heroes USA www.hireheroesusa.org

Marine Parents www.marineparents.com

Mesothelioma.com www.mesothelioma.com

Military.com www.military.com

Military One Source www.militaryonesource.com

National Veterans Foundation www.nvf.org
Operation Homefront Operation Vets www.operationvets.org
Patriot Guard Riders www.patriotguard.org
Soldiers Angels www.soldiersangels.org
Swords-to-Plowshares www.swords-to-plowshares.org
T.A.P.S www.taps.org
United We Serve www.unitedweservemil.org
Wounded Warrior Project www.woundedwarriorproject.org