FIGHTING THE LAST WAR

Altus (Billy) Lotter
**Prelude**

This is not about my own story, but extracts of the memories of some of the bush war veterans that I have been working through in the electronic media. It is a collection of voices, although still few, that have been silent for a long time.

I have also been fighting my own war over the years trying to come to some understanding of my emotions, depression, anxiety, anti-social and self-destructive behavior and the longing for that piece of bush lying on both sides of the border between Namibia and Angola. I searched the electronic media for men in my age group who were also part of the bush war and recorded similar experiences, hoping to find some kind of understanding. This is by no means a way of finding excuses or trying to hide the effects of shortcomings in the composition of my genetic material, the experiences of my childhood years and pure stupidity, by blaming it on the effect, if any, that my time in the military and bush war may have had on me. I longed for healing or at least partially.

This is part of a healing process for me. It is not about writing a book, but about hearing the voices of those men like me that has been forced into silence. Without a choice we had to give up some of the best years of being young. While others were playing we had been learning how to survive, how to kill, how to make war. It took away that innocence that was part of being young. When we eventually joined those that were of the same age, we found that we have grown old. We could not relate in many ways. Somehow we had the first experience of what was to come without knowing it then, being cast out! The worst was, in not having the opportunity to receive recognition, not having a voice to speak on your behalf. It was like to be forced to remove “that” part of your existence. To erase two or more years as if it never happened. Forced into silence by manipulation of facts and statistics, raw racism and intimidation.To be branded as a “loser” while everything proves the opposite. I am still sifting and searching. Unfortunately there is no single factor that defines this, nor a single cure that can heal.

Although the American experience included here forms quite a substantial part, it is by no means meant to be a comparison as the wars differs vastly in scale, objectives, weaponry, tactics and purpose, but merely an effort to see how other veterans are coping in their situation.
The Private War

It is now twenty-five years since my last border trip and still there are those feelings and images that keep returning as if suspended in time. Sometimes it feels like I have never left only to be rudely interrupted by the present reality. However none of these feelings and images is unpleasant.

After completion of my national service, I have settled in like any “normal” young man in venturing out living the new freedom, studying, building a career, having a relationship and eventually a family. It was however in the latter, the failure of two marriages, that I became aware that something is amiss. At the age of 35 all hell broke loose in a once stable life. I f**kt up a marriage of twelve years with two small kids. Everything crumbled around me. After this mess I requested a transfer at work, packed up and moved. I found a small cottage hidden in the Lowveld bush surrounded by mountains 50 kilometers from work, resembling the border to some extend, except for the mountains. There I remained in hiding for three years, living as it was back then in the fifties. My kids visited regularly and occasionally some friend. I tried to straighten things out, but got involved in an unstable symbiotic relationship which I knew had no future.

When my landlord informed me he had sold the farm, I realized that this was the end of my time in the bush as well as for the relationship. I moved to the outskirts of town, still preferring the comfort of having some bush around me, and got involved in a new relationship. This lead to a marriage made in hell. It got progressively unstable. (I am not apportioning any blame to my wife at the time). My health deteriorated with high blood pressure and I sunk into depression and anxiety. Suddenly my anger became uncontrollable. In fits of rage I would climb into trees jumping from branch to branch like a huge ape, breaking them. Alcohol seemed to be the only thing that made me feel that I am still alive. But it only compounded things and soon a restraining order was issued against me. After 4 years I was through with my second marriage. It felt that like everything I touched turned into “shit”.

In seeking professional help it transpired that there is a combination of factors that influenced my ability to have a normal intimate personal relationship. One of these factors pointed to my experiences as an 18 year old in the bush war. PTSD to some extent...? I really don’t know! This “diagnosis” was quite disturbing since I have never experienced the things I went through in the military to be negative in any way. Even the time we off-loaded a Samil 100 Kwévoël full off bodies. The fact that we had to walk on them did not seem strange at the time.

During the last few years however I become aware that there is a pattern that I have not noticed in the past, starting every year around December and lasting to the about the middle of January. I will find myself becoming overly sensitive and withdrawn. My mind starts drifting back to buddies, places and events of my time in the bush. I will listen to
songs from that time and remember the places where I was and with whom. When listening to “A Child is Born” from Boney M, I am “beam me down Mr. Spock” right back at Elundu. I feel the heat and smell the dust mixed with diesel fumes as it is kicked up by vehicles moving through the thick sand. The smell of leaves and branches as the vehicles cut a road through the bush. I squint my eyes against the heat and the glare of the white sand. My bush hat drawn low over my eyes. I am in the endless bush again; see the kraals and sliding down the side of one of those wells dug in the sand to fill the water bottles. The Ovambo women filling their plastic and metal containers, breaking of leafy branches and sticking it into the container to prevent the water from spilling as they carry it on their heads back to the kraal.

I will take out all my books on the bush war and read them all again as I have done so many times in the past. I will look at the photos of the men I have served with, those whom I know by sight only and those who have become legends in our time. Just to become upset, frustrated and angry to find that the years cannot be turned back. The photos correspond with those imprinted on my mind, but time has not been so kind. We have all aged while some is not with us anymore. Every year this reality is like a hammer blow.

Then there are those who will never age. In our minds they will always be young. The likes of Stols and Jordaan! We came back without them. I remember the pain and disbelief. The numbness when packing their kit and sending it back. The empty beds in the tents they shared. The deafening silence of their voices. The anger we felt to go after those bastards and to kill and kill! To be young doesn’t mean that you could not die. But it was not yet part of your mindset then, although you were a soldier. When it happens, it shocked the very foundation of your young life. I remember that in later years doing border camps I was extra nervous, extra cautious. I have had a taste of life and now I cared to live!

Now nearing fifty I am married again. The anger is still there but I have managed to control it to a great extent. I am on chronic medication to help me with depression, anxiety and high blood pressure. Every morning I must take a handful of pills for the rest of my life. But I don’t mind. I have already found some of the peace I have yearned for. For the first time I can value my relationship that I now have with my wife and her kids. I have relinquished control. I am taking the less prominent role. I have allowed God into my live and that alone have changed me!

But my years of been a soldier is still there. During Decembers and Januaries I still grow quiet. I still take out my books and photos. It will never go away, nor do I want it to go away. It is a part of me that I will always treasure!
The Silent Voices Of The Bush War

“It has been many years since I left Omuthiya in body, but it has never left my dreams or my memory”.

“But I miss my friends; I miss the quiet nights with the millions of stars in the sky, the rumbling of the generator, walking around only in shorts, the familiar weight of my rifle, drinking out of a fire bucket, sitting around talking crap”.

“Het my 19de verjaarsdag in 'n boom, nie ver van 59 brigade, deurgebring. Ek het nooit besef dat simptome wat ek jare na Angola ondervind het direk met post traumatische stres verband hou nie. Dit sou goed wees om 'n ander "closure" te kon kry - toe ons Angola verlaat het was daar nie enige sprake van hulp in die verband nie. Ek wonder of dit sou help om self ook terug te gaan Angola toe - dalk die plek uit 'n ander oogpunt leer ken”.

“Gister was dit 30 jaar gelede dat 2 Lt P.J.R. Oosthuizen (5 SAI B Komp), tydens 'n voertuighinderlaag langs die Chandelier, naby Nkongo, 54 Bn, Sektor 10, gesterf het. Oosie..., ek en Gerhard Bezuidenhout het jou graf verlede jaar opgespoor te Jacobskop, naby Vereeniging. Die weersiens was wel baie jare later maar vir 'n wyle was ons twee spraakloos toe ons langs jou graf gestaan het en 'n traan of twee afgevee het. Jy sal bly wees om te weet Bezzie het jou liggaam wat so erg verniel was deur die 82 mm mortier, opgetel en op die Buffel gelaai. Jy sal ook bly wees om te hoor dat ek daarna jou sending voltooi het”.

“Still missing my old buddies in arms and am sitting with tears as I think back and long for the fellowship and good and bad times spent together”

“Wens party dae om nog daar te kon wees”

“AI, HOE VERLANG EK TERUG NA DAARDIE DAЕ”.
“Voor my op my lessenaar hang my eenheid se embleem, 'n swart kraai met 'n wit bors, nie om te spog dat ek daar was nie, maar om my voete op die grond te hou sodat ek nie vergeet nie”

“Good days and bad days and something that I cannot wipe from my memory”.

“Ek was Bren no.1 en ek mis nou nog daai stuk yster”.

“Ek was 'n soldaat. Ek is trots op my magsnommer. Dit is my nommer”.

“Die manne is daar van die seuns geskei en ek was seker die hongerste, dorste en bangste daar in my lewe, maar dit was lekker en ek sal dit weer en weer wil doen”.

“To be both marglinised and forgotten is tough in our 'New South Africa'....... I lost 5 of my friends in one year and miss the camraderie”.

“Ons familie het twee jong manne in die Bosoorlog gehad. Net een het terug gekom. Ons wil nie vergeet wat hulle vir ons gedoen het nie”.

“I am now a Doctor in a town in Australia (Mt. Gambier) and see just about all the towns Vietnam vets, who can't believe they have found a Dr. who actually knows something about what they have been through!”

“Bok van Blerk se DE LA REY som op PRESIES hoe ons voel oor daardie tyd.... voeg by a paar vlieëende choppers en aanvallawaai en jy's DAAR!”

“...these were the best days of my life, and I still have all the South West Africa gear to my wives horror...”

“Ek weet van ouens wat nog so baie "issues" het, geestelike en liggaamlike letsels dra. Niemand verstaan hoekom ons hierdie goed nou met mekaar wil deel nie, maar ons weet”.

“EK SAL NOOIT VERGEE NIE, na 22 jaar onthou ek nog die goeie en die slegte, het my balsak waar almal wat saam met my uitgekaar het op getekn het, my browns en my beret. Dit is deel van my lewe. Cheers”


“Still have my 3 SAI t-shirt with Griffon in yellow on the left side. My wife will also never understand why I keep this and sometimes take it out and look at it”.

“Mis die ou dae baie. Sou seker vandag nog 'n soldaat gewees het as tye nie verander het nie”.

“WAS DIE BESTE TYD IN MY LEWE VERLANG NET NA ALMAL,”
“...still miss my friends I lost up there”

“I believe that there are many ex soldiers that still struggle with the memories of their experiences”.

“Oh, by the way, all I have left is my stepout jacket with all my insignia. My wife does not and cannot understand how I can guard this jacket as if it were my last dime. I will probably die one day with my stepout jacket.”

“My ouers het 3 seuns aan die bosoorlog afgestaan. Nee, my boeties is nie dood nie, maar julle sal weet wat ek sê. As tiener het huul sussie baie keer kruisbeen op haar bed gesit en vir hulle geskryf. Elkeen was vir 2 jaar opgeroep. Ons gesin kan vertel van 6 jaar se gebede. Ses jaar se bekommernisse en stiltes. En wagtstaan vir die nuus. En my boeties wat anders teruggekom het. As ek aan hulle dink, sien ek hulle in my geestesoog kop‐onderste‐bo sit. Stil. Nee, ons het feitlik geen kontak meer nie. My wêreldjie is vir hulle vreemd. En ek verstaan nie hul gevegte nie. Dit is ’n sussie se verhaal. Haar verlangte na haar boeties”.

“Ek kan self nie verklaar waarom nie, maar Augustus van elke jaar was nog vir die afgelope 32 jaar elke jaar ’n maand van herrinering en terugdink...en ek wonder altyd in hoe ’n mate het dit my menswees be‐invloed. Ek wonder wat het van ons oorgebly?....Ek was 17 toe ek weermag toe is. Ek as 51 jarige man vandag sien ’n 17 jarige as ’n kind. Ek was te jonk om ’n bestuurslisensie te kry, maar oud genoeg om twee strepe te dra en ’n peleton persant van ’n pantsertroep in die operasionele gebied te wees. Ek wonder of mense vandag besef hoe dit voel om self K..K bang te wees, en van ’n klomp grootoung laaities net so oud soos jy te hoor: "korporaal, wat nou?"....en jy is self net so vrek bang, net so onseker, net so laatmies soos hulle. Om van jou buddies te "comfort" en by hom te sit, en vir hom te sê as gaan oraiit wees, terwyl jy weet hy gaan dit nie maak nie, terwyl jy self weet hy sal nie eers die "chopper" wat hom moet "cassavac" sien nie...so vrek bang te wees om te slaap, jy bly liever wakker...om van honger en dods nie te praat nie. Om in die sand van Ovambo te lê en te bewe van vrees en aan die mense by die huis te dink...om vir jouself te sê "wat die donder moet ek nou doen?...."

Ek kan een ding met trots sê, al is my gemoed opgefoeter met herrineringe, al is ek vandag ’n stressvolle grolmens (oumens), al loop die agressie nog diep in my menswees (ja, ek gee nie om wat wie sê nie, maar die agressie is daar... sal altyd daar wees...) Ek was daar!!! EK WAS ’n SOLDAAAT IN SUID AFRIKA SE BOS OORLOG....en ja, ek het die fisiese en psigiese wonde om dit te wys. En tot vandag toe is jou kop nie skoon nie....en dan hoor jy nog hoe sommige mense van ons bevolking jou uitmaak as ’n "war criminal"....en jy sien en hoor hoe ander "soldate" vereer word, as helde en oorlogsveterane opgehemel word...en ons?......wat is ons?.....

Ek weet dis te laat om iets aan my gemoed en persoonlikheid te doen om die merke dowwer te maak. Ek leef 32 jaar daarmee saam, dis nou deel van my menswees, en ek het dit so aanvaar, maar die seer is nog soos gister, die fotos in my gemoed het nog nooit verdof of vergeel nie, ek sien die wit Ovambo sand, die makalani palms, die oshanna’s,
die yati strook, die dowwe bruin van die Ratels en Elande, die geluid van die buffel se enjin wat kruisspoed teen sonsondergang agter jou "garr garr garr" terwyl die Eland sag sing... jy proe weer die koel water van Omushu wat vol muskiet larwes is... die video hou aan speel en die beeld verdof nie....

Jy rook jou sat, en jy rook tot vandag toe, en.....”

“My story..., my storie...! Waar begin 'n mens?... Dit het nooit ge-eindig nie. Ek is kwaad vir ons goverment. Het ons jouj weg gev at ons. Ons heeltemal verander. Dit is nou maar so... Ek is nie spyt nie. Ek wou daar wees. Vandag is ek trots om te se ek was daar bo gewees. Ek mis dit baie. Ek het gedink ek het daarmee vrede gemaak en aanvaar. Ek bluf myself. Ek het nie. Ek stort nog steeds vinnig, loop vinnig, eet vinnig. My humeur is kort en ek drink baie. Ons het 'n job gedaan waar ons in geglo het en 'n goeie job gedaan. Toe die oorlog eiendig toe gooì hul ons eenkant en vergeet sonder 'n dankie. Dit is verkeerd. Hulle moet ons onthou en respek gee. Die wat geval het, wie dink aan hulle? Die hoogste prys betaal. Almal wat daar bo was, was nodig om die wiel aan die gang te hou. Van die klerk, chef tot by die rekkies. Almal het bygedrae tot ons oorwinningen oor die vyand. Ek mis my maats, die lang patrollies, vuil browns en die meeste..., die diesel reuk saam met die stof van die buffels as ons so bundubash. Aan al ons maats wat geval het., sal jul nooit vergeet nie”.

“As jy nie daar was nie sal jy dit nie verstaan nie. Ek huil nou nog as ek met vriende daaroor praat. Dit vat aan enige man se hart.”

“Met heimwee my maters, met heimwee, lees ek die stories!!”

“Baie jare nadat ek van Grootfontein terug gevlieg het Republiek toe, het ek en my familie in die mooie Namibia gaan vakansie hou. Ons het in Windhoek die museum besoek en vir enigiemand wat daar was en my ervaring op die grens deel sal ek dit nie aanraai nie. Swapo stal dit daar uit asof hulle die oorlog teen ons gewen het. Die woede kan ek nie hier beskryf nie. Net dat my vrou 'n week later, toe ons in Etosha vakansie gehou het, skaars 70 km van die 61 Meg Basis, vir my gesê het sy ken nie die mens wat ek op daardie tydstrip was nie. Al die emosies, beeldé van die oorlog, en die belediging van 'n museum in Windhoek wat sê ons het die oorlog verloor.....”

“As I look back on the last 27 yrs, I wonder what it would have been like if he was still alive 2 day. So many times did I wish I could just hold or hug him? More times I wished I could call him. This became worse once my mum passed away. I think it’s really unfair that we never get to ask them any advice no more. Who would give you better advice than a parent? I wonder if they would approve of the life I'm living. My mum was so sure I would get married that she even had a wedding present for me already. I have been moving that with me for the last 13 years since she passed away. I'm very proud of the parents I had, they have left a heritage to be proud of for us to keep safe and to keep alive. Would they approve of the way I'm doing it? Thinking of it there was no Internet in Nam then too. But... if I can choose, even as a 38 yr old woman, I would have rather have my father in my life than the hero who died.”
“Cowboys don't cry. What a rush!!!! I get "Chicken Skin" just thinking about it. I still make the missus walk on my side furthest from the road. Stuff like that. Hell, yes discipline, teamwork, Code of Honour, respect, brotherhood. This is what men do. Have for ages. Our fathers and grandfathers too. Some guys are more sensitive and don't handle the bad stuff. Nothing wrong with that. It's human nature. Maybe I'm different but I liked being in the Army. Time of my life.”

“Ek ken so ‘n familielid. Ek ken so ‘n boer (en vriend).

Eersgenoemde was in die Parabats en laasgenoemde in Koevoet. My Koevoet vriend het nog die draadjie van die Booby trap wat hy afgetrap het en sy been flenters geskiet het. Die AK-47 wat hy gevast het by ‘n ter wat hy doodgeskiet het is ook in sy huis. Faktap...

Meer as 20 jaar later...Drank...Stug...Onsosial, behalwe as daar drank is (voor hul papdronk raak).

Die army het party van ons opgek*k. Ek is gelukkig orraait want ek het ‘n weird persoonlikheid en was eers 21 jaar oud voor ek PW en Seuns ontmoet het. Maar ek het nagevolge: Ek haat absolute gesag. Ek haat Sondae middae (die tyd wat jy teruggaan kamp toe na ‘n pas). Ek haat dit om tou te staan en veral by ‘n restaurant (vir kos). Dit maak my rasend en ongeskik – daarom word geen restaurant ete nie sonder ‘n voorafbespreking deur die baas gedoen nie. Maar dis my eie simpele stories.

My twee vriende hierbo se stories moet nog geskryf word, maar hulle is te faktap.....”

“Ek het vriende in daai “ongesiende” oorlog verloor – ek het neefs en vriende terug gekry – wat nooit weer dieselfde was – ek het ‘n pa wat in daai oorlog met sy troepe geveg het – en vandag verbitterd alles bekyk van jongmense wat dood is – die meeste nie eens op die “grens” nie maar onderweg of in ‘n ongeluk....oorlog? ek weet dit nie, maar ons almal dra die litekens daarvan, miskien op jou lyf, ander in hulle siel...ek dink nie enige van ons sal dit ooit ooit kan vergeet nie...dit het ons almal geraak – al is dit net in jou siel....”

“Hi, sorry if this topic brings back any horrible memories or offends anyone. Were any of you guys there, or know about it. My father who passed away almost 3 years ago, was there around ’77-’80, and again sometime in the 80's. He never spoke about it, as I am sure many of you haven’t either and doesn’t want to. It’s just I think the things that happened out there messed up a lot of young guys. My mother told me that the border messed my father up a lot, he was only 16/17 when he went and was stationed there for 18 months. I have never really thought about the things that went on there, because it is something that has never really been spoken about and the army in SA and compulsory duty is really a thing of the past. So people have just forgotten about it! I know there is a forgotten generation of young men and boys who went. My father was a good man and was one of these boys, and the border war did some horrible things to him. I just want to find things out about it, so I can understand him more and why he did some things, the way he did etc.
I wish now, that I could have spoken to him about the war and he could have helped me understand what the type of things that he and so many other young men were gone through. I have been trying to do some research on the topic, but from the soldier’s point of view, firsthand accounts of guys that were there and saw what my father might see and gone through the same.

My father was a good man and always tried his best to make me happy and would do anything for me, but there was a lot about him that I now think back and don’t understand. And things that I understand a bit more now that my mother told me 1 or 2 things that my father did share with her. She said that a couple of years ago there was something on TV about the Border War, and he said that’s where he was and starting crying, and it makes me sad to think of the possible things that my father and the other soldiers went through. My father was a big man and I wouldn’t have f**ked with him, and he had a temper, and a rage that was scary, I don’t think he would have thought twice to kill someone that threatened his family. I don’t want to paint a horrible picture here, he was a good man, but like all of us he had his faults, all I am saying is that I think a lot of his anger and temper comes from the things that happened back then. That is why I would like to know more about this war on a personal level, to help me understand my father better.”

“Good memories Xangongo / Ongiva. I can still smell the heat of that airstrip after running around on it, 40 degrees! Saw some awesome parts of Angola from the Pumas!!”

“Years later I was involved in an un-roadworthy Buffel accident near Ellisras with fatalities and lifelong injuries to some, and once again no apology or compensation from the SADF and the funny thing is, we were proud to be members of the SADF.......”

“My beret is in my kas, browns pas nie meer nie, maar my hart klop warm vir die SAW en Seuns.”

“To this day that smell makes me expect the sound of Whirly’s 20mm at any second - that and the sound of a Draadkar. No matter where I am - the smell of Avtur always gets my adrenaline pumping....”

“18, 19 and 20 – jariges het take uitgevoer wat in ander militêre magte deur gesoute beroeps professionaliste uitgevoer sou word. Ons het dit gedoen as laities! Baie van ons het die besonderse ondervindings van grensdiens deurgemaak: eienaardige mengsels van verveeldheid, vermeng met oomblikke van hoë adrenaliën, en kere van gatknypende terreur - saam met kameraderie wat ‘n leeftyd duur.”

**The Soul Wound**

“Post Traumatic Stress Disorder ("PTSD") occurs in many situations. It often also occurs in combat situations. It has been found that a common pattern of denial exists both from the perspective of the establishment, and from that of the veteran.
After a trauma the body and mind reacts with powerful feelings and thoughts. We become fearful, numb, angry, sometimes aggressive, jumpy, overly alert, withdrawn and tearful. Our bodies may ache; we get head and neck pain. We get irritable with those we love most and generally we find it difficult to be around others and them around us. You may experience flashbacks and/or nightmares - even our sleep is disrupted - triggered by stress, sounds, sights, or smells that are similar to those that were present during the trauma. Our waking state is often disrupted too. We may not be able to concentrate or work at all. Our minds and bodies are in shock. These physical and emotional symptoms are experienced vividly and without abating.

It is not uncommon for people with PTSD to develop problems with anxiety, depression and alcohol or drug abuse as a result of their condition. Unless treated, these problems can lead sometimes to severe dysfunction and disability. This complex of symptoms and coexisting problems with depression and substance abuse can lead to difficulties with family relations, difficulties at work, and problems interacting socially. In fact, people with PTSD have a higher rate of divorce, are at higher risk of being fired or unemployed, and have higher than average problems with social interactions. PTSD is also associated with physical problems, such as chronic fatigue, insomnia and general pain.

Studies in veterans have also suggested that there is more to PTSD than an emotional response that people can get over at will. As with many mental disorders, neuro-chemical changes and changes in the brain also factor into PTSD, making it a complex condition involving psychological and neuro-physiological processes.

Psychiatric diagnosis defines post traumatic stress disorder as an anxiety disorder, which is seriously inadequate to its phenomenology. As an anxiety disorder, PTSD is relatively trivial; its devastation is that PTSD is a "soul wound", a "Post-Traumatic Soul Distress". This is not theology. Soldiers themselves say that they lost their souls. Many can describe the moment it happened: a moment of profound depersonalisation from which they have never recovered. Ed Tick

There are no tests for diagnosing PTSD. It is mainly diagnosed through a comprehensive history of trauma and symptoms suggesting PTSD. Psychiatric experts have compiled a list of criteria that point to PTSD, which includes one or more of the following:

- A history of involvement in or witnessing one or more traumatic events that was frightening, violent, and/or life threatening or perceived as life threatening.
- Recurrent episodes of vivid flashbacks of the event, during which the affected individual feel fearful, extremely anxious, or panicked.
- Recurrent nightmares about the event. Intense distress when exposed to situations, images, sounds, or smells that remind the individual of the event.
- A feeling of being on guard and anxious, as though something dangerous is about to happen.
- A tendency to over-react to stimuli, such as shouting, loud noises, or stressful situations

“Some people first develop clear signs of PTSD many years or decades after their trauma. We still see veterans from as long ago as World War II who report suddenly having
memories or dreams from combat after more than 6 decades. This is common and a normal response for most people. Like any difficult event, memories do come back from time to time. Seeing reminders of one's own experience in the news every day can trigger these memories and dreams.

We have also begun seeing more Viet Nam Veterans having their first symptoms now. We also hear of many people, without PTSD, having dreams about their combat now.

Soldiers with PTSD react to the death of a friend as a narcississtic injury rather than an object loss. In other words they had experience their friends as an extension of themselves rather than as separate individuals.” Fox -74

Winning that battle bolsters the Vietnam vets with PTSD. And their numbers are growing – counsellors say more Vietnam veterans are coming in for treatment of PTSD. That is because many are reaching retirement age, providing more time for memories of the trauma of their war experiences to invade their thoughts.
“Hulle Wat Nog Stukkend In Hulle Koppe Is”

The Vietnam Memories

"We were told, 'Forget everything you've done here, everything you've seen here and go on to your next duty station.' That was almost impossible to do. Thirty years after I came home [a friend] brought me down [to the VA] and told the guy at the front desk, 'This is the guy who never sleeps.' "

"I drank a lot, was on drugs, for years. I got married and had two children but drank and stayed out at night ... And after I got divorced I stayed single, I felt I wasn't good enough to be married again. I had lots of nightmares all the time. I had anxiety. "I met a woman who had two kids and we lived together. I was erratic. Still am. I would get up and run at night ... thinking I was being attacked. One night I ran into the little girl's room and she's in bed shaking. I'm freaking her out; she doesn't know what's going on, she was like only 2 years old. "A friend said 'You better come to [the VA]. They can help you.' I finally did. Thank God I did. I met all these men here. Without them, I don't know where I'd be. I'd probably be dead."

"When I came home ... there was no one to turn to. I couldn't sleep. I turned to alcohol and drugs, mostly pot, but that interfered with drinking so I quit that. I had to drink to sleep. I was having terrible nightmares, flashbacks. "When I'm driving I have to leave two car lengths in front of me because I don't want to be trapped. If there's something going on, I want to have an escape route. I can't follow a bus because of the diesel fuel. Everything in Vietnam was run on diesel fuel. If I smell that behind a bus I have to pull over and let the bus go."

"I got a job in the coal mines but I was missing work because I couldn't sleep. I've been married three times and engaged two times in between. The doctor told me I was under a lot of stress and told me to quit drinking. I had a lot of flashbacks. I tried twice to commit suicide. I had a .44 Magnum with the hammer back to blow my brains out and another time I tried to cut my throat."

"When I came home ... I couldn't get emotionally attached, I had to drink, and I had to carry a gun. I couldn't sleep in the dark, I didn't want to be around people, and I wanted to be alone. I didn't know about PTSD. I've been married three times. I was a good husband but I couldn't get emotionally attached the way I wanted to. It angers me when people ask, 'Does that still bother you? Aren't you over that yet?' You never get over stepping on dead people and killing people. That was 40 years ago, yeah, but you still have blood on your feet, it's still on your mind."

“Even today we are not properly taking care of our own Vietnam vets who are suffering the effects of Dioxin. The VA makes it difficult and called us malingerers for years. We served our country when many hid out in Canada in fear. They got amnesty and we got the shaft. Match those funds with more dollars for all injured vets from all the wars.”

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“You really have to love a country (NOT) that had plenty of money for illegals but none for its veterans! It took me 5 years to get my disability claim approved, three on appeal. They try and stonewall you until you die. They claimed they never received the mandated doctor’s report that was sent to them (the VA) by the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok in a registered, sealed official State Dept. mail pouch to deny my claim. Go figure!”

“What about our men who were over there at that same time it was drop most of them have tried to get help for their health problems. But no one is listening to them which are not right. If we do this for every country we fought with them we would never have any money to help all the men here in the U.S.A.”

“I lost my brother at 42 years old from cancer that he himself believed was caused by Agent Orange after serving in Viet Nam. While at the VA he asked me to stop in the office and express his knowledge of what happened to him while he was over there because he wanted compensation for his 11 year old daughter if there was to be any. They told me "your brother is dying just go be with him". He also told his doctor in front of me to please do an autopsy after he was gone and prove that it was caused by Agent Orange. Right in front of me the doctor himself said he would. My brother came home and died. I contacted the doctor to let him know and ask him when he would be doing the autopsy. He acted as though we never had the conversation!! I have spent your’s morning the loss of my only brother and in my heart I believe Agent Orange was a factor in his early death. But there is no way our government would ever admit to it!!!!”

Gulf War Nightmares

“While I was typing his leave form, a young private asked me if there were a lot of protesters. I assured him that most people supported the war. I told him that most of the protesters were Sixties-wannabe's who chanted "No blood for oil!" without comprehending the need to protect our access to an economically vital natural resource. I was amazed that he was so worried about being abandoned like the Vietnam veterans were. He was fighting the last war.”

“The real issue is: was it worth it? Is this country's convenient access to even an "economically vital natural resource" worth the death and suffering of thousands of people, the monumental environmental destruction that is still going on, and the endangerment of our own troops?”

“My writing about PTSD has been extremely difficult for me as I have been dealing with shit that I have only now begun to process. I have had to incorporate a whole lifetime of shit just to get to the point of being able to face my wartime activities. I use the word "activities" to somehow sterilize what I saw.

PTSD is a life-long endeavour; there is no cure for it. The triggering of a traumatic event changes the landscape of the mind, it no longer works in the same fashion that it did before. The mind has been rewired; the neuropath ways have been altered into a continuous loop. The PTSD triggering incident converts the fight or flight response in the
primitive portion of our brain. Imagine having that scared feeling you get without the fear while keeping the bodily reactions; the tenseness, the adrenalin rush, the mind racing, heightened senses, and the hyper response reflex to react without thinking.

I had several more types of fugues; I would be walking down the isle of the grocery store and experience a fugue. I do not know why, but a grocery store would send me into a crying fit of guilt and grief with only one thought in my mind and nothing else. I would cry for hours and could not be moved, lying in the isle of the store just crying with my wife holding me thinking only of the one singular thought. The Iraqi soldiers we killed that were trying to surrender.

It has been a couple of days since my last posting; I have just now realized that I am in one of those stuck positions. For a person with PTSD their brain has become highly compartmentalized, sectioned off and coordinated along narrowly entrenched connections. The mind will shut down reasoning, conscious processing and engage the unconscious reflexive mechanisms. This controller switch enables the person to react to traumatic situations without filtering sensory information through our conscious mind. Through this defensive mechanism we can survive situations that would otherwise overwhelm us if we had to process the traumatic event in the moment. By the severity of the situation this connection gets heavily imprinted, thus enabling the PTSD sufferer to shift into a stuck position or zoning out. This cognitive binding can be triggered by situations that require emotional response, trusting issues, and really just about anything that requires thinking.

Combat can leave a veteran or soldier addicted to the rush of adrenalin that a survival environment and killing can bring. Upon returning home it could manifest in many ways, constructively such as in positive thrill seeking activities like skydiving, rock climbing, or scuba diving. Others may fall to the wayside and react negatively through drugs, alcohol, and compulsive and impulsive self destructive behaviour. I initially turned to drinking to calm my nerves which intensified the feelings of rage, anger and self-loathing.” Scott A. Lee

“How, I can't run. Hurt all over with nerve damage. And constantly fighting the VA to acknowledge the damage done. All the crap we inhaled. It kind of reminds you how the Viet Nam vets were treated due to Agent Orange. Makes you want to make the final exit for the big bird in the sky?”

“I have had my 20 year fight with the V.A. also; I now have been diagnosed with memory loss, chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia, irritable bowel, headaches, and can hardly walk across the street without assistance! It took many years to get help and I thank God for the D.A.V.”

“Thanks everyone for your service. I too was stationed right across from Log Base Echo with the 13th Evacuation Hospital. I too have the GWI. They can call it CFS/Fibromyalgia but I know that it is organophosphate poisoning and the Government has failed to acknowledge such things. They don't want people to know they poisoned us. Why DID they choose the Guards/Reserves to be up front? Because they believed that Saddam
would use his WMD, we were all sent on a DIP mission in advance for the regular Army. Then brainwash everyone that we are “maligners” because “nothing happened”. Retrograde operations blew up the WMD after the war was called off. Dirty little secrets ... dirty little lies! Anyone can find it on the web and if they were in the fallout area. Political correctness runs amuck!!"

“A Co 3/187 up on highway 8. Shot the hell out of that thing. Rakkasan! Part of the problem with the VA system, is that it varies from state to state, and even county to county. I had my problems when I got back with PTSD, but it seemed to clear up for a while, then 9/11 and everything after put me right back down the rabbit hole. I finally in desperation went to one of our County Service Offices, which is basically trained VA advocates in the Employ of the County. I got an excellent one, and through his tireless efforts I was able to get my rating in 2007.

“If you had been getting the run around in the past, things did get better, so keep trying. As far as the GWS goes, I get tired too easily, and chemicals of any type can cause a bad reaction, but that’s nothing compared to what other guys have gone through.”

“The war may have lasted only “100” hours, but many of us will be fighting that war for the rest of our lives.”

“I served with Thurlow with the RAKKASANS and the D3-187th Infantry Reg. Proud of my time served. Parts of me wish we never stopped when we did and just went in and finished them off when we had them the first time. Would of saved a lot by just getting it done back then, I’ve have health issues since my ETS and went to the VA and they sent me a letter saying it was a figment of the soldiers imagination. What a slap in the face. So typical!”

“I served with the 1st Cav. Division Artillery. I have been diagnosed with Pancreatitis, Renal-Kidney Cancer and pending test results on Bladder Cancer. I guess we have completed our 20 yrs of non-acknowledgement just like the Vietnam vets did. Research has it that over 100k of DS Vets is dead. I was told by a VA employee that our war was only 100 minutes long and that we were not authorized benefits or care. At times I regret having served 20 yrs in the military. I just hope I get to see my 50th birthday.”

“Twenty years later the VA has made tremendous progress with respect to Gulf War Illness, but at what expense? The VA continues to fight veterans over Benefits that they so rightly deserve. Main point being that these are Benefits. They are not handouts or something other than what veterans and current soldiers were promised for their service... Ever heard of the phrase, “deny till you die”? Take a moment and think about it. How many veterans have been turned away and have not had the time nor the know how to challenge this enormous governmental agency. Sickening at best! Although some progress has been made, the VA will not admit to a whole lot being related to Persian Gulf Service. They never have and probably never will. Good luck to those of you still suffering some twenty years later. It’s scary to think of what the current combat troops are going to have to face for the next twenty years. Hopefully their fight will turn out better than ours.”
“For almost 20 years I have been dealing with my health issues from the Gulf War, convinced it was just me and nobody else. I learned to cope with so many of those problems that I have managed to function enough to get by all these years. I finally filed claims last November and of course the VSO doesn’t feel I will be awarded much if anything because I was not seen by doctors for any of it while in the service. I got out less than a year after returning from the Gulf. I have not been able to find anyone from my unit, therefore I cannot confirm anything I put into my claim and because of this, and apparently I am just wasting the VA’s time. I took the PB pills, I got the “God only knows how many and what” vaccinations before and while in the desert, I lived coated with a light film of oil for several weeks, I walked a part of Highway 80 and still walk it to this day every time I think about it. I guess I’ll get passed over like so many other veterans and that is a shame. As much a shame as my marriage is, she can’t handle me anymore and I am only waiting on her to file the papers. I salute every one of you this day, I am honoured to have served with all of you and to have done my part to protect my country, now if it would only protect me.”

“After going thru Iraq to Kuwait I became so sick I couldn’t even drive my 915, I had to rely on my buddy to do all the driving back into Saudi. I lay down on the floor stretching my body behind my buddy’s legs as he drove. Those of you who have driven one you know how hard that task is. When we got back to Saudi we had to pressure wash our trucks and double stack trailers that took around 10 hours or more and being sick at the same time was horrible. I reported to our NBC Sgt about our NBC papers turning green at different places in Iraq but was told it was the diesel fumes from the trucks that caused the change in colour. All I know is that my buddy and I have been sick since we went into Iraq and have never recovered. I’ve been disabled since 1997 because of these illnesses and back injury I can’t work and the VA Regional Office in Winston Salem, NC has reduced my disability benefits just on my back alone from 40% to 10% saying my back had improved! They started taking the money from my check in Feb 2010 and I have it on appeal and the DAV told the VA that they are not to take my money until the appeal but the VA wouldn’t listen. That money was half of my house payment so now I’m behind on my mortgage and Bank of America has started to foreclose on my home of 17 years. My overall disability rating with the VA was 70% and now it’s 60% but not officially, yet. The appeal has yet to be heard and believe me; I will take this all the way to D.C.”

“Twenty years of pretending nothing was wrong with me or I was totally crazy. I am very proud of my service and had to handle years of believing I no longer fit in at home. Divorce, jail time, and self medicating were the result of the VA help I received until I found an attorney to handle my case. I was recently awarded 50% for PTSD. I am grateful for that but it also seemed like a slap in the face. The VA would give me a different diagnosis every time I went in. Then to top it off I only get compensated back to 3 years ago. The Gulf War was twenty years ago and I learned to cope with my issues, not in the healthiest manner at times. I still have had a miserable life since returning home and have to battle every day to make it a good day.”

“ETS’d in mid-95; I began having health issues almost immediately after returning from the gulf. In 94 I had a good sized portion of my right lung removed because it was
“infected”, with what I still don’t know; at least I’m not being told. For all these years I’ve been told I had asthma to which I replied no I do not. It wasn’t until June of 2010 the pulmonary docs came in and said, well, you don’t have asthma, you have Pulmonary Lymphatic Granulomatosis, this may have been caused by the Hydrogen Sulphide I inhaled 24 hours a day 7 days a week for the 2-3 months my unit spent in Kuwait City. I have been fighting the VA since 95; I have had a continuous claim going for over 15 years now. They send me a decision, I go to the DAV and file a disagreement with the decision, and this has been going on CONSTANTLY since 95. I went to the K.C., MO VA on one certain appt., I was in the Rheumatology department for a consult with a douche bag Dr. named Sanders Glatt, I will never forget this, he told me that he felt that there was nothing wrong with desert storm vets and it was all in our heads. Hmm, I told him to sit still while I went to my car to get my 357 magnum I had under the seat and I was going to come back in and blow his head off. I never seen a fat man run so fast as he darted out of the room, locked me in there and came back with the VA police force and a shrink, needless to say that I got a 10 day stay on the nut ward, I guess it was all in my head. Every time I go to the VA my blood pressure goes through the roof, when they take my vitals they make me sit for 10-15 minutes to wait and see if it will come down, often times it only goes up. I am currently rated at 90% with 4 claims on-going now, I stuck my foot in their ass and I aren’t about to back off, it’s been a rough long battle, with the VA, drugs, alcohol, you name it I probably did it. I want to encourage all vets to keep plugging away at the VA, it may take time but it is do-able.”

“...was with the 101st Airborne Eagle Dust-off, we were the first med vac unit in country in Saudi and we all were exposed to the same PB tabs, experimental shots (not annotated in the records) and everything you all were exposed too, minus the depleted uranium.”

“In 2004, 13 years after in left Campbell, I was diagnosed with Congestive Heart failure at 38 years old, and then the diabetes set in, high blood pressure and more. After 2 years of the Heart failure I was almost dead, my heart was at 7% ejection fraction (blood output to the body). In March 2007 I received a heart transplant and am still alive today. I still have the diabetes and all too.”

“I was with the 82 Airborne 2/325 AIR for desert storm and I still think they are not telling us everything. Help us instead of waiting until more than half are gone”

“When I went into a VA centre in 1994 to seek help for what has turned out to be Gulf War Syndrome, constant pain, headaches, digestive issues, tremors, the guy at the front desk here in Phoenix gave me a rant about “real wars” and tore up my 214. I haven’t even looked or listened to the VA since.”

“I’ve bounced from job to job to job, been homeless twice and it’s fixing to go there again. They’re never going to admit what they did. There has only been a fraction of 1 percent of the records from that action declassified, Desert Storm is more secret than the Manhattan Project. Was activated from civilian status with no reserve time owed after 10 years’ service. The Guard Company I was assigned to was shot SO FULL of vaccines. On one day we got 19 shots containing 72 different “medicines”. All three of
our supply sergeants have died since coming home. I was lucky with my own truck; I just stayed detached to other units whenever I could and stopped taking the nerve gas pills. But nothing's wrong with me, it's all in my head. All old soldiers have these problems. Maybe I need some counselling. Right! Maybe I need my government to stop lying to my children.”

**South African Bush War**

“I too am a veteran, from the bush war. I think that I might have suffered, or perhaps am still suffering, from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Syndrome; I am not qualified in any medical or professional capacity to comment on the subject with any degree of validity - other than through my own experiences - and those of my closest comrades.

I have had my series of "rock-bottoms" and have flirted with the forces of darkness. Fifteen years after the end of "my war" the horrors came home to roost and exploded inside me. Inexorably, I'd been on the downward slide of self-pity and self-destruction - drinking heavily, feeding on my nightmares and mixing with low-life scum. It all climaxed in an orgy of sordid misery and I woke one day in an Intensive Care Unit, apparently having tried (not for the first time) to take my own life. I'd lost everything - my family, my business, my house, my car - my dignity. I had nothing, save a suitcase of clothes, the shell of a broken body and a dying spirit that was crammed with desolate hopelessness. Other than death, there was only one-way to go - up. I chose life and the slow, painful process of healing and reintegration into society began.

A generation later in Southern Africa, still suffering the aftermath of a series of grubby little conflicts, the walking wounded, both black and white, still suffer in silence, their scars unrecognized and misunderstood. I am one of the fortunate few, in that the simple act of writing down my experiences has proved immensely cathartic. I have no magical solutions to purge other people's demons - I'm too busy dealing with my own. But the plain act of communicating our pain to one another, somehow strangely, seems to bring a small measure of relief. Perhaps this is what telling “war stories” means. It may be the only way we know how to clumsily try and put the ghosts to rest - and at the same time be there for each other. We know ... we understand... we care - a brotherly love so deep and bonding that it will last forever, that few can comprehend. In another more ordinary life I probably wouldn't have mixed with these people. We have come from different classes, different backgrounds - in fact many are straightforward idiots - but we still care for each other. Bizarre!

In the same way that only an alcoholic can truly understand, and therefore counsel, another alcoholic, as such can only a war veteran understand and counsel another war veteran - as primitive as that counselling may be. Psychiatrists, psychologists and other professional counsellors all have important roles to play, but unless they themselves have experienced the trauma of combat - or any other such trauma (rape, etc.) - they will never in a million years identify with the sufferer. Guide, advise, comfort, and sympathize - yes. But identify? No!
Like alcoholism, PTSD if allowed to go unchecked, will but fester and eat away at the core of a man’s soul, ultimately devouring from inside. It is a condition that does not go away. It does not heal with time - it gets worse. The only way to deal with the past is to confront it - head on. Hiding it away buries it from the world, but does not hide it from a man’s psyche.

Like many before me I tried to escape from my nightmares and bury them in various substances, notably alcohol. When I got sober a few years ago, the nightmares began to dissolve - the pain was still there, but not the screaming white-knuckle terror of reliving the slaughter. I thought I had it beat. Trying to intellectualize the whole sordid history, I rationalized that perhaps the alcoholism had caused the PTSD - or was it the other way round? I became so entangled in my own psycho-analysis, and my own all-encompassing self-pity, that I lost the plot. I tried to out-psyche what gratitude I should have had. I ignored the living and dying examples of my comrades who were slowly but surely killing themselves - quietly and unnoticed. I found I could no longer do it on my own. I embraced what little humanity was left inside me and for the first time in my existence I surrendered my will and my life over to a power greater than myself.

The memories of the slaughter shall always be with me, but they no longer haunt me.

I cannot change the past. I am slowly learning to live in the present - not in the past, nor in the future, but for the now. That is what is real, and it's a case of 'one day at a time’.”

“I have been a sufferer of PTSD, that’s Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. I don't say I can help, but what I’m saying is this: I’ve found that writing about it’s all made it better for me. In a way that is why I have this blog. I've done some research on the net and have chatted to other war veterans who are suffering” from this and from many of them I've heard the same. Writing HELP!!

“Thanks, you top-brass manne! Thanks for debriefing us. What are we supposed to do with all this information you taught us? You taught us how to disguise ourselves, hide in the bush, shoot a weapon and kill the terrorist with a shot between the eyes. Did you teach us how do deal with it? Am I supposed to dissolve it and forget?”

“I saw very few Post Traumatic Stress Disorders but many acute anxiety disorders.”

“Someone was casevaced for the following disorder; after having had a crap he would blast his shit to smithereens with rifle fire”

“These types of experiences bring about a type of rage - a temper that is so hard to resist. I am sometimes faced with situations and have to physically walk away with hands and arms rigid in case I let go and hurt someone. It took me three years or so (with help from other mates that have been in the same situation) to cool down the aggression and nightmares … My wife tells me that I get a 'look' and she knows that she is now dicing with death - that if she pushes a few more buttons, the consequences may be serious. There are no excuses for this type of behaviour. My wife understood that it wasn't the loving man that she married but another person. That is why I do not drink in excess,
because of the possible explosion that lack of control caused by alcohol brings. I cannot risk that I lose control. The blowout that could occur may be terrible. Hence I always must watch my temper, a temper that I never had before the army.”

“Ek sal die lekker tye saam nooit vir enige iets veruil nie, maar daar het tog letsels in my lewe agter gebly… In my huweluk; in my werk; in die grootmak proces van my kinders; in my Geestelike en Sociale lewe… Letsels wat onbewustelik hier binne lê, maar wat partymaal 'n groot sielkundige uitwerking op mens het, wat jou sommer laat verlang en begin huil… en dan alleen wil wees… Hoekom??”

“Toe ek terugkom, was ek totaal bosses. Twee jaar daarna het ek steeds my hemde army-styl gevou – presies soveel cm breed, netjiese hoeke… En as ek vandag my dagboeke lees, kan ek sien hoe selfs my handskrif verander het – van rustig en naïef tot aggressief. En dis nog altyd deel van my.”

“Since those days I have never passed a Christmas or new year without reliving that which happened over a relatively short period between December 1987 and February 1988.”

“So, even now, I still have to manage the influence the war had on me. I am guessing most of the guys in the country did just fine in adapting back to normality – but I cannot help to wonder how many guys could not get out of it. Turning into a bum, or having serial relationships, or got divorced three times, or whose children hate his guts, became alcoholics or criminals or simply cannot live out their full potential…”

“It is a bigger problem than we want to accept. I am chairman of the South African War Vets Association (Gauteng). It was an initiative started some years ago and I have held meetings at my house. The cases of alcohol, drug and wife abuse is astounding. Many of the guys in the 35 - 55 age groups are still battling with PTSD. I have had a run in or two with Spec Forces who claim that PTSD is nonexistent. They seem to poo poo anybody that has suffered from PTSD. My meetings had an assortment of attendees. From guys that were in the thick of it to a driver that never saw any action. He used to do the Grootfontein/ Oshikati run. He never hit a landmine, never saw a shot fired in anger, but this poor oke was so traumatised by his experiences that he is currently a dribbling drug addict at 47. He cannot get the shit out of his head. I used to start the meetings with the opening line that nobody’s experiences were worse than anybody else's. It is the manner in which one manages those experiences. We still sit with a very bad situation where guys are suffering the aftermath of what they went through. The old adages of cowboys don’t cry is still embedded in their psyches.”

“For years I shied away from the 'Saving private Ryan' and 'we were Soldiers... and young'. I felt I had seen it, I did not need to see it Hollywoodized. Then late one night around 2006, I watched "We were Soldiers" with headphones on, and wept. In a way this film gave me permission to feel what I feel. Even though those who fought in the Bush War, like those who fought in many other conflicts around the globe these last hundred years, have been sidelined and treated like masturbating teenagers… you know it happened but no body talks about it unless it is to make fun of them… They have done
this country and its people a great service. But as was said in the Mel Gibson movie! When push came to shove, a soldier does what he does, not for money or ideology or religion, but for this friend beside him and his loved ones back home.”

“I just wanted somebody to listen to what I had to say and understand it. I guess though I made the transition quite easily. But for years afterwards I suffered from dreams of not having completed something.... I also became very moody and irritable and could never have a relationship. I also had had a torn eardrum, which had been misdiagnosed by countless army doctors, and it would affect my hearing forever. There were no support structures for returning soldiers, nobody counselled us or even recognised us. I know many guys had much worse than I did, often turning to alcohol and drugs”.

“I remember seeing the movie "we were soldiers" with old Mel (I had seen many others before, Full Metal Jacket, Deer Hunter et al) and they never did anything. My wife said that I was white in the face when I left the Cinema and I never slept that night. I vowed never to go and see this type of movie again.”

“An ex-family member that are still today unable to hold on to any job or relationship, was a tank driver at the battle, and told me of this many years later. He has never been sent for counselling for post traumatic stress - same as most of us that were there, but he was unable to recover from his nightmares and his life now resolves around his daily alcohol intake.”

Maar daar is nie nêt fisieke skade aangerig nie; ook baie psigiese skade is opgedoen. Skade wat nooit bereken en verwerk is nie.

“When we finished the ops in Angola, me and my brother never stopped talking about it. We spoke and we spoke and we spoke . . . ” sê Grant. Hy raak hartseer. Hy vertel hoe Marco Caforio elke jaar op 10 Junie in die begraafplaas in Boksburg tussen die grafte van sy twee makkers, Andrew Madden en Rob de Vito, sit en huil het. Hy wou hulle terughê, by hom. Sy huwelik was verbly.

“Die meeste van ons is geskei, party meer as een keer. Ek is self geskei,“ vertel Brent, die ander tweelingbroer. “Jy veet self ons mag nie oor dié dinge gepraat het nie. En ons wit mans wys nie swakheid nie. Ons verloor nooit die geveg nie.”

Hy vertel hoe hy introspeksie gehou het; besef het hy moet verander, anders sou hy later heeltemal alleen wees.

“Nou stres ek nie meer nie,” sê Brent. En hy kon Marco Caforio gaan optel. Marco het gesê hy wil niks van hulle (van die army) weet nie. Maar sy vrou het hom uiteindelik drie jaar gelede oortuig om te kom.

Ek vertel hoe ek, in 1978 'n tweede luitenant, jare later my oud-bevelvoerder moes gaan help. Hy wou niemand naby hom hê nie, maar eintlik was dit 'n noodkreet dat iemand moes kom.


Piet Terblanche het in 'n stadium besef hy het hulp nodig. Hy het met sy huisdokter gaan praat. “Ek sal dit stilhou,” het die dokter gesê. Piet was verontwaardig: “Dink jy ek is mal? Ek is nie mal nie, man.” Uiteindelik is hy na 'n sielkundige verwys. Maar dit het niks gehelp nie. “Die man het nie geweet waarvan hy praat nie, want hy was nie dáár nie. Toe wil hy vir my 'n rekening stuur. Sal jy die garage betaal as hulle 'n pap wiel moes regmaak en hy is nog steeds pap?” wou Piet by die sielkundige weet. Louis Bothma

“I remember the day after the Pretoria bomb, my section 2IC losing half his face to RPG shrapnel. I remember this staunch Boereusen screaming for his mother whilst his friends held him down for the medic, tears running down our faces.”

“Toe kom die bosoorlog en my jongste broer skiet op 19 mense sonder dat hy heeltemal seker is hoekom hy hulle skiet, maar hulle is swart en derhalwe, volgens sy leiers, sleg. En hy kom 'n gebroke mens terug wat homself in alkohol begin verdrink. Tot dit later nie meer gehelp het nie en hy maar 'n .22 onder sy keel gesit het. Ons vir jou Suid-Afrika!”

“For those veterans that did develop the symptoms of PTSD, there was little help at hand. They were seldom aware that PTSD had been declared a diagnostic category by the US medical/psychiatric fraternity in 1980 and was recognized by the SADF. One ex-soldier, John Deegan, related in a documentary programme entitled “The War Within” how his life became a litany of ills after his tour of duty on the border. His experiences included admission to psychiatric hospitals, the abuse of drugs, run-ins with the law, and broken marriages. He reckoned that he could only begin to deal with his demons once he became aware that others suffered from similar symptoms and that his condition had a name – PTSD. This is confirmed by the stories of some SADF veterans posted on the internet. In the absence of a national programme of therapy for those manifesting symptoms of combat related PTSD, a few ex-soldiers established their own self-help groups. There are also other sites established for the express purpose of allowing those seeking advice or searching for a (cyber) space to tell their stories to do so. For instance, the South African Veterans’ Association (SAVA) set up a website that dubs itself: “A Non-Governmental, Non-Profit making Veteran Service for Survivors of the 1970’s 90’s conflicts”. Its coordinator, Marius van Niekerk, appears to have a special mission to facilitate atonement and healing for veterans of Cuito Cuanavale and has launched a few projects designed to achieve this. These include the co-writing of a book called Behind the Lines of the Mind: Healing the Mental Scars of War (2007) and the coproduction of a film My Heart of Darkness that touts the byline: “The victims of war are not just those that die, but also those that kill”. Gary Baines
The Battle Now Is With Time

The American Experience

From interactions in the electronic media, it seems that the feelings and experiences that most of the American veterans are faced with has become almost a war in itself, a battle to re-enter everyday life. There is a general mistrust in the government and military that has alienated the veterans and families. "A perfect example of this explanation, in my opinion, is the U.S. invasion and occupation of Iraq. If George Bush and Dick Cheney had told the American public, in their run-up to war, that it was necessary to invade and occupy Iraq in order to open up tens of billions of dollars worth of economic opportunity for their corporate cronies and to gain access to Iraqi oil, the American people and even their corporate news media would have been hard pressed to drum up much enthusiasm for war. Instead, we were provided with (especially after the “weapons of mass destruction” excuse was proven to be a lie) the ideology of democracy (We're doing it to bring democracy to the Iraqi people) and anti-terrorism (We have to fight them over there so we don’t have to fight them here). "The last paragraph that I cite above explains why so many normal Americans are willing to accept the lame excuses of psychopaths hiding behind a wall of ideology. Acknowledging that our leaders are no more than criminal thugs and psychopaths is just too painful for most Americans. It is much more comfortable for them to believe that their country goes to war for idealistic and generous purposes." Lobaczewski

“A large part of the Pentagon budget is devoted to keeping Middle East oil prices within a range that the United States and its energy companies consider appropriate. ... Pentagon expenditures amount to a subsidy of 30 percent of the market price of oil, demonstrating that "the current view that fossil fuels are inexpensive is a complete fiction." Noam Chomsky

“The de facto role of the US armed forces will be to keep the world safe for our economy and open to our cultural assault.” Major Ralph Peters, US Military

"Military men are just dumb stupid animals to be used as pawns in foreign policy." - Henry Kissinger
“So, anyway, in the midst of this, I ran out to this Colonel and I said: "Look, you gotta give these guys their M-14's back. The M-16's are not working. So he looks at me and says: "Doc, you are too close to this." He says: "I'm a Colonel, the Marine Corps is my life, I'm an Academy graduate, I'm up for General, and I don't give a shit about these kids." Dr. Alan Levin

“We were faced with a huge economic lapse in 1997 when the Asian economies collapsed and the whole world held its breath, waiting for the other shoe to drop in the American markets. Well, it didn't drop. But you know why it didn't drop? Because we went to war in Kosovo! We blew up several hundred billion dollars worth of bridges, refineries and factories. The KLA controls 77 per cent of the heroin that's entering into Western Europe. We loosened up that money. American companies got all these new contracts to rebuild the refineries, the bridges, and the economy was saved.” Mike Ruppert

Some suggestions that try to shed some light on this phenomenon are:
1. The American soldiers had to leave their home country and fight a war on behalf of another nation on foreign soil;
2. America was never under threat during any of these wars;
3. As a result it was difficult for the soldiers to really internalize and take ownership of the purpose of these wars;
4. When coming back the soldiers experienced the public opposition to the war as being targeted against them and to some extend it was the case.
5. Little acknowledgement from the Military and the Government of the role played by veterans
6. Conspiracy to conceal and ignore the truth and effects of these wars on veterans.
7. To get any help, especially medical, seems to be a constant battle against ignorant and ill informed and advised officials.
8. Tendency of the USA been the “policeman” of the world and enforces its will by exploiting their own troops.
9. The deeper mystery behind America’s involvement in armed conflicts around the world.
10. Being the worlds only superpower and no-one to answer to.

“I am also a veteran from the Vietnam War. I think this is Vietnam all over again because I know how I was treated when I came back from there.”

“I have been completely forgotten. And I am sick and unable to work because I served my country.”

“My son died a senseless and very painful death. When will I ever get an answer? My jewel is gone forever. Michael's death bed wish was for me to fight for him and fight for all of his comrades. After this request, a few short hours later, Michael slipped into a coma. He died seven days later. Our own military and Government failed my son and are failing his comrades.”
“We went to full chemical gear, and were in that situation for about 2 hours before it was passed down that there was an "all clear". But we were told it was a sonic boom. To my knowledge, you do not get a fireball from a sonic boom.”

“Now we knew that there was something wrong. We were told it was a fireball. We have had men that were ordered to shut up talking about it.”

“On the evening of the first day of ground attack, we detected Lewisite blister vapours in the vicinity of N28 50', E47 50'. I reported the findings to Division Headquarters and requested directions in regards to the chemical agent print-out. I was told to forward the tape up the chain of command. (Tapes are the paper records of the exact chemical breakdown of the liquid by the mass spectrometer.) A report came back that our equipment was only activated by oil smoke. Our computer, however, had separated the petroleum compound from the chemical agent. The computer tape has (conveniently) been lost.”

“Now five years after the war ended, DoD admitted that more than 5,000 troops "may" have been exposed to chemical weapons when a battalion of U.S. soldiers blew up an Iraqi ammunition depot. One month later, at the Pentagon’s October 22, 1996 Background News Briefing, this number was increased to 20,867. On June 26, 1997; the Pentagon increased the number to 27,000. On July 24, 1997, the Pentagon increased the number to 98,900. "An estimated 98,900 troops were in the path of a plume of nerve gas unleashed when U.S. combat engineers blew up the Kamisiyah ammunition depot in southern Iraq in March 1991, shortly after the war. That represents almost one-seventh of all Americans who served in the war.”

“Since the Gulf War ended in 1991, the leadership of the Department of Defence has affirmed to veterans and sworn to the U.S. Congress that "there is no information, classified or unclassified, that indicates that chemical or biological weapons were used in the Persian Gulf" and that "there were no confirmed detections of any chemical or biological agents at any time during the entire conflict." The Department of Defence, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Department of Veterans Affairs have been lying to the U.S. Congress, Gulf War veterans, and the American people about coalition forces' exposure to chemical and biological agents during the war. This criminal, reprehensible, shameful, dishonourable, and egregious act on their part has caused incalculable pain and suffering, caused many who risked their lives for our flag to die, inflicted severe financial hardships, caused many veterans' children to be born deformed and disabled, caused many veterans' children to become diseased, destroyed marriages and families, and eroded the trust of the American people in the institutions they once revered.”

“Gulf War veterans are truly the victims of patriotism. What they have suffered is the great American tragedy.”

“Those who have perpetrated and perpetuated this lie must be held fully accountable.”

As summarized by former U.S. Senator Donald W. Riegle:
"Our afflicted veterans are sick and suffering, and many have died. Others are now destitute, having spent tens of thousands of dollars, depleting their life savings, in an unsuccessful search for an explanation for their ailments. The veterans of the Gulf War have asked us for nothing more than the assistance they have earned. Our refusal to come to their immediate assistance can only lead others to question the integrity of the nation they serve." H. Lindsey Arison III

“Veterans account for nine of every 100 inmates in U.S. jails and prisons, according to the Centre for Mental Health Services' National GAINS Centre.”

“In a statement, VA Secretary James Peake said only a handful of documents were found among piles of documents set aside to be shredded. But he is not pleased. “I insist on the highest possible standards for processing and safeguarding information in VA’s custody,” Peake said. “It is unacceptable that documents important to a veteran’s claim for benefits should be misplaced or destroyed.” Peake said three of VA’s 57 regional offices were involved, without naming them. Veterans of Foreign Wars said they were told four regional offices — in Detroit, St. Louis, St. Petersburg, Fla., and Waco, Texas — were identified as having documents in shredding bins that should not have been there.

“Early arguments were punctuated by allegations that top government officials deliberately deceived the U.S. public about the number of veterans attempting suicide. An e-mail made public during the trial revealed that the head of the VA’s Mental Health division, Dr. Ira Katz, advised a media representative not to tell reporters that 1,000 veterans receiving care at the VA try to kill themselves every month.”

“Recent passage by the District of Criminals of the legislation known colloquially as the Veteran Disarmament bill raises the question of why the conspiracy for world government would want to disarm returning veterans. They are beginning to realize that the buddies and the limbs they left behind in Iraq were lost not in defence of this beloved country but in behalf of the megalomaniacal nightmare of conquest the psychos think is “normal.” Now the veterans understand that the monsters that sent them half way around the world to get sick are dismantling the system of freedom the Founding Fathers gave us here at home.” Alan Stang

“Hundreds of thousands of veterans – from Vietnam through Operation Iraqi Freedom – are at risk of being banned from buying firearms if legislation that is pending in Congress gets enacted. How? The Veterans Disarmament Act – which has already passed the House – would place any veteran who has ever been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) on the federal gun ban list. This is exactly what President Bill Clinton did over seven years ago when his administration illegitimately added some 83,000 veterans into the National Criminal Information System (NICS system) – prohibiting them from purchasing firearms, simply because of afflictions like PTSD.” Larry Pratt

“We, the U.S. have lost over 158,000 American lives to the Vietnam War and that count is still rising. Approx 58,000 in Vietnam. 100,000 or more to suicide and most of those
occurred after the men came home. This accurate accounting gives us perspective on the cost of current and future wars.” Edward Tick

“It is a tense bureaucratic triage faced by thousands of wounded American soldiers as they negotiate their return to civilian life. If they are rejected by the military disability system, they can try their luck with the overwhelmed Department of Veterans Affairs, which means another lengthy process with uncertain results.” Rone Tempest

“However, in 1991 the Department of Defence would take mass experimentation to a whole new level with the introduction of depleted uranium (DU) munitions on the battlefield. For almost two decades, on the rolling sand dunes of Iraq, among the many strewn and shattered remnants of destroyed enemy tanks, our troops have continually inhaled air contaminated with microscopic radioactive dust particles from the reckless and open use of depleted uranium munitions. Little known to most Americans, and almost completely unreported in the mainstream press, is that chemical and biological exposures from the 1992 demolition of Khamisiyah and similar massive bunker sites in Iraq have now been determined to have caused permanent neurological damage in over 300,000 Gulf War veterans, who are now classified as permanently disabled by the VA.” William & Debbie Lewis

“The Department of Veterans Affairs doctors are furious over a recent decision by the Pentagon to block their access to medical information needed to treat severely injured troops arriving at VA hospitals from Iraq and Afghanistan.” Al Kamen

“But an NPR investigation at Colorado's Ft. Carson has found that even those who feel desperate can have trouble getting the help they need. In fact, evidence suggests that officers at Ft. Carson punish soldiers who need help, and even kick them out of the Army.” Daniel Zwerdling

The South African Experience

Apart from the fact that ex-bush war veterans have sunk into silence in the “New South Africa” that they have helped created, they do look back to those times they had been part of the bush war with nostalgia, even if they feel that the SADF had sell them out. Some are still suffering from PTSD, knowingly or unknowingly, with no formal support structures in place apart from old comrades that care. All the veterans have however been alienated and pushed aside. The effects and experiences of the bush war are overshadowed by a hostile government. It is up to us to stand up and support each other.

Some ideas why there is a generally positive outlook by veterans about their time in the bush war are:

1. Part of the perceived total onslaught against the country;
2. An inevitable part of your life growing up knowing that you will be a soldier that will have to protect your homeland;
3. Supported by the majority of the white population and everything possible was done to support the soldiers and make their circumstances bearable;
4. The greater part of the conflict was a low intensity war against terrorists engaging in guerrilla tactics and therefore allowed much more freedom to soldiers to experience the operational environment in a more friendly way;
5. Namibia was seen as part of South Africa due to historic arrangement and also acted as a buffer in keeping the war away from our border;
6. Policy of keeping casualties very low and rather sacrifice some of the objectives in order to achieve this.
7. The Citizen Force and national servicemen were mostly used for internal operations than external.
8. The blurred racial lines in the SADF made us believe that there is after all a future where we will also be able to enjoy equality.
9. Conventional actions involved mostly permanent force members, 32 Bn, Koevoet, and 61 Mech and were limited in the number of soldiers involved.

“An important factor that need to be taken into account and strengthens the bush war veterans point of view, is the present political climate where the bush war veterans receives no acknowledgement or support, whilst so-called veterans of the struggle are being elevated as heroes. At the same time the bush war veterans, as white males and fathers, are at the receiving end of government policies seeking to address so-called imbalances of the past. This is not only affecting their future, but also that of their children. This too some extent relates to what American veterans are experiencing.”


“Stukkie vir stukkie is alles besig om weg te gly, en die reuse bydrae van die Nasionale Diensplig generasie word uit die geskiedenis uitgeskry. As dit wel in die geskiedenis voorkom, word die baby killer - etiket opgeplak.”

“Die nuwe regering soek ‘n militêre geskiedenis vir hulle party (ANC) en kry dit nie, en probeer vergoed daarvoor deur die SAW se geskiedenis te verdraai. Die Sowjet Unie probeer stilweg om sy eer te herwin, en Kuba, wat min het om vir sy volk te wys, probeer om sy aansien hoog te hou en sy eie militêre geskiedenis vir die toekoms te vestig. In die proses, en omdat hulle min het om te wys, verdraai hulle die beeld en die bewese suksesse van die SAW, tesame met hulle maats van die ANC, soos Chester Crocker dit stel: die mite van Cuito Cuanavale!”

As Chester Crocker later wrote: "In early October the Soviet-Fapla offensive was smashed at the Lomba River near Mavinga. It turned into a headlong retreat over the 120 miles back to the primary launching point at Cuito Cuanavale. In some of the bloodiest battles of the entire civil war, a combined force of some 8,000 Unita fighters and 4,000 SADF troops destroyed one Fapla brigade and mauled several others out of a total Fapla force of some 18,000 engaged in the three-pronged offensive. Estimates of Fapla losses ranged upward of 4,000 killed and wounded. This offensive had been a Soviet conception from start to finish. Senior Soviet officers played a central role in its
execution. Over a thousand Soviet advisers were assigned to Angola in 1987 to help with Moscow’s largest logistical effort to date in Angola: roughly $1.5 billion in military hardware was delivered that year. Huge quantities of Soviet equipment were destroyed or fell into Unita and SADF hands when Fapla broke into a disorganized retreat... The 1987 military campaign represented a stunning humiliation for the Soviet Union, its arms and its strategy. It would take Fapla a year, or maybe two, to recover and regroup. Moreover the Angolan military disaster threatened to go from bad to worse. As of mid-November, the Unita/SADF force had destroyed the Cuito Cuanavale airfield and pinned down thousands of Fapla’s best remaining units clinging onto the town’s defensive perimeters."

“...We were properly trained, well disciplined and most of us had the choice of being there, and I think that made a big difference. If you go to our national servicemen, you might find [traumatic stress] amongst them, but in Special Forces there are a few individuals.”

“There are people that went cuckoo because they couldn’t handle the situation but then it was normally military servicemen, guys who actually did not want to be there ... They were forced to be a soldier and many of them were indeed in situations which they did not like. It can be very traumatic for a guy of 18 years old who doesn't want to be there and the next day he's standing there between 50 or 100 bodies. He's never seen a dead guy in his life before and now he's participated in creating the dead. It did happen that those guys couldn't handle it.”

Although many have reportedly struggled with aggression and its consequences, some have found ways to deal with it, as have their families. On the other hand, some say that their anger, aggression and propensity for violence have worsened over time. This increase is most frequently described as an effect, or potential effect, of the violence of their current environments and frustration at their circumstances. A few former conscripts say, for example, that they are more violent now because of 'the life now' - one that they experience as threatening and marginalising. While the external social environment is the main focus of these discussions, and may provide the key reported impetus for potential violence, in some cases, responses are clearly intertwined with lingering trauma. Sasha Gear

“SA’s bush war wobbled the minds of many men, shattering sanity with a ripple effect that still reverberates through societies linked to the controversial conflict. Healing is hard, but made easier if you fought on the "right" side. Soldiers from Angola, Namibia and Cuba, who are still "terrorists" in the minds of some apartheid army vets, have this privilege.

Those who survived could go home and piece their lives back together as proud freedom fighters, men who were recruited to fight against the reviled racists from the south.

Not so soldiers from the old South African Defence Force; they were seen as the intruders, the infidels — white vermin spreading death and destruction in frontline states.
Those who paid the highest price for their conscription haven’t been immortalised on Sishumutolo, the Wall of Names remembering some of the war’s fallen at Freedom Park in Pretoria. Even the names of Fidel Castro’s soldiers can be found there.

The troopers, lovingly depicted in movies such as Boetie Gaan Border Toe, were to become the scum of a liberated land: fresh-faced men who had defended an abhorred dispensation and everything it stood for. Barely had the dust settled over Cuito Cuanavale, the location of one of the last major battles of the war, than they retreated home to witness the unbanning of peoples and parties that had starred in Know Your Enemy, a basic indoctrination course dished out during army training.

Amid the confusion of radical change, they pulled their mantle of shame around them and fell silent, hoping that by shutting up, survival in the new SA would be easier. Yet lingering memories remain. Speaking out, relaying stories that underscored the saying that "the army is the best two years of your life you never want over again", was relegated to back-slapping, guffawing drunk-men’s talk.” Eugene Goddard

“Met die ontbinding van die Kommando's het dit vir my in Junie 2006 gevoel soos oorgawe toe ek ons lede opdrag moes gee om hulle wapens te kom inhandig (ek het gepraat van wapen neerlegging) vir die ontbinding van Langloof Kommando. My uniform (met die ou SAW rangkentekens op) hang op 'n ereplek in my huis”.

“Ek het onmeetbare ondervinding en mensekennis opgedoen, die tydperk wat ek in die SAW was, wat geen universteit of kollekte jou kan leer nie, dit pas ek met groot vrug toe in my nuwe loopbaan. 'n Loopbaan wat ek nie gekies het omdat ek nie meer in die Mag wou wees nie, maar deur die huidige omstandighede gedwing was om te doen. Wat 'n kosbare 14 jaar was dit nie geweet nie ek dink dikwels met heimwee terug daarna”.

“I think I may be suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. In addition I have to confront being discarded for a second time by the establishment with BEE excluding white males from many opportunities in RSA. I have a lot of anger which either leads me to withdraw or to explode at inappropriate times. I constantly feel as if I am on a battlefield. My long-term memory is severely stunted.......”

“But what struck me most was the human perspective of it all – to see very experienced and well trained soldiers expose their emotions publically after all these years, has given me a personal sense of belonging and increasing calm that I have been craving for years. It is becoming clearer to me on a daily basis that there are many of us who still need to dump our memories – many guys are still “there”....”

“But because of the country’s attempts to downplay the violent nature of the conflict and to ignore the messy and not easily narrativised experiences of the various armed factions, South Africa’s former combatants remain essentially invisible. As a result, the insights and ideas of those who have perhaps the deepest appreciation of all for their rights and freedoms are lost to the rest of us. Isolated and lacking any collective voice, individuals are but a faint reminder that the road to freedom in South Africa was a harsh and violent one.” Dr. Susan Cook
“I heard in 2008 that I will be rebuilding the road between Ondjiva and Humbe. A year ago to be precise. I was scared of what I would find here. I was scared the nightmares would come back and haunt me. I cannot remember much of the area. Landmarks and so started coming back after a while and incidents started becoming more prominent. I found a nation next to us, Namibia that lives in a fairly well governed country. I found a nation in Angola that is full of hope for the future. That would not have happened was it not for our effort sweat and blood that was given without asking anything back? Not even after the cowardly attack of SWAPO to try and establish a base in Ovambo on 1 April 1990. Namibians are today even to shy to remember that act of cowardice.”

“Their sense of betrayal was exacerbated by the outcome of the war and negotiated settlement that, undoubtedly, devalued the experiences of SADF national servicemen. The silence imposed by the state was compounded by the veterans’ own wish to forget. Official invisibility intensified individual amnesia. Under such circumstances, veterans tended to repress their traumatic memories so as not to admit recollections too painful to recall. The marginalization of ex-combatants can be seen not only in difficulties faced by veterans of notorious SADF units such as 32 Battalion, but also in society’s failure to acknowledge the hardships that “regular” soldiers who were not necessarily involved in heinous acts faced in coming to terms with their experiences. There are those who believe that the Border War is best forgotten as the country focuses on building a new future. But the experiences and trauma of conscripts, and the latent memories of an often brutal conflict cannot simply be wished away. Soldiers’ stories need to be told and the demons of both individuals and the nation exorcised.” Gary Baines

“The overwhelming majority of white South African males were required to serve in the Defence Force from the age of 17 to 55 years before 1994. The first two years were intensive military training, thereafter they had to serve another six years (720 days) in the Citizen force. The majority of these men today remain inordinately proud of their military skills and successes. They did their duty which was to defend their country and all its people from armed aggression. Many of the soldiers also say they were winning the border-wars: but the National-Party politicians sold out this finely-honed fighting force in a political cop-out and handed them over unarmed – to their enemies.

Many of these many tens of thousands of white male draftees today are traumatised and permanently disabled from their long years of military service. The veterans-association has a list of 7,500 totally destitute, physically-disabled white war-vets who need help now.

The handful of white South African males indeed carried a very heavy burden of military duty before 1994.” Pieter du Toit

The boys who were conscripted into the SADF were usually young, less mature and more susceptible to such things as peer pressure, propaganda and the idea of adventure and excitement, and they viewed conscription from the perspective of a racially based society supposedly facing an atheistic communist-backed total onslaught. While it is important to take account of the feelings that men nowadays bear for their national
service, it is also important to remember that these may have little in common with the views they held at the time they were called up to serve. The idea that serving willingly in the SADF made one a partisan of apartheid is now also widely held, as is the idea that those who fought for apartheid were all monsters and callous killers. The dirty tricks uncovered by the Goldstone Commission, General P. Steyn and by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) made the South African public and the world aware that certain members of the security forces had perpetrated acts of almost unspeakable cruelty. Although it was either members of the PF or more often members of the police who were implicated in the horrific acts of violence, all former conscripts have now become tarred with the same metaphorical brush as the less morally conscious members of the security forces.

Even in educated and knowledgeable circles this is the case, as is shown in the following passage found in an article about the employment of South Africans as security personnel in Iraq: Richard Goldstone was revolted when he learned that some apartheid-era veterans are now employed in Iraq under U.S. government contracts. "The mercenaries we're talking about worked for security forces that were synonymous with murder and torture," says Goldstone "My reaction was one of horror that that sort of person is employed in a situation where what should be encouraged is the introduction of democracy." While many of the mercenaries working in Iraq were probably not simply ordinary conscripts but members of the PF or even the Police, the distinction is not apparent in the article and apartheid-era veterans are lumped together as members of security forces that were synonymous with murder and torture. The murder and torture alluded to above were acts carried out by the few and not by the many, but the stigma attaches itself to all.

Many conscripts were changed by their military experience, especially from the 1970s when many men spent three month tours in operational areas, and returning men were in sometimes more morose, violent, and prone to alcoholism or drug use. Divorce and suicide rates among conscripts were high, and a number of national servicemen suffered from some kind of mental trauma following their service.” Graeme Callister

Unlike the American situation very little is known about the the socio-economic situation of the bush war veterans. There has been no voice to speak for them or help them or their families. We have lost our identity with no bigger purpose only to tell our small little survival stories. Questions can rightly been asked if there are any similarities with the American experience? Are and were there veterans in prison and for what? How many veterans have been through broken relationships, marriages and left job- and homeless? It maybe too late in some cases to help, but in some it may still be possible.

An advert in an Australian magazine aimed at helping their veterans....

“COCKSCOMB VETERANS' CAMP near Rockhampton, in sunny Queensland. Cockscomb has been helping vets and their families since July 1997. Everything you see has been created by Veterans for Veterans. The land is generously ‘lent’ by one who recognised their urgent need, and acted. Those war veterans who need semi-remote sanctuary are
ideally catered for, with all facilities to hand, friendly access, and sixty acres to disappear into the bush for awhile.”

Healing lies in speaking and hearing. It is time to speak up and break the silence without fear of reprisal. For those that are well, for those who are still fighting, and for those left behind......

“They shall grow not old, as we that are left to grow old,
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning.
We will remember them.”

Laurence Binyon (1869-1943)
Websites
Sentinel Projects
Sabov
Sealine
Sa-Soldier
Opsmedic
Warinangola
Sun
Allatsea
Justdone
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Contact Details: donita@mweb.co.za