

SOUND OFF!



BULLETIN

#1

THE NEWSLETTER OF VETERANS UNITED FOR TRUTH, INC.

“VETERANS STANDING UP FOR EACH OTHER”

11 FEBRUARY 2006

SPECIAL TO THE VUFT, INC. MAILING LIST

In Issue 13 of **SOUND OFF!** I included part of an email from Douglas Barber, a young returned Guardsman who was unable to handle the demons of PTSD, and who ended up taking his own life. This bulletin includes an article from truthout.org by a friend of Doug's explaining about the difference in treatment between regulars and activated personnel, and why that made a difference in Doug's and so many others' cases. It is worth a special bulletin to let you know that despite claims to the contrary, the problems are not getting solved.

CAN WE COME HOME NOW?

Charlie Anderson - truthout | Perspective - 11 February 2006

My friend Doug Barber died on Martin Luther King Day. I hadn't known him long, but we had a lot in common. We both lived in the south, were both veterans of the Iraq War, both felt betrayed by our government for sending us to a war without purpose. Both of our marriages had been destroyed in the aftermath of the war, and finally, we were both struggling with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Doug and I both fought during the invasion of Iraq. He was an army National Guardsman and I was attached to the Marines. I don't really know how Doug's PTSD first manifested, but I do know he had a different battle than I did. I had been back less than a month when I found myself diving for cover when the neighbors launched bottle rockets. Soon I was unable to stand any noise that sounded like gunfire. I felt profound guilt that I had come home alive when others I knew did not, and I was plagued by nightmares of the horrors I had experienced far from home.

Because I was still in the navy, I was able to refer myself to the psychiatry department at the local military hospital and was diagnosed with PTSD. After a year and a half of treatment, I was discharged from the military with disability pay. Doug was not so lucky: he was a National Guardsman and not entitled to care in the regular military system. He had to turn to the Veteran's Administration, who determined he had a Personality Disorder. A malady which, by definition, exists before a person becomes of military age, and thus, the VA will not compensate for it or treat it. The VA thus would not acknowledge his subsequent PTSD that afflicted him in Iraq. So Doug suffered the demons of war without adequate treatment. He struggled for two years trying to make ends meet, all the while fighting with the VA for the disability benefits he had earned in the sands of Iraq. He drifted from job to job because of his temper or, as he put it, because he had been trained to kill and that was what he knew. Yet, even though our paths were different, we had yet another thing in common. After fighting so hard against the torment of life after warfare, we were both tired. We just wanted our lives back, and Doug knew, as I do, that this can never happen.

Doug and I are not alone. 30% of Iraq veterans have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. The divorce rate among Iraq Veterans is very high. Homelessness, unemployment and drug abuse are also on the rise. As Doug put it in an article written shortly before he took his own life, "All is not okay ... for those of us who return home alive and supposedly well. What looks like normalcy and readjustment is only an illusion to be revealed by time and torment. Some soldiers ... will live with permanent scars from horrific events that no one other than those who served will ever understand."

Doug and I are America's returned veterans, her sons, left on our own to suffer after the torment of war. I still struggle through life. I often remind myself that I have to bring myself through for my daughter. I force myself to hope that even though my personal finances are in shambles, my marriage destroyed, and nearly everything I once held dear left on the rubbish heap created by this war, this torture cannot last forever. Some days I believe it; on many, I don't.

Though some may question his actions or his motives, Doug was just one of thousands of the forgotten casualties of the Iraq War. He was killed in action long before he died. On my darkest days, I almost envy Doug, because he had the courage to end his suffering. But in reality, I know that his act was not one of courage, but one born out of the deepest despair. There are hundreds of thousands of Iraq veterans, 150,000 still in Iraq and every one of us is in harm's way. Doug has gone to rest, but you the citizens of America cannot; you do not have that luxury. While you are tucked safe in your beds, we veterans are still out here in the cold asking, "Can we come home now?"

Charlie Anderson served as a Navy Hospital Corpsman with Marine Corps' Second Tank Battalion during the invasion of Iraq. He is the Southeast Regional Coordinator of Iraq Veterans Against the War. He lives in Virginia Beach, Virginia.

http://www.truthout.org/docs_2006/021106X.shtml

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