

The American Institute of Stress

COMBAT STRESS

Harnessing Post-Traumatic Stress for Service Members, Veterans, and First Responders

★ Volume 14 Number 2

Summer 2025



Service and Sacrifice, No Matter What the Uniform

Inside: **Police Memorial Day Reflection - We Give Hope**, By Richard Biehl • **AI Applications for Diagnosis and Treatment of Veterans and First Responders with High Stress Levels**, By Peter D. Miller and Donna Miller • **The Preacher**, By John E. Norvell • **Worlds Crossing Over**, By Robert Rail • **A Soldier Reads Emily Dickinson**, By Tom McMurtry • **Moral Injury: A Guidebook for Women Veterans**, By Daniel L. Roberts • **How to Make Stress Your Friend**, By Paul T. Bartone • **It's Okay to Not Be Okay**, By Austin Snowden

What if everything we thought we knew about stress was wrong? The latest documentary by The American Institute of Stress, *Beyond Fight or Flight: The New Science of Stress* challenges outdated ideas and explores groundbreaking research that redefines our understanding of how stress impacts the body and mind. Featuring expert insights from Dr. Lewis Coleman and Dr. David Mason, this documentary reveals revolutionary approaches to understanding and managing stress — offering new hope for health and resilience. Watch the trailer and discover the science that could change your life.



[Click to watch the trailer.](#)

COMBAT STRESS

We value opinions of our readers.

Please feel free to contact us with any comments, suggestions or inquiries. Email: editor@stress.org

Understanding Stress: Our Mission, Your Wellness

A Look Into the History, Vision, and Impact of The American Institute of Stress

Stress is so deeply woven into our daily lives and vocabulary that it's easy to forget how recently the term took on its modern meaning. It wasn't until 1936 that stress, as we understand it today, was coined by our founder, Professor Hans Selye, MD, PhD. In a groundbreaking paper published in *Nature*, Selye introduced the concept of the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS), describing the physiological responses of rats to various stressors—paving the way for decades of research into human stress culminating in 1,700 scientific publications and 40 books by Selye alone.

The American Institute of Stress (AIS) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 1978 by Dr. Hans Selye and his protégé, Paul Rosch, MD. It was created to serve as a central resource for all things related to stress. Other founding members included distinguished individuals such as Linus Pauling, Alvin Toffler, Bob Hope, Michael DeBakey, Herbert Benson, and Ray Rosenman—along with other leading physicians, scientists, and thought leaders dedicated to exploring how stress affects our health and well-being. [Click here](#) for a full list of founding trustees. For a fascinating first-hand account of Professor Selye and the founding of The American Institute of Stress by Dr. Rosch, [click here](#).



AIS remains committed to its mission: improving public health through education about how we naturally respond to both internal and external stressors—and, most importantly, how to manage them before they manage us. Our goal is to help people master stress in ways that promote peace of mind, productivity, and lasting happiness. We

do this by offering evidence-based tools and resources designed to prevent illness and enhance mental wellness. Visit our website, stress.org, to explore scientifically validated online stress [assessments](#), educational [courses](#), documentary [films](#), our free [podcast](#) Finding Contentment, [webinars](#), and free [subscriptions](#) to Contentment and Combat Stress magazines.

This mission is ambitious—and essential. Thanks to the dedication and generosity of our members and volunteers, The American Institute of Stress continues to make a meaningful impact on those who need it most. Interested in supporting our mission? Learn how your donation can help us continue this important work [here](#).

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The American Institute of Stress

Stress Management Experts Wanted!

Obtaining credentials from The American Institute of Stress is a designation that sets members apart as stress experts and reflects their commitment to the advancement of innovative and scientifically based stress management protocols. The AIS Seal and credentials inform the public that the certificate holder commands advanced knowledge of the latest stress research and stress management techniques. For physicians and other healthcare practitioners, it designates your practice as an advanced treatment center for stress-related illnesses.



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Requirements	Open to everyone	Hold a degree or healthcare license and have been in practice or profession for 3 years	Hold a doctorate degree or special license and have been in practice or profession for 5 years
Collaboration with International Professional Community	✓	✓	✓
Continuing education training programs		✓	✓
Subscription to quarterly magazine Contentment and Combat Stress	✓	✓	✓
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Opportunity to join Speakers Bureau		✓	✓
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The American Institute of Stress is a 501c3 non-profit organization, headquartered in Weatherford, Texas. We serve the global community through both online and in-person programs and classes. The Institute is dedicated to advancing understanding of the role of stress in health and illness, the nature and importance of mind/body relationships and how to use our vast innate potential for self-healing. Our paramount goal at the AIS is to provide a clearinghouse of stress related information to the general public, physicians, health professionals and lay individuals interested in exploring the multitudinous and varied effects of stress on our health and quality of life.

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We Give Hope is a reflection of the destabilizing effects that traumatic violence can have on law enforcement personnel as well as their potential to catalyze extraordinary internal personal resources to mobilize beyond personal difficulty to compassionately meet the needs of others. It is the personal reflection of Police Chief (RET) Richard Biehl, Dayton (OH) Police Department through the lens of the 2019 Oregon District mass shooting and the murder of Detective Jorge DelRio three months later.

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By Peter D. Miller and Donna Miller

Artificial intelligence (AI) is no longer a distant concept – it's here, rapidly evolving, and poised to transform lives, especially for Veterans and First Responders. For Baby Boomers and Gen Xers, who may feel uncertain or even fearful about AI, understanding its potential can demystify the technology and highlight its value. This is the first in a series of articles that explain AI in layman's terms and identify AI applications for stress mitigation that can be used by Active Military, Veterans, and First Responders.

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By John E. Norvell, LT COL (RET), USAF

I feel for those who cannot see the light in the darkness, and I know how hard it can be to see others and think, "they have no problems." The darkness can suck you in and you are at the bottom of a bottomless hole. Perhaps that is why I felt so sad about Preacher. He helped me when I needed it at survival school, but no one could help him.



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By Robert Rail, PhD

We can smear the blood off a wound, swab down the flesh, bandage it tightly, and keep going, but two things will never, over your lifetime, fade away or heal... When the bandage is unwrapped the reminder of the scar, or worse, will be forever, and the other scar that is in your mind will descend upon your thoughts without warning for as long as you live. It dwells within us all, and always in every scared and bleeding mind. Some minds like some scars will always carry the mark of conflict, never to be forgotten or resolved.

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We all have stress in our lives. But stress isn't always a bad thing! Stressful situations can teach us useful lessons, making us stronger and better able to cope with future challenges. By building a "hardiness mindset", stress can be your friend!

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By Austin Snowden, Police Officer (RET)

After being exposed to several traumatic incidents in a short period of time, life smacked me in the face. As Law Enforcement Officers, we face a crucial decision to either fold up or fight back against these demons that attach themselves to many of these calls for service. I not only share with you my two most intense calls for service, but how these events affected me mentally. This is my journey after these calls removed me from the profession I loved the most. I am here to tell you that you are not alone and it's okay to not be okay.





Retired Dayton Ohio Chief of Police, **Richard Biehl**, is as much a philosopher as he is a godsend to the law enforcement community, even three years past his retirement. In the aftermath of some of the Dayton, Ohio and even the nation's most horrific tragedies, his presence and his unequalled courage provided far more than a glimmer of hope to the entire community of Southwest Ohio. His landmark article, ***We Give Hope***, allows us to view

his vision, one that enabled an unexpected degree of healing following the Oregon District Mass Shooting, an Honor Sacred Knights rally, the Dayton Memorial Day tornadoes, and the assassination of Detective George Del Rio in the line of duty, all within a six month time period. The limits of the Dayton Police Department were pushed far past what most humans could even begin to tolerate, and yet, their officers thrived under his leadership. This should serve as a model for every police department on the globe, in the face of heartbreak and catastrophe. I witnessed all of this up close and very personally.

Also bonuses and blessings to both the Veteran and First Responder communities, **Pete and Donna Miller** have opened up a topic that breathes fear and loathing to those of us who are old timers. Bringing us out of the dark ages, both of these local heroes are here to educate the masses about artificial intelligence, no longer a distant concept. It is here for the duration, very rapidly evolving and hovering over us to transform our lives, particularly for Veterans and First Responders. For Baby Boomers and Gen Xers, who may feel uncertain or even fearful about AI, understanding its potential can demystify the technology and highlight its value. In the first in their series of articles, ***AI Applications for Diagnosis and Treatment of Veterans and First Responders with High Stress Levels***, will explain AI in layman's terms and identify AI applications for stress mitigation that can be readily utilized

by Active Duty Military personnel, Veterans, and First Responders. For the afraid, prepare to be enlightened!

LT COL (RET) USAF John Norvell's account of those who cannot see the light in the darkness, reveals the tragic loss of his beloved chaplain friend and roommate in the aftermath of the War in Viet Nam. Like so many and too many, he became sucked into the bottomless pit, devastated by war's impact and far beyond what too many fail to see. ***The Preacher*** offers up the tale of those destined to provide solace and support through the worst of times, accumulating the burdens of those who seek them out, to the exclusion of the hell in which they live. Killed After Action has become too frequent an occurrence.

The words of **Dr. Robert Rail** ring all too familiar for those who serve, have served, and continue to serve, no matter what the uniform, capturing the essence of woundedness in his both stunning and startling piece, ***Worlds Crossing Over***: In his words, "We can smear the blood off a wound, swab down the flesh, bandage it tightly, and keep going, but two things will never over your lifetime fade away or heal... When the bandage is unwrapped the reminder of the scar, or worse, will be forever, and the other scar that is in your mind will descend upon your thoughts without warning for as long as you live. It dwells within us all, and always in every scared and bleeding mind. Some minds like some scars will always carry the mark of conflict, never to be forgotten or resolved." For those of us who have walked, run for our lives, and

marched in the same boots, only we know every morsel of his words to be true.

Police Officer and Special Forces Captain (RET) US Army, Tom McMurtry offers us the lighter side of the wartime theater in his unforgotten gaze at the magnificent works of poet Emily Dickinson. ***A Soldier Reads Emily Dickinson*** is certainly a most unique look at the hopeful voice of a fighter and survivor. It is clearly unusual to believe that poetry written by a nineteenth century reclusive spinster would be relatable or meaningful to a twenty-first century combat Veteran, but this would be an incorrect assumption. In the combat theater, finding solace for the soul in poetry is a hidden gem.

Our good friend, **Dr./Chaplain Daniel Roberts**, has just published a groundbreaking volume for the masses. This is not just for women Veterans, but for all those who wish to understand and appreciate the terrible toll exacted on those suffering from the moral injuries inherent in military service. Entitled ***Moral Injury: A Guidebook for Women Veterans***, this revealing book promises to deliver a wide-ranging view of the struggles and anguish faced by military women who are frequently forced into silence. This is undeniably an invaluable resource for those women Veterans working to rebuild their lives and for those tasked with accompanying them on their journey to healing and recovery.

Dr./COL (RET) US Army, Paul Bartone, offers up the lighter side of stress, schooling our readers on how to make stress your friend. Dr. Bartone proposes that life stressors are not necessarily a bad thing, but one that provides some powerful life lessons, leading us to an entirely new repertoire of coping skills and a "hardiness mindset." Dr. Bartone affords us the illuminating concept, in ***How to Make Stress Your Friend***, that hardship and adversity can be very powerful teachers.

Officer (RET) Austin Snowden's exquisite piece demonstrates resilience and survivorship at its very finest. ***It's Okay Not to be Okay*** is a concept I labor to teach my first responder patients, but Officer Snowden demonstrates this far more brilliantly than any of my words could convey. After being exposed to several traumatic incidents within a very short time period, life literally smacked him in the face. Law Enforcement Officers face critical decisions, often on a daily basis, to either fold up or fight back against the demons that attach themselves to many of their calls for service. Officer Snowden not only shares with our readers two of his most intense, traumatic, not to mention tragic calls for service, but how these events affected him in a psychological sense. This is his journey after these events took him away from the profession he loved the most. He is here to tell all first responders that they are not alone on this battleground and that it really is okay to not be okay.

Our group of authors in this issue of *Combat Stress* offer amazing insights that are certain to change the lives of our readers by offering unique perspectives on understanding the stressors associated with putting on a uniform, along with reframing our thoughts into a more manageable perspective. That is why they contributed to this issue and why we exist, for you, our readers.

Your Editor,

Kathy Platoni, PsyD, DAAPM, FAIS

Clinical Psychologist

COL (RET), US Army - Veteran, Operation

Desert Storm, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and

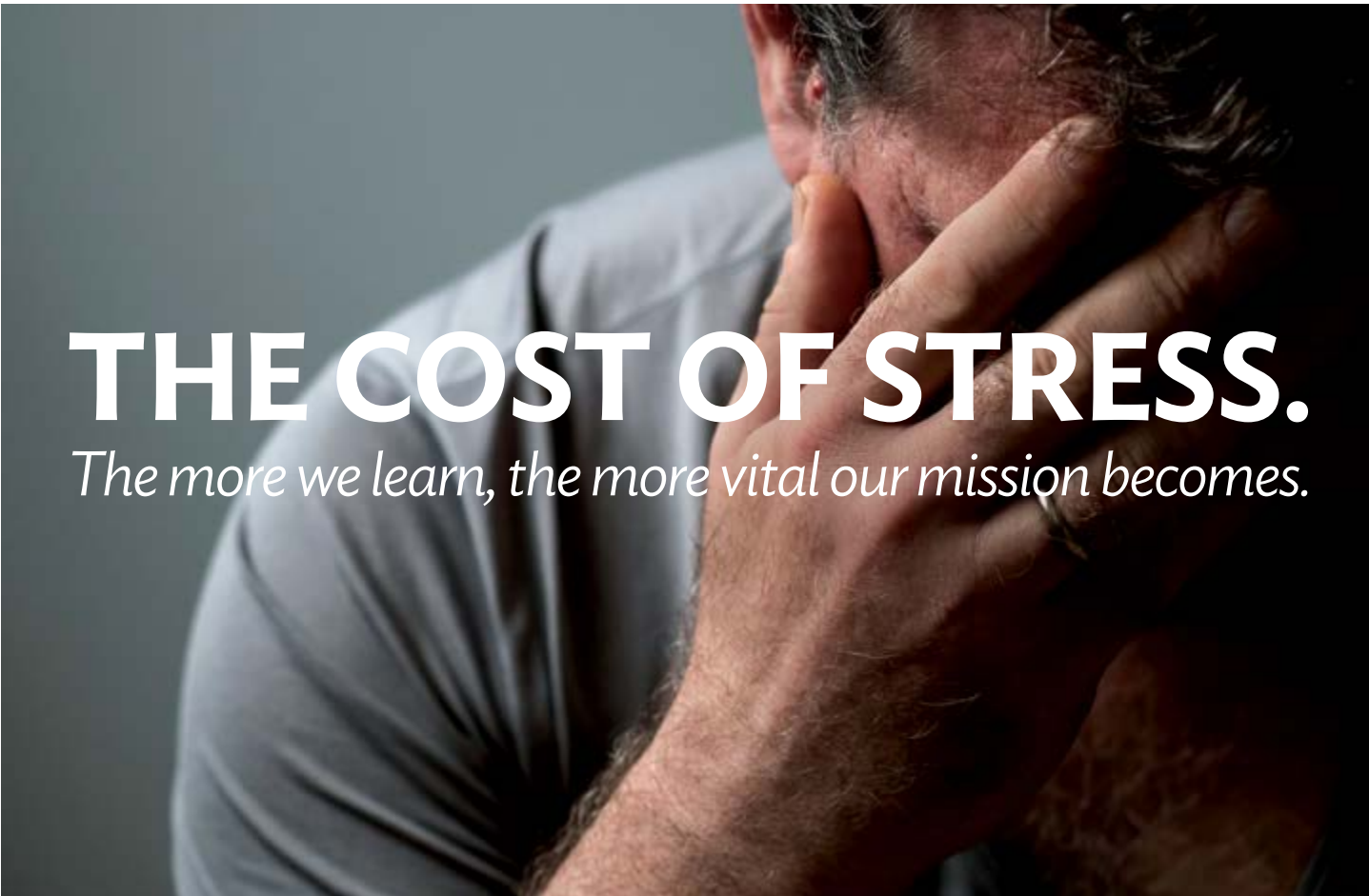
Operation Enduring Freedom (JTF-GTMO and Afghanistan)

Dayton SWAT

Member, Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame

Member, Greene County Veterans Hall of Fame

Clinical Director, Southwest Ohio Critical Incident Stress Management Team



THE COST OF STRESS.

The more we learn, the more vital our mission becomes.

The American Institute of Stress is the only organization in the world solely created and dedicated to study the science of stress and the advancement of innovative and scientifically based stress management techniques. AIS provides the latest evidence-based knowledge, research and management techniques for stress and stress-related disorders.

Groundbreaking insights and approaches. World-changing mission.

Hans Selye, MD, PhD (1907-1982), is known as the father of stress research. In the 1920s, Selye coined the term “stress” in the context of explaining his pioneering research into



the signs and symptoms of disease curiously common in the majority of people who were ill, regardless of the diagnoses. Selye’s concept of stress was revolutionary then, and it has only grown in significance in the century since he

began his work. Founded in 1978 at Dr. Selye’s request, the American Institute of Stress (AIS) continues his legacy of advancing the understanding of stress and its enormous

impacts on health and well-being worldwide, both on an individual and societal level.

A forthcoming AIS initiative – called **Engage. Empower. Educate.** – will leverage the latest research, tools and best practices for managing stress to make a difference in a world increasingly impacted by the effects of stress out of control. We hope you will consider supporting this critical outreach campaign.



[**Click to view The American Institute of Stress Case Statement**](#)

A campaign to Engage. Empower. Educate.

The AIS campaign will support three key initiatives:

Engage communities through public outreach



Improve the health and well-being of our communities and the world by serving as a nonprofit clearinghouse for information on all stress-related subjects.

The American Institute of Stress produces and disseminates a significant amount of evidence-based information, but there is a need to share this material with a wider audience in the U.S. and around the world.

Support for this initiative will provide funding to expand the organization's public outreach for its website and social media, documentary films, magazines, podcasts, blogs and courses.

Empower professionals through best practices



Establish credentials, best practices, and standards of excellence for stress management and fostering intellectual discovery among scientists, healthcare professionals, medical practitioners and others in related fields.

AIS provides DAIS (Diplomate, AIS) and FAIS (Fellow, AIS) credentials for qualified healthcare professionals.

The AIS seal means a practitioner has training and experience in stress management and access to the latest stress research and techniques. It designates their practices as advanced treatment centers for stress-related illnesses.

Support for this initiative will provide funding to continually update best practices in the field.

Educate all through the development and dissemination of evidence-based information



Develop and provide information, training and techniques for use in education, research, clinical care and the workplace. Some of the research-based information AIS develops and disseminates includes:

- Productions – *Mismatched: Your Brain Under Stress*, a six-part documentary featuring some of the world's leading experts on stress. Released in March 2021.
- Publications – *Contentment* magazine and *Combat Stress* magazine for service members, veterans and first responders.
- Podcasts, webinars and website resources – The free podcast series *Finding Contentment*



The American Institute of Stress

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Police Memorial Day Reflection - We Give Hope

By Richard Biehl, Police Chief (RET)

Often, we are not deeply aware of the capabilities of our own potentiality, until we are challenged by the unfathomable. For those serving in the noble profession of law enforcement, it may be in the wake of the darkness of tragic loss that we discover the depth of our strength, our courage, our commitment, and our compassion.

In 2019, during the days and weeks after the Oregon District mass shooting in Dayton, often at the end of exhausting days, when home and alone, I wept. There were many days that I awoke with an intense state of heaviness. I did not want to move, to get out of bed, to face

another grueling day. Yet I had a duty to fulfill to which I faithfully responded, as did untold law enforcement personnel throughout the Miami Valley and beyond, and through which we hoped would meet the many needs of members of our community, fellow police officers, and the



broader public who were so deeply affected by this horrific incident.

No matter how daunting and difficult, we showed up, the many brave men and women of the Dayton Police Department and law enforcement agencies throughout the region. We responded to the initial violent incident, cared for the wounded and the dying, conducted the lengthy and complex follow-up investigation, comforted the surviving family members of those killed, and did so many other acts of selfless service that are necessary following such a tragic and traumatic event. Three months later when Detective Jorge Del Rio was fatally wounded,

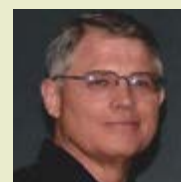
Dayton PD and regional police agencies responded with compassion and care to provide help and support to the Del Rio family and to one another as the experience of grief was yet again a collective experience.

In the responses to these tragedies and too many others, the men and women of the Dayton and regional law enforcement agencies reassured the members of the Miami Valley region and beyond, that law enforcement officers would respond courageously to community crises and provide compassionate service to all those harmed by such tragic incidents.

We give hope!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Richard Biehl, Police Chief (RET), is the former Director and Chief of Police of the Dayton (OH) Police Department. He was appointed to this position on January 28, 2008, and retired on July 30, 2021, after spending 13+ years as Chief of Police and nearly 43 years in public and community service. Under his leadership, the Dayton Police Department received several international awards and statewide awards for excellence in the community and problem-oriented initiatives that improved community safety.



His prior public and community service included 24+ years as a Cincinnati Police Officer, the last six years of his Cincinnati career as an Assistant Police Chief, and subsequently as the first Executive Director of the Community Police Partnering Center, a private nonprofit organization created in the aftermath of the civil unrest of 2001 to promote community/police partnerships to apply problem solving methodologies to address community crime and disorder problems.

In 2020, Chief Biehl completed a master's degree in Mindfulness Studies at Lesley University. Since his retirement in 2021, he has regularly presented to various police audiences on topics of police executive leadership, officer health, safety, and wellness, and preparation for and response to mass casualty events.

Recent published works include *Sleep Deficiency in Law Enforcement: The Perils of Leadership Neglect* (2022, *Ohio Police Chief Magazine*, second edition), *Leading through Traumatic Loss and Grief in Law Enforcement* (*Combat Stress Magazine*, Winter 2022/2023), *Foreword in H. Rahtz, Counterinsurgency Strategy: A Path to Effective Policing* (2024), and *Navigating Crisis and Resilience* (*IACP Police Chief Magazine*, 2025).

AI Applications for Diagnosis and Treatment of Veterans and First Responders with High Stress Levels

By Peter D. Miller and Donna Miller

Artificial intelligence (AI) is no longer a distant concept. It is here now, rapidly evolving, and poised to transform lives, especially for Veterans and First Responders. For Baby Boomers and Gen Xers, who may feel uncertain or even fearful about AI, understanding its potential can demystify the technology and highlight its value. As Demis Hassabis, CEO of Google's DeepMind, noted on 60 Minutes,³¹ AI is on an exponential growth curve, with full

operational potential expected in 5 to 10 years. Similarly, Rear Admiral (RET) Ted Carter, President of The Ohio State University, emphasized, in his Ohio State investiture speech, that future workforces, including Veterans and First Responders, must be fluent in AI to thrive.

Simply put, AI, or artificial intelligence, is a technology that mimics human thinking to solve problems, to learn, and to make decisions. While current commercial versions of AI can't do most of that yet, today's AI can search all of its databases and the internet to answer questions. It can also give verbal responses and create visual effects.

AI's Potential for Veterans and First Responders

Veterans and First Responders face unique challenges, including PTSD, stress, and sleep disorders, often linked to their high-pressure jobs.

AI can address these issues by considering the whole person, not just their job or diagnosis. For example, AI could analyze a Veteran's or First Responder's background, such as growing up in a high-stress neighborhood versus having a low-stress upbringing, to tailor treatment to their specific stress tolerance.

AI could also be a "life-saving tool" for Veterans and First Responders because it can analyze and act on more pertinent information faster than a human, or multiple humans, can.

Most of today's Veterans and First Responders are high school graduates in their late teens and early twenties. If they have behavioral health issues, they could be approaching or even in their early thirties before returning to normal daily life as being productive and happy. They may have 30 to 40 years of productive life ahead of them. Because AI can process information at much higher speeds and eventually even provide therapy, it may add back weeks, months, and even years to a Veteran's and a First Responder's normal and fulfilling life.

AI is emerging as a powerful tool for stress management, offering personalized solutions and proactive support through various applications and devices. AI could be used to analyze data, predict stress triggers, and suggest tailored strategies for reducing stress and improving well-being. For example:

Artificial intelligence (AI) is being used in various ways to help with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) diagnosis, treatment, and support.

AI can analyze voice data, text narratives, and other sources to identify potential PTSD symptoms and risk factors. Additionally, AI is being used to develop virtual and augmented reality tools for exposure therapy, helping patients overcome



their fears and trauma in a safe and controlled environment.¹⁻⁷

Here's a more detailed look at how AI is being used concerning PTSD:

1. Diagnosis and Screening:

- **Voice Analysis:** AI algorithms can analyze vocal characteristics, such as speech rate, vocal tone, and emotional cues, to identify patterns associated with PTSD symptoms.^{1,5}
- **Text Analysis:** AI can analyze patient narratives, such as birth stories or interview transcripts, to identify language patterns and indicators of PTSD, according to a study from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD).^{4,8}
- **Data Integration:** AI can integrate data from various sources, including electronic medical records, self-reported assessments, and behavioral data, to create a more comprehensive picture of an individual's risk for PTSD.^{1,3,4,9,10}

2. Treatment and Support:

- **Augmented Reality (AR) and Virtual Reality (VR):** AI-powered AR and VR applications can create immersive and personalized exposure therapy experiences, allowing patients to confront their trauma in a safe and controlled environment.^{6,7,11,12}
- **AI-Powered Therapies:** AI-driven chatbots and virtual companions can provide support, guidance, and therapy for individuals struggling with PTSD, offering personalized interventions and coping strategies.^{2,13-18}
- **Self-Help and Self-Regulation Tools:** AI-powered wearable devices and apps can help individuals monitor their emotions, identify triggers, and practice relaxation techniques.¹⁹

- **Drug Discovery and Development:** AI can accelerate the development of new medications and therapies for PTSD by analyzing data, identifying potential targets, and predicting drug responses.¹⁹

3. Research and Development:

- **Predicting PTSD Trajectories:** AI can analyze patient data to predict the trajectory of PTSD symptoms and identify individuals at risk for developing or worsening PTSD.^{4,19,20}
- **Improving Diagnostic Accuracy:** AI can help to improve the accuracy and efficiency of PTSD diagnosis, reducing the reliance on subjective assessments and clinical interviews.¹
- **Identifying Biomarkers:** AI can help to identify biological markers associated with PTSD, which could lead to more targeted and effective treatments.^{4,19,21,22}

Consider the work being done by Dr. Philip Held, an associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago. Dr. Held and his team are finalizing an app called “Socrates 2.0” as a generative AI tool to improve PTSD treatment.²³⁻²⁵

The Socrates 2.0 app, developed through the Road Home Program at Rush University Medical Center in Chicago, is a cognitive behavioral therapy-based tool designed to engage users in Socratic dialogue, a method of inquiry used in philosophy and education to delve into deeper understanding by questioning assumptions and exploring different perspectives.²³⁻²⁵

Socrates 2.0 uses a large language model (LLM), specifically running on Microsoft Azure’s GPT-4o, to guide users through questioning unrealistic or unhelpful beliefs, a core technique in cognitive behavioral therapy.^{23,24}

The app prompts users to reflect on their thoughts without requiring personal information, ensuring privacy, and includes features like a hidden AI external rater and supervisor feedback to refine the dialogue. It's a web-based application, accessible anywhere, aimed at augmenting mental health treatment. Testing has shown that Veterans like the non-personal, computer AI interface.²³⁻²⁵

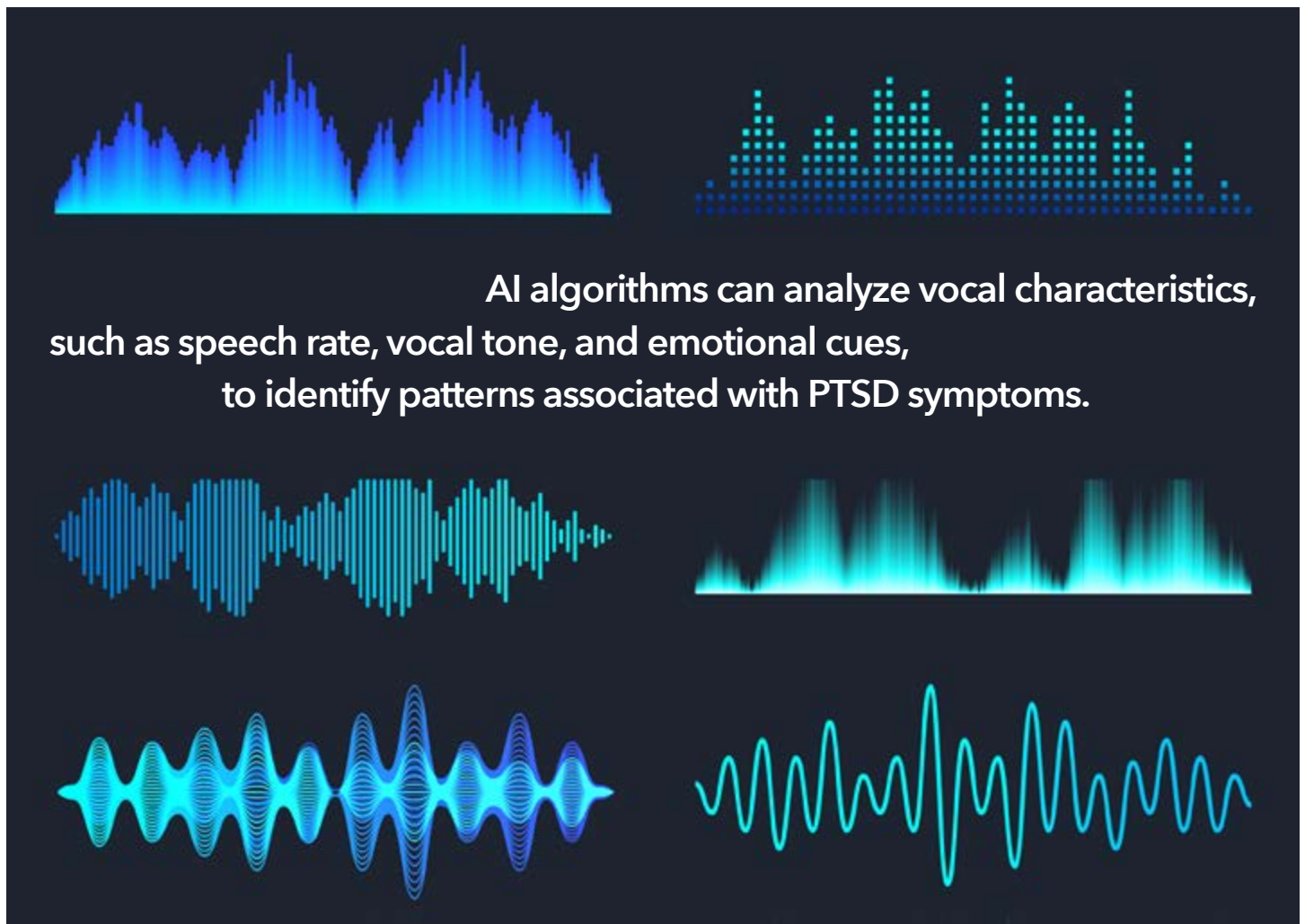
Dr. Held says that the AI app is just one part of a larger healing initiative, which can give patients more treatment approaches to find something more tailored to them.^{23,25}

Dr. Sairam Parthasarathy, director of the Center

for Sleep and Circadian Sciences at the University of Arizona Health Sciences, recently testified on Capitol Hill about the need to speed up biomedical innovation at VA hospitals using AI to detect and treat sleep disorders, often a major problem related to high-stress jobs.^{26,27}

Dr. Parthasarathy, who has worked with Veterans for more than a decade, said modern medicine has become too complex for doctors to manage alone. AI tools can help doctors catch issues earlier by analyzing large amounts of data quickly.^{26,27}

At the university, Dr. Parthasarathy and his team have already embedded an AI-based tool



By embracing AI's potential, Boomers and Gen Xers can advocate for its ethical use and ensure it supports human-centric care.

into their electronic medical record system to help primary care doctors screen patients for sleep apnea, a condition closely linked to PTSD, depression, heart disease, and stroke.^{26,27}

U.S. Army Veteran suicides can be predicted with "moderate to good accuracy" by applying artificial intelligence (AI) to data available before Veterans leave service, according to a new study led by Chris J. Kennedy at Massachusetts General Hospital and co-authored by a University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Department of Psychology faculty member.²⁸

"This research could potentially reshape how the military approaches mental health support for service members transitioning to civilian life," said Assistant Professor and co-author Santiago Papini. "By identifying at-risk individuals early, we may be able to provide more targeted and timely interventions, potentially saving lives."²⁸

AI tools like [SWORN.ai](#) are stepping in to help First Responders. By analyzing real-time data from wearables, job stress metrics, and personal feedback, these platforms create tailored wellness programs to address both physical and mental health challenges.²⁹

Google's Demis Hassabis envisions AI assistants like DeepMind's Astra, which can "see" and "hear" the physical world, learning first in simulated environments before tackling real-world challenges. This approach could accelerate AI's ability to understand human needs, from stress triggers to mental health patterns, making it an invaluable tool for Veterans and First Responders.^{30,31}

Conclusion

For older generations, AI isn't just a tech trend – it's a lifeline for younger Veterans and First

Responders. By embracing AI's potential, Boomers and Gen Xers can advocate for its ethical use and ensure it supports human-centric care. AI's ability to personalize, predict, and intervene can empower individuals to manage stress proactively, enhancing well-being and productivity. AI is not to be feared but understood and harnessed. For Veterans and First Responders, it's a tool to reclaim time, health, and happiness, something every generation can rally behind. By leveraging AI's ability to personalize, predict, and intervene, all individuals can take a proactive approach to stress management and enhance their overall well-being.

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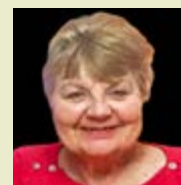
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The Preacher

By John E. Norvell, LT COL (RET), USAF

2 025 is the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War. It was not the war that killed Preacher; it was the years after the war.

I had known Preacher for two years before we became roommates during the war. Preacher and I had gone to Air Force Undergraduate Navigator Training together and worked as a team during the trek at Survival School. The trek was exhausting. Thankfully, I teamed up with him. He encouraged me and

always shared some motivation when I felt like giving up. That was the purpose of our training. We had to rely on each other. We were a team.

We both ended up at Udorn RTAFB in Thailand flying combat missions. After my first roommate, Fast Eddy, moved out, Preacher became my new roommate. He was a good guy, and we liked sharing a room. Of course, at this point he wasn't The Preacher yet.

In the summer of 1973, he picked up the nickname. It's funny how nicknames come about sometimes. Some make sense, while others are just random. For example, there was a captain who always wore sunglasses indoors, so everyone called him "Hollywood." There was also a captain named Upp who got stuck with the nickname "Tits." And then there was my roommate who became "The Preacher" because he had graduated from a Bible college.

Preacher and I would hang out with his friend who was a Phantom pilot in another fighter squadron and who would come to his Bible studies. We'd head to the Thai restaurant on base for dinner. I had never tried Thai food, so my first meal was quite adventurous. The waitress told me it was spicy. I figured "spicy" for Thai's couldn't be too bad, probably like the "hottish" heat from Tex-Mex I had in Arizona. And so I went for it. Let me tell you that the soup was intense! It burned my mouth, it burned going down, it burned in

my stomach, it burned in my intestines, and yes, it even burned coming out.

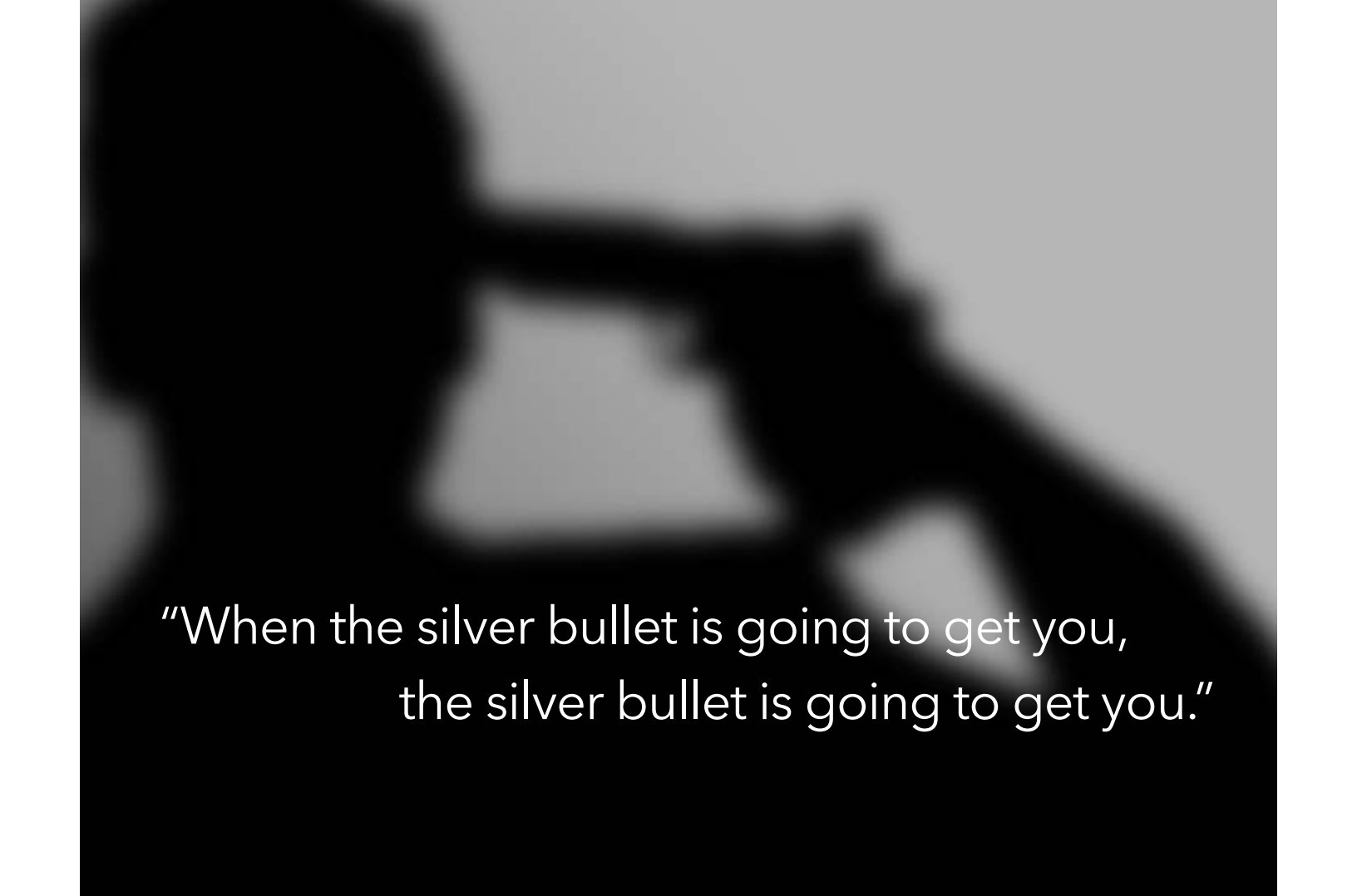
In November 1973, Preacher got some rough news. His wife hadn't winterized their car before driving it and without snow tires, the vehicle slid off the road and rolled down an embankment, getting wrecked. I saw that he was distraught. This was precisely the kind of news I had told my wife not to write to me about while overseas. I was glad we had that deal; no news like that was good news for me.

When combat ended, we had a lot of time on our hands. It was unsurprising that Preacher and I began to get on each other's nerves. We saw each other for perhaps one or two hours a day when we were flying combat and we were always together. By Christmas, we were no longer bickering at each other. Looking back, I realize that most of our tension came from being bored and having nothing to do. He had been in combat, and I think he felt a bit lost, too. We had started a little feud, but luckily it didn't last long. From then on, we got along well for the rest of our time in Thailand.

I had a fulfilling career in the Air Force, but I can't help but feel for Preacher, who faced a much more challenging path.

After returning home from his deployment in





"When the silver bullet is going to get you,
the silver bullet is going to get you."

Thailand, he and his wife went through a painful divorce. It's possible that the strain of his remote tour took a toll on their relationship. Preacher later remarried, but that new marriage also ended in heartbreak. It's deeply saddening to see how his career, which started so promisingly, ultimately stalled, leading him to retire as a captain after 20 years of dedicated service.

One can only imagine the lasting effects of combat on a person's life. Preacher likely carried some heavy burdens from his time at Udorn. With his background from a Bible college and his deep faith, one wonders if those harrowing months of bombing were more than he could bear. My heart goes out to him for his struggles during and after his service.

Was it Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder? I may never find the answer.

Among fighter pilots, there's a saying: "When the silver bullet is going to get you, the silver bullet is going to get you." It's heartbreaking to

think that Preacher carried that weight in his mind for over 20 years. One night, he took a gun and blew out his brain. Preacher chose a heartbreaking ending, but it didn't have to be that way.

After the war, I found myself engulfed in a whirlwind of emotions. Anger often bubbled beneath the surface, and I felt adrift, missing the intensity of combat. The effects of exposure to Agent Orange made me very sick and time seemed to weigh heavily on my shoulders, plunging me into deep feelings of depression. In those darkest moments, thoughts of suicide crept in and I can genuinely understand how isolated Preacher felt. It's all too easy to believe you're the only one grappling with such intense struggles. During this difficult time, I discovered that focusing on my family provided me with a glimmer of strength and hope. It wasn't an easy journey, and healing took time, but I learned that each small step I took made a meaningful difference. I may not fully understand the depth

of Preacher's experiences or the pain he endured, but it's important to remember that many people care deeply and are ready to provide support through tough times.

If you ever find yourself in that dark place,

please know you're not alone. I urge you to reach out for help. It won't always be easy but taking it one day at a time can lead to new beginnings. Each day offers a chance to leave the weight of the past behind.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John E. Norvell is a retired US Air Force lieutenant colonel. He is a decorated air combat Veteran and a former Assistant Professor of military history at the US Air Force Academy. Norvell has written for various newspapers, and historical journals. His memoir, "Fighter 'Gator," is available on Amazon and other platforms. A 1966 graduate of Hobart College, he was awarded an honorary doctorate in 2024 for his contributions to Veterans' affairs.



BODY ELECTRIC

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The American Institute of Stress is an executive producer of Body Electric: Electroceuticals and the Future of Medicine, a documentary film aimed to revolutionize the way we think about health and the human body. This 68 minute movie, by British producer/director/writer Justin Smith, is available online through AIS.



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Worlds Crossing Over

By Robert Rail, PhD

Please forgive my rambling, uncoordinated, incoherent reflections of a past devoid of any form of continuity, but that is comprised of the recollections in my mind that thunder into my consciousness like a bolt of lightning, or roll in like a fog, where I know not what is going to be remembered. My mind is lost between crossing worlds of past and present and I cannot hold onto or separate, the “back then” from the “here and now.”

I can be on a city sidewalk back home on a warm sunny day, where the grass is painstakingly groomed and people are busily walking about with purpose in their steps with cars passing by, where one and all are “calm and safe.”

And out of the “somewhere” of my past life I find myself pulled and dragged back to where my mind is so very clearly torn from the now and plunged into the then.

I was so damn tired, always tired, and always on the alert for any chow that would keep me going, not knowing where or when the next chance to eat will come. Never to enjoy the food, only eating to stave off hunger and stay strong for what “would” always come next.

My pockets “constantly” must be stuffed with some of the salvageable stuff from the government issued MRE packs (meals ready to eat). I just toss most of the government issue chow packets that are packed for twenty years in green sealed wrap and that leave that twenty four hour “after taste” to a local war zone Arab kid who will always put his right hand on his chest as a sign of thanks, and coldly fake smile, grinningly with just his mouth, while his eyes truly mirror the emptiness of his gesture of thanks. No little girls or women can be given anything, because they would be beaten for accepting anything and have it taken away from them or stomped into the ground, despite their hunger,

because they are regarded and treated as little more than animals scurrying on the streets by the local Muslim culture. They would incur the wrath of males for accepting anything from a non-tribal.

It was told to me by my Kurdish interpreter that “you could risk your life dragging a Muslim woman from her burning home, but she would just run right back into the flames to die as she had been trained since birth to do so.” As all of these recollections flashed through my out-of-control and confused mind in a flash, with momentary glazed eyes and blank expression between my stumbling steps, I continue walking on the well-groomed city side walk back home, once again back to the now, but still faltering between worlds. Both of these worlds are too real and far too enduring for me.

Dinner is always supposed to be a very good time at home with the family that pretends to know who I am now, and sometimes friends, who I no longer can talk revealingly to anymore, sharing past favorite, good-tasting foods in a warm, uncomfortably safe, welcoming setting, with seasonal decorations, sometimes creating a festive atmosphere for “all of them.” And out of the “somewhere” of my past life, I find myself pulled and dragged back to where my mind is so very clearly torn from the now and plunged into the then.

Over there, we chowed down after checking our 360 (all around us) and all line-of-sight

And out of the "somewhere" of my past life I find myself pulled and dragged back to where my mind is so very clearly torn from the now and plunged into the then.



openings (scoped and sighted) and egress / ingress, and un-sandbagged windows, with no stupid damn weapons stack (never give up your weapon or the last round in it).

When I have hot chow in front of me and a fork in my hand, all is good, with a free hand for my weapon response to "oh shit, what's that?" Then we chow down on whatever we can get our fork into. We chow down, "hungry or not," so we stay strong, and so we don't end up hungry and weak later, which always ended up happening anyway. When you are on the "edge" you burn through a lot of chow energy fast. Later you pull a dirty cheese sandwich that was stuffed into your pocket walking out of the chow hall and snarf it in three bites while walking the tire ruts (no mines in the ruts) along a rutted pothole road made by thin skin (non- armored) and armored vehicles, washing it down with the last of the Gatorade from the chow hall in your gear pack. That combination made a great feast that sat very well in the stomach.

As I sat at home eating off a clean white plate, with the choice of spoons or forks, I would subconsciously pause and silently smile about that dirty cheese sandwich quenched with a plastic bottle of Gatorade. It was a good "then for there."

I am always so damn anxious and worried about driving back home. I just can't get used to driving for the fun of it, like it used to be, and just going here and there to "get out" and cruise the neighborhood. That was all when I was someone else and not who I am now. I check the expiration date on my license and the tag on the plates on the car repeatedly, always wondering if I have enough gas, compulsively checking and rechecking over and over until I become so angry about who and how I have become now,

and can't even shake the thought that it's better to get blown out of the vehicle from an IED than to wear a seat belt and suck up the blast damage. And how the hell do I remember using a charge card at a pump? Watch the speed limit, have to stop even if no one is around, and don't stare anyone into a confrontation because you can't just take them out or break a neck here. You just have to "be nice," no matter how damn easy and satisfying it would be to tear some clown apart.

And out of the "somewhere" of my past life, I find myself pulled and dragged back to where my mind is so very clearly torn from the now and plunged into the then.

If I smell any burning or smoke or spilled fuel, I am back there again, where in a split second, it seems like I am again, deep in a dream that to me is ever so real, with IEDs everywhere. Can't let them get close on my bumper! Can't let them pin in close to my front! Can't let them flank next to my vehicle! My strong breathing is telling me my body is getting ready for "anything" that will come through the thoughts that bring forth my reality.

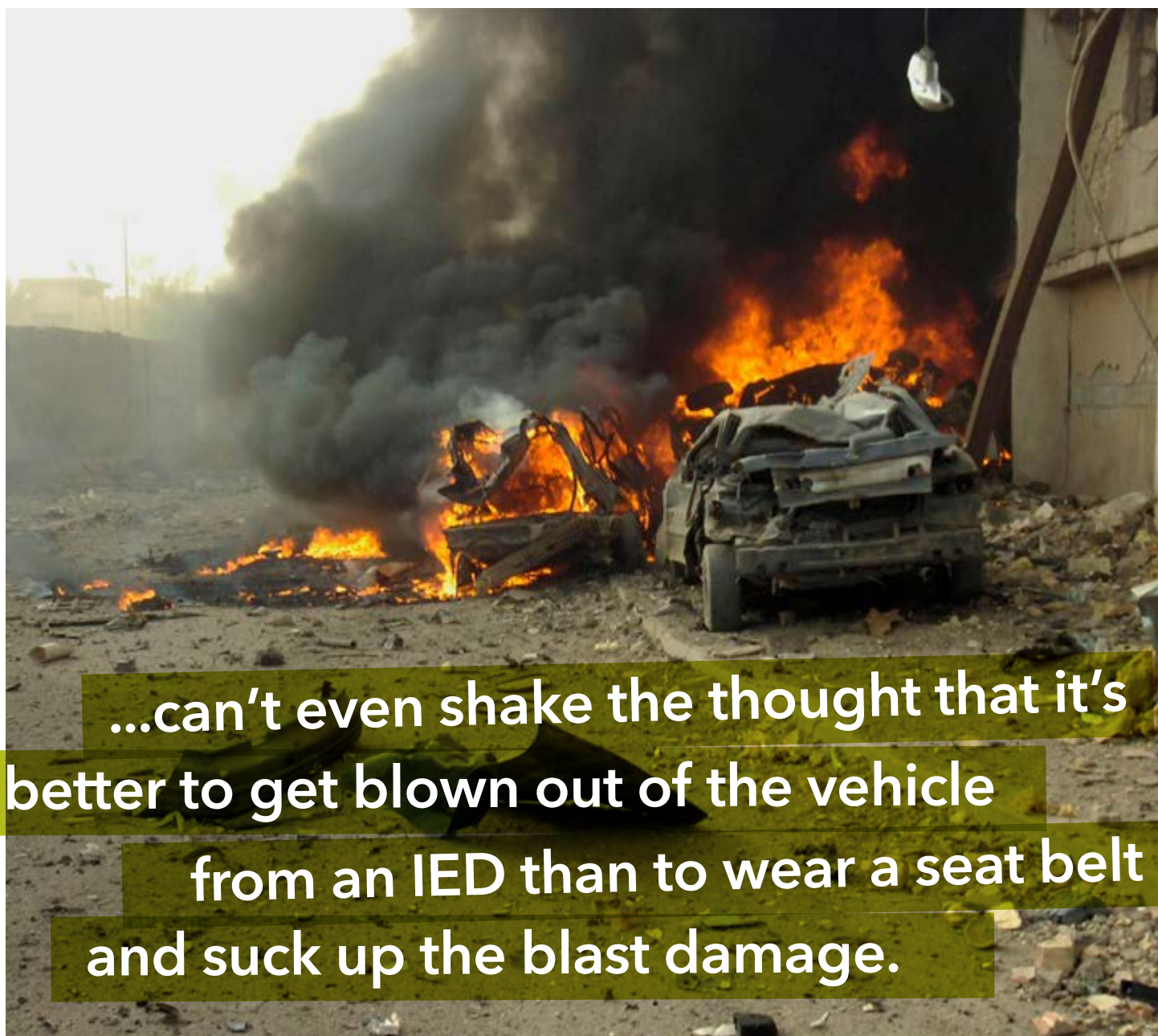
They crowd my rear bumper to detonate an IED (explosive device), and they stop in front of me to put me into a vulnerable pinned-in position. They drive next to me on the road for an open cross weapons shot, I drive with open windows, regardless of whether it's hot or cold, because it's better to eat just a bullet than to eat or dodge a bullet with the glass fragments added in. They all must stay back one hundred meters, because I have the road and they must end up in the ditch. My mind locks on "taking them out" without hesitation. You are only safe if you take them out first.

It is so damn great to go out to eat but I hate the people that are also eating where we go.

They are all just pathetic sheep who waddle in, feed, and waddle out. All the chow tastes so great and you don't have to walk a chow line and "take what is dumped on your tray so you aren't hungry later."

My wife is not just wonderful because of who she is (one very tough lady), but what she does

for everyone else and how she tolerates and puts up with the "both" of me. When I walk into a restaurant, it becomes a tactical deployment for control of the field of fire. I have to sit with my back to the wall and be able to step out to a standing position without being blocked in without an exit strategy. Even when I was a



...can't even shake the thought that it's better to get blown out of the vehicle from an IED than to wear a seat belt and suck up the blast damage.

Out of the “somewhere” of my past life I find myself pulled and dragged back to where my mind is so very clearly torn from the now and plunged into the then.

street cop in the Chicago area, I was tactically aware and ready for any mutt, anytime, who got the impulse to play their games with me. I even had cut out the inside of the right pocket on my duty leather jacket so I could have my hand on my weapon when my hand was in my right pocket, as I would casually talked to anyone who smiled with just their mouth, or stood with their strong hand a foot back, dressed in heavy coats (concealing weapon) for hot weather, or had their hands where I couldn't see them. I was always very nice and overly polite. On the seldom and rare times that I took a forceful first strike (there is no second place trophy on the street) action, I would look down on the semiconscious mongrel and say, “You all right buddy, you okay?” Most of the time they didn't even remember what I had done or what just happened. Along with my back to the wall, I “required” a view of the door/s and windows that weren't sandbagged, and for me that was better than watching a movie.

What really upset me was when I would see some of the “damn, dumb stupid crap” (DDSC), that my brothers and sisters in uniform would do when out amongst the mutt inhabitants here back in the states. My wife would just grab my arm (she was a tactical and martial arts master in her own right) and whisper “it won't help, you don't know them, just let it go.”

The DDSC would be on a meal/coffee break with their back to the door. They would be on a vehicle stop and lean in the driver's side door to look around. They would be standing in line in a store with people passing by and not covering

their weapon with their arm. And that is just the tip of the tactical failure “iceberg” of “situational awareness!” So damn much relentlessly plagues your thoughts from the war zones that can and has gotten so many wounded and killed over there. I always remember that you get a place to die and a time to live and will not know where or when.

And out of the “somewhere” of my past life I find myself pulled and dragged back to where my mind is so very clearly torn from the now and plunged into the then.

Walking down a street between blown out war zone buildings that are built threateningly close together with too many ambush openings, or along dirt paths and roads with no tire tracks to walk in to avoid the land mines, is all like watching a movie about someone else that is in your body that not you, where anything can happen and you're not in control of your own body anymore and have lost “something” of yourself to somewhere else. I unblinkingly hawk eye all the locals walking by me, some within knife range and all within bomb or gun range, some braced against the too close walls of the narrow streets or sitting on little stools humped over a teacup and “never” speaking above a whisper. They all have something to tell you “without saying a word, they yell out everything they don't want you to know by how they look and move” and there is so much more that you “must” understand, learn, and know to live.

How are they walking? Are they walking while staring intently at your weapon, and not your

eyes, and then you know what they fear about you. Or are they going somewhere or idly slowly walking looking for a vulnerable moment of a turnback from you? Or are they moving slower more like predator stalking looking for prey with their head unnaturally fixed while their eyes dart wildly staring at everything within the range of their unknown intent?

They are all going somewhere doing something. I refuse to forget what the past has gifted me as a lesson in the blood of others that is not and cannot be severed from my mind. I see someone wearing a heavy coat on a hot day, to conceal what... weapons, C4 or some other rigged toy? You must suspect everything and everyone is there to attack and kill you and your partners every second of every day! You trust, relax, or allow yourself to be distracted... and you die, and the worst that can happen is that you fail to protect your partners and that I cannot ever comprehend and refuse to live with.

My eyes instinctively glance to the pants (if wearing pants) cuffs to see if they are even or if one pants pocket is weighed down with a weapon that makes the one pants cuff lower than the other? And is the collar on that pocket side of a shirt pulled down by the neck concealing a knife, device or gun? Or is the lean narrow smoldering hate filled face approaching you betrayed by the image of a skinny face on robed obese body laboring to carry a soon to be detonated sacrificial gift of martyrdom?

When does an idle wayward remembrance, triggered by random sights, sounds, or smells, become an overwhelming mind controlling memory of a past that was not being obsessed about seconds before? When do memories become an overwhelming mania, and debilitating diversion from your safe reality, and when do your past reflections inflict such uncontrollable interfering parallels into present reality that you may not always be aware of where you really are?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Rail, PhD is a retired American Police Officer, University Instructor, and published author who is recognized internationally as one of the foremost experts on terrorism recognition. As a war zone trainer for the International Police Task Force IPTF in Bosnia, Kosovo, and the US State Department, and DOJ in Iraq, Dr. Rail was responsible for designing curriculum and instructing elite police officers from 63 nations who have been deployed to various war zones of the world. He was also named as a physical confrontation advisor and resource training provider to select personnel of NATO and OSCE. Dr. Rail was a resident instructor at the Specialized Advanced Training Unit of the High Institute of the Baghdad Police College in Iraq. He is a frequent contributor to publications, television, and radio programs and conducts both training and consulting services for universities and corporations worldwide. He is the author of five books: *Surviving the International War Zone*; *The Unspoken Dialogue*; *Defense Without Damage*; *Custodial Cuffing and Restraint*; and *Reactive Handcuffing Tactics*.



A Soldier Reads Emily Dickinson

By Tom McMurtry, DAIS, Police Officer, CPT (RET), US Army

One might not think that poetry written by a nineteenth century reclusive spinster would be relatable or meaningful to a twenty-first century combat Veteran, but you would be incorrect. When I read Emily Dickinson's poetry, I hear the hopeful voice of a fighter and a survivor.

I first read the poetry of Emily Dickinson as an assignment in my high school English literature class. I thought it was okay, but it didn't speak to my teenage mind

the way Rudyard Kipling's work did. ("IF" is still my favorite poem.) I was reintroduced to Dickinson recently on the occasion of a visit to her home / museum in Amherst, Massachusetts.

Before arriving, I reacquainted myself with the story of Dickinson's life and read/reread some of her more well-known poems. In class fifty years ago, my task was to read her poems and understand the point she was trying to make. This time I read her poems to discover how they made me feel. I found that they could be bright or dark, urgent or peaceful, forward-looking or lonely. Sometimes there were multiple emotions in the same poem.

At the museum, an interpretive guide escorted us through the Dickinson homestead. She was very engaging and extremely knowledgeable. As we moved from room to room, she would quote poems that had been written during different periods of the poet's life. The guide encouraged questions and comments from us. At one point, our guide noted that there was a general feeling of melancholy about Dickinson's collected poems. I commented that I thought her poems felt hopeful. The guide was intrigued and said that at the end of the tour she would be very interested in understanding why I felt that way.

When the time came, I openly admitted that I was no Dickinson scholar and had read only a fraction of her nearly 1800 poems. Of

the poems I had read so long ago, many were, in fact, less than joyful. I pointed out, however, that most of them seemed, too, to have an uplift at the end. I found this to be hopeful. Then I explained that I was reading Dickinson from the vantage point of a combat Veteran and I saw her as a fellow survivor of hard times. My Soldier's brain kept hearing Miss Emily's voice ending her poems by saying, "I'm still here." The interpreter thanked me for this new insight and pointed out that Dickinson had left no notes to explain or describe the meaning of her poetry, so every reader was free to find their own meaning in her work.

To further explain what I mean, here are my personal interpretations of what I feel Emily Dickinson is revealing in five of her better-known poems. The poem titles are in parentheses:

- I have felt unseen and unheard and I'm still here. (*I'm Nobody! Who are You?*)
- I have had mental health struggles and I'm still here. (*I Felt a Funeral in My Brain*)
- I have had no literary success and I'm still here. (*Success is Counted Sweetest*)
- I know life is short and uncertain and I'm still here. (*Because I Could Not Stop for Death*)
- I have felt a longing for physical intimacy and I'm still here. (*Wild Nights - Wild Nights*)

I was part of the Invasion of Iraq in the Spring of 2003. Once things settled down and the

There came a day
at- Summer's end,
when I thought that such
men for the Saints
were Remembrance of -

The Sun, as common,
went abroad,
The flowers, accustomed,
Here,

As if you had the
Society of
that - with all things
now -

occupation began, I was able to send emails home. Looking back, some of my emails reflected many of the same emotions listed above. I would describe going through good times, bad times, hard times, and sad times..and I was still there. I would sign off the emails to my family with three numbers. The numbers of days since I left home. The number of days I had been in Iraq. The number of combat missions in which I had been a participant. For example, on October 10, 2003, I signed off with:

218 - days away from home

158 - days in Iraq

62 - combat missions

1 - day closer to home

My last thought was always the same. I was one day closer to home. This was my hopeful ending. This was my finishing uplift. I will let Emily have the last word on hope.

"Hope" is the Thing with Feathers

By Emily Dickinson

"Hope" is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I've heard it in the chilliest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tom McMurtry, DAIS, Police Officer (RET), CPT (RET), US Army Special Forces

has spent most of his adult life serving others. He joined the US Army at the age of nineteen, volunteered for and completed Infantry, Airborne, and Special Forces training. After three years serving on a Special Forces HALO Team Tom became a Reservist. He remained in the Special Operations Reserve for twenty more years. He was recalled to active duty for the invasion of Iraq as a Psychological Operations Specialist, during which he was awarded the Bronze Star Medal. After his combat tour Tom returned home and entered the police academy at age 49. He served as a patrol officer for 15 years and received the Distinguished Action Award for his response on the night of the Dayton mass shooting in the Oregon District. Tom retired at the age of 65 but was recalled to part time duty by his department at the height of the pandemic to help cover for fellow officers who were sick. All of that aside, Tom will tell you that he takes greatest pride in his 45-year marriage to his wife, Holly, along with their five children and ten grandchildren.



**I'm Nobody! Who are you? (260)**

I'm Nobody! Who are you?
Are you - Nobody - too?
Then there's a pair of us!
Don't tell! they'd advertise - you
know!
How dreary - to be - Somebody!
How public - like a Frog -
To tell one's name - the livelong
June -
To an admiring Bog!

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain, (340)

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
And Mourners to and fro
Kept treading - treading - till it
seemed
That Sense was breaking through -

And when they all were seated,
A Service, like a Drum -
Kept beating - beating - till I thought
My mind was going numb -

And then I heard them lift a Box
And creak across my Soul
With those same Boots of Lead,
again,
Then Space - began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear,
And I, and Silence, some strange
Race,
Wrecked, solitary, here -

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
And I dropped down, and down -
And hit a World, at every plunge,
And Finished knowing - then -

Success is counted sweetest (112)

Success is counted sweetest
By those who ne'er succeed.
To comprehend a nectar
Requires sorest need.

Not one of all the purple Host
Who took the Flag today
Can tell the definition
So clear of victory

As he defeated - dying -
On whose forbidden ear
The distant strains of triumph
Burst agonized and clear!

Wild nights - Wild nights! (269)

Wild nights - Wild nights!
Were I with thee
Wild nights should be
Our luxury!

Futile - the winds -
To a Heart in port -
Done with the Compass -
Done with the Chart!

Rowing in Eden -
Ah - the Sea!
Might I but moor - tonight -
In thee!

Because I could not stop for Death - (479)

Because I could not stop for Death -
He kindly stopped for me -
The Carriage held but just Ourselves -
And Immortality.

We slowly drove - He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility -

We passed the School, where
Children strove
At Recess - in the Ring -
We passed the Fields of Gazing
Grain -
We passed the Setting Sun -

Or rather - He passed Us -
The Dews drew quivering and Chill -
For only Gossamer, my Gown -
My Tippet - only Tulle -

We paused before a House that
seemed
A Swelling of the Ground -
The Roof was scarcely visible -
The Cornice - in the Ground -

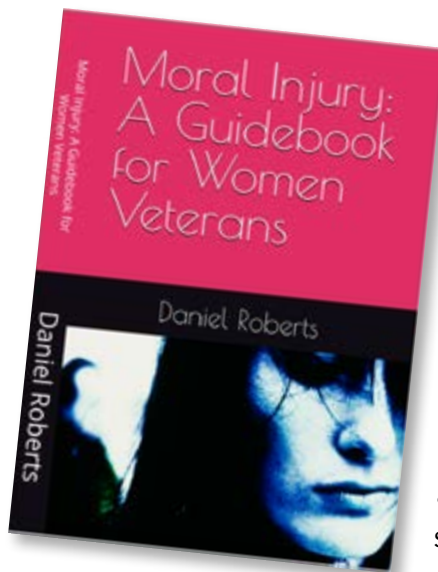
Since then - 'tis Centuries - and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses' Heads
Were toward Eternity -

*The Poems of Emily Dickinson: Reading Edition,
edited by Ralph W. Franklin, Cambridge, Mass.:
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Moral Injury: A Guidebook for Women Veterans

By Daniel L. Roberts, DM/IST

Moral Injury: A Guidebook for Women Veterans provides a comprehensive exploration of moral injury, particularly as it affects women who have served in the military. Beginning with the foundational aspects of moral injury, the book delves into definitions, historical context, and the various sources that can lead to it, from combat experiences and leadership decisions to cultural expectations and ethical dilemmas. It elucidates the devastating effects of moral injury on veterans and their families, highlighting the challenges in recognition and diagnosis due to its unique presentation compared to conditions like PTSD. Moreover, the guidebook offers a



range of intervention strategies and daily practices for healing and rebuilding, emphasizing the importance of forgiveness, mindfulness, connecting with nature, engaging in meaningful activities, and utilizing support systems. Overall, this book serves as a valuable resource for understanding, addressing, and mitigating the impact of moral injury within the women veteran community.

Women Veterans can receive a free copy of the book by emailing Dr. Daniel L. Roberts at droberts@misns.org. If you are not a Woman Veteran, but want a copy of the book, email Dr. Roberts and make a \$10 donation to <https://misns.org/donation/>.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Daniel L. Roberts, DM/IST is a distinguished leader in the field of mental health and veteran care, serving as the President and CEO of the Moral Injury Support Network for Servicewomen, Inc. This esteemed non-profit organization is dedicated to pioneering women-focused education and research on moral injury, providing vital support to those who have served our nation. With over two decades of experience, Dr. Roberts has been a cornerstone in offering emotional and spiritual guidance to both male and female members of the armed forces.



Dr. Roberts' recent publications include *Moral Injury Risk and Protective Factors in Women Veterans* (Current Treatments Options in Psychiatry), *Providing Chaplain Support to Morally Injured Servicewomen* (Allons-y: Journal of Children, Peace, and Security), *Male Chaplains and Female Soldiers: Are There Gender and Denominational Differences in Military Pastoral Care?* (Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling), *Providing Spiritual Leadership to Survivors of Violence Against Women* (SAGE Business Cases), *Combating Religiously Influenced Racism in Organizations* (SAGE Business Cases), *Modifying the Qualitative Delphi Technique to Develop the Female Soldier Support Model* (The Qualitative Report), *Women and Leadership: Using the Delphi Technique to Effect Organizational Change* (SAGE Business Cases), and *The Comprehensive Female Soldier Support Model: A Delphi Study* (Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy).

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How to Make Stress Your Friend

By Paul T. Bartone, PhD, COL (RET)

We all have stress in our lives, whether from finances, relationships, work demands, health issues, job changes, or just plain uncertainty about the future. For many of us with military or first responder backgrounds, it's past experiences and losses from combat operations that can haunt our memories for years. There's also plenty of advice about how to cope with stress, which primarily seems to involve avoiding it in some way, such as performing

relaxation and mindfulness exercises. While such approaches can help in the short term, in the end, they are just "band-aids" that don't really solve anything. But there is a much better way: to develop a hardiness mindset in which you start to look at stress as a friend and advisor. Stress is a part of life that can teach us valuable lessons and help us grow into stronger and more capable people.

The hardiness mindset was first discovered in 1979 by researchers at the University of Chicago. By looking at groups of high-stress workers and comparing those who developed stress-related diseases (eg., high blood pressure, heart attacks) to those who remained healthy, they were able to identify the mental and psychological qualities linked to healthy stress coping. They called these traits the three C's of Commitment, Control and Challenge. Combined together, they comprise the Hardiness Mindset.

People who score high in hardiness have a strong sense of life and work commitment and a deep interest and curiosity about the world around them. They also believe that their actions make a difference, that they are largely in control of their own destinies. And they tend to see change and disruptions in life as challenges to overcome and from which to learn. High-scoring hardy people interpret stressful and painful experiences as a normal part of existence, part of life that is overall interesting and worthwhile.

The high-hardy person, while not immune from the ill-effects of stress, is strongly resilient in dealing with highly stressful conditions.

In contrast, people low in hardiness are detached and uninterested, feel powerless to change their circumstances, and try to avoid things that are new and different. They prefer a world of sameness and security. They often find their lives rather dull and boring.

When encountering stress, the hardy person doesn't shrink away or try to avoid it, but looks for ways to solve the problem. Despite the temporary disruption and even with the pain that stressful situations can cause, a hardiness mindset helps one recognize that stress is part of life for everyone, and it can always teach invaluable life lessons. Paradoxically perhaps, stress can be an advisor and friend, helping us to grow and be better prepared for whatever future challenges may come our way.

What would this actually look like? Among the many big stressors in life, one that most of us will face sooner or later, happens when we lose a job, either through lay-offs, budget cuts, retirement, or transitioning out of the military. Below is a (fictional) scenario in which two individuals have been forced to leave their jobs in the military. In the first case, Don is low in hardiness, and tends to avoid the situation. In the second example, Mike, shows how a person with a high hardiness mindset might react.



CASE 1: “Don was scared. He’d been in the military for the past 6 years, and was pretty comfortable with his job as a heavy equipment mechanic. He earned a decent paycheck and the medical benefits were great. His two children were both born in Army hospitals. Now the military was sizing down and he was being forced out. He always figured he’d make a career in the military, and never really thought much about work on the outside. Now he had to decide what to do next and was afraid he wouldn’t be able to provide for his family. All his work in the military dealt with some highly specialized equipment, like tanks. Who cares about that on the outside? His job prospects didn’t look good. The more he thought about it, the more stressed-out he became. As his ETS (Expiration Term of Service) date drew near, he started spending more time at the club and bowling alley, and drinking more than usual. When his wife, Beth, tried to talk with him about the future, he told her to stop worrying and changed the subject. Don was having more trouble sleeping and started feeling depressed. He even stopped going to his kids’ soccer games.

Job changes are stressful, like any major changes in life. In this situation, it’s natural to worry about the future. Will you be better or worse off than you were before? But failing to address

the change won’t solve the problem. There is a better way.

People who develop a hardiness outlook or mindset are not thrown off-kilter when sudden changes or stressful situations come up. Instead, they look at them as challenges to overcome and are confident that they have the skills and resources to succeed. Rather than avoid or

deny, they look for things to do and constructive actions they can undertake to solve the problem. One of the best things about hardiness is that it can be learned and mastered.

CASE #2: “Mike was also being forced out of the military after 7 years as a heavy equipment operator. He wanted

to stay until retirement, but with this latest RIF (Reduction in Force), that wasn’t an option anymore. He was a bit scared and worried about providing for his family, but he saw “the writing on the wall.” He knew he was going to have to prepare for a job in the civilian world. While he knew it would be a difficult transition for his family, he felt he could cope with this challenge, just as he had survived other stressful experiences in his past. One of the first things Mike did was sit down with his wife, Debby, to review their options. While the transition back to civilian life was sure to be disruptive, they started to focus on the positive advantages. For



We call this a “mindset” because hardiness (or lack of it) is a set of habits, “habits of the mind” that develop over a lifetime.

example, they would be free to move wherever they wanted, maybe even back to Minnesota where most of Debby’s family lived, and where she had left her previous job as a dental assistant. As soon as Mike had an ETS date, he started talking to some friends who had already left the military. They advised him to start working on his resume and get help from his local Transition Assistance Program (TAP). He went online and found more information, attending every TAP seminar he could. They helped him write a resume that emphasized the many marketable skills he’d learned in the military and even advised him about some new clothes to buy. As he went through some practice interviews, he started getting more and more excited about his future prospects. While still a bit nervous, Mike found himself actually looking forward to his new life and felt confident he could find a good job on the outside.”

We call this a “mindset” because hardiness (or lack of it) is a set of habits, “habits of the mind” that develop over a lifetime. It sums up how you have gotten used to looking at the world around you and making sense of it, including yourself and other people. Like all habits, these mental habits are not easy to change. But the good news is that whatever your hardiness levels, there are things you can do, little by little, to break the bad “low hardy” habits and build up a stronger hardiness mindset. Focusing on the basic building blocks of Commitment, Control and Challenge, here are some exercises you can do on your own that will strengthen your hardiness and to begin to turn stress into a positive force in your life.

Hardiness-Commitment is all about being actively involved and engaged in activities and the surrounding world, as well as getting a sense of

competence and self-worth. At the opposite pole of commitment is alienation, or feeling that your life is meaninglessness. Try the following to build your commitment:

- Take time to think about what’s important and interesting to you... your personal values and goals. Finding the things that matter to you and then focusing more of your time and energy in those directions will increase your overall sense of purpose and meaning in life
- Work on improving your skills and competence in some area that is important to you. This builds your confidence and feelings of engagement in life
- Pay attention to what’s going on in the world around you, read, and observe. Be curious!
- Take pride in your positive accomplishments and be grateful for the good things in your life. There is wisdom in the old saying “Count your blessings!”

Hardiness-Control is the belief that you can control or influence what is happening and what is going to happen in life. The opposite of control is a sense of powerlessness or helplessness to do anything that will make a difference. Try the following to build control:

- Focus your time and energy on things you can control or influence. Don’t waste time on the things that are not within your power to change
- Work on projects that are within your capabilities, things that may be difficult and challenging, but are still within the realm of your control
- With really big and difficult jobs, break them up into manageable pieces so you can see progress
- For situations you truly can’t control or solve, redirect your energy to areas where you have more influence and can make a difference.

Hardiness-challenge is a positive perspective on change and variety in life. People high scoring in challenge tend to take changes in stride, see variety as part of the richness of life, and are optimistic about the future. On the opposite side, people who are low in challenge are always seeking security, want everything to be simple and predictable. They are somewhat fearful of the future. Try the following to build your challenge:

- Try new things. Take some risks! Branching out into new areas can be scary, but taking risks is an important part of life that stimulates curiosity. Stretch yourself!
- Be willing to change your plans to meet changing conditions. We live in a world of change. Things are changing all around us. Be flexible and willing to accept these changes. When you make plans, do not lock them in stone
- When you fail at something or experience loss or disappointment, ask yourself: what can I learn from this? Rather than getting depressed or

beating yourself up for failing, ask what you can learn from it. Hardy people take advantage of situations, even when they don't succeed. See what you can learn, even when you fail

- Don't dwell on past disappointments. Learn a lesson, forgive, and look ahead

By building up your hardiness mindset, you will start to see stressful situations in a different light. Stress is uncomfortable, but it's not all bad. With a hardiness mindset, stress can be your friend and advisor, helping you to benefit from tough experiences and to live a richer, happier, more fulfilling life.

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Paul T. Bartone, PhD, COL (RET) is a Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute for National Security Policy, National Defense University. A retired U.S. Army Colonel and research psychologist, Bartone served as Commander of the U.S. Army Medical Research Unit-Europe, and taught leadership and psychology at the National Defense University Eisenhower School and at the U.S. Military Academy West Point, where he also served as Director of the Leader Development Research Center. As the Army's senior research psychologist, he served as Research Psychology Consultant to the Surgeon General and Assistant Corps Chief for Medical Allied Sciences. A Fulbright scholar, Bartone is past-President of the American Psychological Association's Society for Military Psychology, a charter member of the Association for Psychological Science, life member and Fellow of the American Psychological Association, and a Fellow of the Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society. He holds an MA and PhD in Psychology and Human Development from the University of Chicago.



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It's Okay to Not Be Okay

By Austin Snowden, Police Officer (RET)

Overhead cruiser lights flashing in the dark, siren wailing echoing off the walls of the city buildings. My speedometer reads over 90 MPH as I'm reading notes on my MDT screen and dispatch sends updates. I am in a race to confront another unknown dark force of evil, in a location of potential hidden dangers, for which I have no knowledge of their whereabouts. Arriving on scene, I run up to the condo of a domestic dispute where I am told the

wife and daughter are being held hostage by the husband/father. Within minutes of my partner knocking on the door, a male subject opens up the door, just enough to peak his head out and present a revolver at eye level. Shots from the subject whiz past my left ear like the sound of a bumble bee flying past my head, while biking on a hot summer day. Three of us return fire as the subject closes the front door during the exchange of rapid gunfire, "99! 99!" being shouted as an all call (signal 99) through the country dispatch center. We retreat back to cover, while keeping the sights of our handguns on the front door. I could feel my heart beating so hard, I could have sworn I saw it through my load bearing vest. Sirens screeched in the distance as far as one could hear. Our calvary was on the way to help us. This scenario called for desperate measures. I had no knowledge of what the suspect's motive was, other than the fact that he was intoxicated and had held his wife and 14 year old daughter hostage in the home. At least, this is what we were told while en route. Three to four hours into a standoff with S.W.A.T., the subject was located inside the condo by the front door, deceased with multiple gunshot wounds.

Even four years later, the memories, triggers, and flashbacks remain a constant. I thought long and hard about making a lateral transfer to a new department four months after this shooting, as if that would eliminate these demons from

following me. It did not. Things actually became worse. Five months into a new department (nine months after the shooting) I found myself involved in, yet another officer involved shooting. At this point, I was convinced that I was simply, a "sh*t magnet." Being one of the first officers on scene for another officer who was shot in the face in the line of duty, I knew early on that this officer's very life was now in my hands. With the help of six to eight more officers/deputies that arrived to render aid along my side, we were able to get the wounded officer onto Medflight to save his life and hopefully, to begin his very long road to recovery. I can remember being on my knees, pressed into this mucky, bloody dirt around this wounded officer, alongside two female deputies also rendering aid to this officer with me. We were like a Nascar pit crew, cutting gauze, packing, wrapping, cutting more gauze, packing, wrapping, and keeping pressure on the entrance underneath his right eye and the exit wound to the front of his left ear. We were painted in his blood, which was all over our uniforms and our forearms. About eight yards to our right was the suspect, laying on his back with half of a face missing from a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head.

The crazy thing about this incident is that this critically injured officer lived. I still talk to him periodically and it gives me great joy to see him



One thing stands out from both of these incidents for me; one word: teamwork.

alive and living life to the fullest. The scene was memorably catastrophic, however a blessing for the surprising outcome.

One thing stands out from both of these incidents for me; one word: teamwork. We simply cannot fight these battles in the field alone. We have to lean on one another to get the job done. I had faced nine months of chaos; however, I made it through with a whole lot of teamwork and joint efforts. What we don't expect, however, is the terrible aftermath and the long recovery process from being exposed to such trauma. I found myself fighting terrible demons on calls for the following two years. I lived with the horrific images of the subject from my shooting at domestic violence calls and too often, saw the bloody face of the officer that was shot on overdose victims. When these traumatic events would arise, I would experience horrendous tinnitus (high pitched ringing) in my ears, which I assumed stemmed from my shooting. The noises in my head would get so loud, I had to read people's lips to figure out what they were saying to me time and time again. I got very good at hiding these things from my colleagues. On the flip side, I was going home after work acting like a robot to my wife and kids, all while thinking about my gun sitting right there on my nightstand. Yes, I mean thinking about ending my life. I was simply getting tired of fighting. I came to the realization that I had to do something, not only for myself, but for my wife and twin babies. I went into work the very next day, walked into the locker room, and stared at my locker for no less than fifteen minutes. Being completely honest, a sense of comfort wrapped around me, as if God came down to tell me everything was going to be okay. I got dressed in my uniform and shortly thereafter, sat down with my sergeant in his office. I told him

everything, cringing the entire time; thinking about the judgement I was going to receive. I feared the gossip that was going to spread throughout the department, all while having no idea what would become of me and my career. I was confused, scared, and fearful for my family. Regardless, I laid it all out there. I knew I had to trust that feeling I'd had in the locker room. I could not let my family down or continue to go down this path without getting myself help. I was immediately placed on paid administrative leave and eventually, let go from the department after being medically terminated from law enforcement. This was far more than I could bear.

During my recovery, while on paid administrative leave, I decided to go to equine therapy, offered by a local retired Veteran and police officer. I was also receiving psychological treatment from one of the best clinical psychologists in the state of Ohio, if not the world, along with working out at the gym at least five days a week. I pushed myself to meet with close friends and to talk about my experiences with other police officers, not only to help with my personal healing, but also theirs. I was terminated several months later, once a medical decision was made for me. After all of this, I noticed an instant rebuilding of my family. I saw my kids being able to recognize who "daddy" was and to get excited when I would enter the room. My relationship with my wife flourished into romantic dates, in-depth conversations, and trips to destinations we talked about, but that I never had the time to do. I was finally able to attend family events and holidays, which was strange because I had missed so many of them. Additionally, I leaned on two to three other officers I had worked with and depended on those relationships, only to find that

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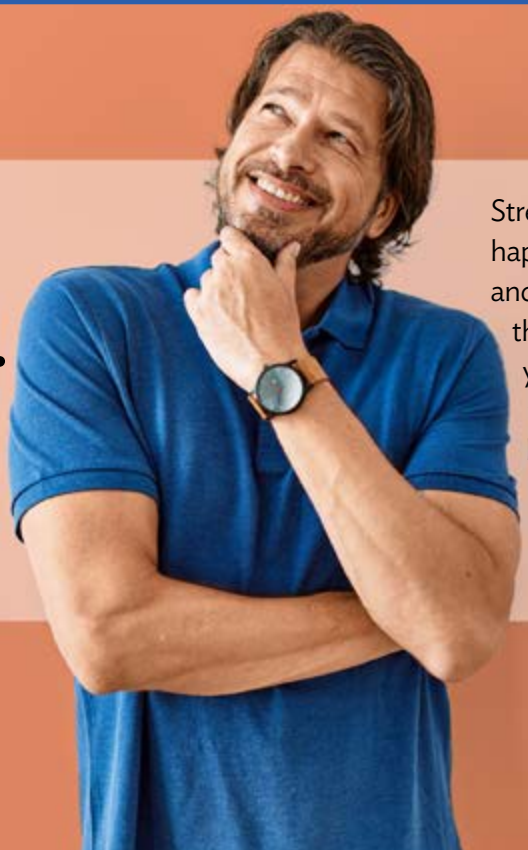


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I would engage in a variety of other training sessions with horses, where these magnificent animals would truly gauge where I was mentally.

we are actually all a little broken and need one another. Furthermore, there were three of the most beneficial actions that I took during this difficult time. First, I relied on my religious beliefs. I trusted in God so much, He was the first being I spoke to when I woke up in the morning and the last to speak to



before bedtime. I prayed often and read my Bible even more. A relationship with God is something I simply could not imagine not having, as I feel I was exposed to certain things through my tenure in law enforcement to lead others to Him. That is a very rewarding feeling for me.

One day I went to the gym, after charging my AirPods the previous night, and observed that my right AirPod was completely dead. I was confused, as this made no sense to me since they both charge simultaneously. I still put them in and walked into the gym, scanning the environment because... well, I am a cop. I am just not a big fan of human interaction. Ironically enough, while in the gym, I came in contact with a friend who was familiar with my current situation. He decided to check in with me. While speaking with him, I noticed that nearby, there was a blond-headed guy with a high and tight haircut and a very upright posture. You're probably thinking what I'm thinking; that he was either in the military or a cop. This gentleman came over to me and stated, "I'm sorry for inserting myself into your conversation, but something was telling me to talk to you." He went on to say, "I couldn't help but overhear your conversation, as I just charged

my headphones, but for some reason my right one is dead." I call this a "God Wink." This gentleman was an Ohio State Highway Patrol Trooper and through this conversation, oddly enough, we spoke about God's word. This conversation was full of encouragement and uplifting advice at such

a perfect time. We are still friends to this day and speak regularly.

Secondly, one is never too good or too well-put-together for therapy. I mentioned earlier that I had been relying on equine therapy. I would physically go into a giant open barn, with dirt floors and hay, to meet with the same two horses once weekly in the early morning. The horses would either stick by me or simply walk away. This is because they live life in the "now." If horses feel stressed or anxious, they just instinctively walk away. This teaches one to slow their breathing and to live in the "now," just like horses do. I would also engage in a variety of other training sessions with horses, where these magnificent animals would truly gauge where I was mentally. This was truly life-changing and my greatest recommendation for therapy by far.

The other form of therapy many of us are familiar with are the creepy office meetings with psychologists. I have seen the same clinical psychologist off and on for the last 4 years and she has changed my life in a drastic way. This not only involves providing me with coping mechanisms for my PTSD, but also just genuine life advice. I

consider her one of my biggest cheerleaders and these appointments are far from anything “creepy.” It feels like we are tackling everything together, as a cohesive unit. So, don’t underestimate or undermine the power of what you all call “the shrink.” Take advantage of these appointments.

Lastly, be vulnerable enough to tell your story. For the male species, we miss the mark on this a lot. We have this masculinity card that we just simply cannot put to the side, especially within the law enforcement community. We believe this makes us look “weak” or like less of a man. This holds just as true for female police officers. I am by no means saying that one has to go into every detail of traumatic events, as I don’t want to relive any of my traumatic events either. However, it helps to get

things off your chest, especially if one can share this with fellow officers. There is actually a greater chance they have either been through similar incidents or are even currently going through them. Rely on that “teamwork” mentality that we use in the field. Also pick up the phone and dial up your buddies. Hit them up and check in with them. One never knows if that number was dialed up at just the perfect time. Have the courage of conviction to have these difficult conversations and grow together. Just remember, you have options, you’re not alone in this fight, and it’s okay to not be okay. After all, if I never spoke up to get help, it’s highly likely you would have never known my story to begin with. May the lessons I have imparted resound within you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Austin Snowden, Police Officer (RET), has spent his professional career of twelve years serving others through law enforcement. He first began his journey as a Corrections Officer at the Preble County Sheriff’s Office at the age of eighteen. Shortly after, he transitioned to the role of Deputy Sheriff and eventually served two and half years as a School Resource Officer for the National Trail School District in Preble County. His compassion for public service and being a positive role model to youth was placed at the forefront of everything for which he stood. This was shown through the response of the community, the students, and the faculty at the school frequently. After eight and a half years with the Sheriff’s Office, he transferred to the Miami Township Police Department in Dayton, Ohio. Austin served one year with the Township, where he was awarded several times for his professionalism. Austin was awarded a Distinguished Service Medal for lifesaving actions he performed for a man that was attempting to kill himself by jumping from a bridge. He was awarded a Medal of Valor for his actions during an officer involved shooting in September of 2021. Austin finished his career with the Lebanon Police Department, after serving two and half years for the City of Lebanon. During his service, he was awarded a Life Saving Award for his lifesaving actions performed in 2022, by rendering aid to an officer who was shot in the head. All of that aside, Austin will tell you he is extremely grateful for his relationship with God due to his journey, and will speak loudly of how blessed and fortunate he is for his loving wife, Tori, along with his two year old twins.



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