

## **Review: *Faces of Combat, PTSD & TBI: One Journalist's Crusade to Improve Treatment for Our Veterans***

### **Remy Benoit**

Sometimes, sometimes we are greatly blessed by the right voice, the right words, the right book at the right time.

Pulitzer Prize winning, Crusading Journalist, Eric Newhouse has graced us with such a gift at the absolutely right time with his *Faces of Combat, PTSD & TBI: One Journalist's Crusade to Improve Treatment for Our Veterans*.

January 2009 presented us with the horror our soldiers face in war, and in coming home, with the simple fact that more of them committed suicide than died in combat. Take a moment, please, and let those words sink in—more deaths by their own hand than by IED's, than by bullets and bombs.

That fact is an indictment of us, each and everyone on us who endorses sending women and men to war and then ignoring their overwhelming needs in country and when they come home.

To fight a war you must designate an enemy. To have soldiers present themselves to combat you must stir up something that will enable them to confront and, yes, kill, another human being. That something is anger—anger that once turned on is very hard to turn off.

War is, by its very nature, destruction—leveling the civilized work of centuries—ending human life, not only of the soldiers of the enemy, but of those elderly, women, and children that we so euphemistically call *collateral damage*.

We, hopefully, raise our young to a standard of morality taught by their culture, instilled in them by their religious training. When they are on the field of combat, and in today's wars that field is just about everywhere they are, with just about no real downtime, that training is catastrophically challenged by the intense need to stay alive. Their entire code of conduct, code of ethics, training of what is right, what is wrong, is turned upside down. They will see things, have to do things, that are the stuff of nightmares, of that proverbial monster lurking at the top of the stairs, under the bed, in the basement of everything diabolical that terrifies us as humans.

We ask them to go into the unknown, to drive down roads blistered with IED's.

We ask them to go into private homes searching for the enemy—private homes with children in them, just like their own.

We ask them to pick up and bag pieces, brain matter, of their closest buddies, of civilians, of enemy soldiers.

We ask them to suffer Traumatic Brain Injury quietly, and to not speak of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder for fear of repercussions, losing benefits, and social and military stigma.

We ask them to not question the long term impact of Agent Orange, or Depleted Uranium on their bodies, and possibly the bodies of their still unborn children.

We ask them to do a thousand other soul wrenching things and then within just a few hours they are back in the world and asked to get up, have their cup of coffee, and get on with life.

War is insanity; asking them to leave that irrational world and come back and slip back into civilian

skin, heart, and soul is irrational. It is also unkind, exploitive, and deadly.

Such is the story, such is the reality, the Eric Newhouse presents us in *Faces of Combat, PTSD & TBI: One Journalist's Crusade to Improve Treatment for Our Veterans* as he gives us, word by word, page by heart rending page, the real stories, the sleeping and waking nightmares, of what has bored into those who know, up close and personal, war.

Sit down with Mr. Newhouse and LEARN.

Learn what happens when that anger, denial, pain, terror, loss come home and have no outlets but self, the community, co-workers, and nuclear families.

Learn the fear of forgetting because forgetting might just make you forget the buddy who died bleeding out in your arms, or who scattered into pieces on the ground around you; who splattered onto you.

Sit down with Mr. Newhouse's words and feel the frustration of months and months and months of waiting, pleading, red-taping their way through to try to find help from the VA.

Sit down with Mr. Newhouse's words and feel the bullets they eat, the cars they crash, the drugs and the alcohol they down in desperate attempts to end, or at least momentarily quiet, the never ending pain and begin to realize that by our not being there for them, by our not assiduously insisting on immediate, professional, and respectful treatment for their physical, mental, emotional, and soul wounds that we are part of the stuff of their nightmares.

Sit down with Mr. Newhouse's words and understand the impact of these current wars on National Guard troops who probably never expected to be in any county other than this one—and learn how be deployed, redeployed, and possibly redeployed again has impacted on these people.

Sit down with Mr. Newhouse's words and lean what it is to be a female soldier who lives with fear of rape from her own comrades in arms.

Sit down with Mr. Newhouse's words and learn what happens when the given underlying causation of the war, the thing that made the cause righteous, is undermined by the unveiling of the less than righteous statements that caused them to be there in the first place.

Sit down with Mr. Newhouse's words and feel what the apathy of the public does to the gut of a soldier.

I know, you're busy. Well, so are they—pulling sixteen hour shifts, with no place safe to rest—pulling sixteen hour shifts where the temps are 140 F, or -3F. They are busy, wearing Kevlar, hoping that their Humvees are or will be armored, and they will not die because they are not properly supplied. They are busy pulling sixteen hour shifts, deployed for whatever numbered time, watching uncontrolled private contractors pull down salaries way, way beyond theirs while they lose homes, wives, children, and their own personal mental, physical, and spiritual stability. Think about this—there but for the grace of no draft, go you.

Is there a way out of this? If the damage is physical, if the war wounds are neurological, if the war wounds are spiritual, can we help to heal them? Montana thinks so, Mr. Newhouse thinks so, and tells you about the changes in Veteran care in his state—about their successes, about their learning what works and what doesn't—about their problems with the entrenched and often abysmal bureaucracy of

the VA they come up against.

Do your homework—LEARN, help, write to Senators, to your Representatives, to your President, to General Shinseki at the VA and insist that we do 100% of what is right for our Veterans. If you do your homework—if you help clear away the mess and smoke of war—if you make sure no war is fought without real justification—you will be helping their coming HOME WORK for them.

And remember this, something we so blatantly forget—the troops, in country or coming home, are US. They are not separate from us—they are our daughters, our sons, our wives, our husbands, our mothers and fathers.

By saving our Veterans, we save ourselves. We save America from a new wave of alcoholism and drug addiction. We save this country from increasing divorce and joblessness and homelessness. We save families from the violence that boils over; violence that causes additional suffering from war related post traumatic stress disorder.

We ease the burden on our jails and prisons.

It's a lesson we should have learned after 7 million Veterans came home from Viet Nam four decades ago and were allowed to fall, were often pushed through, the cracks—without compassion, without justice, without us there for them.

Learn it.

Say it—Never again!

This time we are here for you—for all of you—and we demand that it be made right for you.