

# After the War

by Charles R. Figley

More than a decade after the war in Vietnam has ended, popular media interest in those who fought there is greater than ever. And although few, if any, of the millions of men and women who served in Vietnam resemble Rambo, many are troubled by the war and by its outcome. They are presently seeking professional help in record numbers. It is not surprising, then, to find so many non-fiction books about and by veterans of Vietnam. Readers who are not familiar with the special circumstances of the Vietnam veterans can turn for background to nearly any one of many books now available. Their focus and level of sophistication vary greatly, however.

The view that prevailed prior to 1970 ——— was that civilian life is a welcome relief from the stress and confinement of the military and of war in particular: that rarely do combat exposure effects last beyond a few weeks or months; and, if they do, there must have been clear signs of pathology prior to, during, and immediately following combat."

Several early books, written primarily for a professional audience, discussed the special problems of Vietnam veterans.<sup>3,4</sup> Some were burdened with political rhetoric but, collectively, they were important contributions to what would become one of the most prominent research topics in the social and mental health sciences.

The quality of the literature increased substantially following the war, when the polemics about withdrawing American troops from Vietnam became moot. These second-place books were initial attempts to quantify and evaluate the war-related adjustment problems of Vietnam

VIETNAM: THE BATTLE COMES HOME—A PHOTOGRAPHIC RECORD OF POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS WITH SELECTED ESSAYS. Gordon Baer, photographer. Nancy Howell-Koehler, ed. 1984. 112 pp. \$16.95. Morgan and Morgan, New York.

VIETNAM VETERANS: THE ROAD TO RECOVERY. Joel Osier Brende and Ervin Randolph Parson. 1985. 270 pp. \$17.95. Plenum Press, New York.

DEAR AMERICA: LETTERS HOME FROM VIETNAM. Bernard Edelman, ed. 1985. 316 pp. \$13.95. Norton, New York (paper \$6.95. 1986. Pocket Books, New York).

HEALING FROM THE WAR: TRAUMA AND TRANSFORMATION AFTER VIETNAM. Arthur Egendorf. 1985. 324 pp. \$15.95. Houghton Mifflin, Boston.

WOUNDS OF WAR: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL AFTERMATH OF COMBAT IN VIETNAM. Herbert Handin and Ann Poiringer Haas. 1984. 267 pp. \$16.95. Basic Books, New York.

BLOODS: AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE VIETNAM WAR. Wallace Terry. 1984. 312 pp. \$17.95. Random House, New York.

HOME BEFORE MORNING: THE STORY OF AN ARMY NURSE IN VIETNAM. Lynda Van Devanter with Christopher Morgan. 1983. 320 pp. \$16.95. Beaufort Books, New York.

LIVES AFTER VIETNAM: THE PERSONAL IMPACT OF MILITARY SERVICES. Josefina J. Card. 1983. 185 pp. \$25.95. Lexington Books, Lexington, Mass.

POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER AND THE WAR VETERAN PATIENT. William E. Kelly, ed. 1985. 320 pp. \$30.00. Brunner/Mazel, New York.

PSYCHOTHERAPY OF THE COMBAT VETERAN. Harvey J. Schwartz, ed. 1984. 315 pp. \$29.95. Spectrum Publications, New York.

THE TRAUMA OF WAR: STRESS AND RECOVERY IN VIETNAM VETERANS. Stephen M. Sonnenberg, Arthur S. Blank, Jr., and John A. Talbott, eds. 1985. 454 pp. \$24.95. American Psychiatric Press, Washington, D.C.

For the rest of the decade following

the war, scholars and clinicians, faced with the obvious needs of Vietnam veterans, began to examine carefully the psycho-social problems of the latest cohort of war veterans. Over twenty of these professionals began to affiliate through the Consortium on Veteran Studies in an effort to document the immediate and long-term psychosocial consequences of combat in Vietnam. Their efforts accounted for at least 90% of all the major presentations and publications on the topic for the next several years.<sup>6,8</sup>

Among the Consortium's achievements, in addition to a rich professional literature, was 1) bringing the special problems of Vietnam veterans to nationwide attention ——— and recognition (*cf.* the Final Report of the President's Commission on Mental Health); 2) developing the category of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) within the new Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders;<sup>2</sup> and 3) facilitating the development of both the Veterans Administration's national outreach program of storefront centers for readjustment counseling services (the Vet Centers) and in- and outpatient treatment of PTSD at their Medical Centers across the nation. During this extraordinary period of



pioneering research and changing perceptions of Vietnam veterans, several books were written for the general public. These books were primarily written by Vietnam veterans about their own experiences.<sup>1-5-10-18-22</sup>

Among the most recently available books, many of those written for a general audience carry on the tradition of autobiographical descriptions of the war and its wake. Those who are familiar with the earlier literature will recognize the clear superiority of the current crop which include works by MacPherson<sup>13</sup> and by Scruggs and Serdlow,<sup>14</sup> which were unavailable for review.

Vietnam: The Battle Comes Home, is a large-format volume of excellent photographs by Irene Baer, accompanied by an equal amount of text consisting primarily of previously published essays. Anhur READINGS: A journal of Reviews

Blank, Robert Muller, Arthur Egendorf, John Wilson, and Robert J. Lifton. The focus is mainly on PTSD, so that the unsophisticated reader might falsely conclude that this syndrome is found only among Vietnam veterans and that, other than Dioxin poisoning, PTSD is the veterans' only major difficulty.

Vietnam Veterans: The Road to Recovery is by two psychotherapists with many years of experience working with troubled Vietnam veterans. Brende, a psychiatrist, and Parson, a clinical psychologist and Vietnam veteran, pool their knowledge of combat-related stress disorders, particularly PTSD, to make this a useful monograph for scholars and clinicians, it provides a good overview of the psychosocial problems of Vietnam veterans-- and an adequate frame of reference for understanding the immediate and long-term

emotional consequences of the war. Beginning with a discussion of the complexities and subtleties, both in Vietnam and at home, the book traces the major difficulties faced by these veterans, particularly those troubled by their war experiences, and the process of recovery. Extraordinary attention is given to issues rarely addressed in the other books under review: family life and veteran adjustments; women and ethnic minorities; and identifying local and regional resources of readjustment services for the veterans.

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clinical scholars in this area, including five whose own books are reviewed here. Indeed, their articles provide an extended summary of many of the points made in their books. After a chapter tracing the history of Congressionally-mandated treatment of PTSD and the establishment of the national readjustment counseling program, useful theoretical principals are provided in the following three chapters. The remainder focus on various clinical programs, on techniques, or on particular populations such as women and minorities. The most comprehensive bibliography available on PTSD completes the book.

The effects of military combat in general, rather than of the Vietnam war in particular, is the subject of *Psychotherapy of the Combat Veteran*, a collection of ten essays written primarily by psychodynamically-oriented clinicians. Schwartz, the editor, provides a rich and useful introduction and, although the book as a whole is not organized in any clear or useful fashion, each chapter is designed to explicate in some way the intrapsychic processes associated with military combat. Unfortunately, the very first chapter, on the conceptualization and treatment of war neurosis, is woefully lacking in comprehensiveness.

Nevertheless, clinicians who prefer psychoanalytic principles and treatment, or what Schwartz calls "the traditional approach," are likely to be pleased with the book, particularly if they are familiar with the experiences of Vietnam veterans. The final chapter, which focuses on the Israeli experience, is especially interesting.

Twenty-two pieces by well-known scholars and clinicians with expertise on Vietnam veterans are gathered in *The Trauma of War: Stress and Recovery in Vietnam Veterans*, edited by Sonnenberg, Black, and Talbott, all nationally recognized psychiatrists. Nearly all the major topics in this area, other than history, are covered at least adequately and frequently superbly: social networks; PTSD assessment and treatment; group, family, and individual psychotherapy; national outreach and in-patient treatment programs; flashbacks; incarcerated, women, Hispanic, and black veterans; active duty and POW Vietnam veterans; and foren-

sic assessment. Of particular interest are the chapters by co-editor Blank, who currently heads the Veterans Administration's national outreach program for Vietnam veterans. The lack of an authors' index and an appendix with copies of the various measures described in the text are annoying faults but not serious detractors from an important contribution to the literature.

All of these books provide at least some useful information about Vietnam veterans. Most draw heavily on the significant publications of the past, many of which are listed in the references below. Collectively, these books represent an emerging and more enlightened view of the tragedy of the Vietnam war, a view that appreciates the complexity of factors whose interactions account for the radical difference in postwar performances of Vietnam veterans. More importantly, what is emerging is an appreciation of the immediate and long-term psychosocial consequences of traumatic events. We are beginning to realize that any war or stressful experience has the potential, in interaction with the participants and their resources, to trigger PTSD and other potentially debilitating symptoms.<sup>7</sup>

The movement toward this more informed view of the consequences of war has recently led to the emergence of a new international organization of scholars and practitioners. In some ways it embodies the original efforts of the Consortium on Veteran Studies. The Society for Traumatic Stress Studies was founded by twenty leading scholars with the intent of promoting and disseminating new knowledge about the immediate and long-term psychosocial consequences of traumatic events such as war. These efforts, to the extent that they can contribute to a more enlightened military and government policy, hold promise for preventing another tragedy such as our involvement in Vietnam. They provide even greater assurance, however, that never again will men and women exposed to the horrors of war be ignored or abandoned like those who served this country in Vietnam. The books reviewed here are a tribute not

only to greater wisdom of a nation "id its professionals, but to the courage and tenacity, and will to survive of those who are veterans of the Vietnam war.

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