

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

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1 General Background

I went in the military in January 1967. I had my basic training at Fort Ord, California and Fort Polk, Louisiana for advanced infantry training. When this was finished I went overseas to Viet Nam. I landed in Bien Hoa which was where you processed in and they assigned you to a unit. I was assigned to the 196th light infantry brigade that later became the 23rd Americal Division.

We were flying to Chu Lai when 10 miles North out of Bien Hoa one of the engines was hit by enemy fire. We turned around and returned to Bien Hoa We got there and we had to fill out emergency forms because of the attack. We stayed there at Bien Hoa overnight and then shipped out again the next day to Chu Lai. This was my first experience with war and it really frightened me.

We stayed at Chu Lai for training in how to protect yourself from booby traps, agent orange, ambushes and what to do when they happened. After a week I shipped out to my new unit, the A Company 431st infantry. they gave us an orientation for another couple of days and showed us how to get out and in to the base safely. They trained us in how to jump out of helicopters safely and how to hold the rifle when doing it. There were incoming mortar rounds and snipers while we were training at the base camp.

About a week later my platoon went out patrolling and we encountered some enemy (Charley). Each night we set up an ambush. Different platoons did this on different nights. One night we were attacked and we called in a gunship (chopper with 60 caliber machine guns). Next morning we went on patrol and came across some bodies that had been killed by the gunship attack. I found this very disturbing.

Our daily routine was to send out patrols and at night we set up ambushes and did more patrols. Different platoons would do different stuff each night. When platoons would encounter the enemy they would often call for artillery support (during the day and sometimes at night) and I would help with the artillery if I were in camp.

At this time I was asked to drive a personnel carrier which was a dangerous job because they were especially targeted by Charley. When I returned to the states after my Viet Nam tour I trained other soldiers in California, Arizona, and Idaho how to operate personnel carriers. I

drove the personnel carrier during Operation Dust Off south of Chu Lai, which was a division level operation.

During this operation I left the personnel carrier and went out reconnaissance patrolling and there were a lot of gunship and air strike and artillery actions. This is when I saw a whole lot of dead bodies. Some were out GIs and there were a lot of Viet Cong and even more were civilians. Many of these were burned with napalm and some were still alive with terrible wounds. We saved the ones we could. I sat there and thought about my own family with tears running out of my eyes. When I saw all those dead bodies I wondered what we were doing there. I wanted to go home. We put our own dead in plastic bags so they could be taken back home and we buried the Viet Cong and civilians there.

The second big operation I participated in was west of Hoi An between Chu Lai and Da Nang. Our name for it was Camp L.Z. Ross (L.Z. is landing zone). It was an Americal Division operation. We went into this operation by chopper. The same thing happened as in Dust Off; there were a lot of GIs wounded and killed and a lot of dead Vietnamese. I did not want to go on this operation. I was so depressed but I had to go because it was my job. I had to handle the wounded and when I moved the dead bodies I was careful to touch only their clothing, not their skin. That is the Navajo traditional way.

There were no more operations in the next few months and we just went on routine patrols and gunfights and ambushes.

When my time in Vietnam was almost up they sent me to the training center to help train the newcomers. Then I returned to the United States for the rest of my time in the Army.

These were my military experiences.

2 PTSD Effects: Flashes and loud noise

When I went on leave after overseas service I had a lot of flashback dreams and would wake up at night seething like crazy. My mother made a herb drink for me to take before going to sleep and this was some help. I had two healing ceremonies before I went back to finish my Army service. When I had leave from Fort Ord I would return to have Navajo Blessing ceremonies and then return to Fort Ord. That really helped me and I had fewer flashbacks.

When there is thunder and lightning at night I sometimes jump out of bed and scream due to flashbacks. Also, Rain at night bothers me a lot.

3 PTSD Effects: Bodies

Another PTSD effect relates to dead bodies. Because of the large number of dead and wounded I saw in the Dust Off and the Camp L.Z. operations I have not been able to bear to look at a dead body since my return from Vietnam. About thirty years ago my uncle Scott Yellowman died and I saw his body at the funeral. It depressed me so much that I didn't have the strength to work for several days and I had flashbacks for about a month and could not sleep well. Six months after Scott Yellowman's death I had a healing ceremony and that was helpful. I asked my health provider about this and he said it was because of the war and I should avoid looking at dead bodies. Since then when I go to funerals of my relatives or friends I am careful not to look at the dead body.

One time when I was traveling from Page to Copper Mine the traffic was stopped because of an accident and there was a dead body in the road. I stopped way back and was careful to look in other directions until they covered the body.

4 Health Issues: Nose

Here is how my nose was badly injured. Towards the end of January 1968 I was coming back from R & R in Australia and we landed at Da Nang. I waited at Da Nang for about four days for a flight back to my outfit at Chu Lai. Finally we got the flight and arrived at Chu Lai where they picked us up and took us to the training center at Chu Lai. (The training center was where new soldiers were processed in and trained for a week before they shipped out to their units. Also, people going home were processed there.) In my case we were just waiting for our units to pick us up. They assigned us to a large tent where I waited for my company to come and pick me up. We all went to sleep. It was that night that the Tet Offensive began. There were incoming mortar rounds. Sometime after midnight a mortar round hit the ammo dump by the airport and there was an enormous explosion. The shock wave from the Ammo Dump explosion hit our tent and the pieces of the wood frame came down and hit us with great force. The wood slammed into my nose on the left side and I had a nosebleed.

I had no time then to deal with my nose because I was helping others who got hurt bad. There were many badly injured soldiers and the medic had to take care of them and so only at the end did he quickly look at my nose.

Then two days later my company (A company 431st infantry) picked me up. Back at my company at the Peninsula the medics checked my nose and gave me some medicine. I had a headache for several days.

After returning (1968) the problems with my nose started to get worse. As the years went by the problem got slowly worse so that I could not breath at all through my nose at night and so my mouth would get dry and wake me up at night. My sleep was very disturbbed. I keep a bottle of water by the bed and stick metholatium in my nose at night. Also, I frequently would discharge a large amount of greenish yellow mucus from my nose.

Finally it got so bad I went to the doctor and was referred to a doctor in Phoenix who performed an operation on my nose. The Doctor's name was Dr. Jefferey Taffet. Doctor contact information is provided below. This was about 1998. It helped for a while but now my nose is plugging up again andI have dry mouth at night and the mucus discharge has begun again.

I think there may also be some effect here from the large amounts of agent orange that we were exposed to in Vietnam. They told us it was insecticide or various other things but I'm sure most of it was agent orange. It even got into our food when they were spraying it around.

Doctor contact information:

This is my GP:

Dr. Daniel A. Bunch
601 N. Navajo Drive
Page, Arizona 86040
928-645-8823

This is the doctor in Flagstaff I consulted with and who sent me to the doctor in Phoenix.

Dr. David Hipkin
1515 E. Cedar Avenue STE A3
Flagstaff, Az. 86001
928-774-2788

This is the doctor in Phoenix who did the operation on my nose

Dr. Jeffrey Taffet
3411 North 32nd street Suite 150
Phoenix, Az. 85018
602-956-1250

5 Health Issues: Ears and hearing

When I got to Vietnam I was assigned to A company, 4th infantry battalion, 31st Infantry, 196th light infantry brigade in Chu Lai. The 13th Artillery battalion was assigned to the 431st but they were short handed a lot of the time and they were right next to our bunker at Chu Lai. So they trained us do do artillery for when they didn't have enough artillery personnel. The people who were better at it were called to help the artillery most often. I was real good at it, so I spent a lot of time at the base helping with the artillery. Also, when we went on mission those of us in the regular infantry who were trained to help the artillery would go help out the artillery camp and form perimeters around the artillery base camps. During my tour of duty I spent about six months doing this work with the artillery.

There were times when we fired artillery constantly for the entire night. I would hear a buzzing sound even though I did wear the ear plugs (when I had time to put them in). Eventually they pulled me out (April 1968) because of the constant buzzing in my left ear.

Now when I change altitude my left ear hurts and I can't hear out of it very well. I have to turn up the radio and TV real loud, and people have to speak up or I can't understand them. After a few hours at the same altitude it returns to normal. But it gets bad again when I change altitude, which happens a lot on the Navajo reservation.