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A Deluge of Troubled Soldiers Is in the Offing, Experts Predict

By SCOTT SHANE

Richard A. Oppel Jr. contributed reporting from Baghdad for this article.

The nation's hard-pressed health care system for veterans is facing a potential deluge of tens of thousands of soldiers returning from Iraq with serious mental health problems brought on by the stress and carnage of war, veterans' advocates and military doctors say.

An Army study shows that about one in six soldiers in Iraq report symptoms of major depression, serious anxiety or post-traumatic stress disorder, a proportion that some experts believe could eventually climb to one in three, the rate ultimately found in Vietnam veterans. Because about one million American troops have served so far in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to Pentagon figures, some experts predict that the number eventually requiring mental health treatment could exceed 100,000.

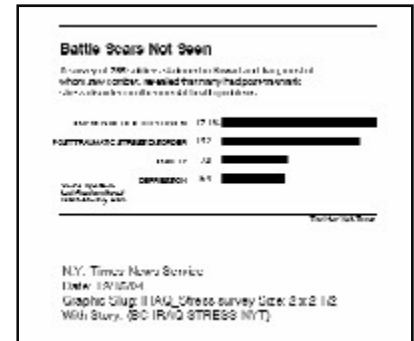
"There's a train coming that's packed with people who are going to need help for the next 35 years," said Stephen L. Robinson, a 20-year Army veteran who is now the executive director of the National Gulf War Resource Center, an advocacy group. Mr. Robinson wrote a report in September on the psychological toll of the war for the Center for American Progress, a Washington research group.

"I have a very strong sense that the mental health consequences are going to be the medical story of this war," said Dr. Stephen C. Joseph, who served as the assistant secretary of defense for health affairs from 1994 to 1997.

What was planned as a short and decisive intervention in Iraq has become a grueling counterinsurgency that has put American troops into sustained close-quarters combat on a scale not seen since the Vietnam War. Psychiatrists say the kind of fighting seen in the recent retaking of Falluja — spooky urban settings with unlimited hiding places; the impossibility of telling Iraqi friend from Iraqi foe; the knowledge that every stretch of road may conceal an explosive device — is tailored to produce the adrenaline-gone-haywire reactions that leave lasting emotional scars.

And in no recent conflict have so many soldiers faced such uncertainty about how long they will be deployed. Veterans say the repeated extensions of duty in Iraq are emotionally battering, even for the most stoical of warriors.

Military and Department of Veterans Affairs officials say most military personnel will survive the war without serious mental issues and note that the one million troops include many who have not participated in ground combat, including



sailors on ships. By comparison with troops in Vietnam, the officials said, soldiers in Iraq get far more mental health support and are likely to return to a more understanding public.

But the duration and intensity of the war have doctors at veterans hospitals across the country worried about the coming caseload.

“We’re seeing an increasing number of guys with classic post-traumatic stress symptoms,” said Dr. Evan Kanter, a psychiatrist at the Puget Sound veterans hospital in Seattle. “We’re all anxiously waiting for a flood that we expect is coming. And I feel stretched right now.”

A September report by the Government Accountability Office found that officials at six of seven Veterans Affairs medical facilities surveyed said they “may not be able to meet” increased demand for treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder. Officers who served in Iraq say the unrelenting tension of the counterinsurgency will produce that demand.

“In the urban terrain, the enemy is everywhere, across the street, in that window, up that alley,” said Paul Rieckhoff, who served as a platoon leader with the Florida Army National Guard for 10 months, going on hundreds of combat patrols around Baghdad. “It’s a fishbowl. You never feel safe. You never relax.”

In his platoon of 38 people, 8 were divorced while in Iraq or since they returned in February, Mr. Rieckhoff said. One man in his 120-person company killed himself after coming home.

“Too many guys are drinking,” said Mr. Rieckhoff, who started the group Operation Truth to support the troops. “A lot have a hard time finding a job. I think the system is vastly under-prepared for the flood of mental health problems.”

Capt. Tim Wilson, an Army chaplain serving outside Mosul, said he counseled 8 to 10 soldiers a week for combat stress. Captain Wilson said he was impressed with the resilience of his 700-strong battalion but added that fierce battles have produced turbulent emotions.

“There are usually two things they are dealing with,” said Captain Wilson, a Southern Baptist from South Carolina. “Either being shot at and not wanting to get shot at again, or after shooting someone, asking, ‘Did I commit murder?’ or ‘Is God going to forgive me?’ or ‘How am I going to be when I get home?’ ”

When all goes as it should, the life-saving medical services available to combat units like Captain Wilson’s may actually swell the ranks of psychological casualties. Of wounded soldiers who are alive when medics arrive, 98 percent now survive, said Dr. Michael E. Kilpatrick, the Pentagon’s deputy director of deployment health support. But they must come to terms not only with emotional scars but the literal scars of amputated limbs and disfiguring injuries.

Through the end of September, the Army had evacuated 885 troops from Iraq for psychiatric reasons, including some who had threatened or tried suicide. But those are only the most extreme cases. Often, the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder do not emerge until months after discharge.

“During the war, they don’t have the leisure to focus on how they’re feeling,” said Sonja Batten, a psychologist at the Baltimore veterans hospital. “It’s when they get back and find that their relationships are suffering and they can’t hold down a job that they realize they have a problem.”

Robert E. Brown was proud to be in the first wave of Marines invading Iraq last year. But Mr. Brown has also found himself in the first ranks of returning soldiers to be unhinged by what they experienced.

He served for six months as a Marine chaplain’s assistant, counseling wounded soldiers, organizing makeshift memorial services and filling in on raids. He knew he was in trouble by the time he was on a ship home, when the sound of a hatch slamming would send him diving to the floor.

After he came home, he began drinking heavily and saw his marriage fall apart, Mr. Brown said. He was discharged and returned to his hometown, Peru, Ind., where he slept for two weeks in his Ford Explorer, surrounded by mementos of the war.

"I just couldn't stand to be with anybody," said Mr. Brown, 35, sitting at his father's kitchen table.

Dr. Batten started him on the road to recovery by giving his torment a name, an explanation and a treatment plan. But 18 months after leaving Iraq, he takes medication for depression and anxiety and returns in dreams to the horrors of his war nearly every night.

The scenes repeat in ghastly alternation, he says: the Iraqi girl, 3 or 4 years old, her skull torn open by a stray round; the Kuwaiti man imprisoned for 13 years by Saddam Hussein, cowering in madness and covered in waste; the young American soldier, desperate to escape the fighting, who sat in the latrine and fired his M-16 through his arm; the Iraqi missile speeding in as troops scramble in the dark for cover.

"That's the one that just stops my heart," said Mr. Brown. "I'm in my rack sleeping and there's a school bus full of explosives coming down at me and there's nowhere to go."

Such costs of war, personal and financial, are not revealed by official casualty counts. "People see the figure of 1,200 dead," said Dr. Kanter, of Seattle, referring to the number of Americans killed in Iraq. "Much more rarely do they see the number of seriously wounded. And almost never do they hear anything at all about the psychiatric casualties."

As of Wednesday 5,229 Americans have been seriously wounded in Iraq. Through July, nearly 31,000 veterans of Operation Iraqi Freedom had applied for disability benefits for injuries or psychological ailments, according to the Department Veterans Affairs.

Every war produces its medical signature, said Dr. Kenneth Craig Hyams, a former Navy physician now at the Department of Veterans Affairs. Soldiers came back from the Civil War with "irritable heart." In World War I there was "shell shock." World War II vets had "battle fatigue." The troubles of Vietnam veterans led to the codification of post-traumatic stress disorder.

In combat, the fight-or-flight reflex floods the body with adrenaline, permitting impressive feats of speed and endurance. But after spending weeks or months in this altered state, some soldiers cannot adjust to a peaceful setting. Like Mr. Brown, for whom a visit to a crowded bank at lunch became an ordeal, they display what doctors call "hypervigilance." They sit in restaurants with their backs to a wall; a car's backfire can transport them back to Baghdad.

To prevent such damage, the Army has deployed "combat stress control units" in Iraq to provide treatment quickly to soldiers suffering from emotional overload, keeping them close to the healing camaraderie of their unit.

"We've found through long experience that this is best treated with sleep, rest, food, showers and a clean uniform, if that is possible," said Dr. Thomas J. Burke, an Army psychiatrist who oversees mental health policy at the Department of Defense. "If they get counseling to tell them they are not crazy, they will often get better rapidly."

To detect signs of trouble, the Department of Defense gives soldiers pre-deployment and post-deployment health questionnaires. Seven of 17 questions to soldiers leaving Iraq seek signs of depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder.

But some reports suggest that such well-intentioned policies falter in the field. During his time as a platoon leader in Iraq, Mr. Rieckhoff said, he never saw a combat stress control unit. "I never heard of them until I came back," he said.

And the health screens have run up against an old enemy of military medicine: soldiers who cover up their symptoms. In July 2003, as Jeffrey Lucey, a Marine reservist from Belchertown, Mass., prepared to leave Iraq after six months as a truck driver, he at first intended to report traumatic memories of seeing corpses, his parents, Kevin and Joyce Lucey, said. But when a supervisor suggested that such candor might delay his return home, Mr. Lucey played down his problems.

At home, he spiraled downhill, haunted by what he had seen and began to have delusions about having killed unarmed Iraqis. In June, at 23, he hanged himself with a hose in the basement of the family home.

“Other marines have verified to us that it is a subtle understanding which exists that if you want to go home you do not report any problems,” Mr. Lucey’s parents wrote in an e-mail message. “Jeff’s perception, which is shared by others, is that to seek help is to admit that you are weak.”

Dr. Kilpatrick, of the Pentagon, acknowledges the problem, saying that National Guardsmen and Reservists in particular have shown an “abysmal” level of candor in the screenings. “We still have a long ways to go,” he said. “The warrior ethos is that there are no imperfections.”

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Freedom Is Not Free

By MAJ Brian M. Adelson

I am not sure if many understand this as much as the Iraqi people do today. For the first time in history they had a free election, and I was lucky enough to have a front row seat (Some may argue that this wasn’t the first free election that Iraq has had, but I researched this with several Iraqi people and in their opinion it was).

Many have asked what my duties would be during the elections and for security reasons I could not tell, but now that it is all over, I would like to try and share some of my experiences. The Iraqi unit that I advise had the mission of securing several polling locations to make it safe for the Iraqis to vote. To minimize danger, the planning for this was held very close, and nobody, well except a few of us, even knew the locations until around 3:00 pm on Saturday. They also attempted to keep the minimum number of sites to make security easier. That is important to know, and you will understand why in a minute.

During the weekend I kept thinking about how much different our voting experience is in America. I would imagine that on November 1, 2004, many of you conducted business as usual.

To compare that to here...On Thursday evening the roads closed. Basically, people were told to stay home or risk being shot at, and I can attest to the fact that vehicles moving after the “No Roll Policy” went into effect truly risked being shot at. On Friday, the Military descended on many villages and set up security...Armed soldiers patrolling the streets to keep the polling locations safe. Merchants were not able to open their shops. Although, in the village we were in we made an exception for the bakery. He was a smart entrepreneur, giving us freshly baked bread, before asking us to pull a few strings for him. I also coordinated to have the local drug store remain open for a few hours on Election Day, because working in retail I understand what it means to have competitive hours. A curfew was enacted and anyone caught out after dark was arrested and held until after the elections. On Election Day, just to get the opportunity to vote, most



people had to go through at least two searches and sometimes three just to get the chance to stand in line. We don't even like to get searched when we board a plane.

I was having a discussion with the Iraqi Colonel that I work with, and he tells me that many people will not come out to vote, because there are too many terrorists in this town. All I could think was that I was out walking around all day and talking with people—there is no way they are terrorists. A few minutes later the soldiers started to bring in several detainees that were arrested. We had intelligence on many people in the village that were planning to try and sabotage the elections, and our unit conducted raids throughout the night and arrested many people. I believe this was the reason that we did not have any incidents in our area.

As I said earlier, we limited the number of polling sites so that we could secure them better. Well, the local politicians did not think that was fair to all of the villages in the area. How can we have a free election if we do not provide access to polling sites in all villages? Since people could not drive, how would they get to polling locations that were in other villages? The locals requested a meeting with the Iraqi General and said that they would provide their own security for the sites; they just needed an election official and ballots. I thought this was amazing. The dangers were very real to each person and place that had voting going on. They wanted their right to vote, and they were not going to let the terrorists stop that.

At the end of the day over 30,000 people in our area were able to vote. The turnout was overwhelming and more than anyone expected. There are only around 50,000 voting age citizens in this area.

We were sitting around watching the news at the end of the day, and you could feel the emotions. One of the interviews that we saw was of an older woman, and she was saying that she was sick but would not miss this opportunity. In some of the Officers I could see tears in their eyes. They had dedicated their lives to this, and many of them went without sleep to make sure that it was successful. To know that their efforts were worth it was very rewarding.

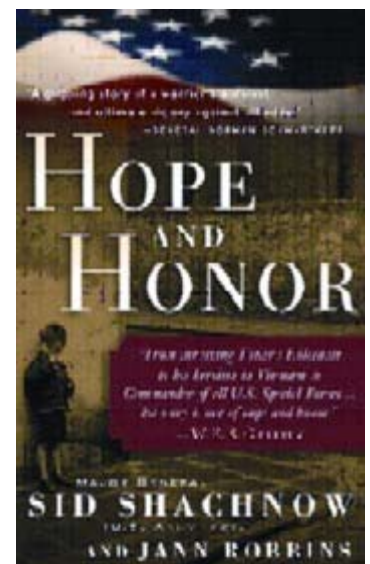
HOPE AND HONOR: Major General Sid Shachnow

By Colonel Herb Rosenbleeth, USA(Ret), National Executive Director

Hope and Honor is the story of one of the bravest men in the history of the Jewish people, or more accurately, in the history of all mankind. It is the true story of a young boy born in Lithuania, who grew up under the horrors of the Nazis and who eventually, through the greatest courage, determination and heroism, become a Major General in the U.S. Army.

Hope and Honor is a story of survival, of the will to keep going and, perhaps most important, to remain honest, decent to all others, and a person who cares for mankind. It is a story that we, as members of the Jewish War Veterans of the USA, can all be proud. For Sid Shachnow is one of us.

Sid Shachnow was born in Kaunas, Lithuania, on November 23, 1933. Lithuania was peaceful and young Schaja's very early years were spent playing with neighborhood children. In his earliest years there no visible signs of the extreme hatred, the extraordinary violence or the unimaginable horrors of the Holocaust that were about to come. Who knew?



Sid Shachnow's Uncle Willie knew. Willie Schuster was the brother of Sid's mother, Rose. Willie tried in vain to convince the Shachnow family and extended family to leave Lithuania, to leave Europe. Uncle Willie's efforts were in vain. The Jews of Europe largely believed it would all blow over, that things would not get worse, that the Germans were people of culture, people of intellect. Civilized people.

Instead, they were people who brought torture, starvation, mass executions, unbelievable fear and murder to six million Jews. Civilized people.

Hope and Honor is the story of the Shachnow family, one uncle and aunt burned alive, Sid's grandmother murdered execution style, friends killed in cold blood or hanged. Civilized people.

In 1951, at the age of 17, Schaja Shachnowski arrives in the United States and does not know English. He is placed in the eighth grade.

In 1955, at the age of 21, Sid Shachnow enlists in the U.S. Army as a private. He remembers, as I did in my own boyhood, that those in the Army were heroes of our country, the victors in the Big War, the saviors of mankind. Sid Shachnow and I each wanted to be members of the U.S. Army!

The second half of Hope and Honor is the amazing story of Sid Shachnow's military career. Sid goes twice to Officer Candidate School (OCS), not graduating the first time because he was not a U.S. citizen. He becomes a citizen and goes to OCS again, this time becoming a second lieutenant. Thus begins his career as an officer which quickly takes him to fierce combat in Vietnam, and later includes four assignments in Europe, more combat in Vietnam, several service schools and assignments of consistently increasing levels of responsibility. Sid Shachnow proves to be a leader, a courageous leader, a quick-thinker and an officer with the political skills to succeed at the highest levels of military and foreign service. Major General Shachnow was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal (two awards), the Silver Star (2 awards), the Defense Superior Award, the Legion of Merit and many other U.S. and foreign government awards.

Hope and Honor tells of Sid's loving and wonderful wife, Arlene, who is there for him throughout his military career. Arlene adjusts magnificently to the many challenges of making a home and raising four daughters while simultaneously supporting her husband's needs and career. This summer Sid and Arlene Shachnow will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary.

On March 12th of this year JWV was extremely honored to have Major General Shachnow and his wife, Arlene, as our guests at the JWV National Executive Committee meeting in Crystal City, VA. General Shachnow addressed our NEC dinner with remarks about his life and about his book.

I strongly recommend that you read Hope and Honor! You will see the Holocaust through the eyes of a boy and you will know his hunger and his fear. You will see the U.S. Army through the eyes of a man, and you will know his spirit and his strength.

This is a book for you!

NEVER AGAIN!!! NEVER FORGET!!! OH, NEVER MIND

By PNC Bob Zweiman, Chairman, Coordinating Committee

Slogans are sort of like those gizmos on the computer screen. Put your pointer on it, and it consolidates your information and your emotions on the issue. Although you have to credit slogans as fundraising tools for special events and direct mail, they save you at least a page and a half of additional writing. Slogans are shorthand to identify a subject without detailing the facts or issues involved.

This year Holocaust commemoration events flood the calendar. So, you talk about what happened before the victims were freed and during their confinement and the indifference of the people who should have cared and not about the difficult approaches necessary to accomplish their freedom nor really what you've got to do to prevent its recurrence in a universal sense in the future.



Probably the most refreshing recognition was at the United Nations session. Was it a positive approach to teach so that people will learn what happened and not actually why it happened and why hate-driven humans were stand-ins acting in the stead of the most vicious animals in the forest? Our moral sensibilities are now supposed to intervene and endow purity on all people. We remembered—we didn't forget—we didn't do anything to prevent it from happening again.

Now we are coerced by an undefined formula that all good people will be good...All bad people will be good...unless, of course, you live where the understanding of the slogans does not exist.

The tsunami is a forceful example of one form of action which does not involve the directions or the actions of a human being—we can easily then afford to help and support those devastated since mother nature spanked us while very carefully ignoring the same result of human devastation which was not created by human power...as going to help Indonesia while ignoring genocide in Sudan or even, in our country, where nature caused the excessive water damage in California and western state areas. The help which is presented becomes the indicia or some sort of universal compassion for our fellow man. It lasts as long as the media have not gone on to something else—like steroids in baseball.

I had just seen a movie called Hotel Rwanda—not necessarily a class A or even a C movie. But, I was struck by one very small segment which lacked sloganeering—really a wee bit of dialogue between a United Nations protector who, in line with universal concern and protection, is being ordered out, leaving the refugees open, helpless and unprotected. Devastating as it is, a freedom to massacre and murder is accomplished in the midst of well-rehearsed speeches.

Of course, this happened and was present during the 60-year period we now commemorate, as it happened in Yugoslavia, Rwanda, Cambodia, Iraq, Syria, and a number of other areas which had European economic interest so—what else—use diplomacy until you can corral your investments—an appeasement to negotiated insanity.

But, since we claim to have dibs on the word "holocaust" and its slogans, we have to use words like genocide, racial profiling, ethnic cleansing, etc.

So, here goes the language, which I took from a movie review, spoken to a Rwandan hotel manager by the UN Protector who was ordered to evacuate, leaving Rwanda open and naked to extinction:

"You're dirt, we think you're dirt. The West, all the super powers, they think you are dirt. They think you are dumb...You are worthless...You're black...You're not even a nigger, you're African."

How simple amorality can be used as a simple defense by degrading the victim.

- Do you overcome it with education, and whom do you educate, the victim or the tormentor?
- Do you negotiate from strength or weakness, and how do you accomplish anything if you only have just one or the other?
- Do you turn the other cheek, or do you blow the hell out of the tormentor?

Unfortunately, most assume a position from which you can never get them to vary, and this is especially so when they have a classy slogan to back them up.

They create their own moral imperative. Thus the same solution must apply in all cases...if you're a negotiator, you negotiate while the beheading continues...if you take no prisoners, you push forward no matter what the result may be.

The ultimate resolution is, Hell, you have a slogan to help you remember that the victims are really dead. Your slogan will foster impressive commemorative annual events in the community, the nation or wherever, or the insipid bleating of "Never Again" or Never Forget" or ultimately, the well spoken apathetic who makes sure to be appointed and return to the committee preparing for next year's vacuous commemoration event.

Really, it is very strange how strange can be strange.

PNC Edward D. Blatt, 1928-2005

By JWV

PNC Edward D. Blatt died on Friday, Feb. 18, 2005, at Beth Israel Medical Center in Newark, N.J. He had become ill while on a fact-finding mission in the Middle East and at NATO headquarters in Belgium for the Jewish War Veterans, continuing his service to the JWV through the end of his life.

PNC Blatt, a native of Philadelphia, PA, served as National Commander of the JWV from 1993-94 and as President of the National Museum of American Jewish Military History from 1996-98. He served in the U.S. Navy during World War II and was a member of the Lt. Milton Kelkey Post 575 in Philadelphia, where he was twice elected Post Commander. He also served as County Commander of the Philadelphia County Council and Department Commander of the JWV Department of Pennsylvania prior to being elected National Commander.



At the time of his death, he continued to serve the JWV as National Personnel Chairman and Director of the National Service Officers. In addition, he had served as a Commissioner of Veterans Affairs, appointed by the Mayor of Philadelphia. In his capacity as Chief of Staff to PNC Paul Ribner in 1974-75, he represented the JWV on a trip to South Vietnam in support of American troops stationed there. As National Commander he was invited to the White House for discussions on Israel with President Clinton, and in 1993 he witnessed the signing of the Oslo peace accords between the Palestinians and Israel.

Mr. Blatt was director of Roosevelt Memorial Park, a position he held until he joined Joseph Levine & Sons as funeral counselor in 1981. He was also vice president of Haym Salomon Memorial Park in Frazer. He was in semiretirement from Joseph Levine & Sons at the time of his death. He is survived by his wife, Katherine (Kay) Blatt, four children, 12 grandchildren, 10 great-grandchildren, two sisters, and two brothers.