

Commentary...

Thank you for your service

By Greg Walker
Guest Columnist

“No one is advocating for these men and women after you’ve stripped them of their humanity and then send them back out into society.”
— “Jane,” military spouse

“Dr. Richard Stone, executive in charge of the Veterans Health Administration, told lawmakers that many former service members are deeply damaged, with 77 percent having been exposed to combat, and the issue cannot be solved solely through mental-health treatment.

“Significant amounts of this relates to personal, financial and relationship problems, and loneliness and isolation,” he said. “The post-9/11 generation of veterans joined the military knowing they were going to combat. That is a unique individual in America.”

<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/04/30/hours-after-7th-vet-suicide-va-officials-repeat-plea-public-help.html>

I served in uniform for 24 years and fought in two U.S. military campaigns. The last 10 years of my working career provided non-clinical advocacy as a Department of Defense-trained recovery care coordinator, first with the U.S. Special Operations Command Warrior Care Program (2009-2013) and

then in the private sector. As an RCC and military liaison I traveled and met with both VA and DoD clinical teams and commanders in multiple locations around the globe. These include major military treatment facilities and Department of Veterans Affairs Polytrauma Rehabilitation centers. Suicide and attempted suicide fell into that realm to include active interventions, hospitalizations, and all too often funerals.

As of 2019, both the Veterans Administration and Department of Defense have quietly announced they do not have the means to mitigate military service-connected suicide. This after over 15 years of offering otherwise and along the way obscuring, mis-directing, and all too often outright lying about their ability to do so.

“Suicide is the final stop to a long painful road,” Jane shared with me last week. Young men and women enter the military today and are trained to de-sensitize so they can do their jobs, their missions, in what is now the longest continuous and most brutal war(s) the United States has ever fought. “They are told repeatedly that their needs and pain do not matter. They learn to just suck it up and push on.”

Despite putting on a caring face the true and only mission of the U.S. Military is to project combat power. Good

soldiers, Marines, airmen, and sailors are “fit to fight and win,” period. No one predicted our now 18 years of global deployments and warfare against an enemy that thrives on mutilation, beheadings, mass executions of women and children, and suicide bombers. And how such warfare has affected now four generations of military service members and veterans since 9-11. “They are over-tasked and under-manned,” Jane continued. “I have seen what that does to the non-commissioned officer corps. I have seen these same guys that come into the military loving their wives and kids destroy them because there is no where else to put the stress except on your family.”

Time and time again over the past ten years when I was working closely with our service members, many of them ultimately having to leave the service due to their wounds, injuries, or illnesses, I witnessed both men and women war fighters whose marriages and family lives were swirling down the toilet be deployed, or re-deployed, or re-deployed again to Afghanistan, Iraq, Africa, Latin America, and elsewhere. In one case my closest friend, a fellow Special Forces soldier, returned home to an empty house. He had to climb through a second-story window to get in and when he did all he found on the living room floor was a rolled-up

military sleeping bag...his wife’s parting gift along with the divorce papers.

“I have watched some of my best friends go from being a bright light to a faded shell of themselves as they live in the Army-react mode,” says Jane. “To be honest most of the leadership doesn’t care. The military is a numbers game, and being in the military is like being on a horrible turnpike that has no exits. You literally just keep moving in the same circle until you are stationed someplace else, or a new commander comes in, and then it starts all over again.”

Washington (CNN) U.S. Army veteran Eric Donoho was sitting alone at the kitchen table of his Indiana home when he placed a loaded handgun into his mouth.

A combat veteran who had survived three separate bomb blasts while serving in Iraq, Donoho found himself standing at the precipice in 2015 — the culmination of a years-long battle with depression, compounded by a series of personal tragedies and his own struggle to reacclimate to civilian life after leaving the service.

“Over time I just lost the joy and happiness from life, I lost my faith in humanity, I basically lost the ability to have hope,” he told CNN.

“I was just at that bottom. ... I figured it would just be best if I ended it,” Donoho added. “I knew that I had to

decide to get on dying or get on living, and at the time I had choose to get on dying. ... That led me to my kitchen table in December 2015 with my Glock in my mouth trying to pull the trigger.”

Twenty-two military service-connected suicides take place daily in our country. The Oregon National Guard continues to have the highest suicide rate for all National Guard organizations in the country, and our state government does nothing meaningful. In fact, it does just the opposite (<https://nuggetnews.com/MobileContent/Opinions/Opinions/Article/Dying-in-committee-Playing-politics-with-veterans-lives/18/18/26128>). The following two non-government organizations are making a difference, one life at a time, one of which – Mission 22 – was founded in Oregon. Please join, donate, or in some other meaningful manner support their efforts on behalf of our warriors and their families. They fought for us. It’s time we fight for them.

<https://www.mission22.com/about>

<https://www.22kill.com/about/#/mission-and-history>

Editor’s note: Greg Walker is a retired U.S. Army Special Forces soldier and Deschutes County Sheriff’s Office deputy. During his tenure with DCSO, he frequently worked in Sisters.



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