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end up on the street is not drink or mental difficulties — it is poverty.

The drawdown of US troops in Iraq is already in full stride. In Afghanistan, NATO is training a force of 350,000 Afghan police and soldiers to take over when the last foreign troops leave Afghanistan by 2014.

"I don't think there is a bureaucracy big enough to deal with the number of folks and the needs of the people who are coming back," said Belle Landau, executive director of the Oregon Returning Veterans Project. Landau's son is an Iraq War veteran.

The Returning Veterans Project is a statewide nonprofit that helps veterans with mental and physical problems related to their service. Service providers offer pro bono services for veterans. Among the most common issues are depression and anxiety, PTSD, drugs and alcohol abuse, and a new phenomenon — sexual addiction, fueled by unlimited Internet access, lots of downtime, and the constant need for stress relief.

"In April, May 2010, 2,500 soldiers from the National Guard 41st Brigade came back to Oregon after an almost 12 months combat deployment," Landau said. "Three months later, we saw a 144 percent increase in the number of clients we were serving."

There are still relatively few of this new breed of veteran in the homeless population. But according to Neil Donovan, Executive Director of the U.S. National Coalition of the Homeless, those on the path to homelessness are still at the early stages of that transition.

"This is my 33rd year working in homeless services, so I have seen Vietnam veterans, I have seen other veterans, (and) I kind of have a good sense of how long it takes to come back home and spiral down. And it takes a while. It doesn't happen in a year, and it doesn't happen in two years," he said.

"What tends to happen is you have a year's worth of nightmares, and then your wife leaves," he said, "And then you have another year of nightmares, and the Oxycontin or the Percoset that you're on stop working because it's a narcotic that will only work for so long, and then the pain becomes so profound that you begin using it beyond the prescribed amount, and then the doctor won't prescribe it any longer so you start self-medicating, and then you start getting into illegal behavior."

At this point, up to three years down the road, the soon-to-be-homeless veteran slides below the poverty line and the risk of homelessness becomes acute.

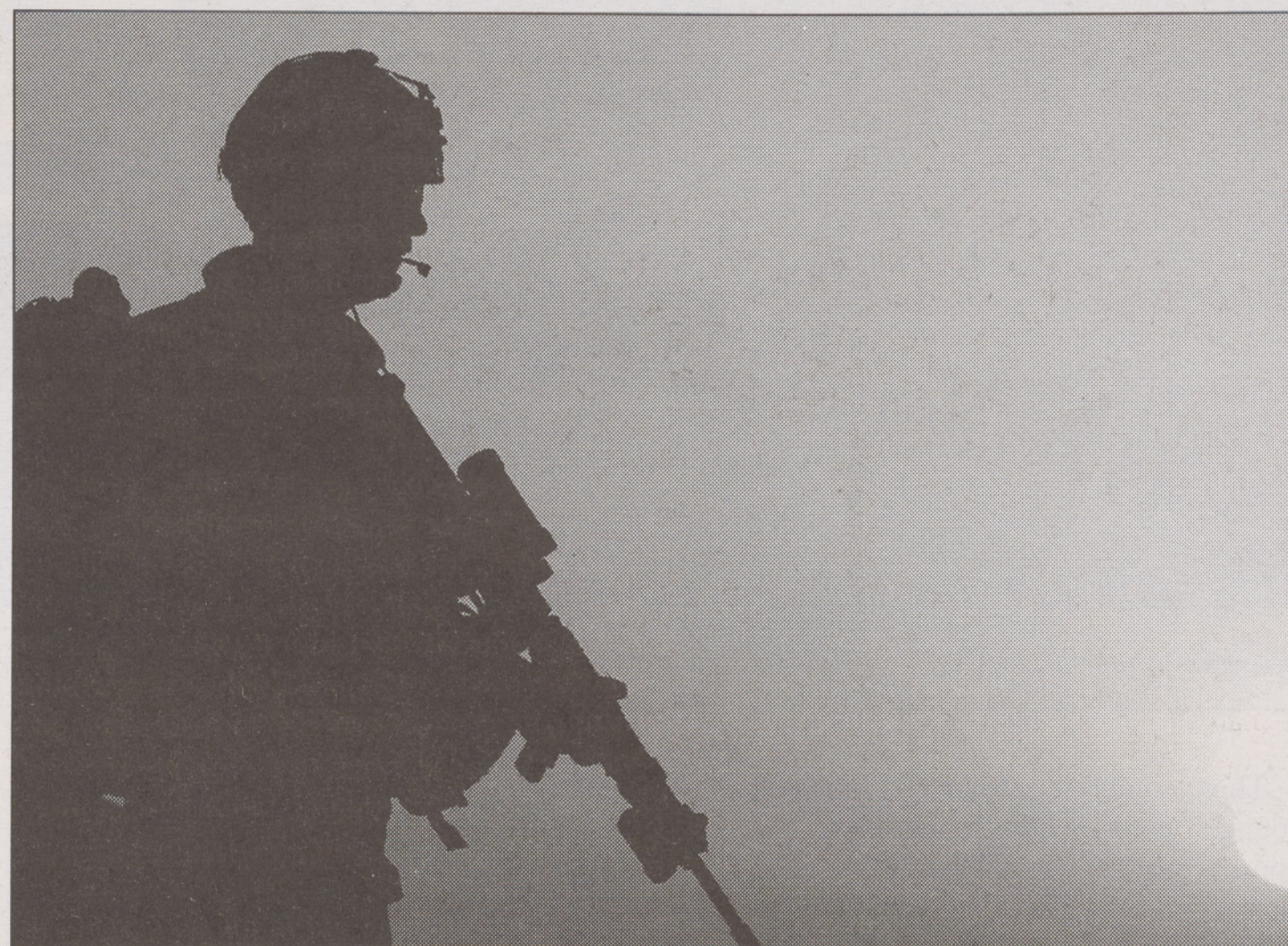
"We are quite far out from seeing the true wave of people who will become homeless. And there are going to be a lot of people who are homeless and the people who are homeless are going to be people who are

physically handicapped as well as emotionally handicapped," Donovan added.

There are other dangers in the current economy for the newest population of veterans. Many Western countries are cutting spending as they wrestle with huge deficits, and that could threaten funding for vital programs just at the point the newest veterans need help.

Canada recently proposed \$226 million in budget cuts from its Veterans Affairs, but a government spokesman told Vancouver street magazine Megaphone these were aimed at improving efficiency rather than lowering benefits.

Canadian MP Peter Stoffer said he was concerned about the impact on health care and services. "As the official Opposition



A soldier with BRAVO Company, Royal Canadian Regiment

REUTERS/DENIS SINYAKOV

critic for Veterans Affairs, I have many examples of how the system of caring for our veterans is broken," he wrote in a blog on the Canadian Veterans Advocacy website. "Veterans' homelessness is also on the rise and more veterans are using food banks."

Funding at the U.S. VA has actually risen after a 2009 pledge by U.S. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric Shinseki and President Obama to end veteran homelessness by 2015. But Angell agrees it is hard to predict what will happen in the future.

"It's hard to imagine that people wouldn't be behind the employment of veterans," she said. "And really that's not just a government issue — that's the American People's issue. It's not up to government to hire every single veteran. It's really up to the private sector to join forces with that and make those employment opportunities available."

Even though there are relatively few

young veterans in the homeless population, there are already signs of potential trouble.

Determining a global count of veterans on the street is difficult, in part because of varying official definitions of what constitutes homelessness.

According to the most recent data available from the U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD), 144,842 American veterans, or 11.5 percent of homeless adults, spent at least one night in emergency or transitional housing between October 2009 and September 2010, down 3 percent from the year before. A second measure, the number of homeless veterans on a single night, rose 1 percent.

For its part, the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans in the United States estimates that while only 8 percent of the general populace are veterans, those who served in the military account for nearly

service military base, a central point for veterans to connect with their military community and its services.

In place of such a base, the VA and the veteran community conduct Yellow-Ribbon events to keep veterans to stay connected with counseling, services and other opportunities.

Experts cite a host of reasons veterans may be at risk of homelessness: trouble adjusting to the chaotic rhythm of "normal" life after the comforting rigor of military routine, post-traumatic stress disorder, difficulty translating work in the service into marketable job skills, loss of camaraderie, dependence on alcohol or drugs, serious physical injury.

Veterans may also contend with all the issues that can cause homelessness in the mainstream of society: lack of affordable housing, jobs that don't pay a living wage, red tape that makes social services impossible to navigate, physical or mental disabilities.

There is also the trained mindset of a soldier.

"One thing I've learned from this job is that a veteran will ask for help if their buddy needs help, but it's difficult for them to ask for help for themselves," said Belle Landau with Returning Veterans Project. "The other part is that only 1 percent of the country is serving in the military. Most people are disconnected from their neighbors who may be a military family. There's such a disconnect in these two wars more than any other. It makes people feel isolated. If nobody knows, they feel totally disconnected, as if their service wasn't worth much. The community needs to get more involved, and that's what we're trying to do."

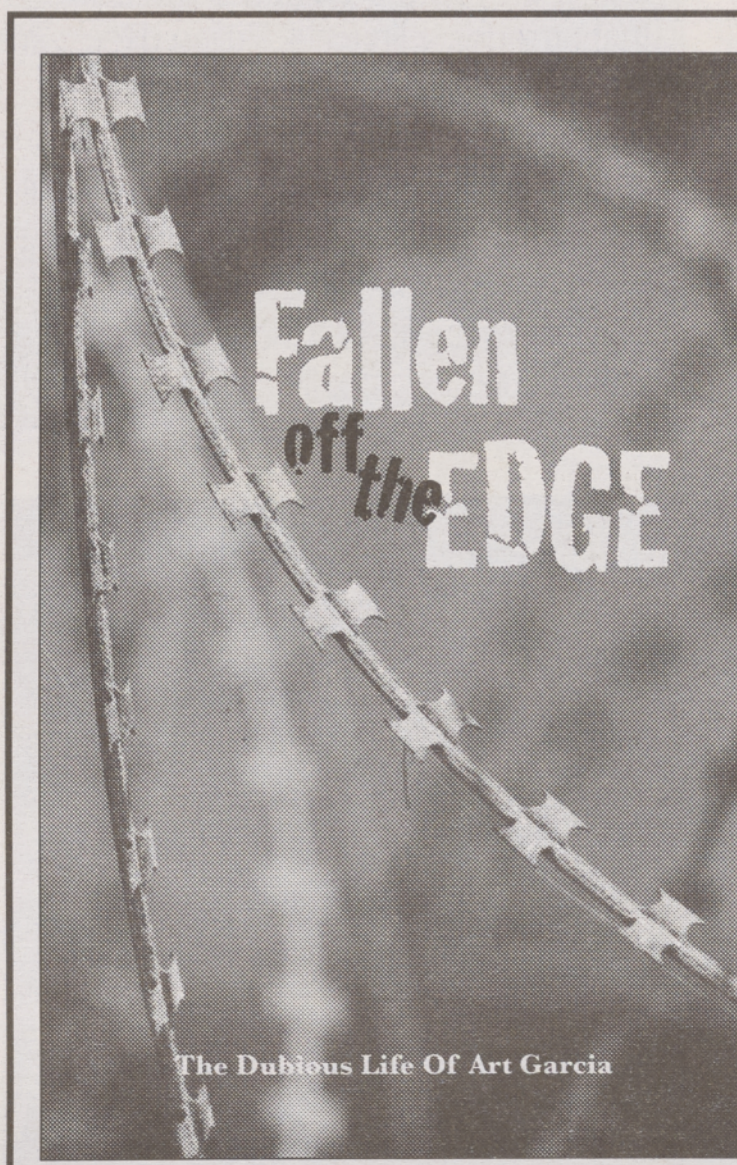
McNabb echoed the same experience.

"My generation of service members is very skittish and they don't necessarily come out and say I'm homeless," McNabb said. "It is pride. The military is a very fear-based society. They pretty much tell you if you talk to someone, it's on your permanent record. You have the pride of wearing the uniform, you're children's heroes, and now you're needing help and asking for it? That just throws so many people off."

The high unemployment rate, combined with personal relationship problems and the trauma of war are being blamed for Oregon National Guard having the highest rate of suicides of all national guards. Twelve soldiers at Fort Lewis-McChord in Tacoma, Wash., took their lives in 2011, up from nine in 2010. More than 34,000 soldiers are based there, up from 19,000 prior to the Iraq War.

The new returning veterans also face a greater likelihood of serious physical disability than those of the past, according

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Fallen Off the Edge

A new book by Art Garcia

"Fallen Off the Edge" is a chronicle of one man's experiences after returning from the Vietnam War. Told through the eyes of Street Roots columnist Art Garcia, this book celebrates the major victories born from a series of questionable choices. Art's jocular storytelling takes the reader along with him in and out of the California prison system over the course of 10 years until he found the strength and courage to pull himself up from the fall.

The book is available online at www.blurb.com under searchword Art Garcia.



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