

**Post Traumatic Stress:
PTS Disorder
to
PTS Growth**

Auburn University
Center for Governmental Services

November 3 - 4, 2011
Mobile, Alabama

Conference Sponsors

Alabama Department of Mental Health
Alabama Department of Rehabilitation
Greenleaf
UAB School of Medicine

Conference Partners

Alabama National Guard
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HealingVeterans.org

Faculty

Andy Farris
Healing Veterans, Inc.
Roswell, Georgia

HealingVETERANS.org

*“From a foxhole
to
the White House...”*

HealingVETERANS.org

*“Dedicated to helping
America’s veterans heal spiritually
from their trauma of war.”*

HealingVETERANS.org Mission Statement

- To help Veterans:
 - Heal spiritually from their “soul” wounds
 - Grieve for friends
 - Release guilt survivor and “moral guilt”
 - Begin a journey of spiritual healing
 - Learn that it is alright to be at peace

My Story

- Messenger
- My healing journey from “my war” has been the result of the people and events God has placed on my life’s path

Vietnam 1967 – 1968

- 25th Infantry Division
- 4 campaign stars
 - Fall Offensive, 1967
 - TET Offensive, 1968
 - TET Counter, Offensive I
 - TET Counter, Offensive II

Sept. 1968 – Nov. 1982

- In retrospect:
 - School
 - Cocooned
 - 3 veterans, one house
 - Work
 - “Corporate”
 - “Work-alcoholic”

Sept. 1968 – Nov. 1982

- Sales
 - “Search and destroy”
- Alcoholic
- Sports
 - Adrenalin
 - Teams
- No intimate relationships
 - Fear of loss

My Reflection

“Looking at my reflection I was aware that I was indeed alive . . . did not know why.”

– Our Finest Young Men, A Spiritual Journey from the Trauma of War to Inner-Peace, Andrew H. Farris

My Epiphany

***“A thought formed in my mind,
a sense of knowing -
I was alive simply
by the grace of God...”***

- Our Finest Young Men

A Purpose

***“...that God must have
a purpose for my life.”***

- Our Finest Young Men

What We Still Carry

- Emotional flashbacks
- Anger
- Guilt
 - Survivor guilt, moral guilt
- Moral anguish
 - What we did, or did not do
- Self-destructive behaviors
 - Addictions

What We Still Carry

- Depression
- Heart disease
- Family dysfunction

- "What They Carried", Tim O'Brien

Statement of Need

- In 2010, the VA provided treatment for PTSD and related conditions to over 1.2 million veterans...
 - ***“60% of the veterans treated were Vietnam Veterans.”***

- Dr. Antonette Zeiss, Acting Director, Chief, Mental Health Department, Virginia

“Avoidance”

- You came home to:
 - A hostile environment
 - Hostility toward you individually
- You went back to school or work
- Got married
- Raised families
- Became work-alcoholics and alcoholics

“Avoidance”

- You joined associations
 - Men’s Groups
- To stay so busy you avoided thinking about Vietnam

– Sr. Trauma Recovery Team, Counselor, V.A., 2009

Vietnam Veterans Today

- In your late 50’s or early 60’s:
 - You are retiring, voluntarily or not
 - You have a high divorce rate
 - Your children are out of the nest
 - Many of you have gotten sober
 - You are faced with all this time to think

“I See It in Their Eyes”

“The Vietnam veterans who come in here now, I can see 40-odd years of pain and regret... The Iraq vets say they are ok, but I can see it in their eyes, too.”

– Sr. Trauma Recovery Team, Counselor, V.A., 2009

“The New One’s”

“I have a good five more years of work with your generation . . . then a good ten more years with the new one’s.”

– Sr. Trauma Recovery Team, Counselor, V.A., 2009

VA PTSD Treatment

“...studies conducted over the nearly three decades since (DSM) adoption of the PTSD definition . . . do not form a cohesive body of evidence about what works and what does not.”

– Treatment of PTSD: An Assessment of The Evidence, Institute of Medicine’s Committee in Treatment of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, 2007, 2008, 2009

“Profound Guilt”

- Among the painful legacies of Vietnam . . .
 - Loss of religious faith
 - Rage directed at God
 - Fundamental moral questions...and
 - Guilt...a profound sense of guilt

– William Mahedy, Out of the Night, The Spiritual Journey of the Vietnam Veteran, 1986. US Army, Chaplain, Vietnam 3 years

“Crisis of Faith”

“The spiritual journey of the vets is important for America, especially for that part of America that calls itself Christian.”

– William Mahedy, *Out of the Night*

Why?

“History will long dwell on how America made the same bloody errors in Vietnam and Iraq within a generation . . .”

– Maureen Dowd, *The New York Times*, April, 2006

Statement of Need

“Nearly 1.64 million US troops have been deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq . . . The VA should expect up to 35% of those serving to seek PTSD treatment.”

– Rand Corporation; *Journal Management Science*

“The New One’s”

“We taught them they could break down doors, destroy the enemy . . . We taught them they could be superheroes . . . NOW, they are hurt, physically, emotionally, and they do not know what to do . . . We did not teach them how to heal.”

– US Army Colonel, Iraq veteran, 2011

“They are Different”

“Veterans know that, having been to hell and back, they are different . . . We expect them to put the war behind them . . . but it is impossible for them to do so.”

“Veterans feel they have lost their souls, and their relationship with divinity.”

– *War and the Soul*, Edward Tick, PhD, 2005

“The Journey”

“. . . to complete the journey out of the spiritual night – the healing of memories is crucial . . . In a religious sense this means handing them over to God.”

– William Mahedy, *Out of the Night*

“A Competent Guide”

“A veteran has, I believe, a better chance of finding a competent guide in a contemplative monk or [cleric] a person who has encountered God in the darkness of the unknowing.”

– William Mahedy, *The Vietnam Reader*, 1991

Healing Retreat

- Spiritual Healing Retreat for Veterans
- Journaling to heal
- Anger and forgiveness
- Strength through suffering
- Spouses round-table
- Grief ceremony

Healing Retreat

- The journey home
 - “Exposing wounds”
- The healing ceremony
 - Conyers, Georgia; June 6-9

The Journey Home

“There are certain wounds that never heal except through prayers and tears, there is a need to expose your wounds to one who is able to listen and to be a companion in prayer.”

– Father Anthony Delisi, OSOB Monastery of the Holy Spirit

“Find Joy in the Pain”

“We can thus linger with the pain as well as the joy, and even find joy in the pain, looking to the new life it brings in faith.”

– Father Gerard, OSOB Vietnam era Veteran

Forgiveness

“God allows things to happen to us so that we learn how to love and forgive . . . We are not very good at forgiving ourselves.”

– Fr. Michael Francis, OSOB, Abbot The Monastery of the Holy Spirit

Spouses Round Table

“One of the sessions included a wives’ briefing on PTSD . . . For the first time in over 40 years, my wife and I talked about things that I had stuffed into the bottom drawer in the “Do Not Open” file . . . I discovered that she too had a “Do Not Open” file . . . one I never knew existed.”

– D.S.J., Marine, Vietnam, '69-70

“Many Stand With Us”

“The retreat helped me realize that I can’t hold on to the bad things war throws at us . . . or it will eat us alive . . . in many ways, it was closure . . . not in the sense that full and complete healing . . . but an understanding that many stand with us in this healing journey.”

– R. R., Afghanistan veteran

“Cleanse Us”

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

– John 1, 1:9; Dr. D.H., Vietnam veteran. MD

Giving Forgiveness

- The Healing Ceremony at the Spiritual Healing Retreat for Veterans
– June, 2011

I Have Forgiven Myself

“I was able to spend quality time with my aging father, a 30-year Army veteran who served in Vietnam . . . I have forgiven myself for holding grudges [against] him for not spending more time with me as a kid, and even as an adult.”

– J.P., Army, Desert Storm era Veteran

“Glue Them Together”



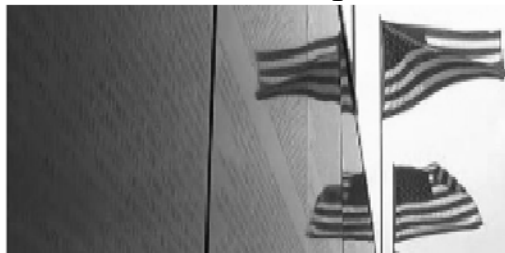
Bridging the Gap of Georgia
“Helping Veterans find employment and re-establish themselves in society.”

“Glue Them Together”



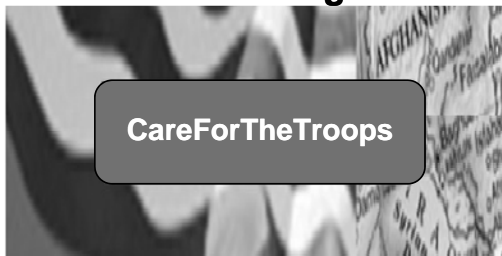
**St. Ann Vets Helping Vets
St. Ann Catholic Church**

“Glue Them Together”



HealingVETERANS.org
**“Helping America’s Veterans on a
spiritual journey to healing.”**

“Glue Them Together”



***“To care for those who have
borne the battle, and
their spouses, children, and families.”***

“Glue Them Together”

- Atlanta Vet Center
 - Spouses round-table for Healing Veteran Retreats

“Glue Them Together”



**American Legion Post 319
“Central Services”**

“Glue Them Together”



“Just Listening”

“Glue Them Together”



**The Monastery of the Holy Spirit
Spiritual Healing Retreat for Veterans**

We Are Responsible

“Our Veterans cannot heal unless society accepts responsibility . . . to our veterans, [we] must say, we are responsible for you, for what you did, and for the consequences.”

- Heal the Warrior, Heal the Country, Edward Tick, PhD, 2008
<http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/fa-just-foreign-policy/heal-the-warrior-heal-the-country>

Leave No Resource Behind

- **Veterans with PTSD need help from every resource we can provide**
- **BREAK DOWN THE BARRIERS!**

Together We Can . . .

“Bring them all the way home.”

- Rev. Robert Certain, Vietnam veterans, POW
<http://www.unchainedeagle.com/>

HealingVETERANS.org

**“From a foxhole . . .
to all the way home.”**

The Retreat 2012

- **Spiritual Healing Retreat for Veterans**
- **The Monastery of the Holy Spirit**
 - **An ecumenical retreat house**
 - **July 2012**
- **For information:**
 - www.healingveterans.org/HV.html**
- **Reservations: 770 - 760 - 0959**

Sponsor A Retreat

- **Spiritual Healing Retreat for Veterans**
- **If your organization would like to sponsor a retreat**
 - **Contact: Andy Farris**
andyfarris@healingveterans.org

HealingVETERANS.org

“ . . . be at peace ”

– St. Paul, Second Epistle to the Corinthians