

The North County Times - Californian

## **BOOK REVIEW: Book on PTSD contains solid advice for veterans, families**

**By STEVE FISHER - For the North County Times | Posted: Monday, March 22, 2010 11:12 am**

In his book "Once A Warrior Always A Warrior: Navigating the Transition from Combat to Home, Including Combat Stress, PTSD, and mTBI," Col. Charles Hoge effectively describes in lay terms the causes and effects of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). And his approach is so comprehensible that he has created in his book a signature PTSD reference for warriors and their families.

While all professionals have a vast vocabulary of confusing acronyms, the author has written this handbook in language that the warrior and his or her family can understand. In his book, he draws on an extensive medical background, a 20-year active-duty Army career, and time spent in Iraq during the second year of the war ---- a year when some of the most difficult fighting was encountered by coalition forces.

Hoge clearly explains that severe wounds, constant deployments, high operational tempo, and lack of clear front lines have made PTSD a signature injury of the past nine years of war. The impact of this stress is experienced throughout the family, not solely by the warrior.

Through the use of the acronym LANDNAV (Land Navigation) he helps the reader navigate through the transition from combat to home, and through the sometimes intimidating medical systems of the military and the Veterans Administration. Worksheets, case studies and the raw commentary provided by retired First Sgt. Michael Schindler of his own struggle with PTSD provide a basis for better understanding and self-evaluation.

The one missing element in Hoge's book is his approach to the team he describes as necessary to support warriors and their families coping with stress: He includes mental and medical health professionals and chaplains, but absent in his discussion is the military leadership. In the Marine Corps, the leadership ----- particularly the small-unit leader ---- is key to identifying and assisting warriors in need of support. The Marine Corps is making a concerted effort to eliminate the stigma and prejudice of individuals acknowledging they have PTSD.

Hoge might have disregarded the chain of command because of past experience. Many older generation military leaders have dismissed claims of PTSD as shell shock, combat fatigue or just slackers attempting to use the system, but today's leaders get it. The leadership is and must be involved in order to fully eliminate the stigma of PTSD and support the warrior family.

Hoge explains that PTSD is a manifestation of survival and functioning in stress. The emotions and reactions that are symptoms of PTSD are also beneficial reactions to placing normal people in an abnormal situation ---- war. Anger, an adrenaline rush and dropping to the ground would be normal reactions to small arms fire from the enemy. Those survival skills in combat aren't turned off like a light switch. Nor should they be.

As Lt. Cmdr. Mary Neal Vieten observed, "Today, you can have someone serving in Fallujah one day and home making cookies the next day."

Our military members and their families can use this book as a guide to understanding PTSD and learning to cope with the stress of multiple and lengthy deployments to combat. While our medical community can take nearly miraculous steps to physically heal wounded warriors, the mental and emotional wounds are not so obvious, and they require understanding and long-term support that might be impossible for anyone who has not been to combat to understand.

Hoge does understand and he has responded with wisdom and a helping hand in his book for the military families whose commitment is so significant.

Steve Fisher is a retired Marine officer and combat veteran; he lives in Fallbrook.

“Once A Warrior Always A Warrior: Navigating the Transition from Combat to Home, Including Combat Stress, PTSD, and mTBI”

\*\*\* 1/2 (out of four)

Author: Dr. Charles W. Hoge, MD, colonel, U.S. Army (ret.)

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