

Stark County Honor Court Annual Mentor Appreciation Breakfast

Restoring Dignity

**Kathy Platoni, Psy.D., DAAPM, FAIS
Clinical Psychologist
COL (RET), US Army**

**Veteran of Operation Desert Storm and the Global War on Terrorism ~ JTF-GTMO, Iraq and Afghanistan
Dayton SWAT**

**Member, Ohio Veterans Hall of Fame
Member, Greene County Veterans Hall of Fame
Editor, Combat Stress Magazine**

We are addicted to war. We (Veterans and members of all branches of the Armed Forces) are not the same people who left for war, amidst waving flags and sobbing loved ones. We are diligent in not admitting this to our families, but the adrenaline rush of combat is like none other. Nothing compares. Nothing else allows us to feel so fiercely alive (Bahten, 2012). We are part of that everlasting brotherhood/sisterhood that redefines who we are, even more so than our own names; that elite culture that identifies us as warriors, warfighters, and war dogs.

Our training has altered the very mindset that was once the guiding principle for navigating the world as civilians, everything set in its perfect place. Now we borne to live by the principles of war, the doctrine of the battlefield. We lived it and survived by it. Subconsciously and on autopilot, we apply maximum firepower to respond to the enemy threat; milliseconds to reach this lifesaving decision without any time left to question our actions (Bahten, 2012). These are workable solutions in combat, but are rarely adaptive on the home front.....but there is no off switch or easy way to dial this back in the "slower paced" world into which we have been thrust back. In the civilian world, the "reaction must be proportionate to the provocation", but this may mean certain death on the battlefield (Bahten, 2012). There is no manual to guide us to extinguishing that which is pure and unadulterated survivorship in the wartime theater and thus, we regretfully unleash on the people we love the most. Our old selves are not hanging in the closet to don like a well-worn shoe. The explosive emotions of unresolved grief and anger and guilt and yes, even survivor guilt sear our souls with more unfinished business than could fill a landfill and because we have not yet received the instructions for the placement of the shut off valve. This is not an integral part of the Law of War. Rage has the potential to erupt at any time, as the more primitive structures of our brains cannot detect location or geography. Our entire world has become a threatening place, another battleground, a new set of foxholes and trenches. This unsafe place will not allow us to form attachments, to reconnect with those we love the most, as we have learned that the people we love "get killed" (Bahten, 2012). We

operate on the bare bones dogma that we must attack to survive and to protect, a harvest of anger and rage that instinctually permitted us to survive. This rarely bodes well for family dynamics or for stepping back into the minefield of the civilian world.

Without the willingness to not only listen, but to hear, the casualties of war will multiply exponentially. There are a host of programs provided by the military designed to facilitate redeployment and homecoming (Yellow Ribbon and Beyond the Yellow Ribbon Programs, the Center for Deployment Health Psychology, Military One Source and the like), but hundreds of thousands of the 2.7 million men and women who served in Vietnam and the 2.6 million of us who have been deployed in support of the Global War on Terrorism have yet to make it all the way back to the society that sent us to war. Though many of these issues come into play at home and at work and yet never come to the attention of law enforcement, readjustment issues may rise to the level of psychological disintegration that results in interfacing with local, county, or state law enforcement authorities, depositing these issues very much into the public eye. No Service Member or Veteran, let alone any community that has sent its citizens to war, is immune or exempt (Etter, McCarthy, and Asken, 2011). With woefully inadequate available resources to treat the masses of suffering souls, the lack of preparation by government agencies even at the inception of the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan 20 years ago in order to meet the enormous medical and mental health demands of returning forces, the stigma of seeking mental health services, and the grossly underestimated numbers of Service Members and Veterans writhing with the psychological wounds of war, law enforcement encounters may be the very first opportunity for psychologically wounded warriors to find their way to mental health services. We are very clearly unready to navigate the 1000 miles of bumpy road to redeployment, even years after coming home. Do we ever really come all the way home?

Neither can we forget that many of our law enforcement officers themselves have served on active duty in time of war or are currently in Reserve or National Guard, which readily lends itself to the common bonds among those who wear the uniform, whether blue, green, brown, or tan. On both sides of that coin are those who live and continue to live with the constant threat of danger, who have witnessed the horrors of human cruelty and man's inhumanity to man, the terrible and tragic losses of brother and sister Service Members, as well as law enforcement officers in the line of duty; all those who relentlessly and willingly place themselves in harm's way to protect to and to serve for duty, honor, country, and community. There is the battleground of the combat theater and the battlefield of the streets. We may all very well be inextricably linked in this fight together (Etter, McCarthy, and Asken, 2012).

We, as a citizenry, need not look much further than the exploding numbers of suicides among Veterans, which has exceeded 30,000 lost lives since 9-11, four times more than those military personnel who died in combat. We can attribute this not only to psychological injuries, but to the substance abuse too often utilized as a means of self-

anesthetizing against pain of all types and intensities, depression, marital, family, and interpersonal problems; incapacitating physical injuries, TBI's, financial and legal problems, lack of jobs, and homelessness, just for starters. And we, the war dogs, come to the point that we shun the public that spurns us, further increasing isolation, alienation and feelings of abandonment by the peoples of the nation we swore to protect and defend. The time is long past due to walk a mile or two in our boots, not only to understand the enormity of the sacrifices made by these Veterans, but that the magnitude of the problem and the solutions to them must become the responsibility of every citizen of this country for whom we willingly offered up our lives. That should make every single one of us accountable, not to mention the justice system, law enforcement, local businesses, churches, surrounding communities, and the citizenry at large, for closing the gap in restoring our Veterans.

We Veterans will always be made of some kind of hardcore, gritty stuff. It's who we are. The only salve for the indelible imprint of war is to go back and do it again. And again. Little else has come to make sense than to live on the edge for a cause that few will ever come to appreciate or understand. In Nancy Sherman's book, *Stoic Warriors*, she describes anger as one of the primary remnants of war (Etter, McCarthy, and Asken, 2011), "as much a part of it as weapons and armor". And so we return home as weaponized from the "deeds of war" that are pressed upon us as part of our necessary armamentarium, short fused, ready to ignite, and without a target upon which to unleash it. Add to this adversity and hardship that defy any conditions 99 percent of the American populace could ever even begin to fathom, the abuses inherent in toxic and ineffective leadership, multiple deployments in rapid succession, and exposure to excessive numbers of gross injustices forced upon the soul, it is no wonder that the scourge of what we carry home sometimes leads to involvement with law enforcement. The good news is that if our law enforcement officers are educated in some of the finer points of the plight of the Veteran, many of them Veterans themselves, there is a far better chance that the situation can be diffused and resolved (Etter, McCarthy, and Asken, 2011). The very best chance for the de-escalation of a potentially explosive situation is the knowledgeable and well-informed police officer who is willing to listen, to hear, and not to judge, never overlooking the fact that there may be considerable danger lying in wait from the Service Member or Veteran, whose training in reacting to threats and conducting business in highly pressurized situations, makes it even more critical for law enforcement to curb the crisis and prevent it from turning into another battlefield. Do not expect that women and non-combat arms Service Members were not involved in combat in the theater of operations, where the front lines are indistinguishable from the rear echelon. Never forget that we live by the code of duty, honor, and country, not ourselves. At the very least we owe them the very same allegiance they have given us as servants of our great nation as the most noble of deeds for a cause far greater than themselves, for their willingness to don the uniform in time of crisis and war, for writing a blank check to the people of the United States of

America, payable up to and including their very lives and to be willing to repeat this as often as our government asks this of us. There is no price too high that we would be unwilling to pay in service of our homeland, no struggle or privation that we would fail to undertake. We are borne for toil and tribulation. This is the very best of what America has to offer, the most precious and priceless of our resources, our first responders both here and over there. There is an indelible debt of gratitude to be paid on both scores.

And hence it is the Honor Court, presided over by the Honorable Judge Taryn L. Heath and under the guidance and direction of Ms. Michele Hammers, Honor Court Program Director, who have enabled honor to be restored to those who have served, for tortured souls to be reinstated as functioning and esteemed members of our community. It is the Stark County Honor Court that serves as the exemplary model for Veterans Treatment Courts, not just throughout the State of Ohio, but all the way through the nation in training and mentoring numerous other Veterans Treatment Courts. And it is the extraordinarily generous Battle Buddies of the Mentorship Program who have so unselfishly dedicated themselves infinitely to the Veteran community, to enable justice to be served to our Veterans as they are guided and propelled forward into their transition back to society, holding tight to the well-deserved pride for having served this great country in time of war. In a culture ruled by self-indulgence, selfies and reckless abandon in service of the self, it is wholly renewing, not to mention celebratory, to discover that the milk of human kindness and bona fide and genuine heroism still exists, right here in the Great State of Ohio, smack in the middle of the grand city of Canton, Ohio.

The destructive causes and consequences of incarceration and reincarceration have left a vast trail of damages for those Veterans who have fallen from grace, forced to face the justice system. Homelessness is estimated to be 3.5 times higher for Veterans with a history of interfacing with law enforcement and the confinement that often follows (Clark, 2022). This homelessness problem too easily becomes a vicious cycle of living on the streets, followed by imprisonment. Thanks to the Veterans Treatment Court model and the mentorship programs that accompany them, the light at the end of the tunnel is not necessarily an oncoming locomotive for these Veterans. The sense of community and profound camaraderie that is too often absent in the years succeeding redeployment is an answer to the plight of homeless Veterans who have been imprisoned (Clark, 2022). Furthermore, this may serve as a means of replicating that which is so sorely missed after military life, leading to tremendous isolation, substance abuse, and despair. What the Stark County Honor Court and its mentors have enabled, encouraged and empowered is the accomplishment of a successful return to a life of value, meaning and purpose. This breaks down the barriers to healing, to recovery, and to accountability by re-immersion in those well-ingrained values inherent in the military culture: duty, honor, country, and selflessness (Tirocchi, 2019). We should not

rest until the Veterans Treatment Court and the mentorship program have been brought to bear for any Veteran in need of a Battle Buddy at their side and a chance to take back all that was lost to them. This is what we owe our Veterans, who have sacrificed far too much to be cast aside and to be deprived of the freedoms that they fought to safeguard and defend. These are the very people that would take a bullet for the entirety of these United States and anyone living in it. We can ill afford to turn our backs on them.

The selflessness of those who have stepped up in mentorship and in service of humanity right here in this community is no less than a gift of priceless proportions; those who have already placed their lives on the line countless times and yet still chose to offer up enormous helpings of service to that banquet table of all things good and right and generous in their charity. And truth be told, there are few more precious gifts than the outstretched hand from those who have walked in your boots and those who steadfastly walk beside them, Vet to Vet. Blessed are those who lay down their lives for their friends.



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Stark County Honor Court Program for justice-involved veterans will celebrate its eleventh (11th) Annual Mentor Appreciation Breakfast on Friday, May 27, 2022 at MAPS Air Museum beginning at 9:00 a.m. The Honorable Judge Taryn L. Heath presides over the Specialized Docket Treatment Court for veterans, providing increased management to veterans and active duty military personnel in the criminal justice system that may be eligible for benefits and services from the Veterans Administration. The keynote address will be delivered by Dr. Katherine Platoni, Psy.D., DAIPM, FAIS, Clinical Psychologist, Colonel, Retired U.S. Army, Colonel, Ohio Military Reserve/State Defense Forces, Dayton SWAT, Director of Support Services, Fraternal Order of Police, Ohio Lodge 117, Editor, Combat Stress Magazine. Dr. Platoni has been a practicing clinical psychologist for 40 years and maintains a private practice in Centerville, Ohio. She has deployed on four occasion in time of war. (*See attached Bio of Dr. Platoni*) **and is a survivor of the Fort Hood Massacre of 5 November 2009.**

Invocation by Rev. Dr. John Schluep of Warrior's Journey Home. The American Legion Post 44 will be presenting the colors and vocalist Melanie John will be performing the National Anthem. All veterans and the general public are encouraged to attend.

Questions or additional information contact:
Michele M. Hammers, Honor Court Program Director (330) 451.7789
mmhammer@starkcountyohio.gov
Tickets are \$15.00 per person RSVP is required by May 9, 2022
Checks made payable to Mr. Mikes Catering