



VETERANS FOR PEACE
HUMBOLDT BAY
CHAPTER 56

THE FOGHORN

DECEMBER
2016

“Cutting Through the Fog of War”

Boot Camp Hell

By Jon Reisdorf

Three months ago, I received a desperate call from Amy Smith concerning her son Adam, in boot camp at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Actually, Adam was at a medical holding battalion because of a knee injury. After rehabbing he was scheduled to restart basic training. Probably in six weeks. Amy was freaking out because her son had written two letters begging her for help. Every day he and other injured soldiers suffering from depression and expressing doubts about being in the army were forced to stand in front of the other recruits where they were mocked and ridiculed. Adam wrote “I can’t take it any more”. She had not talked to him since he arrived at the military entrance processing command – MEPS – in July. While at MEPS he took his final oath and command took away his phone. He was still allowed to write letters but as Amy soon discovered he did not always receive her responses.

I asked what steps she had taken so far. She had called Adam’s recruiter every day. They were not returning her calls. Not that she held out much hope there since the recruiter tandem had lied to Adam, Amy and her husband from day one. Her first question for me was how to navigate the maze of Ft. Sill so she could make sure her son was okay.

Listening to Amy an obvious question came to mind: What did Adam mean when he said, “I don’t think I can take it any more?” Amy’s answer changed everything and eventually lead to Adam’s discharge with an Entry Level Separation: He had attempted suicide while in high school and she was worried he might try again.

We needed to talk to Adam now and fast. But how? Taking the recruits cell phones away during the week is the usual policy at most basic training and advanced individualized training facilities. However, except if the recruit is in hot water the phones are normally returned over the weekend. Sill was an outlier.

We had to get current information on Adam and letters were too slow. Amy already knew that prior to his injury Adam was assigned to Charlie Company and she knew his military ID number. Very helpful. I had Amy read through Adam’s letters looking for the names of Drill Instructors (DIs) and other Non Commissioned Officers (NCOs). DI Murphy and First Sergeant Stone were mentioned and that was a start. Amy needed to call the DIs and the First Sgt to explain that he had attempted suicide in high school and that his letters indicated depression and possibly worse.

The highest percentage of suicide among active duty service members occur when they are in entry level status – basic training or advanced individual training – AIT. The party line is that commands take suicide very seriously. In actual fact most NCOs and DIs still routinely mock, even target, recruits who report suicidal ideation. Unless there is an actual suicide attempt depressed and suicidal recruits are routinely denied their right to go to sick call. The few who make it to behavioral health find that many career military mental health professionals take the talk of suicide as a ruse to get out of the service. Up and down the chain of command most lifers discount mental health issues largely as BS. Most

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supervising NCOs on up to platoon and battalion commanders routinely apply the tired old bromide "suck it up, man up and quit whining and you will be fine."

Being the weekend guy on the Hotline I often get to talk to recruits in basic and AIT directly. Ideally I try to get depressed, suicidal and or homicidal service members to turn themselves into an ER. Health care professionals working at ERs take suicidal and homicidal ideation very seriously and often force commands to respond.

In Adam Smith's case I did not get a chance to speak to Adam until he was safely home with his family. But I was successful in getting three crucial calls between Mom and son. While I will never know what ultimately did the trick I believe getting on record Amy's letter describing Adam's attempted suicide in high school was crucial to our eventual success. The letter described what was happening to Adam currently at Sill and what Amy wanted: 1) To talk to her son 2) Get him evaluated 3) Get him discharged. She then described the suicide attempt in high school:

On March 1, 2016 around 3:00 pm the school counselors wanted to have a meeting with Adam and me about his grades. He was failing 3 classes. The meeting was very intense. I was there, along with 3 of his class room teachers, two army recruiters, and 2 school counselors. The room was full. I tried to keep it light but the atmosphere was dark and threatening. One of the recruiters started talking intensely to Adam who I could see was shutting down. After the meeting I asked Adam if he was ok. He told me he was. I was worried because I knew he was not. I asked him where he was going. He told me he was going home to study. I had to go back to work but I knew my husband was going to be home soon so I thought he would be safe.

At work I got a panicked call from Wallace, Adam's best friend. She was crying so hysterically I could not understand her. She finally calmed down and

told me Adam was in his room at my house with a gun and he was going to hurt himself. I called my husband who rushed home from work. When he arrived he found Adam laying on the floor holding a gun. My husband took it away from him and waited by his room till I got home. As I was driving home I texted Staff Sergeant Simpson and informed him that Adam had picked up a gun and threatened to shoot himself.

Staff Sgt. Simpson texted back there was nothing he could do. The only thing we could do was call the cops. Sgt Simpson said he would text or call Adam later in evening to see how he was. I am enclosing a copy of the texts.

I was very upset when I got home and asked Adam why he was doing this. I told him that this is not the way to do things. I told him if he needs help I will help him. He started yelling saying he did not want my help. He wanted to be left alone. He said he was stressed out. He could not handle going to work, school, his recruiters trying to make him make weight for the Army, and graduate from school. He did not want our help. He wanted to be left alone.

I could not leave him alone after that. I made sure somebody was home with him at all times. I called the school and talked to the counselors and told them about Adam trying to hurt himself. They removed him from class and had a meeting with him the also called in a school psychologist to evaluate and assess. Copies of those evaluations will be obtained and forwarded to Charlie Company CO, Senator Murray, and the JAG at Sill.

The next communication I hear from Ft. Sill should be informing me that my son is being properly evaluated by behavioral health and that the staff judge advocate has begun paperwork for his immediate discharge.

Amy included all pertinent contact information at the close of her powerful letter which on my recommendation was sent certified. The letter got her a supervised phone call with her son - her son was on speaker phone with his DI and First Sgt listening in. The First Sgt said that Adam denied the events in the letter and refused help at



...continued on page 4


Eureka VA Clinic Town Hall Meeting

December 6, 2016, 4:30 p.m. to 6 p.m.

930 West Harris Street, Eureka, Ca. (former Safeway building just west of WinCo)

Everyone is welcome to attend whether you are enrolled with the VA or not. This is an opportunity to learn about services available to veterans through the VA Clinic. A representative of TriWest Healthcare Alliance will also be present to discuss the **Veterans Community Care** (formerly "Choice") **Program** and what it offers.

All veterans should consider enrolling with the VA even if you have health coverage elsewhere. *You are NOT taking services away from other veterans.* In fact, you are helping because the VA health care system operates on a needs basis. In order for more services to be offered there must be a demand. If an existing service is not sufficiently utilized that service may be discontinued, thus, depriving the few who need the service of its local availability. The greater the demand the more services are provided. You may also be eligible to obtain many of your prescribed medications at no cost or a nominal copay. You may even be able to continue to see your present provider through the Community Care program. In addition, the VA has a 24-hour TLC Advice Nurse available via a 1-800 number.

Learn more at the Town Hall meeting, December 6th  Tell a Fellow Vet!

Questions? Contact: 'Nate' Lomba at 707.269.0528 or Email: nsloba@reninet.com

*Your Veterans For Peace representative
on the Town Hall Council is:*

N. S. 'Nate' Lomba, PE, SE (Ret.)

*He would like to hear your suggestions
for improving VA Clinic services;
he can be reached at: NSLpe@reninet.com*

**Next VFP56 meeting will be held
on Thursday, December 1st at
7:00 PM.
Meeting will be held at 24 Uni-
tarian Fellowship Way, Bayside,
Jacoby Creek Road. Veterans and
non-veterans are more than wel-
come to come and help us dialogue
about what we together can do to
bring about peace in this complex
world.**



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behavioral health. He could assure Amy that Adam was being treated fairly and humanely. Amy told me she was still in distress. Adam sounded distant, wooden, and not at all well.

Amy gave me the phone numbers. I got the First Sgt. and DI's voice mails. The DI, Sgt. Murphy called me back. I asked DI Murphy to pass this message on to First Sgt. Stone. I was putting Stone on notice that I was holding him personally responsible for Adam's well being.

I gave Murphy an overview of the Hotline, that we are there for anyone in the services seeking information or support. I asked the DI if he had children – he had three boys. I raised a stepson and we talked for some time about how boys will sometimes lie when under pressure. Amy really needed to talk to Adam without supervision. Adam was her only son and she was not going to stop until she did.

I asked him to pass on to First Sgt. Stone the following: Amy was forwarding the text messages from Sgt Simpson the recruiter collaborating that he knew about the suicide attempt, along with the accounts of the father and friend and school counselor. I would also call Captain Pierce at JAG and the home state for the Smith's Washington Senator Patty Murray's military case worker Derek Fischer and ask for their help. I planned on informing them about the First Sergeant's lack of cooperation with Adam's mother.

I closed our conversation in a way that worked well in the past with people in the chain of command: "Sgt. Murphy I am not trying to get anyone in trouble. I just need to be sure Adam is safe. A kid like Adam will never make a dependable soldier. You are the DI, you know that. So let's get this kid discharged before he hurts himself." The DI promised he would personally keep an eye on Adam and would see that the First Sgt. truly got the message. He thanked me for what we in the Hotline did for service members.

Within five minutes Amy received a call from Adam, this time unsupervised. Amy told Adam about me and the Hotline and they were working to

get him discharged. The call was emotional and fairly short.

I was sending a follow up letter (which he did not receive) detailing the regulations covering his rights and the steps to take to ensure he was processed out quickly.

Within days a letter arrived from Adam saying that he would be discharged under Chapter 5-11 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice. Adam was in a panic. Now his life was over. Why couldn't his mother just stay out of his life. The letter detailed what Adam was hearing from his First Sgt. "Son. You are receiving a bad discharge. You will never get a student loan. You will never get a job. Yeah Mommy will get her wish and you will be out of the military forever but good luck having any kind of a life."

Such threats toward service members awaiting discharge are common by NCOs and their equivalent in other branches. The threats almost never hold water but they are used to terrify and punish boys and girls already on the edge. How many suicides occur after such bullying? The thought keeps me up at night. I was determined Adam wouldn't be such a victim.

I immediately called Captain Pierce at Sill. He was an important contact made the Monday after Amy's initial call. I had googled Staff Judge Advocate, Fort Sill. I then called several numbers in the Sill directory until I reached a helpful clerk. I asked her who in the JAG office really cares about soldiers and she said you want to talk to Captain Pierce. He returned my voice mail that afternoon. After we talked, Pierce gave me his cell number with instructions to call him any time.

After hearing that Adam was again in a dangerous state of mind I called Pierce. He answered my urgent call within fifteen minutes. We could only talk in hypotheticals since Adam had not signed a privacy release form. As I have noticed in other cases I can often find someone from JAG who dislikes the abuse and bullying as much as I. Pierce was firmly in that camp. I indicated that Adam needed to be talked off the ledge. After all First Sergeant Stone's threats did have some basis in regulations. Technically Adam

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by not revealing his suicide attempt (based on the verbal instructions of recruiter Sgt. Simpson) had committed the felony of fraudulent enlistment. And it was not uncommon for soldiers to be saddled with a label of personality disorder in their discharge paperwork. What was in the discharge was all up to Adam's command. Pierce assured me that while both bad scenarios were possible they were unlikely. The only way to know for sure was to speak to Adam in person and see what paperwork his command had given him to sign.

Under the Uniform Code of Military Justice a service member being administratively discharged has the right to consult an attorney from the Trial Defense side of JAG. This right is almost never honored by command in any branch. I have found that civilian clerks often help me get around command's road blocks. Pierce put me in touch with a helpful motherly type who, after hearing Adam's story, contacted her friend, a clerk in Charlie Company. Five minutes later I heard that Adam was going to get his visit with Captain Pierce. This was followed by a third phone call home.

The next time I talked to Amy she was on cloud nine. Adam no longer blamed Mom, indeed he thanked her for saving his life. Captain Pierce had explained to Adam that the First Sergeant was "misinformed". There would be no charge of fraudulent enlistment. Since behavioral health hadn't evaluated him there would be no label on his DD 2-14 of "personality disorder" with all its implications. The discharge was worded purposefully vague and ambiguous. Adam was discharged with an Entry Level Separation for a previously undisclosed prior physical and or mental condition. He could honestly say in a job interview that he injured his knee playing football and re-injured it in basic training and so he had been administratively separated because of a previously undisclosed condition. No mention needed to be made of the suicide attempt. All Adam had to do was sign the paperwork and then he could be processed out. He should be home in a week to ten days.

It took a bit over two weeks but it certainly made my day when I received an email with a picture of

Adam and Amy embracing under a welcome home banner followed by a phone call from mother and son thanking me.

Note: names and dates have been changed. The incident that occurred did not happen at Ft. Sill but at another army base. While working on "Adam's" case I received several calls from service members at this base. One of the calls was from an ER doctor seeking a hardship discharge at the base. Over time she detailed to me the depths of the completely dysfunctional scene there. In our last phone call she told me the base was under congressional investigation. I have not received a call from service members in distress at this base since.

At Standing Rock, A Native American Woman Elder Says "This is What I Have Been Waiting for My Entire Life"

by Ann Wright

Comments

This time I have been at Standing Rock, North Dakota at the Oceti Shakowin camp to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) for four days during a whirlwind of national and international attention following two terrible displays of police brutality toward the water protectors.

On October 27, over 100 local and state police and National Guard dressed in riot gear with helmets, face masks, batons and other protective clothing, carrying assault rifles stormed the Front Line North camp. They had other military equipment such as Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Personnel carriers (MRAP) and Long Range Acoustic Devices (LRAD) and a full assortment of tasers, bean bag bullets and clubs/batons. They arrested 141 persons, destroyed the Frontline camp and threw the personal possessions of those arrested in garbage dumpsters. The Morton county sheriff reportedly is investigating the purposeful destruction of personal property.

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In another overreaction to the unarmed civilian water protectors, on November 2, police shot tear gas and beanbag bullets at water protectors who were standing in a small tributary to the Missouri River. They were standing in the frigid water to protect a handmade bridge across the river to sacred burial sites that was being destroyed by the police. Police snipers stood on the ridge of the burial hill with their feet on sacred burial sites.

On October 3, in solidarity with water protectors, almost 500 religious leaders from all over the United States arrived to join water protectors in a day of prayer for stopping the Dakota Access Pipeline. Retired Episcopal Priest John Flogerty had put out a national call for clergy to come to Standing Rock. He said he was stunned that in less than ten days, 474 leaders answered the call to stand for protection of Mother Earth. During the two hour interfaith witness, discussion and prayer near the current digging of the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), one could hear the digging machines destroying the ridge line to the south of Highway 1806.

After the gathering, about 50 of the group drove to Bismarck, the capital of North Dakota, to call on the Governor of the State to stop the pipeline. 14 clergy sat down in the rotunda of the capitol in prayer, refused to end their prayers and leave the capitol building when ordered by the police and were arrested.

*"We must change and we must change our treatment of
Mother Earth."*

Another five people were arrested 30 minutes later when storm troopers were deployed to intimidate the remainder of the group when they walked across the street toward the sidewalk in front of the Governor's ranch style house to kneel in prayer. The women arrestees were transported 4 hours to a county jail in Fargo, North Dakota when a women's cell was available

in Bismarck. Two of the men arrested were shocked when they were told that the women arrested had been taken to Fargo as they had been placed by themselves in a cell that would accommodate ten that was filled with feminine hygiene products. The men arrestees also said that their cash was taken and the jail issued a check for the cash, resulting in their having NO cash upon release making getting a cab or buying food virtually impossible as taxis and grocery stores generally don't cash checks. Instead, those emerging from jail are told to go to a bank to cash the checks which are located far from the jail and probably closed when arrestees are released.

On Saturday, November 5, tribal council leaders arranged for a ceremony for horses as the plains Indians are "descendants from a powerful horse nation." Tribal leader John Eagle reminded the approximately 1,000 persons in a large circle at the new Tribal Council Sacred Fire, that in August 1876, 4,000 horses were taken by U.S. military from the Lakota in what is known as the Battle of Greasy Grass, and known to the U.S. military as the Battle of the Little Bighorn. He also mentioned for the non-Sioux that the Sioux word for horse means "my son, my daughter." He said that the return of horses to the sacred fire would be a healing for the horses for their genetic memory of the treatment of their ancestors in the past century as well as a healing for the native American population for the genetic trauma for their historical treatment of their ancestors. Healing for many at Standing Rock from their recent violent treatment by police and North Dakota National Guard, was an important aspect of the ceremony.

Chief John Eagle pointed out that many Native Americans have joined the military and that as combat veterans, they have double post traumatic stress (PTS), first from their treatment as Native Americans and second as combat veterans. John emphasized that for native combat veterans in particular, it is important to use the word "water protectors," as the terms "demonstrators and protestors" may trigger a PTSD response from their days in the U.S. military. He said that he could see PTSD in the eyes of many

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who went through each of the recent encounters with the police.

As John Eagle explained the purpose of the ceremony, in the distance galloping down the road of flags into the Oceti Sankowin camp came 30 horses and riders. With “peace cries” not war cries, the large 1,000 person circle opened to welcome the horses and riders. They circled the sacred fire many times to the every increasing “peace cries” and the beating of a large drum. He called on each “water protector” to have courage in their hearts to overcome anger and fear and to turn to prayer, as the police and government don’t know how to deal with nonviolence and prayer. Leaders asked that no one take photos of the sacred ceremony once the horses entered the circle.

Another leader said that Native Americans must begin forgiving rather than waiting for an apology for their treatment by the U.S. government. He predicted that the U.S. government will never give an apology and that unless Native Americans forgive the pain they live in, they will live in anger. “Lives are better if one can forgive,” he said. “We must change and we must change our treatment of Mother Earth.”

The son of American Indian Movement (AIM) leader Russell Means told of being in the Front line camp and being clubbed by police as he protected an elder woman. He said that he felt that he had seen violence unfold before, that the treatment by police in 2016 was “familiar in our blood.” Means also reminded everyone to help the young water protectors who are having difficulty in coping with their experiences with the police in the past two weeks.

As the ceremony was ending approximately thirty Navajo Hopi youth and adult supporters arrived into the circle after running from Arizona. Greeted by great cries from the 1,000 persons in the circle, a 15 year-old Hopi youth in sobs said, “150 years ago we were forced to run away from our homes but today we have run to help keep your and our homes, in a prayerful spirit, but to show the government that it cannot make us run away again.”

As I walked from the circle, an older Sioux woman told me that she had been at the Front Line camp the day it was destroyed. She had been sitting in prayer when the police stormed in, roughed people up, broke up the camp and arrested her. She said that she has been in the camp for three months and will stay until the camp ends. In tears, she said, “I am now living as my ancestors lived...in nature all day, everyday, in community living, working and praying together. I have been waiting for this gathering all my life.”

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Ann Wright is a 29 year US Army/Army Reserves veteran who retired as a Colonel and a former US diplomat who resigned in March, 2003 in opposition to the war on Iraq. She served in Nicaragua, Grenada, Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Sierra Leone, Micronesia and Mongolia. In December, 2001 she was on the small team that reopened the US Embassy in Kabul, Afghanistan. She is the co-author of the book “Dissent: Voices of Conscience.” (www.voicesofconscience.com)

Veterans For Peace Responds to Election Results

Veterans For Peace calls for all of our members and those who believe peace is possible to remember that peace is not found in elections, it is found in the work we do to create it. This election season has been one of the darkest and most disappointing in recent history. Peace was missing from all the debates. Now that we know who will be the next president, we have a lot of work to do and it begins now!





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LET US HEAR FROM YOU!

If you would like to submit an article, opinion, comment or response to anything you have read which might interest the members of VFP-56, please e-mail it to turtldncer@aol.com, in word format, or mail to Jim Sorter at 1762 Buttermilk Lane, Arcata, CA 95521. Submissions will be included on a first come basis until the newsletter is full. Late arriving submissions will be archived for future issues.



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