



VETERANS FOR PEACE  
HUMBOLDT BAY  
CHAPTER 56

# THE FOGHORN

NOVEMBER  
2016

*“Cutting Through the Fog of War”*

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## Book review by Jon Reisdorf of *Waking Up From War: A Better Way Home for Veterans and Nations*. Author Joseph Bobrow, PhD, Foreword by H. H. The Dalai Lama

I first heard about Joseph Bobrow and his book *Waking Up From War* this year when I met the author at the yearly conference of counselors of the GI Rights Hotline. Bobrow was on a panel with several vets dealing with what it is now described as Moral Injury. His presence on the panel was a no brainer. For years he pioneered a very effective holistic approach to treating our returning service men and women and the veterans who struggle mightily to find their way back to wellness - the Coming Home Project. I was eagerly looking forward to this panel discussion and hearing from the master - literally a Zen master in the tradition of one of my all time heroes Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Haht Hanh. Bobrow greatly impressed because he talked little and listened much and showed great compassion as one particular Vet with PTSD raged and ranted - (as often happens with PTSD).

It took me many months to finish *Waking Up From War*. Not because it is a thick tome - it is 239 pages including notes, acknowledgment, etc. in the hardback edition. Nor because the writing is dense and tedious. It is packed with information but shares many stories and is written in an easy, conversational style. It took me months to read it because it is so true, so close to home.

I take home my work on the Hotline. The callers to the Hotline, like the service members populating Bobrow's book, often experience suicidal ideation and terrible suffering - physical and psychological. Often they experience injustice arising from a systemic lack of empathy from the chain of command. In order to I get my callers to open up to me I share my own struggle with depression and suicidal ideation when I received my orders to report for induction in 1970 and refused to go. After listening to their struggles I craft narratives based on their stories. To provide mitigation (and help restore empathy) I share the stories of my callers to command and congressional case workers. These stories share this common reality: service members that call for help almost always joined for the right reason. And their stories suggest they tried mightily to succeed and each for their own very different reasons failed. They should therefore be discharged in a way that their future life isn't ruined. My strategy is a simple one: share their stories until I find someone whose humanity is still intact. So far I have always found someone who cares. This approach sometimes evokes from a commander (usually an officer) stories of their own suffering arising from PTSD and Moral Injury. Because of the raw emotion accompanying my work I could only read the stories in *Waking Up From War* in drips and drabs. But, I did finally finish the book and highly recommend it.

*Waking Up From War* begins with a chapter titled "Community Heals and Isolation Kills". Bobrow describes how "war trauma" acts as "a time-release bomb whose continuing and unpredictable shockwaves shatter links." These links are the human connections that hold together a society. We see the ripple effects of these shattered links in our coarsening social interactions, our practice of isolating ourselves from others with differing life experiences and views. The fraying, even breaking of these social links, can further be seen in the dysfunction on display in Washington when connection and social cohesion is so badly needed. And is visible, too, in a community of veterans and the civilians who blithely and blindly support our wars ignoring the "fundamental lack of integrity" by those who have led us into continuing quagmires in the Middle East.

Our leaders mislead us into the wars and ignore the true costs of war paid by the very small percentage of our population who

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fight our battles under false pretense and purpose. A majority of the media, the fourth estate, through ignorance, laziness or for less savory reasons are also complicit in these lies. These lies perpetrated by our leaders, are often born out of contempt for democracy and hubris, is one of the causes of Moral Injury.

Psychiatrist Brett Litz and his colleagues define moral injury as “perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations.” Clinical psychiatrist Jonathan Shay further defines moral injury as stemming from the “betrayal of ‘what’s right’ in a high-stakes situation by someone who holds power.” All of the above were present in the war in Korea, much more so in the Vietnam war and the ugly, dirty wars in Latin and South America and certainly defines our current wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria and in the ongoing drone warfare in Yemen, Iraq, Syria and around the globe.

Waking Up From War spells out the causes and effects of Moral Injury but is much more concerned with its treatment. In Chapter 2, “Turning Ghosts into Ancestors” Bobrow explains how “war trauma brings in its wake a collapse of time” which is characterized in its sufferers by “an experience of haunting.... [U]nprocessed experiences that have been sequestered away and frozen in time in the interest of survival.” In the presence of a supportive community in a healing setting such as occurs in his Coming Home Project sufferers of Moral Injury are allowed to engage in the present moment and transform “a haunting ghost into a memory.... Turning ghosts into ancestors.” This allows these experiences to teach us instead of torture us.

The Coming Home Project holds retreats where participants are encouraged to connect with and open to their “ghosts” and let the often painful process of healing to occur. A healing that best occurs in safe spaces with fellow sufferers guided by skilled counselors in a setting that encourages “safety, trust and belonging” Bobrow describes this organic process as the “Alpha and Omega” of effective treatment.

Chapter 3, “Resilience, Trauma, and the Limits of Plasticity” has a powerful observation about war trauma - “can’t live with it, can’t live without it.” Veterans, the surviving victims and the families of both all know the first part of the premise all too well - “can’t live with it.” True because untreated it doesn’t allow us to live any kind of life as the ghosts of war haunts every aspect of our life, waking and sleeping. While chapters one and two explores how to begin to heal the “can’t

live with it” aspect, chapter three expands on these aspects and introduces that seldom addressed: “Can’t live without it” concept.

“Can’t live without it” is a premise that service members and even those who cover the war as reporters have observed as true. Time and again when people who have experienced combat as participant or reporter return home they often admit that they miss the war zone and have a “deep ache for lost bonds with battle buddies.” Chapter three examines how sufferers can reclaim “lost elements of [their] humanity - exhilaration and aliveness, bonding, a sense of meaning and purpose” which helps with the “can’t live without” issue.

In all the books’ chapters, the failed approaches by the heavily funded DoD and VA treatment programs are described and explored. The DoD approved and lavishly funded programs and treatment plans ignore best practices, and through their lack of integrity undermines trust and contributes to further Moral Injury instead of addressing it. These deeply flawed programs undermine community and discourage true sharing and caring by participants. Those who are supposed to be on the side of service men and women and veterans ignores what is effective and instead relies on what SHOULD work according to preconceived notions.

Bobrow explains that a big reason for the DoD’s support of these expensive and poorly devised programs is its emphasis on achieving readiness. Over the years, I have spent hours arguing with Readiness NCOs and First Sergeants on this very point. They insist that it is good enough to tell someone who is experiences major depression and suicidal ideation to suck it up and get with the program. I have heard from service men and women that their therapist addressed their suicidal ideation by instructing them to have a beer or to stop thinking of those negative thoughts. The goal is to apply a quick band aide on a gaping moral, spiritual and psychological wounds so that a service member can get out in the field and be productive again. The powers that be have spent many years and billions of dollars on a continual search for a silver bullet that will accomplish the impossible - to quickly repair a broken human being - and push him or her back into the revolving door of multiple deployments. This emphasis on a Silver Bullet and quick fixes results in a double standard in the DoD. Bobrow’s research finds that “there seem to be two standards, one for nonmilitary programs, where research evidence is required, and the other for the military’s own programs, where evidence of effectiveness is not necessary.”



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Chapter 3 also explores the neurological basis behind the workability of the effective programs. Here Bobrow presents the research of neuroscientist Stephen Porges and his research into the neurological shutdown which occurs in mammals when they can no longer effectively fight a threat to life and limb or flee from it. Porges found that mammals find ways to shut down by playing dead. In humans, this produces an emotional, even physical shutdown as a defense mechanism. Those who are effectively treating those traumatized by war have found how to turn off the defensiveness that sufferers use to cope.

Restoration of humanity and the sought after healing occurs in what Bobrow describes as a state of “felt safety.” Hard and often slow to achieve. The DoD approved “silver bullets” never get there. Only time spent in a healing environment like the one created by Bobrow’s Coming Home Project can eventually do the job. The DoD hospitals and clinics often end up being triggers of defensiveness instead of a safe space that allows guards to come down and allow a true return to well-being to begin. Porges research suggests that a safe space would include “play... the exercising of the neural regulation of the face through song, through listening, through music, and through reciprocal social interactions. So in a sense talk therapy can be a neural exercise.” Bobrow adds this further observation: “in a supportive therapeutic environment rather than a formal psychotherapy setting, the service member gives voice to their story and the process of listening to other’s stories provides the same ‘neural exercise’ that safety represents.”

Chapter four, “We Are Family: When a service member deploys, the whole family deploys” describes the need to address the very real needs of the family of the service members as well. Bobrow goes beyond the normal concept of family to include all of us and our role as civilians “working in concert to repair the damage of war and build new connections.” There is a lot in this chapter, but regrettably it is beyond what I do as GI Rights Hotline counselor. I often do have contact with family members, especially in the beginning. While I don’t keep statistics on this, I would guess that 90 per cent of the calls of concerns from family members about a service member comes from moms. Usually the wives are too overwhelmed by it all to be help in my work. Moms are amazing!

Chapter five delves deeply into the issue of moral injury and why it is largely ignored by the DoD and the services. A DoD spokesman claims it is “poorly defined” and there is no “formal diagnosis.” Of the major branches the Army comes the closest to addressing through new training videos

which attempts to give soldiers coping mechanisms to “keep in the fight.” Bobrow is clear, Moral Injury is not the result of war crimes committed by bad apples but it is “baked into the war experience.” As one of the participants in Coming Home a Marine explains “you know it’s wrong ...but you have no choice.” Moral Injury resulting from a loss of integrity arises in our culture all the time even outside of war by the very nature of living in a competitive society that values winning above all else. As Bobrow explains: “integrity is precarious...it needs to be renewed each day, like baking fresh bread. We are all a hair’s breath away from “there but for the grace of God go I.”

Chapter 6 title is All the Way Home. In this chapter, Bobrow describes something that I have often noticed in my ten years of work on the Hotline. While service men and women are reluctant to share their experiences with a loved one they are eager to spill their guts to someone who they believe can truly understand and has absolutely no axe to grind. On several occasions I have spoken with colonels in the Army, regular and National Guard, about a service member under their command describing the service members problems arising from PTSD and how I want to find a way that will allow that person to have a life going forward. I relate my own experience as a Conscientious Objector during the Vietnam War inducted in the Army changed my life forever. Within minutes I hear how they too are suffering from PTSD and how difficult it has been for them and how it has so deeply effected their lives.

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Next VFP56 meeting will be held  
on Thursday, November 3rd at  
7:00 PM.  
Meeting will be held at 24 Uni-  
tarian Fellowship Way, Bayside,  
Jacob 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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My one objection to Bobrow's book is how he handles acronyms. To differentiate between PTSD and various forms of Moral Injury Bobrow introduces a variety of acronyms. Since I read the book in spurts and starts I sometimes got lost in the acronyms. He could have avoided this by providing a glossary, putting a reminder in a footnote on the bottom of the page or in parenthesis. If you are going to read the book like I did I recommend jotting down the meanings of the acronyms as they are introduced and keep that "glossary" with you as you read the book. Ultimately, though, if you just skip the acronyms like I did it doesn't detract from the power and importance of Bobrow's *Waking Up From War*.

*Submitted by Jon Reisdorf*

## *SOA WATCH Convergence At The Border*

*Posted by: Becky Luening <becky.pdx@gmail.com>*

### *EPORT FROM THE BORDER*

I want to echo John Grant in encouraging VFP folks to support SOA Watch and other allies in building a powerful movement to demilitarize the border. Not just the border between the USA and Mexico -- there is a second border wall going up on Mexico's southern border that must also be challenged. One of the presenters at a workshop I attended this past weekend wished out loud that we would take our movement there too, so that the people resisting US policies in that border region might see the solidarity that exists up north, and so that our own understanding of their conditions may be deepened.

I was so glad to have been able to attend this first SOAW-led Encuentro at the Border. It was wonderful to be among the crowd of people making noise and flashing lights at the detainees held inside the private detention center in Eloy, Arizona, Thursday night, and see lights flashed back at us, a moment that is captured well in John's photos. The emotional energy of that moment carried right on through the next three days. VFP member Dave Logsdon from Minneapolis, a consistent attendee at Ft. Benning, had balked at the idea of moving the vigil to the border when VFP members met to discuss the proposition in Columbus last year. But at our hotel breakfast table Sunday morning in Nogales, he couldn't have been more enthusiastic and excited about being there. Here is my report.

### *PUPPETISTA CENTRAL*

Embracing my role as a Puppetista for the third year running, I arrived early to help set up shop and to assist in creating puppets and props for the Sunday morning skit, some of which would be used in

connected marches and actions throughout the weekend. In addition to relative newcomers like me, this year's multigenerational collective had a solid core of experienced builders, some of whom have been stalwart participants with SOAW for a dozen years or even decades. The story and direction of the skit morphed over time in a creative, synergistic process that also included an amazing artist from south of the border, and the quality of the process was evidenced in the quality of our co-creations and the emotional impact of the final performance. The process wasn't trouble free, but we freely worked through the obstacles and conflicts that arose along the way.

In gratitude: The build site itself was a gift from a guy named Will, located in a funky industrial area not too far away from a furniture outlet with an endless supply of cardboard cartons (our list-serv aptly named cardboard chaos). Friends from a performance troupe called En Pie de Lucha in Dallas graced the skit with the same beautiful large-scale calavera that was present at Fort Benning last year, to summon ancestral spirits. Solid volunteers turned out day after day to paint butterfly wings and do papier mâché. Open hearted people all, some brought snacks to share, and the Pima Friends House in Tucson provided homey lodging for the duration.

### *THE ROLE OF THE FENCE*

The Puppetistas' creative process, and I dare say the unfolding of the entire Encuentro, had to be lived hour by hour, because details were constantly in flux. In considering the flow of the action, the biggest question mark was staging, because we had no idea how it would work to have two stages with a fence in between. It was unclear where the crowd would be situated in relation to the stages. It was hard to decide how many props or puppets to put on the Mexican side, and we puzzled over how to coordinate the action between the two sides. No one had yet visited the Nogales site, so none of us knew how easy it would be for people on one side to see through the fence to what was happening on the other. Turns out it wasn't easy at all. Unless you are right up on it, despite the spaces in between, those solid bars of steel really do interfere with your view.

According to someone I spoke with upon my arrival in Tucson, US border patrol agents had warned organizers that they were to keep a clearance of a distance that kept changing, from 10 feet to 3 feet to 5 feet. But when push came to shove, from the moment the marchers arrived at the staging area in "Ambos Nogales" Saturday morning, people on both sides got right up on the fence, made contact with each other, and even poked things through the spaces between the steel posts, with no response at all from border patrol, to our great relief.

Obviously, the border fence played a major role in the Puppetista skit as well as in the overall program, having been intentionally cast for the part by the Encuentro planners who chose this particular site. And it was extremely effective in its role. On the

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VFP-led march to the border, there came a fork in the road where people had to choose to proceed to either the north or south side of the border. Burning hot sun combined with the potential jam-up at the northbound border crossing, where people are forced to stop and show their papers, made it difficult to just pop back and forth, and the imposed hard division of the “beloved community” was frustrating, confusing and disconcerting at times. But the way the massive, rusty, prison-like bars towered over our bifurcated movement, the way it snaked into the distance along the hilly terrain, was dramatic and perfectly symbolic of the facts we had all come together to learn about, to resist and to change; the divisions, the death and the pain caused by the heartless inhumanity of global capitalism and its agents.

### THE BANNERS

Upon my arrival in Arizona, I chanced to sit in on a planning session for a very successful direct action that took place on Sunday after the vigil, at the highway checkpoint between Nogales and Tucson. [Great video footage and photos from this action and other weekend happenings can be found on the SOA Watch website, facebook and youtube pages.] Planners leaned on the Puppetistas to create banners for this action, and I took it upon myself to sew and paint a couple of them. One reads, “Freedom of Movement is a Human Right,” and as I painted those words, I reflected on how, as a white middle-class US-American, I have been able to take freedom of movement for granted. I considered what it would be like to be locked out of the place where my loved ones reside; to be refused refuge while running for my life: Unthinkable, unimaginable, yet everyday realities for far too many in this fractured world of ours.

Another banner boldly proclaims, “WALLS KILL.” One Puppetista crew member who lives and works in Tucson informed us that the dangerous journeys many migrants make (or often don’t make) through the desert are not on the Mexican side of the border as I had mistakenly assumed, but on the US side. The fence has been erected first in the places that offer relatively easy crossings, geographically. But in desperation, people cross wherever they can, and this is why the fence and its accompanying militarized zone have resulted in so many more deaths of migrants seeking refuge from conditions caused by our own government’s uncaring policies, including extreme poverty and violence, human trafficking, and drug wars. In a cruel squeeze play, many others are caught up in the terrorizing nets of ICE and Border Patrol and end up suffering and dying in hellish detention centers, privately owned and located in remote locations like Stewart, GA and Eloy, AZ, away from public view or oversight.

### THE WORKSHOPS

At the end of the Saturday morning march, I continued on to the Sonoran side, where I chose to hang for the entire afternoon and evening at the clean and comfortable workshop space provided by a nearby elementary school. Thankfully, local collectives were at the ready with cold water, sodas, tostadas, tamales, and other refreshments on offer. Though attendance fell over the day, due partly to the energy-sapping heat, the workshop presentations

were top notch. Here is a brief synopsis of the four I attended:

[1] Representatives of the Colibrí Center for Human Rights (Colibrí = hummingbird) described the crisis of increased numbers of missing and deceased migrants on the border lands, a direct result of militarization of the US-Mexico border. They talked about efforts to track numbers of migrant deaths and disappearances, and to match families, Central American as well as Mexican, with missing relatives through forensic services. They said the costs of developing the border wall, plus maintaining the huge security apparatus surrounding it, amount to \$18 billion annually (!).

[2] Presenters from two spaces that support those making the dangerous journey north, Las Patronas and Hermanos en el Camino, both with locations on each coast of Mexico as well as the middle of the country, discussed what they have witnessed along migration routes over the years. Unfortunately, I am fluent in only one language, and I missed getting a simultaneous translation device for this presentation, so am still waiting for a recap from other attendees. (This and other confrontations with the boundaries of language inspired me to reapply myself to the study of Spanish upon my return home.)

[3] In a comic-tragic one-man performance at the modern art museum down the street, Colombian-American artist Héctor Aristizábal effectively “channeled ‘terroristic’ energy into constructive action.” Through a riveting half-hour performance using minimal props, dialogue and sound effects, titled “Nightwind,” Hectors shares a harrowing personal story about torture and the murder of his brother in a way that helps exorcise the terrorist that resides within him as a result of his lived experience. Its intended impact: to spur audience members to act to end torture wherever it is happening (frequently within our own borders). Something he said in his preface stuck with me, about the need to exercise our own unique imaginations as opposed to consuming the commercially canned fantasies of pop culture.

[4] Professor Alejandro Vélez Salas, a visiting professor at ITAM, discussed the thousands of unnamed people forcefully disappeared (killed, imprisoned or enslaved) in Mexico and the lack of responsive action by those in power. He made a point about the abductions being much more democratic than Mexico’s political system. Ana Anamorado, from Movimiento Migrante Mesoamericano, a mother who herself is missing a son, discussed the conditions and gave examples of the circumstances that drive people to flee their homes, and talked about this organization of mothers that tours nationally throughout Mexico, telling their stories, restlessly seeking clues that might lead them their loved ones, dead or alive, with occasional success.

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In response to my quest to understand the inhumanity that allows so much tragedy, Prof. Salas simply stated that the migrant victims tend to be the poorest of poor, the most disposable of people. In contemplating all the interrelated forces that make it so, it becomes clear that we are meant to use our privilege to speak up on behalf of the voiceless.

#### THE WRAP UP

Despite the visual challenge imposed by the fence, sound flowed freely back and forth between the two stages, and come Sunday morning, our Puppetista narrator took his place on the southern stage, while the beautiful action that unfolded on the other side of the fence was at turns both graceful and chaotic.

In the climactic scene, masses of monarch butterflies, the ultimate symbol of free migration, join in a dance of transformation with the deer, a creature that represents and reconnects us with the wisdom and riches of the natural world, along with other significant figures. As the vibratory energy builds, two giant hands, one on each side of the border fence, seek and find each other and eventually touch over the top, to the immense joy of the cheering crowds assembled below.

When Father Roy came over to thank Puppetista facilitator Coleman Smith after it was all over, he remarked that it was the first time he had wept during a Puppetista performance. I will long treasure the visual memory of glancing through the fence and glimpsing friends on the other side, dancing and celebrating at that moment when the hands touched. There are some forces of nature that physical fences simply cannot block.

Many many thanks to all those who worked so hard, for many months in advance, to make this first Encuentro at the Border a reality. It was great to see the solid VFP turnout, and I'm hoping we'll have a chance to do it again. But I also hope that, by continuing to build a multilateral, multicultural, multilingual movement that values all life on this planet, we might eventually succeed in erasing these contrived divisions, and turning these and other walls into bridges. It was very meaningful to be gathered at the border while simultaneously holding in our thoughts the women sailing to Gaza, and our sisters and brothers now standing up in Standing Rock.

*In solidarity with all, Becky Luening  
Associate Member, Portland Oregon VFP Chapter 72\*

## *Lost in Limbo: A Female Service Member's Story*

*By Jon Reisdorf*

As so often happens, I received the initial call from someone close to the service member in crisis rather than the service member

herself. In Nancy's case it was a close friend, Lannie, who told me that she was afraid that her friend, a Marine might hurt herself. Was there anything I could do? Sadly, what she described was not that unusual. According to Lannie, Nancy was feeling all alone, hopeless with no way out and, exhausted from the intense stress of doing a highly dangerous job she wasn't equipped for. After weeks with little no sleep, Nancy let her guard down to her friend, bursting into tears indicating that with no way out she was considering taking the only way out left to her. I am afraid every day for at least 20 service men and women who don't have a Lannie to support them suicide is the result. I receive at least one call every weekend of someone struggling with depression and suicidal ideation. What is unusual in Nancy's story? I rarely get calls from non commissioned officers- NCOs: Nancy was a staff sergeant stationed at a Marine airbase in Okinawa.

Lannie and I came up with a plan to convince Nancy to call me. About 30 minutes later I received the call. She was a very cool customer. In a very guarded, flat, calm voice devoid of pain or much emotion she answered my questions. Yes, she had told Lannie that she was thinking of killing herself. No, there had been no current attempt and she did not have a plan. No, she had never attempted suicide in the past. And no she didn't think she would go through with the thoughts. But she was exhausted and needed a way out. Could I help her?

Was the Marine command aware of her crisis? Yes, in fact she was supposed to see her therapist again on Monday. She was referred to behavioral health by her command about a month ago after she informed them matter of factly that she was depressed and suicidal. She reported her suicidal ideation several times during the course of her weekly therapy sessions. What had the therapist diagnosed her with? I asked. Nothing, Nancy reported. In fact, her therapist, Captain Malone didn't seem overly concerned. What should she do when thoughts of suicide came up? she asked. Malone told her to "think of something else." Despite her report of suicidal thoughts, Malone insisted that she didn't need to see a psychiatrist. Malone had conducted no formal tests or evaluations and none were planned. Nancy was certain that her therapist didn't believe her.

Once I established a rapport I began to probe the circumstances leading up to Nancy's breakdown. In a detached monotone she described the series of events leaving her shattered and thinking of suicide. While on leave from the Marine airbase in Okinawa, she stayed in a quaint inn in a small village in southern Kyushu. She woke up in the middle of night choking from smoke. She managed to get out without injury but not everyone was so lucky. The smell of burning flesh and the screams of terror haunted her dreams. Subsequently she began to obsess about death and dying experiencing almost daily panic attacks that she quickly suppressed. Outside of her good friend Lannie she had no one to turn to. Her great aunt Lucy who raised her was gone and with her death any connection with blood relatives. Nancy felt utterly

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isolated and lost. Additionally she was recently transferred from a job she enjoyed to supervising a crew tasked with repairing jet engines on fighter jets, something she felt unqualified to do.

For the first time in her career, she was terrified that she might kill someone under her supervision or just as bad through missing something cause the plane to crash killing the pilot and possibly ... who else? The combined stress of all of the above left Nancy deeply depressed and thinking that she would rather die than be responsible for killing others. She was unable to sleep and she had lost interest in eating. Her mind kept telling her that suicide was the only way out.

I told Nancy that while it was highly unusual for even a military therapist to be so cavalier about suicidal ideation it was the norm for such therapists to mis-diagnose and wrongly treat psychological issues. The first order of business was to get a proper civilian diagnosis. I explained that the Civilian Medical Resources Network (CMRN), under the leadership of Dr. Howard Waitskin, Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry (University of New Mexico) could provide that diagnosis quickly at no cost to the service member. With her permission of course I would contact them that very day.

CMRN is a godsend for the GI Rights Hotline. In March, 2005 Howard Waitskin, a Vietnam era conscientious objector and an associate member of Veterans For Peace, recognized the good work being done by the Hotline and offered to help. Like the Hotline, CMRN operates on a shoestring by a dedicated band of volunteers led by Waitskin. I submitted the request for help on the CMRN's confidential website and finished my shift.

When I got home there was an "urgent response needed" email from CMRN. Because I indicated that Nancy had suicidal ideation the response had been immediate. A GI Rights Hotline counselor and a CMRN intake volunteer living in Kansas, Anne Cowan had already called Nancy and conducted the intake. Nancy was scheduled with a health care professional for the formal evaluation. Could I help with the suicide watch? Whenever someone is diagnosed with depression and/or suicidal ideation volunteers call the client daily until they are stabilized. Due to this program, CMRN has yet to lose a single caller to suicide.

Howard Waitskin has developed a beautiful intake instrument which - independent of anything else - produces a validated psychological instrument that has to be taken seriously by any behavioral health specialist. Additionally the three part intake interview can be done by a trained amateur such as myself. I have done several and I am amazed at its comprehensive nature. On top of that, the intake interview is followed up by a phone or Skype interview with the client by a health care professional. This volunteer, supervised by Howard Waitskin can give the Hotline counselor the exact right document to use in requesting intervention from congressional offices, the chain of command

or therapists in behavioral health working for the Department of Defense. Over the next two weeks, using the CMRN's powerful evaluation and the professionally supported document generated by the CMRN psychologist, Nancy was able to get a new therapist who is finally taking her condition seriously. Captain Malone was placed on leave and hopefully retrained or reclassified.

Now, with a combination of talk therapy, medication to help her sleep and behavioral modification to control her eating disorder Nancy is no longer feeling suicidal. Depressed? yes. Anxious? hell yes, but she is receiving coping strategies from her sessions with a caring Navy therapist. She still wants out of the Marine Corps and we continued to work on strategies to accomplish this: we still have the CMRN evaluation which if it was accepted by the Marines alone might result in a medical board being convened. However, the CMRN evaluation will not do the job unless the Navy evaluation concurs. I developed a plan for Nancy but at this point she is unable to move forward with the steps necessary to accomplish them. If a service member is unable to present their case due to depression and overwhelm counselors can approach command. However, Nancy requested that I wait. At this point she doesn't want to rock the boat. I have given Nancy and Lannie my home phone and email but I have not heard from her for some time. I will keep you posted if there is an update.

Note: All the identifying details, names, branch of service, locations etc. have been changed to protect the confidentiality of the real Nancy. However, the story is truly typical of service members in all branches stretched beyond the breaking point. The DoD needs to take very seriously the psychological aspects of Moral Injury and PTSD. Baby steps have been taken. Much more needs to be done.

You can donate to or offer to volunteer to help the Civilian Medical Resources Network by visiting their website. You can learn to do an intake in an afternoon or two of training over the phone and can do as much or little as you wish. Naturally, CMRN is looking for trained medical and licensed mental health professionals to help with the formal Skype evaluations.

*<http://www.civilianmedicalresources.net> or the GI Rights Hotline network at [girightshotline.org](http://girightshotline.org) or call Jon Reisdorf at the Arcata office of the Hotline 826-0165*





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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](mailto: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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**The service is free. The call is confidential.**

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