Veteran Cultural Competency
California History-Social Science Project
in Partnership with Cal Humanities
February 12, 2015 Webinar

INSTITUTE FOR VETERAN POLICY
swords-to-plowshares.org
combattocommunity.org
An Overview of Services

Housing:
- Permanent
- Supportive & Transitional

Employment & Job Training

Health & Social Services

Institute for Veteran Policy

Women Veterans Program

Legal Services for Disabled Veterans
What am I Going to Learn?

KEY POINTS

- Military experience and military training
- BATTLEMIND and the combat experience
- Military and combat-related issues
- What to say...What not to say!
United States Armed Forces

- The Army, Marine Corps, Navy and Air Force fall under the jurisdiction of the Department of Defense (DOD).

- The Coast Guard reports to the Department of Homeland Security during peacetime and to the DOD (by way of the Navy) during wartime.

- All five branches have an Active Duty and Reserve component. Only the Army and Air Force have National Guard components.
Elements of Military Culture

- **Chain of command** – means following orders.

- **Routine and structure** – what happens when this is gone?

- **Aggression** – faster, harder, louder, meaner.

- **Respect** – for authority and for one’s self.

- **Strength** – not asking for help.

- **Honor** – used to being trusted.
Key Terms and Lingo

CURRENT CONFLICTS

Global War on Terror (GWOT) – Includes Operation New Dawn, Operation Enduring Freedom, also known as Overseas Contingency Operations

Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)
Iraq combat operations from 4/19/2003 to 9/1/2010

Operation New Dawn (OND)
Refers to U.S. troops remaining in Iraq for non-combat operations

Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)
Refers to the conflict primarily in Afghanistan, as well as other theaters of combat operations

Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR)
Refers to the ongoing operations in Iraq and Syria
Iraq & Afghanistan Veterans

How many Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are there?  

Over 2.6 million men and women have been deployed in support of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and over 56% of these veterans are currently separated from the military.

How old are the most recently separated veterans?  

About 40% of recently separated veterans are under the age of 25.

How many Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are unemployed?  

In 2013, Post-9/11 veterans have higher rates of unemployment (9%) compared to all veterans (6.6%) and civilians (7%).
The Combat Experience
Buddies (Cohesion) vs. Withdrawal

**Combat:** No one understands your experience except your buddies who were there.

**Home:** Re-establishing bonds with family and friends that have changed takes time.
Targeted vs. Inappropriate Aggression

**Combat:** Service members make split second decisions that are lethal in a highly ambiguous environment.

**Home:** Over reactions to minor insults, inappropriate aggressiveness, assault, spousal abuse, snapping at kids, buddies or a boss.
Tactical Awareness vs. Hyper-Vigilance

**Combat:** Survival depends on being aware of your surrounds at all times.

**Home:** May feel anxious in large groups or situations where you feel confined.
Individual Responsibility vs. Guilt

**Combat:** Responsibility is to survive and do your best to keep your buddies alive.

**Home:** May feel you have failed your buddies if they were killed or seriously injured.
Mission Accomplishment vs. Failure

**Combat:** Taught never to give up; win at all costs.

**Home:** Difficult to accept situations that are out of one’s control and/or defeat.
The Combat Experience

HOW ARE THE CURRENT CONFLICTS DIFFERENT FROM PRIOR CONFLICTS?

- Multiple deployments.
- Lengthier deployments.
- 360 degrees of fighting, (no “front” lines).
- Urban combat with no clear enemy.
### The Combat Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMBAT EXPERIENCE</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>2013</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Working in areas that were mined or had IEDs</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving small arms fire</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowing someone seriously injured or killed</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being attacked or ambushed</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receiving incoming artillery, rocket, or mortar fire</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Myths and Stereotypes

**What are some stereotypes about the veteran population?**

- All veterans served in the infantry.
- All veterans are in **crisis**.
- All veterans have served in **combat**.
- Women do not serve in combat.
- All combat veterans have post-traumatic stress (PTS).
- Veterans are rigid.
- Veterans with disabilities are unemployable.
- All people who were in the military self-identify as veterans.
Identifying a Veteran
Identifying a Veteran
How old are most recently separated veterans?

About 40% of recently separated veterans are under the age of 25.

How does this compare with the rest of the population?

In California, the population of people that are 18–25 is only 1–2%. In the military, they account for over 40% of the military population.
Women Veterans

How does military service impact women?

- Women veterans represent 10% of the total veteran population.
- Thirty percent of women veterans have served Post-9/11.
- Over 280,000 women have served in Iraq and/or Afghanistan.
- Until recently, women did not serve in official combat arms jobs, but that does not mean they didn’t participate in combat.
Diversity in the veteran population

AGE, RACE AND ETHNICITY BY GENDER

**Women Veterans** vs **Non-Veteran Women**

- **17 - 24**: 14% **Women Veterans**, 17% **Non-Veteran Women**
- **25 - 34**: 20% **Women Veterans**, 17% **Non-Veteran Women**
- **35 - 44**: 17% **Women Veterans**, 18% **Non-Veteran Women**
- **45 - 54**: 26% **Women Veterans**, 17% **Non-Veteran Women**
- **55 - 64**: 18% **Women Veterans**, 17% **Non-Veteran Women**
- **65 - 74**: 6% **Women Veterans**, 10% **Non-Veteran Women**
- **75+**: 10% **Women Veterans**, 10% **Non-Veteran Women**

**Women Veterans** vs **Veteran Men**

- **White Non-Hispanic**: 67% **Women Veterans**, 81% **Veteran Men**
- **Nonwhite Non-Hispanic**: 25% **Women Veterans**, 13% **Veteran Men**
- **Hispanic**: 15% **Women Veterans**, 6% **Veteran Men**

Median age of women veterans: 49

*More racially and ethnically diverse than veterans who are men*

*PUMS, 2011*
Combat Stress and Related Issues

- Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)...known before as Soldier’s Heart and Shell Shock
- Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
- Military Sexual Trauma (MST)
- Alcohol and/or substance abuse
- Depression/suicide
Combat Related Physical Injuries

- Severe physical injuries may include muscle skeletal, paralysis, amputation(s), burns, TBI and blindness.

- Moderate to minor physical injuries may include back injuries, hearing damage, nerve damage, knee, hip and other joint injuries.
I was experiencing psychosis where I would fight my way through the hallways and clear rooms as if I were back in theater. The hospital police would have to be called in to secure me.

All in all I made four trips over to the ‘sandbox.’ It was upon returning from my second trip that I began to notice ‘changes’ in myself. By changes I mean I was more irritable, paranoid for no reason, unable to sleep, and had trouble focusing when around other people.
Recognizing PTSD

**Exposure to a traumatic event**

- Experienced, witnessed or was confronted by death or serious injury.
- Experienced intense fear, helplessness or horror.

**Symptoms (three groups)**

1. Avoidance and numbing
2. Hyper-arousal
3. Re-experiencing
Over 52,000 U.S. service members have been wounded in action in the current conflicts.

Slightly more than half of the injuries are due to blasts.

In 2011, an average of 16 service members were inflicted with a brain injury every day.

Difficult to estimate frequency of concussion among combat troops who do not require medical treatment, as they may be only briefly stunned or knocked unconscious.
Military Sexual Violence

- Military sexual trauma (MST) refers to both sexual harassment and sexual assault that occurs in military settings. It often goes unreported due to stigma and fear of potential loss of military career. Only 16% of survivors report the assault while in the military.

- In 2011, less than half of reported cases were deemed by commanders for possible disciplinary action. Of those, only 48% went to trial.

- Sixty percent of women with military sexual trauma also suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. MST is the primary causal factor of PTSD for women, while combat experience is the strongest predictor of PTSD for men.
Military Sexual Violence

Particular aspects of military culture make it more difficult and complicated to report military sexual trauma.

- Loyalty to unit.
- Sexual assault is likely grossly under-represented in terms of reports (5,061 reports in 2013 versus estimates (19,000 per year).
- Emphasis on self-reliance.
- Minimization of weakness.
- Effect on career. (Can’t just quit and find another job.)
- Need to rely on perpetrators for safety/security.
- Report may not be believed, or victim may be punished.
Substance Abuse

- There is a high co-morbidity of mental health issues and substance abuse among current-era veterans.

- Reserve and National Guard personnel who deploy with reported combat exposures are at increased risk of new-onset heavy drinking, binge drinking and alcohol-related problems. Younger members of all branches are at the greatest risk for alcohol problems.

- There is little comprehensive data on substance abuse and dependence in the military because the use and abuse of drugs often results in a less than honorable discharge status and these discharge statuses are omitted from many studies.
Suicide

- The Veteran Administration (VA) has confirmed 22 suicides per day among the entire veteran population and 1,000 suicide attempts per month among all veterans seen at VA medical facilities.

- Adjusted risk of suicide for male veterans is twice that of non-veteran males.

- Women veterans are 2 – 3 more likely to commit suicide than non-veteran women.

- Deployed women are three times more likely to commit suicide than non-deployed women, and deployed men are 42 percent more likely to commit suicide than non-deployed men.
Talking to Veterans

**build rapport**
- “Welcome home”
- “How can I help you?”

**ask factual, logical questions**
- How long have you been home?
- What did you do in the military?

**avoid “judging” statements & questions**
- How many people did you kill?
- What do you think of the war?
Talking to Veterans

WHAT TO SAY... WHAT NOT TO SAY!

⇒ “Thank you for your service, but I don’t think we should have been there in the first place.”

⇒ “Why did you join? The military is a job for men.”

⇒ “You’re a mother/wife, how could you leave your family while you were deployed?”

⇒ “Do you have post-traumatic stress disorder?”

⇒ “What’s the worst thing that happened to you over there?”

⇒ “Have you ever killed anyone?”

⇒ “Were you raped?”
Talking to Veterans

WHAT TO SAY...WHAT NOT TO SAY!

- “Thank you for your service or Thank you for your commitment.”
- “Can you tell me a bit about why you decided to join the military?”
- “How did your time in the military impact your family?”
- “What was it like to transition out of the military?”
- “What’s a few of your most memorable experiences?”
Talking to Veterans

- Never do a cold interview.
- Ask open ended questions.
- Let the veteran write the narrative; let the veteran tell their story.
- In doing so, they will likely answer the lingering questions about PTSD and related issues.
- Be prepared to be a active listener.
- Never ask about killing people or rape.
Talking to Veterans

- Class projects or assignments
  - Oral interviews
  - Biographies
  - Literature
  - Videos and documentaries

- Veteran organizations
  - Subject matter experts
  - Fraternal order
Documentaries

- **War Torn 1961-2010** (Directed by Jon Alpert, Ellen Goosenberg Kent) Chronicles the lingering effects of combat stress and post-traumatic stress on military personnel and their families throughout American history.

- **Hell and Back Again** (Directed by Danfung Dennis) Is an intimate, visceral portrait of one man’s personal struggle at home in North Carolina, where he confronts the physical and emotional difficulties of re-adjusting to civilian life with the love and support of his wife.

- **Lioness** (Directed by Meg McLagan and Daria Sommers) The untold story of the first women in U.S. history to be sent into direct ground combat.

- **Invisible War** (Directed by Kirby Dick) An investigative documentary about the epidemic of rape within the U.S. military.
- *Heaven in the Midst of Hell* (by Sheri Snively, United States Navy Reserve Veteran)
  A chaplain’s view of the war in Iraq.

- *The Sandbox* (by Mike Liguori, Marine Corp Veteran)
  Stories of human spirit and war.

- *Women in the Line of Fire* (Erin Solaro)
  What you should know about women in the military.

- *When the War Came Home: The Inside Story of Reservists and the Families They Leave Behind* (Stacy Bannerman)
  Personal account of the emotional impact realities of her home front experience during that time, something shared by thousands of reservists; spouses and partners.
Events and Memorials

- **Veterans Day** - November 11
  The official holiday that honors people who have served in the U.S. Armed Forces.

- **Memorial Day** - May 25
  The holiday in the U.S. for remembering the men and women who died while serving in the country's armed forces.

- **Arlington National Cemetery** - Washington, D.C.
  Tomb of the Unknowns.

- **Veterans Memorials**
VA Hotlines

VETERAN CRISIS LINE
800-273-8255
800-273-TALK

COMBAT CALL CENTER
877-927-8387
877-WAR-VETS

WOMEN VETERAN CALL CENTER
855-829-6636
855-VA-WOMEN
- Campus Veteran Groups (Student Life) and Resource Centers
- Local Veteran Administration (Health Care)
- Vet Centers (Readjustment Counseling)
- Veteran Service Organizations (American Legion and VFW)
What Did I Learn?

KEY POINTS

⇒ Military experience and military training
⇒ BATTLEMIND and the combat experience
⇒ Military and combat-related issues
⇒ What to say...What not to say!
Research and Publications

- Swords to Plowshares Website
  swords-to-plowshares.org/advocacy-and-policy/research-publications

- Reference Guide: Veterans and Their Families
  (August 2014)

- Transition Manual (April 2012)

- Veterans and Criminal Justice: A Review of the Literature
  (August 2011)

- Bay Area Domestic Violence Screening Guide

- Women Veterans Fact Sheet
Thank You for Your Attendance

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