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"They were neither typical..nor unique" : an exploratory study of enlistment decisions of American veterans from past to present

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Veteran's experiences during and after their time in the military have been documented far more than their pre-military life experiences. This paper will focus on which factors relate to enlistment decisions by men from various war eras. It will examine whether there are any themes in pre-military experiences that may lead to men choosing to enlist in the military, and how they now reflect and make meaning of their choice. My research question is, do any pre-military factors matter or make a difference in how men choose to enlist, and how they now reflect on their choice?

To answer these questions thoroughly would mean interviewing far more than ten to twelve veterans, however, if ten voices can be recorded whose stories have not yet been documented, it will be a worthwhile study. There is the possibility that the reasons for enlistment are highly individualized, and no two stories are alike; there is also the possibility that there are commonalities to veterans' reasons for joining. Some reasons for enlisting may be for patriotism, money, rite of passage, increased economic stability, manhood, and discipline.

The ever-present question underlying this study is whether or not the process by which men choose to enlist is important to social work. This paper will keep that question nearby in order to justify the reasoning for this work. Is it relevant to how we as social workers treat and work with veterans? Many men have told their war stories, have shared their battle scars, and tried to make meaning of their ineffable experiences. Many

have found that creating narratives of their stories has been healing. Many still are dissatisfied with what they perceive as wrongs done against them by the military. Who do they tell their stories? Friends and family possibly, but more likely, fellow veterans and therapists and social workers. We all know the stories of the wrongs, but there is a gap in what we know about their expectations of their military experience; their hopes to attend college, gain respect, follow a family tradition, or just get a job. Who were they before they went in, and who are they now?

This study will focus on the narratives of veterans describing how their early life experiences relate to or caused their decision to enter the military, and how those factors helped shape their reactions to experiences in the military. The Vietnam veterans as a group are the largest and most available population in the San Francisco bay area, the area where this study will take place. However, my interviews will not be limited to Vietnam veterans; many of them were drafted during this era, and all draftees are excluded from this study. Many young men were drafted during WWII, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War; however, many young men also enlisted during these eras, and they are the targets of this study, as well as veterans from the more recent Gulf War and the current Iraq War. Many of these men were never shipped overseas to see combat, yet their experiences are nonetheless valuable to both the social work profession and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Smith College School for Social Work was founded on the mission to serve veterans, and its history reflects a long standing relationship with the Veterans Administration. In 1918 the Smith Psychiatric Training School, which later became the School for Social Work, was created to serve WWI veterans, and since then has had close

ties with the VA, originally offering supervisors conferences just to VA personnel (Smith College History, 2008). The relevance of this topic is supported by our wartime history of the past one hundred years. The emergence of trauma theory and PTSD has helped move the study of trauma in many fascinating directions that help clinicians understand how to better help their clients.

At the time this paper is being written, the United States of America has been engaged in a war in Iraq for five years. Over four thousand American military servicemen and women have been killed and many more thousands have been injured. The tens of thousands of men and women who are returning home with serious injuries such as amputations and traumatic brain injuries will flood the VA hospitals across the country with a plethora of needs including vocational skills and training, psychotherapy, and life-long medical needs.

Medical technology in the combat environment has improved exponentially since Vietnam, which means there are fewer deaths and more injuries. This is indisputably an improvement in the kind of medical care the troops receive, but it is questionable to whether the mental health services have kept pace with the medical care. Traumatic brain injury is on the rise, usually caused by roadside bombs that cause the brain to literally be jostled inside the skull. Other times head injuries are caused by shrapnel lodged in the head from roadside bombs and rocket propelled grenades. These are just some of the many ways soldiers are being severely injured while in combat, but the rise in traumatic brain injury is cause for concern for how seemingly able-bodied men and women will be perceived and reintegrated into the community. Many will appear whole and healthy, yet suffer from short-term memory damage, retardation of motor skills,

chronic pain, major cognitive deficits, and emotional distress. If there are more men and women returning home with physical and psychological injuries, the VA hospitals and local community health centers must be prepared to serve this unique population, and in order to serve this population, clinicians must understand the profound effect military experience and war has on the human psyche.

A serious concern about the number of available services has been talked about in numerous newspaper articles and television reports. There are many VA hospitals in the country, but not all of them provide the same caliber of services. When an injured soldier returns home he usually goes through one of the large VA hospitals, such as Walter Reed. When it is decided he is stable enough to go home, he may return to another state and perhaps to a very small town. This limits the access he has to a VA hospital, and there have been stories about soldiers' health and progress steadily declining because they cannot get to regular treatment, such as physical therapy. This puts a huge burden on partners and family members to take care of the soldier, further bringing them into financial instability. These stories are not uncommon. We as clinicians have to find a way to make ourselves available to the veterans isolated in rural areas who are in great need of treatment; of course it's not the clinician's responsibility alone; it is a systemic problem, and the VA needs to assess the needs of veterans and act accordingly as soon as possible. This paper will also look at the current military response to such needs, as well as public response, including within-military unit assessments, and studies that have been done looking at how best to treat trauma. At this time, while the war is still being waged, the need is truly urgent.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The experiences of veterans have been documented in abundance since the early nineteenth-hundreds. War and those who fight wars have been documented since ancient times, and have spurred works comparing ancient battles with today's experiences of combat. This literature review will focus on the more contemporary documented narratives of veterans, with an emphasis on why they chose to enlist in the military. It will also take into account the most recent studies available on veterans, and will draw on research concerning mental health issues of veterans both past and present.

The review of the literature will be discussed in three sections, beginning with the history of mental health in the military and attention to veterans' issues. The next section will explore the common experiences of veterans, including the reasons veterans decided to join the military. The final section will look at both the military and the public's responses to the increasing and continuing needs of veterans, including mental health services and studies on various treatment modalities currently being used.

History of Military Mental Health and Attention to Veterans' Issues:

From "Soldier's Heart" to PTSD

As veterans returned home with startling stress reaction symptoms, their families, the media, and the military personnel who treated them began taking notice. The traumatic experiences they endured during wartime, and the ensuing life problems caught the public's attention and caused concern for medical and mental health professionals.

The analysts of the early twentieth century thought of trauma in theoretical terms as “almost any very distressing incident” (Brewin, 2003, p. 4). Sigmund Freud “used the analogy with a physical wound to write of a traumatic event penetrating a kind of mental skin designed to protect a person from excessive stimulation from outside” (Brewin, 2003, p. 4). Much later on, other psychologists began to look at trauma and what it does to the human psyche, and theorized that the root of trauma and its consequences lies in how a traumatic event “shatters people’s assumptions” and contradicts core beliefs about the world we live in. (Brewin, 2003, p. 4).

As the Civil War came to an end, soldiers returning from the warfront came home with symptoms that their families felt helpless to assuage. Many became homeless wanderers, known as ‘tramps’ (Ward, 1990, p.221). The symptoms they experienced were known as “soldier’s heart”, “irritable heart”, and “nostalgia” (Tick, 2005, p. 99). People had begun to recognize that the war had indeed made an indelible impact on men’s psyches.

When World War I ended, many men returned home with problems; they were unable to keep a job, and had tendencies to be nervous and easily agitated. This cluster of symptoms that veterans experienced upon return from the warfront was called “shell shock”, referring to their exposure to a constant barrage of exploding bombs. The symptoms included irritability, chronic anxiety, sleeplessness, psychosomatic complaints, detachment, despair, nightmares, rumination and excessive vigilance (Berzoff, 2002,). World War I had been the first war to use hand grenades and machine guns in large quantities; and it was the first time poison gases had been used to kill enemies. All of those weapons caused massive casualties on the battlefield (Schading, 2007).

In World War II we saw major improvements in combat tactics and the heavy use of air assaults from behemoth bomber planes such as the B-17 and the B-24. They could drop enough bombs to flatten cities, and were protected by smaller fighter planes that were just beginning to use high-powered, rapid-firing weapons (Schading, 2007). The use of tanks, aircraft carriers, “Liberty” ships, submarines, and amphibious ships all played roles in shifting the power to the Allied forces, and led to major technological innovations for the future (Schading, 2007, p. 199). When men returned from World War II to their homes, many had barely turned twenty years old and had already cheated death many times over. The term “shellshock” was still being used by families and medical professionals. It was around this time that the famous Minnesota Experiment was being conducted on the impact of starvation in men, causing psychological problems in the participants and showing researchers what so many soldiers and civilians experience during wartime. A World War II veteran who was featured in the impressive Ken Burns (2007) documentary series, “The War”, talked about the incessant discomfort in the life of a soldier, saying that they were either too cold or too hot, wet, hungry, and exhausted. The physical discomfort on top of the almost constant danger of being injured or killed was only beginning to be understood by the public.

The Korean War began just five years after the end of the Second World War, and showed the continued and increased use of fighter jets for combat. This era also saw the improvement of medical care and wound treatment, and the use of helicopters to transport the injured to hospitals that were set up near the fighting. This led to a higher survival rate than ever seen before. Although almost 34,000 soldiers were killed during this conflict, and many more injured (Schading, 2007), there is not nearly as much

documentation about the psychological effects of this war as compared to WWII and Vietnam. However, it is argued that WWI, WWII, and Korea all showed higher rates of combat exhaustion due to prolonged tours of duty, that were then shortened during Vietnam for this reason. “In a war,... there is perhaps no general condition which is more likely to produce a large crop of nervous and mental disorders than a state of prolonged and great fatigue” (Grossman, 1996, p. 69). The conscientiousness toward shortened tours of duty in these past wars has been neglected in today’s war in Iraq. The stop-loss measures being taken to ensure the immediate availability of enough ground troops have caused many soldiers to go on their second, third, and even fourth tours of duty in Iraq. As social workers, we should probably expect to see higher rates of combat fatigue and PTSD because of this.

The Vietnam War is known well for the controversy around the treatment of veterans when they returned home, and this abuse by one’s own countrymen only added to the already damaged psyches of many of the vets. “Only the veterans of Vietnam have endured a concerted, organized, psychological attack by their own people” (Grossman, 1996, p. 280). This was the first time people started really taking notice of the problems the veterans were having transitioning back into their civilian lives. It was a combination of public outrage against the war, and the type of combat that was being asked of the soldiers, which combined to create major psychological pain in returning vets. The public outrage was strongly related to the incessant media coverage showing nightly the escalating casualties and deaths on television. The symptoms the soldiers suffered from would be portrayed in countless films and books, and would come to be very well known: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.

It was not until 1980 that Posttraumatic Stress Disorder became the label that would encompass this cluster of symptoms, and finally become a diagnosis in the Diagnostic Statistics Manual. Schools created programs, including Smith College's own Smith Psychiatric Training School, opened in 1918 for the purpose of treating the increasing numbers of WWI veterans with problems. The program later became Smith College School for Social Work, and still maintains ties with the VA (Smith College School for Social Work, 2008). By this time, mental health workers were beginning to understand the implications of combat and warfare. However, what they needed next were options to successfully treat it.

The DSM-IV-TR describes an extreme traumatic stressor as "involving direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate." (American Psychological Association, 2002, p. 463). It must involve a response of "intense fear, helplessness, or horror" (American Psychological Association, 2002, p. 467), and the resulting symptoms are what characterizes PTSD.

The consideration of PTSD as a new diagnosis did not occur until many years after the Vietnam War veterans had returned home and tried to bring attention to their issues. Even in 1980, there was still a lot of skepticism associated with the disorder because of a lack of formal research on the subject. The information that the DSM committee did have was largely based on informal studies of people who had experienced combat, the Holocaust, and other major stressors (Brewin, 2003).

The decision to create the new PTSD diagnosis caused controversy between anti-war protestors, sociologists, social workers, and politicians. Some argued that the media and movie directors had fueled a misleading representation of the Vietnam Veteran who suffered from flashbacks and explosive anger. Others argued that the diagnosis was politically motivated in order to shift attention toward veterans' issues and away from the politicians supporting the war (Brewin, 2003).

Common Experiences of Soldiers

There are many commonalities of experience during and after the military that have been portrayed in countless books, movies, TV shows, and veterans' narratives. It has been valuable in validating what veterans report and has led to an appreciation of their experiences by medical and mental health professionals, as well as the veterans' family and friends. Less time has been devoted to the commonalities involved in making the decision to join the military, and perhaps it is because the information is not deemed useful. What will understanding the decision-making process tell us about soldiers, veterans, men? In a sense, gathering this information can be looked at as a miniature needs-assessment, a cross-sectional look at what men in each era were thinking about their livelihoods. Stephen Ambrose said it well in his book about the men who flew B-24 bombers in WWII, and which is fitting to describe all soldiers, "They were neither typical....nor unique" (Ambrose, 2001, p. 29).

Enlistment Decisions: Past to Present

Men's decisions to join the military throughout the years are frequently documented in a quick and succinct manner at the beginnings of individual's stories. It is hardly more than a few sentences, "I had an older brother who was in the army and he

had gone to Vietnam about two months before I joined, so I figured I would join up and help him.” (Ebert, 1993, p. 6). And “I had a friend that...came up to the pool one day and told me he had enlisted in the marines. I said ‘What the hell’. So I went down and volunteered for the draft and within two weeks I was gone—that quick.” (Ebert, 1993, p. 8).

Who are our country's veterans? According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there were 208.1 million civilians over the age of 18. Of these, 26.4 million were veterans, which is 12.7 percent of the adult population. This information was compiled for the year 2000. They found that the racial and ethnic makeup of veterans is becoming more closely representative of the population as a whole, meaning the younger groups of veterans are more representative than those veterans aged 65 and older, which makes sense when one thinks about the segregation of African American troops during WWII. Vietnam War veterans make up the largest veterans population, with 8.4 million veterans, and WWII vets make up the second largest group, with 5.7 million (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). It was also found that poverty is low among veterans, with the youngest vets being the most likely to be poor. The youngest veterans are considered those who were in the service in 1990 and after. However, the Veterans Administration found recently that 1 out of 4 homeless people are veterans, even though they make up 11% of the population, a number smaller than the 14.5% recorded by the Census Bureau (Helfing, 2007). It makes sense that the number of veterans has been dwindling in recent years, after a long break between wars. However, the number of veterans will be increasing again as a result of the most recent wars in the Gulf, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

James Ebert (1993), who interviewed over fifty Vietnam veterans, found that the motivations for nearly 8 million American men to enlist included

the allure of adventure or travel. Others saw the service as an avenue for social and economic advancement, attracting young minority members and the poor of all races with promises of education, technical training, and self respect. For still others, the military was expected to provide direction and discipline (Ebert, 1993, p. 10).

Curious about this, I went through books and articles on earlier wars to see if these reasons were true in other eras, starting with the Civil War.

As the seemingly inevitable beginning of the Civil War approached in 1861, thousands upon thousands of volunteers signed up for the local militia, being that the United States Army at the time had less than 17,000 men, and Lincoln had called on volunteers. People were absolutely enthusiastic to join the cause. “Whole towns signed up” (Ward, 1990, p. 39) apparently out of a sense of duty, and thinking that they would be gone only a few weeks, as Lincoln had only asked for ninety days of service. The country was still young and people felt a direct link between it and the successes and privileges in their lives. “I owe all I am to the government of the United States. It had educated and clothed me with honor. To leave the service is a hard necessity, but I must go” (Ward, 1990, p. 41). This statement came from an army officer who made the decision to leave his post with the Army and “go with the South” (Ward, 1990, p. 41)

At the beginning of World War I, the United States watched as the conflict in Europe escalated. President Woodrow Wilson called it a “war to end all wars”, and noted that “American soldiers... would not fight for empire or for global power, but would fight to right a European political system corrupted by monarchy, imperialism, and excessive militarism” (Neiberg, 2007, p. 2). However, “debate over the wisdom of American entry

meant that the war did not have a clear, single meaning for Americans.” (Neiberg, 2007, p. 2). I found plenty of literature on what it was like for young German and European men to join the military, but not very much on what it was like for Americans. This paper focuses on American men’s decisions to join, so I will not include the perspectives of young men from other places in the world.

The young men who were to become B-17 pilots in the European Theater of Operations during World War II, described themselves as bound by “a sense of duty” and a “fervent belief in God and country” that were ingrained in them by family and society (O’Neill, 1999, p. 4). Others felt “restless”, or wanted to make up for “lost education”, such as one young man who left school during the end of the depression in order to help his family financially by getting a job. Many felt comfortable handling and shooting guns due to their upbringing on farms, and for one young man, enlisting “was almost a family tradition” (O’Neill, 1999, p. 6).

Most of these pilots dreamt as little boys that they would one day fly, and at the time, the Air Corps, which would later become the Air Force, provided the best chance to do so. They grew up during the time of Charles Lindbergh’s famous flights, and most of them had never traveled outside of their state, let alone been in an airplane. One man reflects, “Pictures of Lindbergh with his helmet and goggles were on the front pages. I just thought he was the most glamorous creature on God’s earth. I grew up thinking Lindbergh was our greatest American” (Ambrose, 2001, p. 29). The American patriotism during this time was overwhelming and saturated every media outlet, and was even stronger after the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. Although plenty of men chose to enlist

to avoid the draft and have a choice in the branch of service and types of jobs they could get, many more enlisted for the aforementioned reasons.

The Korean War was bolstered by a widespread fear and dislike of communism, which brought about the initial American support of a “police action” in Korea. Many of the men in the military were WWII veterans who had served in the Pacific theater, including one twenty-four year old enlisted Marine who, after WWII became “quickly bored with civilian life when it ended” (Hastings, 1987, p. 17). He reenlisted in 1949 and was commander of one of the first platoons in Korea. Another young man, “Burke was one of many Southerners in the unit, young men whose hometowns in the late 1940s could offer neither a paycheck nor a life-style as attractive as that of MacArthur’s army” (Hastings, 1987, p. 17). And yet another young corporal had joined very early in his young life; “With his parents divorced and jobs hard to come by, he had joined the army at sixteen because he could think of nothing else to do. He had never thought much about fighting. For himself, like many of the men, the flight to Korea was a first-ever trip in an airplane” (Hastings, 1987, p. 17). Once again, the lure of travel outside of one’s state, and a chance to experience things out of the ordinary were enough of a lure for fresh young men enlisting during that time so soon after the Second World War.

Vietnam may be one of the most documented war experiences in America. There are vast volumes of soldiers’ narratives of their time there. “Bloods: narratives of the Vietnam War by black veterans”, offers many individuals’ reasons for joining. Many in the book were drafted, and of those who were not drafted, 60% were draft-motivated, meaning they would rather enlist and have some choice about the branch of service and type of job they could get in the military, rather than wait to be drafted straight into

combat infantry (Terry, 1984, p. 18). Those who joined voluntarily, in addition to avoiding the draft, had desires to go to college, and attain better job opportunities. Some believed in the cause and had been raised with the belief that one should do their duty for their country. There were others whose family members had fought in other wars. Specialist 5 Harold “light bulb” Bryant explained that his father had been in WWII and felt that the Army was racist. He did not encourage his son to join, but Harold felt that he would at least get a choice if he enlisted rather than wait to be drafted by another branch (Terry, 1984, p. 18). One man stated quite frankly that he “only went for revenge” (Tick, 1984, p. 90). He had volunteered for combat duty “because those bastards killed my cousin...I don’t give a damn that we lost. I was a failure because I didn’t kill anybody for my cousin” (Tick, 2005, p. 90).

Another important factor in influencing men’s decision to join the service was the impact of the media and culture. John Wayne was a hero to so many young boys due to his brave leading characters in many war movies. Ron Kovic, author of “Born on the Fourth of July” remembers his Saturday afternoons spent watching movies such as *The Sands of Iwo Jima*, wishing to be just like John Wayne (Kovic, 1976, p. 65). During my time at my internship at the San Francisco VA last year, I did not understand why veterans kept talking about John Wayne. I had no idea the impact his characters had on them, and the patriotism he inspired.

The political environment that Kovic was growing up in, along with all the other young men who would probably see Vietnam in their near future, was filled with the progression of the space race with the Russians, and the fear of Communism. It influenced the media, television shows, comic books, and high school history classes.

Marine recruiters visited schools, repeating President John F. Kennedy's words about what one could do for one's country. They offered an opportunity to be something, and Ron Kovic's seventeen year old self wanted badly to do something with his life (Kovic, 1976, p. 81). "More than a few men enlisted because there was a war and they wanted a taste of it...As a boy growing up we played cops and robbers, we played cowboys and Indians and I grew up around hunting...I was making bombs when I was ten years old...I simply went by what I'd seen in John Wayne movies. I believed it all" (Ebert, 1993, p. 11). Inherent in this desire to be a part of the war experience is the attainment of manhood. As one veteran of the Marines during the Vietnam War put it, "The Marine Corps built men" (Terry, 1984, p. 4).

As well as minorities and the poor being the majority of the men enlisting in the military, so were the men who were the sons and nephews and other family members of war veterans. Many had no real knowledge of what was actually going on in Vietnam, or even knew where Vietnam was to begin with. It is commonly assumed that the enlisted men were mostly minorities, however, the "social and economic distinctions" played a stronger hand. But, "minorities in the United States were more likely to be poor; and the poor, as well as the poorly educated—regardless of race—found their way into the service and into combat at double the rate of their more affluent neighbors" (Ebert, 1993, p. 7). What do the numbers look like? An "enlisted man with a college degree had only a 42 percent chance of ever going to Vietnam...High school graduates had a 64 percent chance of being sent to Vietnam, and dropouts stood at a 70 percent chance" (Ebert, 1993, p. 7). The amount of men killed in combat also reflected these numbers.

Now that we have been in the Iraq war for five years, and over a million and a half soldiers have rotated through the Middle East, there are stories and narratives being compiled on what these young men and women thought about when they enlisted. Some of them still felt the same as the men in the Civil War, having a sense of doing one's duty. "Going to war is something I've always wanted to do my entire life. I would have felt some big void if I hadn't done it" (Wood, 2006, p. 38). Another young man was on the phone with Army recruiters on September 11th, 2001. He had left the reserves in the early nineties, but came right back on that fateful day. "Being American, I wanted to defend my country, my family, and my beliefs" (Wood, 2006, p. 88). Many men felt and still do feel that they are defending freedom, and essentially protecting their loved ones from harm and oppression. A few talked about joining in order to get out of their bad neighborhoods, away from drug-dealing friends and dangerous situations. And some, despite their grim reality at home, were still not sure "if it was the right thing to do. I guess everyone feels that way, being nervous about boot camp" (Wood, 2006, p. 5). One young man in particular described his decision to join the Army as his "Plan C" because he had been homeless for several years, had battled a drug addiction, couldn't get a job, and felt that he essentially didn't have any other options (Wood, 2006). He arrived at basic training in Louisville, Kentucky on September 10th, 2001—he wryly referred to his timing as "impeccable" (Wood, 2006, p. 121).

In July of 2007, the Army began a recruiting tactic using a \$20,000 sign up bonus, which meant a "quick ship" for the new recruits, who would have to agree to leave for basic training by the end of September. Many young people took the Army up on their offer, showing that money can be a major factor in the decision to join up. Over four

thousand new recruits signed up between July 25 and August 13, 92% of them using the "quick ship" bonus (White, 2007).

Common Mental Health Issues

It is important to note that not everyone who experiences trauma will have posttraumatic stress disorder, or trauma-related symptoms. The literature is mostly focused on posttraumatic stress disorder, but this paper will look at veterans' experiences regardless of whether or not they were diagnosed with PTSD or experienced trauma of any sort. Many veterans returning from the Vietnam War described feelings of "explosive, uncontrollable rage, resulting in antisocial behavior" (Berzoff, Flanagan, & Hertz, 2002, p. 421). I found in my work with veterans that this was true for many of them, and it was not uncommon to have veterans in the waiting room arguing or yelling, or coming in with a black eye after getting in a physical altercation with someone. Many of them reported feeling angry all of the time, and angry at the people around them, even if they didn't know them and had no reason to be angry at them. It made me wonder if they were always this way, if they were angry growing up, or if their experience in the military caused them to become unable to control their anger.

Lt. Col. Dave Grossman (1996) talks about the massive amounts of "psychiatric casualties" in every American-fought war. During World War II, over "800,000 men were classified 4-F (unfit for military service) due to psychiatric reasons" (Grossman, 1996, p. 43). There were more soldiers being discharged from service for this reason than there were new soldiers being rotated or drafted in to the service. Studies have been done to find out just how long it takes for a soldier to become what they call a "psychiatric casualty", and they found during WWII that it takes approximately sixty

days of “continuous combat” (Grossman, 1996, p. 43). After this time, symptoms that look like chronic nervousness, agitation, dissociation, and sometimes even silliness and humor, start to belie the strong desire to keep the horror as far away from their consciousness as possible (Grossman, 1996). Anxiety states can lead to what is sometimes known as the “berserk state”, often portrayed in movies because of the dramatic and shocking nature of their behavior. Soldiers in berserk states lose all control and affect regulation, and this is often when atrocities are committed (Shay, 1994, p. 79)

Several other types of trauma can and do occur in the military arena; military sexual trauma is a hugely underreported occurrence. Although none of my interview questions will address this issue, I feel it is very important to include this information. There are often physical altercations, witnessing or participating in violent acts, and being exposed to life-threatening non-combat situations. Valente and Wight’s article on Military sexual trauma (MST) urges physicians to make assessments for MST a part of their routine checks, and to learn to be sensitive in approaching the subject with veterans (Valente & Wight, 2007). This should be the same for mental health clinicians who work with veterans, too. It is a very stigmatized subject and veterans may not voluntarily offer this information.

Another interesting type of trauma that may or may not be a predictive factor in choosing to enlist in the military is intergenerational transmission of trauma, which argues that parents with trauma histories pass on symptoms and other subtle effects to their children. There is no empirical data that clearly defines what intergenerational trauma is, but there is an abundance of descriptions of secondary traumatization. The concept is based on the idea that children of trauma survivors understand something that

many others do not, that their place in this world is unsafe, fragile, and unpredictable.

There is more media attention currently talking about father-son intergenerational trauma, in which both father and son are war veterans with PTSD, with the son's symptoms and the media coverage of the war triggering the father's PTSD symptoms (Ancharoff, Munroe, & Fisher, 1998). One of my questions will be about the veteran's family history of war veterans, asking him if he had or has any family members who were in the services, and how that impacted his decision to join.

Other Commonalities

One common understanding between soldiers that is not shared between civilians is that tragedy and suffering in civilian life “is both uncommon and unanticipated. In battle, a soldier lives with the constant understanding that not only *might* such events occur, but they probably *will*—and if not to that soldier, then to someone close to him” (Ebert, 1993, p. xi). Once men are in real danger of injury or death, their only focus and prerogative is to protect the men in their immediate group. The camaraderie that grows between men is compelling and also well documented as a common experience of soldiers in the military. This happens whether or not they see combat, however it seems to be strengthened when they must rely on each other for protection. There seems to be a profound connection, and a need to be a part of something bigger than oneself, yet connected on a deep level to many others.

One of the more fascinating readings that I found was that of Edward Tick, Ph.D (2005), who has written several books on veterans' experiences and how to heal what he calls “soul wounds” (p. 5). He uses ancient war rituals and practices, as well as Native American warrior rites of passage as ways of understanding why men are attracted to the

military. The prospect of becoming a man and joining the ranks of other men who are there because they accomplished something is a strong factor—one may even say it is biologically and anthropologically driven.

In his study of how men learn to kill in the military, Lt. Col. Dave Grossman talks about the strong aversion people have to killing each other. He did an extensive study on the firepower used in each war, starting with the Civil War, and found that thousands of men either did not shoot at the enemy at all, or abandoned their weapons altogether. This, however, has changed as we have moved into present day; in other words, he explains, men are now much more likely and willing to fire their weapons at the enemy, and do so in order to kill. The tendency to kill should not be confused with the tendency to be aggressive. Most people have the ability or the drive to be aggressive, but this is much less likely to develop into actual violence. This is a noteworthy addition to my research because one can infer that motivation to join the military is not driven by the desire to kill people. He states that only about two percent of the population “are able to endure sustained combat: a predisposition toward ‘aggressive psychopathic personalities’” (Grossman, 1996, p. 44).

The Military Response

Many studies emerged in the 1980’s because of a congressional mandate to study PTSD and other postwar psychological problems (Kulka, Schlenger, Fairbank, Hough, Jordan, Marmar, & Weiss, 1990) as a response to the needs of the Vietnam Veterans. The Veterans Administration “funded research on combat veterans, most of them U.S. soldiers returning from Vietnam...[M]ilitary research provided the bedrock for much of the initial shaping of the diagnosis of PTSD” (Brewin, 2003, p. 10). This decision to

spend time and money on research has been a major investment and commitment on the part of the Veterans Administration.

Although many of these studies do not directly inform my research into how men make the decision to join the military, they are nevertheless valuable to both the social work field and to how we conduct future military actions. The acknowledgment of PTSD led to shortened tours of duty in Vietnam, and the use of high-tech weaponry is leading to innovations in the biomedical field for treatment of injuries and preparation for today's combat. One of these new programs is the Military Operational Medicine Research Program (Crowley, 2008, www.MOMRP.org) created by the U.S. Military to research new ways of preparing and protecting the emotional well-being of its soldiers. This information is what the Veterans Administration and the Department of Defense are working from, and it informs the policies and services for veterans.

The National Vietnam Veterans Readjustment Study (NVVRS, Kulka et al., 1990) produced data that show some risk factors for PTSD are related to level of exposure to war, a veteran having one psychological or readjustment problem, and race/ethnicity. African American and Latino veterans reported more mental health and life adjustment issues (Price, 2007), although there is not clear reasoning as to why this is. One might argue that this is due to previous traumas, including experiencing racism both before and during their military experience, and the possibility that they came from low-income and perhaps violent, economically depressed urban areas.

A 2003 study on predictors of posttraumatic stress disorders in adults did not look at veterans, but nonetheless had interesting findings (Ozer, Best, Lipsey, & Weiss, 2003). Their study showed "somewhat higher" levels of PTSD for those who experienced a

traumatic event “prior to the target stressor than those who indicated that they had not been previously exposed” (Ozer et al., 2003, p. 57). I am interested in the idea that people who have had early traumatic experiences are more likely to join the military, but I have found no data to support this. They also found that psychopathology in family of origin was a stronger predictor of PTSD “when the traumatic experience involved non-combat interpersonal violence than when the traumatic experience was combat exposure” (Ozer et al., 2003, p. 57). PTSD can occur from cumulative traumas that have occurred over time, which intuitively makes sense. However, it hints at what is to come from the 1.5 million soldiers who have rotated through Iraq so far, and how they may be seriously affected by their multiple tours of duty, wherein they may be exposed to trauma after trauma.

McFarlane & Yehuda (1996) talk about the course of posttraumatic reactions and the conceptual framework of resiliency. They say that,

The way people behave during a disaster may also have an important impact on their survival; their prior experience of traumas and their training will play a role in their ability to maximize their chance of survival. Equally, a person’s immediate emotional reaction at the time of the trauma will influence the capacity to respond to the threat in an adaptive way (McFarlane & Yehuda, 1996, p. 156).

In 1986 a study was done to determine which veterans developed PTSD. They found that there was no relationship found between pre-military variables and a diagnosis of PTSD, and that the most important factor for alleviating symptoms of PTSD was a strong support system upon their return from war (Solkoff, Gray, & Keill, 1986). Ozer found this to be significant as well, but found that the psychopathology of the family of origin was a stronger predictor of PTSD, which would imply that pre-military variables (i.e., trauma stemming from the family of origin), would indeed compound the risk of

suffering from PTSD due to later trauma experiences. The study by Solkoff, Gray, & Keill (1986) would also seem to be contradicted by McFarlane & Yehuda's study that says that prior trauma experiences dictate how a person will react in the event of another traumatic experience. Ozer, however, did not include veterans in his study, and so the trauma he referred to was limited to non-combat trauma. Either way, it is an interesting addition to the experiences that men have prior to military enlistment, which may or may not have an influence on their decision to join.

One and a half million men left Vietnam with PTSD, and over 100,000 committed suicide (Tick, 2005). These alarming statistics were just a few of the many startling numbers that brought about major investments in research by the military, including the Department of Defense, and the Department of Veterans Affairs Hospitals, as well as many independent research facilities. A current vein of research is in the biomedical field, and is looking into preparing soldiers for warfare so that they have minimal negative psychological side-effects. The Military Operational Medicine Research Program has a program called "Battlemind" that explores this concept. "The MOMRP is a medical research program that provides biomedical solutions to protect and enhance soldier performance in multistressor operational and training environments" (Crowley, 2008, www.MOMRP.org). What this actually looks like in action is difficult to understand from the information on the website, but the Battlemind program was created to help families of soldiers during deployment stages: pre-deployment, deployment, and return from deployment. It emphasizes skills such as seeking out social support, talking about issues, independence, psychological debriefing, and navigating the military system (WRAIR Land Combat Study Team, 2008).

Public Response

The details of counter-military recruitment are compelling as a grassroots movement to prevent military recruitment. The movement has been gaining strength and numbers since the Vietnam War. Allison & Solnit (2007) give impressive statistics on how much money and effort the military exerts in recruitment strategies. Currently, the military is not meeting its 80,000 recruit quota (Allison & Solnit, 2007), which is affecting soldiers through the “stop-loss” program, which keeps soldiers involuntarily longer than their original enlistment time. It has also recalled some 2,000 soldiers who have already left active military service. These recruitment programs probably have an influence on how people choose to enter the military.

When considering the type of person who enlists, one can also look at the type of person the military recruiters target. The military has a publicity relationship with “NASCAR, the National Hot Rod Association, and the Professional Bull Riders Association” (Allison & Solnit, 2007, p. x). It would appear they are looking for young men who like an adrenaline rush and people who are more willing than most to take bodily risks. There are also monetary bonuses being offered, which may lead one to think that young men with little or no money may be very tempted to join based on the financial gains. Are they looking for poor people with nothing to lose? Allison & Solnit quote Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who spoke to that effect well:

Then came the buildup in Vietnam, and I watched [the poverty] program broken and eviscerated, as if it were some idle political plaything of a society gone mad on war, and I knew that America would never invest the necessary funds or energies in rehabilitation of its poor so long as adventures like Vietnam continued to draw men and skills and money like some demonic destructive suction tube. So, I was increasingly compelled to see the war as an enemy of the poor and to attack it as such. (Allison & Solnit, 2007, p. xiv).

Other forms of public response have been less political and more focused on the simple task of getting veteran's stories documented and preserved in the Library of Congress. Such is the Library of Congress Veterans History Project, a volunteer-driven project that began in 2001 with this goal. So far, people have interviewed and recorded over 45,000 interviews with veterans from World War I to Iraq and Afghanistan (Kingsbury, 2007). Many families already preserve their relative's war stories through oral narratives, and many nursing homes do the same, calling it "reminiscence therapy" (Kingsbury, 2007, p. 2). In addition to this ambitious project, many filmmakers have been making war documentaries, the most recent and notable by Ken Burns, *The War* (2007), a 14 hour series shown on PBS in late 2007. He was inspired to make the film after learning that over 1,000 World War II veterans die every day! (Kingsbury, 2007, p. 2). The story of WWII is told by families of soldiers and the soldiers themselves, from four different towns in America. It is truly a moving and engaging series; to hear the stories of "normal" people, rather than through the lens of the media, military historians, and politicians of that era.

There are several more projects similar to this on various internet sites and radio programs, including MySpace and familyoralhistory.us, the Veterans History Project, and StoryCorps on National Public Radio, all with the same goal in mind, to preserve the stories that will die with these veterans if not documented (Kingsbury, 2007).

Other Studies and Treatment Considerations

In a study on how young people choose the military, college, or the workplace, the results showed that “although college aspirations decrease the odds of choosing the military over college, they increase the odds of choosing the military over work”

(Kleykamp, 2006, p. 283), and that military presence in the town or city also plays a large part in influencing young people's decision to join. They also found that if the person had a parent in the military, it would strengthen the chance that they, too would enlist, however, this factor was not found to be as strong as the military presence. The appeal of upward mobility that the military provides has been found to be an influence among people of color, especially African Americans (Kleykamp, 2006). The military offers somewhat steady employment over time, and has many benefits. During wartime, however, I wonder if this changes peoples' decisions to join. They hypothesized based on results of many other studies that "African American men enlist at higher rates and choose to remain in the military for a career at higher rates than their white peers" (Kleykamp, 2006, p. 273), leading one to believe that the military offers more appeal to people of color for economic reasons than it does for white males. However, they found little racial and ethnic differences in their study, and instead concluded that people enlist in the military because of "college aspirations, lower socioeconomic status, and living in an area with a high military presence" (Kleykamp, 2006, p. 272).

The process of career decision making has been studied and documented in journals such as the *Journal of Vocational Behavior*. In one particular study, they found that parents have a strong influence on their children's career decisions, but that it is based on the parent's belief that the child will be good for the job and will be capable of doing the job. (Gibson, Griepentrog, & Marsh, 2006). It does not look at more subjective issues such as the parent's general feeling about the military and the war and current affairs. In their findings, they noted that this kind of research on decision making around

careers is without a theoretical base, and therefore is flawed in trying to predict career-motivated behavior (Gibson et al., 2006).

Currently, the major problems that veterans face when they leave the military are adjustment problems, lack of a job, financial issues, mental health issues, relationship and marital problems, and physical implications. Perhaps one of the most fascinating studies was done to find out whether enlisted men who had experienced childhood traumas were more likely to be negatively affected by combat than those men who had not experienced early trauma (Cabrera, Hoge, Bliese, Castro, & Messer, 2007). They found that early childhood trauma was indeed a predictor of increased mental health problems after being exposed to combat. This study impresses upon the reader the importance of this knowledge when treating combat veterans. These pre-military factors must be taken into consideration when caring for returning soldiers, who are more vulnerable to depression and PTSD (Cabrera et al., 2007). Trauma-focused group therapy and present-centered group therapy were both found to be helpful in alleviating chronic trauma-related stress disorders.

Allen (2001) suggests containment, narrative therapy, and psychoeducational approaches for treatment. He describes this treatment as a phase oriented trauma therapy that focuses on safety and structure, and draws on attachment theory (Allen, 2001). Although all other studies have found social support to be the main predictive factor for lessening symptoms of PTSD, Allen warns that the social support necessary for trauma survivors is very specific both to gender and to quality of relationships. This helped to inform my decision to interview male veterans only.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy and Cognitive Processing Therapy have both been found to be helpful alleviating symptoms resulting from trauma. A program called *Virtual Vietnam* is a virtual reality simulation program that is used to desensitize returning soldiers from the combat experiences they went through in war. This tactic is less useful for veterans with non-combat trauma, but it is a fascinating approach nonetheless (Wright, Basco, & Thase, 2006). The idea is to desensitize soldiers from the fear that causes the uncomfortable physical reactions. Cognitive Behavior Therapy encourages people to be able to tolerate their fear reactions, rather than become anxious and panicked by them. This means sitting and being aware of their heart beating faster and harder, noticing that they are sweating, shaking, or feeling fearful, and being able to wait out the sensations until they eventually pass. This process of desensitization is supposed to keep soldiers from taking their fear reactions into their civilian life, where for the most part, they are in a safe environment.

Summary

In summary, the literature provides an interesting array of studies that have been done on veterans and how they decided to enlist, their chances of having posttraumatic stress disorder and how it both the military and the public have responded to the challenges that this population has suffered through the years. These are important perspectives to look through rather than the usual paradigm of seeing war experience as a small window of events. The men and women in the military are people who have many reasons for joining an organization that rests on a very bloody and violent history. The very nature of the military is to protect the United States through whatever means necessary, usually including violence and death. It is no secret that the job description

includes ones risking of life and limb, yet this factor rarely, if ever, came into peoples' minds as they decided to join. The question is, have things changed? This project will examine this through interviewing both older and younger participants.

The predictive factors related to joining the military, as found in the literature, tell us that the economy plays a part; if there are jobs and career mobility available at the time. Values and beliefs also seemed to play an important role, as well as whether or not the veteran had family members who were in the military.

The predictive factors found to be related to PTSD are interesting but do not say whether early traumatic experiences predict actually choosing to go into the military; rather they predict reactions to later military-related trauma. However, the history of trauma theory and the diagnosis of PTSD are relatively new, and could benefit from further study. At this point in time, the demand for immediate responses from the mental health community is high, and is only going to become greater and more urgent as time goes on. The men and women who make the decision to risk their lives deserve mental health attention, and I would assert that they, above most other groups, should be a top priority for clinicians. The acuity of problems they experience has been revealed to us since the return of the Vietnam soldiers, and we have no reason or excuse not to pay attention this time around.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the decision process and influential factors that went into the decision to join the military. My research question focused on veterans' experiences of joining the military and how they reflect back on these decisions now.

Because this question has not been explored in depth before, an exploratory study using qualitative methods was used. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 veterans who identified themselves as male United States military veterans who had willingly enlisted. Findings were then analyzed qualitatively.

Sample

This study interviewed 10 participants, ranging in age from 24 to 88, however, one participant I interviewed was actually drafted, and had to be excluded from the study. All were male and were veterans of the United States military. They were from World War II (n=5), Vietnam War era (n=1), Korean War era (n=0), Gulf War era (n=0), or the current Iraq War era (n=3). All participants identified as white, a limitation of diversity which will be elaborated on in the discussion section of this paper. On average, the interviews lasted one hour.

Obtaining a Sample

The target size for the sample was 12 participants; due to the length of the interviews the final sample was nine participants. Eligibility was based on whether the

participant was male, had willingly enlisted in the services, and was a veteran of the United States military. The strategies used for recruiting were through word-of-mouth, putting up flyers in the local VA clinic and non-profit organization that serves veterans, and through the snowball method. This sample was non-random, as I was targeting a specific population.

Being that the sample size was quite small, obtaining a diverse population was difficult. I chose to interview men only because the findings would be more powerful if only one gender was examined. One weakness of using this method of research is that the diversity of geography, race and ethnicity, and gender are not explored due to the small sample size. A strength, however, is the depth and richness of the information provided by each participant.

Ethics and Safeguards

This study was approved by the Human Subject Review Board of Smith College School For Social Work (see Appendix A). I explained to all participants that all identifiable information will be removed when the information is transcribed. I removed names and used numbers to differentiate between participants' narratives. I kept the informed consents separate from the recorded audio tapes. I was the only one transcribing the data and no one had access to the information until it had been properly disguised. My research advisor only had access to the information after the identifying information had been removed.

The narratives are the most important part of this study, and during presentations of my thesis, I will want to use some direct quotes. In order to protect the identity of the participant, I will use a pseudonym or no name at all. I will be presenting data about

participants as a group whenever possible, and I will be using illustrative vignettes and quoted comments. I will be sure to disguise all identifying information in order to protect the participants.

Data and audio tapes will be stored for three years in a secure, locked location as required by Federal regulations. After that time, they will either continue to be stored in a locked location, or they will be destroyed.

Risks of Participation

There were minimal risks to participating in this study. There was a chance that discussing their choice to join and their expectations before joining may have created discomfort. I had no intention of talking about their combat experiences during the military, which would carry much more risk than the subject I was researching; however, these experiences sometimes came up during the interview regardless. These minimal risks were discussed in the screening process. I also informed the participants that they could withdraw or stop the interview at any time without penalty. They did not have to answer any questions that made them feel uncomfortable. I also monitored their responses and reactions carefully during the interview. My goal was to make this a comfortable and safe experience. I did this by discussing expectations and participant rights in the beginning of the interview and revisited these rights, if necessary.

I did not distribute a list of referral sources to participants because they were likely already hooked up with the VA system. I let them know that if they felt they need further support, that I can provide referrals or they can contact their VA counselor. Confidentiality was discussed. I assured the participant that their identifying information would be disguised before anyone other than myself has access to the data.

Benefits of Participation

A benefit to participating in this study is that veterans will be able to tell their story and have their perspective heard. They may also benefit from knowing that they have contributed to the knowledge of social workers and other mental health clinicians. I told them that the information I am attempting to collect is not currently in the literature, and so the story of their decision-making process will add to the existing research on veterans in the field of social work, and will give clinicians an enhanced understanding of how we can better serve veterans' needs. I explained that unfortunately, I could not provide any financial compensation for their participation in this study

Data Collection

Participants were recruited through word-of-mouth, and then using the snowball method. In addition, flyers were posted in the local VA clinic, and in the local non-profit organization that serves veterans. Informed consent forms were reviewed by me with each participant before signing and commencing the interview (see Appendix B). Participants from outside the Bay Area were sent letters explaining the study, in addition to the informed consent forms (see Appendix C), and in advance of the interview.

The method for data collection was an open-ended, semi-structured interview that focused on the areas described previously (see Appendix D). A number of them were conducted face to face in the participant's home, and others were conducted over the phone. All were digitally recorded and took between 60 and 90 minutes. A pre-approved interview guide was used to conduct the interview, although several follow-up questions were asked to either clarify or to explore certain themes in more depth as they came up.

Therefore, each interview varied in certain areas. All interviews were transcribed by me and identifying information was disguised.

Data Analysis

During transcription I took notes of common ideas that were in each interview. After all interviews were transcribed, I used an open coding method to find overarching common themes. I then used axial coding to look deeper within specific themes, and went back and forth between open and axial coding to assign themes, labels, and ideas to the participants' words. I also paid close attention to unusual or uncommon responses by participants (Anastas, 1999).

Transcripts were reviewed to find relevant data pertaining to the decision process and varying environmental influences for joining the military. These influences included school, money, travel, military recruitment presence in schools and towns, and family support or lack thereof. Transcripts were also reviewed for patterns and themes that were not anticipated by the pre-determined interview guide, but that were brought up by participants during the interview. During the data analysis process, I went through each question on the interview guide, and looked at the responses from each participant. I then compared and contrasted their responses and highlighted themes and commonalities, while also acknowledging the unique responses that perhaps were only said by one or two participants.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand how men decide to join the military, and learn about what factors influenced their decision. I interviewed ten male veterans of the United States military, however, one participant was actually drafted and had to be excluded from the study. The sample was obtained mostly through word of mouth, and led to the opportunity for me to meet with five WWII veterans, one Vietnam War veteran, and three veterans from the current Iraq War period; one of them had actually completed a tour in Iraq.

The participants all identified as white and heterosexual. Their ages were 24, 25, 27, 61, 81, 87, 87, 87, and 88. Five men came from Northern California, two grew up in Nebraska, one was originally from Illinois, and another hailed from Missouri. One participant was an only child, two were the youngest of their siblings, and six were the oldest child. I asked this question out of curiosity and to see if there was any pattern in birth order. Although most participants were the eldest of their siblings, I don't think any real conclusions or theories can be drawn from it. The year that they were born, the era that they grew up in, and the historical circumstances that happened to occur during their lifetime were much more indicative of their chances of joining the military. The call for volunteers after the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941 was a powerful motivator for many young men who were of age and eligible to join, as will be discussed later on in this chapter, and talked about more in the Discussion Chapter.

Five had joined the military during peacetime, and of those five, four were aware that a war was approaching and very likely. The one who was not aware that a war was approaching had joined in 2000, and obviously had no knowledge of what would happen after the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001. He expressed this frustration during our interview, saying that he would have chosen a different branch of service had he known that the United States would engage in war with Afghanistan and Iraq. The other four participants joined during wartime, yet some expressed that the war had influenced them, and others said it made no difference, that they were going to be pilots no matter what, or that they were interested in the military lifestyle before there was any prospect of a war. Of those participants to whom the war did matter, the responses were split between being very patriotic and angry that our country had been attacked, or because the country was at war and they were prompted to join because of the impending draft.

Another demographic question I asked about was the participants' level of education before they joined the military, and their parents' levels of education. All nine participants completed high school. One had begun college, another had taken a few college classes including one that would prepare him for joining the Air Corps, four men had completed two years of junior college, and one had gone on to graduate from university before joining the Marines.

I then asked them about their parents' levels of education; of their parents' education levels, one participants' parents both had advanced graduate degrees; his mother was the first woman to earn a Masters degree from the University of Missouri. Two participants' fathers had graduate degrees while their mothers had high school

diplomas. One subject's parents dropped out of high school. Two subject's parents both had high school diplomas, and another's mother had a high school diploma while his father had dropped out of high school. One man's father had a high school diploma and his mother had gone to a technical school to be a beautician; another participant's mother had a high school degree while his father had dropped out to join WWI and then returned to high school years later while in his 50's to finally graduate. I thought there would be a difference in levels of education for the subject's parents depending on the era in which they were in school, but this did not seem to make much of a difference. The one subject whose parents both had advanced degrees obtained them before the depression.

I asked each subject about their family's socioeconomic status while they were growing up, wondering if growing up in a poorer family would be impetus to join the military. However, it was difficult to draw any conclusions from that information because five of the nine participants who are WWII veterans grew up during the depression, and so none of them were wealthy but still reported that they didn't necessarily feel deprived, "I don't think we ever felt that we didn't have enough. We were limited, don't misunderstand, [but] we didn't feel that we didn't have enough to do what we wanted to do." As another so aptly put it, "we weren't poor, we just didn't have any money." Keeping the context in mind was important when asking subjects this question because of the vast changes in economics over the last seventy years. Coming out of the depression, one subject said, "jobs weren't that lucrative, you know." Of the three youngest subjects, all in their 20's, the two from California came from families that could be considered financially well-off, both estimating that their parents made over \$100,000 per year. The other young man came from a very small town in Nebraska, and he

estimated that his parents made between \$30,000 and \$60,000 per year, supporting a family of seven. Overall, it is difficult to make any useful comparisons between the socioeconomic status of these men, who joined the military during the WWII era, the Vietnam era, and the current Iraq War era. One thing that can be said for them is that none of them were extremely wealthy, and none were desperately poor by depression era standards.

The major question driving this study was how the men made the decision to join the military in the first place, and follow-up questions inquired into why they chose their particular branches of service, and what were the major influencing factors. Of the nine subjects, four were in the Air Force; two of those four were in the service during WWII, when it was still called the Air Corps, and it later became the Air Force after the end of the war. The other two were in quite recently, during the current Iraq war. Two participants were in the Army, one during Vietnam and the other during the current Iraq war. Two subjects were in the Navy during WWII, and one was in the Marines, also during WWII. I was interested in why they chose their particular branches and what they knew about what differentiated each branch from another. Some had done their research on the different services before making their decision, and others knew exactly what they wanted to do in the military and chose based on that desire. First I asked them about why they made the decision to join the military.

Joining Up

This section will talk about how the subjects decided to join the military, what branch they chose and why, and how the people in their lives reacted to their decision to join.

The Decision

The first young man I interviewed, a 27 year old from Northern California who joined the Air Force in August of 2000, reported that he was influenced by his father being in the military during the Vietnam War era, and his lack of desire to go to school. He was twenty years old when he joined.

Um, partly my father being in the Marines, and he always talked real highly of it, and seemed proud of what he did in the military, and, I kind of wanted to do the same thing. That was a major thing for me. And also, I didn't really see myself going to college, it wasn't really something I wanted to do, so, I knew I just couldn't stay at home forever, so I had to do something, so I figured the military was a good way to go.

When I asked him how he chose the Air Force, he said it was influenced strongly by the wishes of his parents, as well as the fact that it was, at that time, peacetime.

Well, I figured, when you're not fighting in a war, I didn't really see the benefit of going in the Marines of the Army, 'cause I'd always heard kind of negative things about them, they don't really have much for education and quality of life wasn't really good I heard, so I decided on the Air Force; figured I'd get a better education, quality of life would be better... Another decision, ah, deciding factor too, was my father didn't want me to go in the Marines' cause, he liked it, but at the same time he didn't feel like he was treated very well; he didn't want me to have to go through the same thing, and he didn't feel like he got anything out of it once he, once he was discharged; he didn't feel like it really, like it really sent him anywhere. And then my mother didn't want me to go into the Army, so I kind of made them a promise each that I wouldn't go into either one of those, so...it was either the Air Force or the Navy and I didn't want to be on a boat, so...

I returned to the subject of joining during peacetime versus wartime, considering that during his service, our country did move from peace into a war with Afghanistan and Iraq.

I'm happy I did it, I'm proud that I did it. I kinda wish that, you know, it's impossible for this to have happened, but I kinda wish that I would have known something was going to happen, combat-wise, 'cause I woulda joined a different service. [If I had] known something was going to happen; if we were going to

invade Iraq, or if I knew that we were gonna get into a war, I would've gone somewhere, I would've gone in the Marines or the Army or something.

I asked him why.

Just 'cause I fell that's what people need to do. I mean, there's only so many people that are willing to fight; most of them that are willing to fight need to do it. I mean, I say that because I've never been in it (combat), and I'm sure somebody that's been in it would call me an idiot, 'cause I don't really imagine anyone really wants to go to war, but it's like, when you're in the military—when I was in the military, in the Air Force, I'd been in for a year, and then the war kicks off, you know, we get to act, you kind of want revenge, you wanna go over there and be like 'hey', you know, 'fuck you', you know. And you can't. 'Cause you're in, you're locked into a commitment in the service, and you can't switch, you can't 'oh I'm going in the Army now', no sorry, you're here for the four years now. And you can't go to combat. So you're kinda stuck. And it's very frustrating.

Along with this frustration in not being able to switch to another service more actively involved in the war effort, was the guilt he felt at not contributing enough, even though he was aware that he had no control over it.

And it's like now when people ask me 'oh you were in the military' and it's like, it's like an ongoing joke, you know. And they're like 'what service were you in?', 'Air Force', 'oh I thought you said you were in the military', you know. They like to make fun of the Air Force and the Navy, like 'oh you guys don't do shit', but you know, we do our part, but still it's like, you almost feel guilty, you don't feel like you did enough...I used to carry around a lot of guilt for the whole, you know, war thing and being in the Air Force but, I just kinda have to let that go because when I joined there was no war, there was no 9/11, there was nothing like that and there was no, there was no way to tell that that's going to come. So, I just kinda had to let that go...'Cause, it bothered me for a long time. If you ever talk to my mom or my dad, it really bothered me. But then, I mean, there's nothing I can do about it...So I guess now maybe, being in the police department, that's my way of making up for it. You kinda, try to protect people that are here, you know.

We talked for a while about his guilt from feeling that he had not been able to participate in the war. When I asked him if he would ever re-enlist he said that he had thought about it, but that he has to keep in mind the fact that he is getting married this year and wants to settle down and have children. He said he felt torn between his sense of duty and his responsibilities at home, and acknowledged that being a police officer was a choice that

was likely influenced by his military service. "I feel like I need to do something where I feel like I'm making a difference."

Another young man, a 24 year old from Nebraska who joined the Army in 2002 when he was 19 years old, reported that he joined when he went with his friend down to the recruiting station and spoke with the recruitment officer. Several of his friends were signing up for the Army Reserves, and so he went in to find out more about it. He had been given the opportunity to go to college for electronic engineering, and decided to turn down the full scholarship he was offered. He said he was aware that the war in Iraq was probably coming, but that "it was kind of at the back of my mind when I enlisted."

Well, when I joined the military, actually I had a full ride scholarship to the University of Nebraska, in Lincoln, and ah, I guess I kinda got scared and I ah, I wanted to serve my country, see what I could do, and maybe see a few new places and find some more out about myself.

I asked him why he chose the Army over the other branches.

Um, well actually when I first went in the recruiting station, I actually wanted to go reservist and just do the weekend thing, so I could still go to school, but the more I started talking to the active duty recruiter, the more I started to think that that's what I really wanted. That's kind of the way I went, is just this, kinda spur of the moment thing I guess.

Because he scored in the upper ten percent on the pre-entrance test that tells a new enlistee what kind of jobs he is eligible for, he was able to choose to be a mechanic for the M2A2 Bradley Fighting Vehicle, a vehicle that looks like a tank and is used to transport infantry. Rather, he *thought* he would be a mechanic on the M2A2 Bradley.

Honestly, when I first joined, I ah, my job was a combat arms job, so when I enlisted, I should have known that I was gonna be on the front lines, I'm gonna be doing the ground pounder work, I'm gonna be doing this and doing that. I did not know this...It kinda threw me through a loop. So, I came in thinking I was going to be a mechanic on an M2A2 Bradley, and come to find out I was actually going to be inside the M2A2 Bradley, so it was, it was different. I mean, that should tell

you right there what my expectations were, I mean, it's just, I wasn't really expecting much, I wanted a job, I knew I wanted to do something with my life, so I guess that's just what I took.

A 25 year old man from Northern California who joined the Air Force in May of 2003 when he was twenty years old, said that he was working retail and not really "doing anything" when a Marine recruiter approached him "in full dress uniform" and suggested that he come in and talk to him sometime. He went home and talked it over with his brother and then spoke with his mom and dad about it, who then went and talked it over with his grandfather. His father, grandfather, and uncle are all veterans, and he admitted that the prospect of the Army or some kind of service was always within his sphere of influence, even when his father would joke with him about joining up.

Well, growing up, my dad was always messing with me about you know, you gotta join the Army, you're not gonna do anything, join the Army, that kind of, you know...Just messing around, yeah, join the Army, yeah, join the military, it'll show you discipline...It wasn't ever a forced thing or anything, it was, you know, I always knew it was joking, but...

He said that he was influenced by the fact that he had several veterans in his family, and he took their opinions on which branch he should choose seriously, "They told me if you're going to join, join the Air Force. Um, yeah, they definitely didn't want me in the Marine Corps. I got a lot of flak about that." It was apparent that his parents and grandfather felt strongly that he should choose the branch that would offer him exactly what he wanted, and that was a job as a general purpose vehicle mechanic.

I talked to my dad, and my parents ended up talking to my grandpa, and it came back just to go talk to the Air Force just to see what they had to say. And the Air Force was the only one who could guarantee me a job. Like, um, in the Marine Corps and in the Army, you're infantry first, so no matter what your career field that you go into, you're always going to be infantry first, if they need you in the front lines, you go. And the Air Force doesn't do that, they guarantee you, I had a signed contract and everything.

It was also clear that his family did not want him to have to face the possibility of being an infantryman if war broke out, which it did shortly after he joined. Actually, he joined up with the Air Force, and then was in the Delayed Entry Program for eight months because there were no job openings yet. When he finally did go to boot camp, it was May of 2003, when bombing in Iraq had begun. I asked if he remembered what he thought about this at the time, and if it changed the way he felt about his decision to join, but he said that it didn't; "no, not really, not at that time, not at all. It was kinda, I think it was just like, everyone was just so miserable being there as it was, you know, the boot camp part, that it, I don't know, it didn't really click with me, you know?"

A 61 year old man who was originally from Northern California and joined the Army in 1965 as an 18 year old, reported that he joined because he wanted to become a pilot. It was wartime and there was a draft in place, and young 18 year old men were signing up for selective service, vividly aware that they may be called to duty. "Yeah, you know it was pretty much understood and expected between the draft and whatnot, most folks were expecting to do military service." He said he was interested in becoming a pilot from an early age. "A friend of my dad's gave me a model airplane back when I was about six or seven years old, and that's when I made, as a six or seven year old, made my career decision." He said that he joined the Army because to become a pilot, you only needed a high school diploma, whereas in the Air Force and Navy a two year degree was required. He had graduated from high school and had begun taking college classes, which allowed him to defer his draft status for a short time.

Well, I joined the military to become a pilot, and the thing that made the biggest decision was I dropped a class and I was a half unit short of having my student

deferment; I got classified as 1-A and ah, so I decided to join up instead of waiting to be drafted.

He was aware that if he had waited to be drafted, he would have likely not been able to train as a helicopter pilot. He subject completed two tours of duty in Vietnam, one from December of 1966 to December of 1967, and the other from 1970 to 1971. At age 24 he was the most experienced pilot in the whole aviation battalion, which consisted of three or four hundred pilots. He flew observation helicopters and command and control helicopters during his first tour, and on his second tour he flew supply airplanes and monitored seismic sensors that had been placed in the country to detect enemy movement. He said his decision to join was also influenced by the fact that his father was a veteran of both WWII and the Korean War, both of which he was drafted in for. "He wasn't ah, real thrilled about the military." However, he was supportive of his son's decision to join. "Ah, you know, he never really said too much about it, um, he didn't express, he didn't express anything one way or the other. No, I think for the most part he was supportive in everything I did."

This subject and all five of the subjects who participated in WWII had in common the understanding that they could very possibly be drafted, and that they must make a decision based on this reality. This was a recurring response between the WWII vets as well as the one Vietnam veteran and became a common theme. One WWII veteran commented on this.

Back then all we seniors in high school knew that we would be in the military. Some guys wanted to wait until they were forced to, they were drafted, and others enlisted. Most of the enlistees enlisted in the Marine Corps or the Navy.

He emphasized that there was a constant reminder that the country was at war.

We'd been in war since, oh the war had been going on in Europe since 1939. This was '44 so that's five years, so the war had been going on since I was 12. So it was a fact of life...Ah, go to a movie and you would see the, what was it? Movie tone news. All war. And ah, the newspaper headlines always just had to do with the war, the battles and, '4,000 people lost yesterday', or '8,000', you know. Ah, a ship might go down, one of the larger ships, and they'd lose five or six hundred men.

Another WWII veteran had similar things to say.

Well at that time, well, first of all you have to know that at that time there was a tremendous call for people, and there was a desire on young people to go contribute to that...The times were so much different about what was going on and ah, parents knew their children are—particularly males, are gonna be going, one way or another.

And another veteran of the Second World War echoed this reasoning, saying that he knew he would have to do it, and why not just "get it over with." He had graduated from college, but knew that jobs were hard to come by, and the country was urging young men to join the war effort. "Yeah, it was a reality, you had to face it." I asked him why he decided to join the Marine Corps, and he said that a recruiter had shown up at his college campus—the only one of all the WWII subjects who saw a recruiter in a place other than the recruiting office, "they showed up, and they interviewed a bunch of guys. So that took me out of the draft." I asked if that was the only reason, and wondered aloud about the stereotypes that come with being a Marine, that they are seen as being the best and the bravest, the first ones sent in to conflict; laughing, he said "Well I guess, maybe it's an ego trip."

Another WWII veteran was motivated to join the war effort because of the attack on Pearl Harbor. He and his younger brother ventured to San Francisco to join the Air Corps and become pilots, however his brother made it and he did not because of a vision problem. Instead he enlisted with the Navy, and spent part of his time in the service on a

ship, making ice cream in the ship's fountain when he wasn't up on deck spotting enemy planes.

I would have never volunteered unless we got attacked, you know? I wanted to do my part with whatever—I wanted to be a flyer but I couldn't be, so I took the Navy, which is the next best thing.

And one WWII veteran joined the Air Corps just before the attack on Pearl Harbor, and was inspired to join because he had always been interested in aviation and very much wanted to become a pilot, "There were times that I'd lie down in the grass and just look at the airplane while it was going over." He enlisted a year before he was eligible for the draft. He said he was not particularly influenced by the quickly approaching war, he just wanted to fly; he had an idea "that it's probably gonna be war, yeah. Didn't seem to bother me; I just wanted to fly airplanes...no, I was just taking what came along in history."

Reactions from Friends and Family

One of the questions I asked each subject was about peoples' reactions. I was surprised to hear that most of them acknowledged that their loved ones were not thrilled that they were joining the military, however, their reactions did not sway the subjects' decision. Not surprisingly, none of their mothers were happy that they would be going into the military, especially those who were very likely going to be heading into a warzone and whose lives would be very much on the line.

I mean, I kinda felt bad for my parents, 'cause I'm an only child, and you know, I didn't want them to be upset, but the majority of my friends were supportive. They didn't really have anything negative to say.

I asked him more about his parents' feelings about him joining up, wondering what kind of conversations they had about it before he left for the Air Force, and how those discussions were influenced because he is their only child.

My parents were, apprehensive, but like I said, they were supportive. They knew it was something I wanted to do, and they were just more concerned that I wasn't...they didn't want me to make a mistake. They didn't want me to get in and then regret it. They didn't want me to... 'cause I think my parents thought I was just doing it to get outta here and...they didn't want me to just do it, and make a hasty decision, and take off and then regret it and kinda waste four years of my life. They were worried about that. I kinda looked into the different services. Like I said, I promised I wouldn't go into the Marines or the Army, so that pretty much left the Air Force or the Navy. And the Navy, I'd kinda always wanted to be a Navy SEAL ever since I was a little kid, but you know, I didn't really want to put in the whole—you have to do like so many years on a boat, and ah, it didn't really appeal to me that much.

Another didn't even tell his parents before he signed up. They found out the night before he left for the series of medical exams that are conducted before joining.

My family, they were kinda blindsided by it 'cause I really didn't tell them too much that I was going, and ah, I guess it was just a last minute thing and all a sudden I come home one day and I'd been through MEPS and everything...I don't know, they were a little skeptical I guess you could say about it, which I can kinda understand, I mean, they didn't really know what it was for, I guess..I mean, it was my decision, I made it for myself, I was, I considered myself an adult. Now I don't know if I was exactly making an adult decision 'cause I should of told them more about what was going on, but I guess it is what it is.

His friends, however, "were stoked." Another man was the only subject who had several friends who did not approve of his decision. He had talked it over a lot with his family, who were supportive, so he was not swayed by his friends' feelings.

I'd already made my decision. At that point it was kinda, it was already too late, you know? I was already going in, so the opinions really didn't matter, you know? I had a few friends that were supportive, um, a lot of my friends weren't; they were very anti-military. Um, when I was younger I hung out with a lot of like, punk rocker type kids, and they were all, told me that it was the worst decision. But a lot of my other friends were definitely very supportive of it.

All of the other veterans, six of the nine, said that their friends and family were understanding, if not supportive, of their decision to join the military. The country was either already at war, or it was quickly approaching a war, and people had already accepted that their sons, boyfriends, friends, brothers, and husbands would in all likelihood, be joining up and doing their duty. It was an expected reality for many of them.

Being In

This section focuses on the subjects' expectations of the military, their general experience while in the service, and what coping skills they used during that time.

Expectations

Of the nine subjects, only a few had expectations of what it would be like in the military, and of those, their expectations were quite minimal. One said "I actually, I expected boot camp to be harder." Another said "I had no idea of what to expect when I first went in." Another, "Yeah, not knowing what to expect. Just anxious, I guess, and nervous." Another subject said "Well, I didn't really have any expectation in that regard, I didn't know. But I was motivated, and you know, whatever it was, just accepted it and dealt with it." And another, "No, I was zeroed in on wanting to fly." And two others, "I don't think so.", and "No, no, I mean I just knew that I was going to be drafted if I didn't do something, and the draft, a couple of my friends were drafted." One subject was aware of the risk he would be courting if he joined the military.

Well, I just knew it was dangerous, my life would be on the line, but also felt very lucky that I wasn't ah, Army or Marine Corps in the land forces because I had a sack to sleep in every night and good food. Not like a, a trench soldier or something like that. I felt very lucky.

General Experience and Coping Skills

I struggled with the decision to talk about the subjects' experiences while they were in the service because the purpose of the study was to talk about their decision to join, not about their experiences during their time in the military. I did not want to risk causing any distress in the participants if they happened to recall painful or uncomfortable memories. However, to talk about their decision to join and their reflections on it now and not talk about everything in between seemed amiss. Also, what happened during their time in the military often informed how they later felt about the experience.

Every subject except for one went overseas at some point during their service. One went to the United Arab Emirates for a little over six months, and was a firefighter on an air base. He was also chosen to be on the Honor Guard, and then to be on the Drill Team, which is a specialized group within the Honor Guard and travels around the country performing at sports events as a kind of performing representative of the Air Force. The training for this special duty was very rigorous and only included a small group of men, and they fostered a close bond with each other. He said that bonding with the other men and travelling to different places was a lot of fun for the time that he was on the Drill Team. I asked about the moments that were stressful, and how he coped during those times.

I worked out a lot. I didn't drink; a lot of my friends would drink a lot on the weekends, you know, they'd do things like that, and I never did that, I never got into that. Every once in a while I'd go out and get, get a heat on, and stuff like that, but I'd always end up getting in trouble or doing something stupid, so, it wasn't worth it. So I used to work out a lot, um, I had a few friends that didn't really like to drink either, so we'd just go out and do whatever, get food and just fuckin' hang out, you know. You kinda just fall back on your friends, that's why

it's important to have friends in the military, and you kind of, you really can't not have friends, you just kinda have to.

Another subject was on stop-loss while stationed in Korea and had about four months notice before being deployed to Iraq. He was in Iraq for 373 days. He was an infantryman in the Army and drove a Bradley Fighting Vehicle. I asked him about his stressful moments, if he had any, and how he coped, and he wanted it on the record that he spoke to his mom every single day, and drew strength from talking to her, even if they just talked about what she had been up to that day, or how his siblings were doing. "And just talking to her for ten minutes a day is like, the most mellow thing for me in a week." He said he didn't think being in the Army was particularly stressful.

Um, when joining the Army, I didn't really consider that a stressful situation; I was just enjoying life.

I asked about bootcamp.

Oh, well no, I hated life there, but that's just, that was just one of those things that I just dealt with. When I went to basic training, I knew it was going to suck, so I expected the worst, hoped for the best.

Returning from Iraq, however, he said he had a bit of a hard time.

When I first got back from Iraq and stuff, I turned the wrong way, ah, I started drinking a lot, and ah, I fell into basically a state of depression. So it is, it does deal ah, put a hardship on you I guess you could say, to where, you've gotta learn that not everything you can control. So that's where I kinda went in and started getting help.

He started getting therapy and cut down on his drinking after that.

Another veteran was stationed in a pretty desolate area of America and did not have to go overseas during his time in the Air Force. He was happy to not have to go to Iraq, although there were several periods in which he was "in the bucket", meaning he was eligible to be deployed to Iraq. "Yeah, to go to the desert, I didn't want to go at all,

never wanted to go. I was, yeah, I was really scared when they told me that, when it was my, when I was in the bucket. I was, yeah, I was really scared." His job was as a general purpose mechanic, and he worked in a repair shop working on trucks and some Humvees, a vehicle widely used in Iraq at the moment. He says he greatly enjoyed his job, but hated the ranking system.

I loved my job, and if I could have that job, in that shop, with those people, as a real, you know, a job outside of the military, I'd do it in a heartbeat. We had a lot of fun in that shop, and there's some good people in it, but the military aspect of it ruined everything, the chain of command and all that...I decided like, maybe a year and a half into it that I knew I wasn't gonna re-up...I didn't like, I don't know how to um, it was more the people who outrank you have like, total control over you, basically. So the ranking system I didn't like at all. Um, the fact that a guy coulda been younger than me but still outranking me, and he could know less than me, which is not uncommon at all. And yeah, they have all power over you.

I asked how he coped.

Um, we fished, camped, a lot of outdoor activity; that's the best thing to do there, there's snowboarding, they got great skiing up there, yeah, snowboarding, all that good stuff, four wheeling, um, everyone's got a gun there, everyone goes hunting, and all that, or we'd just go shooting, that kinda stuff. Paintball was another big one that we'd—the actual base built an old hangar, an old helicopter hangar into a big old paintball course for the base...but other than that, not much, drank. Everyone drinks.

He said he talked to his family all the time, and received a lot of support from them. He also had a calendar on which he was counting down the days and eagerly awaiting his discharge.

Yeah, I talked to my family all the time. Um, at least once a week I would talk to my dad. And my oldest brother, too. And they were a big support, you know, they knew I hated it. You know, he hated it when he was in, my dad, and he was telling me you know, you just gotta do it, you're there, you're almost done, that's what they kept telling me, you're almost done, you're almost done. What's one more year? You've already been in three years, what's one more year?

The one subject who was in the military during the Vietnam War flying helicopters and airplanes said he did not feel that he was very stressed during his time in the military.

You know, there weren't anything, nothing occurred to me that I considered a tough time, you know, I just, I was either well adjusted enough or naïve enough not to maybe even understand everything I was exposed to, and ah, um, it was I guess probably because of the way I was raised, I just accepted the way things were, and didn't really get too wrapped around the axle on anything...you know, in the days that I was in the military, alcohol was a big part of the military life, not particularly for me in the sense that you know, I wasn't drinking every day or anything of that nature, but Friday night, you were expected to show up at the officer's club at happy hour. So there those types of things, but I didn't, I didn't even show up at happy hour that much.

The World War II vets also struggled with finding ways to cope during their time in the military. I asked one man who was in the Navy what it was like to spend nine months on a destroyer in the Pacific.

Confinement. Ah, monotonous. Food was not good. Back then we had a lot of powdered eggs, powdered milk. Food was not good...We eagerly looked forward to returning.

I asked how he coped, and he said he spend his time playing cards with his friends. He said he also went up on deck and looked at the water, commenting on the fact that he had never before seen a body of water larger than the Missouri river before in his life.

Other than that, I frankly, I enjoyed going out on deck and just looking at the waves and the water, horizon...and other times I'd go way up on the bow, right up on the pointed bow, and just stand there, and there'd be wind in your face, and I'd just look at the horizon; the sunsets were gorgeous. But you did whatever you could just to be content, which was difficult, to be content.

Another man who was a pilot in the Air Corps and flew airplanes hauling supplies over the Himalayas to aid in the building of the road from Mandalay, talked about the week long breaks they would take to relieve stress.

Um, you'd get stressed, you'd get worn out, because it was a—most of us anyway felt some high tension, and in an effort to break that up, um, during that time over in India, I had a week to ten day little hunting camp up there in the Himalayas that they had and run for us, which was good.

And one man who was stationed in New Guinea flying patrol and escort planes came to the realization that he just couldn't worry about something that he could not control. I asked him if he was ever stressed out.

No, I don't think so. I um, I had decided that if the bullet came along with my name on it, why, worrying about it before it happened wasn't going to change anything. So I more or less had that philosophy...I really just, I felt like I was going to make it through and I did. And there was a lot of guys thought they were gonna make it through that didn't, so.

He also said he had four leaves in Sydney, Australia during that time, and that he went there because "that's where the girls were!" which probably helped to relieve some stress.

Looking Back

This section will focus on the participants' reflections on their decision to join the military, including their feelings about the military system, and their most proud moment.

Reflection

I asked subjects to reflect on their decision to join the military. For some, the decision was made only five years ago; for others, the decision was made over sixty-five years ago. Sometimes they talked about how they are different, or just the same as when they went in. This subject said that he felt like he had changed since being in the military.

I definitely think I'm a different person than who I used to be. Like, I still have my sense of humor, I still joke around, stuff like that, but, certain things set me off, like, make me angry, like, when I hear about like, you know, people that protest against the military, and it's just, it makes me mad, it's like, you don't have any idea what these people are going through, and you're standing up saying it's wrong, and everything else, it's like, walk in their shoes for a day and then...it just

makes me mad, you know, it really pisses me off when people do stuff like that. But then again, it's their right to do that. So, can you really get mad at them?"

I asked him whether he felt he had acquired new qualities or characteristics from the military.

Ah, discipline, integrity, things like that. You can definitely tell, like, especially when I was in the police academy (after his military service), and the police department, you can just tell, you can always tell the military person, the prior military person; it's the way they carry themselves, the way they act, you know, it's like, just with more confidence, and they're upstanding...you'll never see a military person dodging a run or you know, getting somebody else to do their work for them, you know, or stabbing somebody in the back; you get that a lot from regular people that have never been in any kind of training like that, you know, they're lazy, but military people aren't like that, they're just, they handle their shit. They do a good job and they go home at the end of the day. And they don't complain about it. That's just one thing that, that I'm proud that I did and I can say that I did, and when I go to work I know I'm gonna handle my shit and go home and not complain about it.

Another subject kept his answer simple when I asked him how he felt about his decision, "oh I'm ecstatic about it." He then added to that sentiment.

Oh I've changed a lot. The Army makes you grow up very quickly. It brings forth a lot of discipline that a lot of people in their mid-thirties I'd even say, don't even have. I mean, it makes you, I mean, it makes, I don't know, it's almost...it's really made me a better person I think. It's made me more respectful for my elders, it's made me more respectful of my country, it's made me respect what people do for a hard day's work.

Another subject expressed his strong relief at being out of the military. He didn't like the ranking system and how it inflated peoples' egos and caused power struggles.

Um, I have no—I'm glad I'm out, I'm glad I'm out, and I would never go back in, but I would never tell someone not to go in or to go in...I'd let them make their own decision, do it, 'cause it wasn't all bad, obviously, you know, so...um yeah, I'm just glad I'm out, definitely...Like, I'm out now, I can grow a beard, I can grow my hair long if I want to, and it's cool; I can dress the way I want, all that kind of stuff...yeah, the uniform, 'you have to do this', I don't like being told what to do, so, that whole thing.

I asked him if there was anything in the military that he learned that he uses now that he is out of the system.

Yes. As far as my job goes. You know, that's what I'm going to school for, same thing, and um, as far as the military part of it, maybe a little more respect I have, you know. But everything is drill and kill, and it's drilled into your head, so like some things just come and you don't even realize it...I think it was good discipline; it was good discipline to learn, I think. I went from a, like, kinda like a wild child to, you get this discipline and then just kind of mellow after that. I try to avoid any kind of conflict now, whereas before I joined the military I'd probably be in the middle of it.

Another subject who had planned to stay in the military before some structural changes occurred that led him to leave expressed his love for the military life.

Yeah, I loved the military. I really did. And like I say, if they hadn't kind of indicated that my career in aviation was over, I would've stayed in a heartbeat...Oh, I have no regrets whatsoever.

He said that although he loved his career in the military, it did sometimes negatively influence his family relationships.

Well, the level of discipline in the way ah, you know the discipline of the military doesn't necessarily transfer very well to your kids. And I didn't get that part when I was raising my kids, you know? It's hard to, it's a lack of understanding, you know, human nature to some extent, but I was a, I was a flaming asshole to my kids when they were young and growing up, and I didn't even realize it...my military attitude carried on several years after I left the military, and I just didn't get it.

I asked what he would say to a young person who was thinking about joining the military now.

Oh I'd recommend it. I'm very um, pro-military, I'm very adamant in my concept that I think every citizen needs to do some government service of some sort. And not necessarily the military, but I think our um, I think our citizenry would understand their government a lot better if they were required to do some active participation in it.

One participant reflected on his military service as an educational experience.

I'm proud of it. I'm happy, it was educational, I did things, saw things I would not have seen if I hadn't. Sure. And I'm pretty darn proud that I did.

I commented that it was a pretty amazing thing to do, and he gently disagreed with me.

It was not amazing then. It was just normal, standard, accepted, honestly. Did nothing out of the ordinary. Everyone did it...It hasn't changed me. It's made me more appreciative, I think, of life.

I asked him what he would say to someone today thinking of joining the military, and he said he would encourage them to do it because it is "a good educational experience.

Other than that I don't really have any feeling nor opinion."

Another subject who flew planes during his time in the service also had positive feelings about his experience in the military.

Oh it was very, um, a very good feeling. I got to do something I wanted to do. Got there and got back...It gave me ah, a lot of education and experience in ah, people. And um, a lot of self satisfaction; give me a lot of confidence, and made it possible for me then, with just a high school education, to find a niche in the business world that turned out to be very nice for me.

Although he reflected positively on his time in the service, he said he would not have stayed in because he also did not like the ranking system and the "rigmarole" everyone has to go through at certain levels in the system. He felt that that sometimes overshadowed the job itself, and flying planes was the job he was interested in, not advancing through the ranks.

Another subject also felt good about his time in the service, and his ability to do his duty for his country.

I'm just, I feel I was very lucky. And ah, I don't know, if ah, we were attacked here in the states, I'd certainly want to go again; of course my age would prevent it, I would; [I'm] loyal to this country, and I'd go again.

Similar to the other subjects, he also said that being in the military made him learn to be more "congenial with my customers and other people."

Another subject who served in WWII had a lot to say about it. Earlier in the interview he had expressed his dislike of war. "Well, ah, I didn't like war. I didn't like the idea of killing people and I didn't like the idea of them killing me!" This was a man who flew 189 missions, including combat missions in which his plane was shot full of holes and he was lucky enough that he wasn't.

Well, I'm glad that, everything that I did, I'm thankful that I had that life. And I'm thankful that I survived it as well. As far as war is concerned, I think it's terrible that we went to Iraq; I think that before people go to war there should be some kinda, ah, negotiations or things going on to try to solve the differences, some way other than killing each other. It really is tragic in this world; we live on a little part of this universe, the Earth is just a very little space, but it's all we've got and we should be able to do with it a lot better than we have. If we spent the time and money and effort trying to make peoples' lives better, instead of going to war and killing each other, ah, the Earth could be a really, a nice place.

He didn't like war, however, he stated that he did have a good life, even when he was flying in a warzone and was in danger. He surprised me by saying that he felt he should be doing more public service. I asked him why. "Well, I don't know. I had a good life and I probably oughta try to give more back." I asked about his military service being a form of public service, and if he considered it so. Laughing, he said "Well yeah, I know that a lot of people have said that, they appreciated the fact that I was in the war for five years!"

Another subject said something similar to the others, that he felt the military gave him a sense of self confidence, and a way to feel that "I don't have anything to prove to you, you know." He came home from the war and began working, often with men older than him, yet working under him.

I guess the way I can interact with people, can talk with people, and you know, that one year I worked with the state, you know, you're new, you've got men working under you, and you're 22 years old and you're trying to tell guys 30 years

old what to do. You've gotta earn their respect, you gotta get it, and I had no problem that way with that.

Proudest Moments

Asking the veterans what they were most proud of from their military service yielded some very poignant answers. A few of the men could think of specific accomplishments that they were proud of.

Drill team. Because it wasn't an easy thing to do...not just anybody can get on to the drill team, so it was pretty cool. And then the training was very intense, you know, constantly doing push ups, pull ups, throwing the rifle around, and running. So, it wasn't, it wasn't easy. It wasn't handed to us, so we had to earn it, so it was cool.

The most exciting part of being on the drill team for this subject was the chance to perform for people at major sporting events. Listening to him describe it, I could feel the energy and excitement that he must have felt when he and his team, who had trained hard and earned this honor must have felt.

It was a rush, it was, I can't describe it, I've never felt anything since, that was that much of an adrenaline rush. Especially when you do like, a basketball game or football game, or like a professional football game, it's like however-many thousands of people there, and you walk out and everybody's quiet, and then you start doing your thing and everybody does like a really cool move, and then everybody screams, and it's just crazy...yeah, it was awesome. And especially because when we started drill team, you know, it was right after 9/11, so everybody was pro-military, pro-America, so everybody loved us, you know? It was great, it was really cool.

Another subject talked about his homecoming from Iraq, in which he and his unit were welcomed home.

I would really say coming back from Iraq and having everybody there, just still brings chills to me, but ah, having everybody there, they stand up and they're applauding, and you got a four star general telling everybody to be quiet so we can get everything started, and they're not listening, they're just cheering, and it's jus the most exhilarating feeling I've ever had in my entire life, and I would do it again in a heartbeat. It was just awesome, I can't even explain it to full effect, it was awesome.

Another veteran responded to this question simply, "That I completed it." And another subject did not have anything in particular that he was exceptionally proud of, even though he did enjoy being in the military. He acknowledged that he served during a particularly politically difficult war era, however, and that he was probably lucky that he didn't receive the same treatment as many other veterans of the Vietnam War.

You know, I don't know that uh, anything in particular stands out, you know, during a whole bunch of the time I was a flight instructor, so you know, I enjoyed that and I was pretty good at it. Um, I think just the fact that I served, you know, during those times, considering the way it turned out for a lot of people and who a lot of folks reacted to what was going on at the time. But you know, I didn't have any of the particularly bad experiences like some of the other guys did as far as dealing with the anti-war crowd and that sort of thing, you know, I just didn't see it.

One veteran who had a very successful career in aviation after his service, and had many impressive accomplishments to his name, talked about being honored publicly for his service in the Air Corps, which he was very proud of.

Well, I was inducted into the Walk of Honor in Lancaster, ah, [for] aviators that have been honored. It was 2006 I was put in there, and they give you a medal and all that kind of stuff, and my family was all there.

The rest of the veterans were proud of getting home alive. One subject gave a very long pause to this question, and I wondered if I had somehow overstepped a line by asking. He smiled at me and simply said, "I guess just doing it...got there and got back."

One subject was injured while serving on a seaplane tender ship during the battle at Iwo Jima, and he felt lucky that he was not seriously injured. He was happy to have made it home safely, saying "Well, I guess that, I came back alive, really."

This last subject participated in two of the three worst battles in the Pacific during WWII, one of them being Iwo Jima, where he led a rifle company on a 38 day campaign

and earned the Bronze Star. I asked him what the Bronze Star was for, and his modesty was both amusing and very moving to me. "Well, they say bravery, but it's more for self defense." I asked him if that was what he was most proud of, but he said otherwise.

I think going through those four years and then coming out alive. And having done a fair job; well, I guess I did a fair job when I was doing it. I feel proud, yeah. I did my duty, so.

The Final Message

My two final questions for the veterans were about what they think veterans need now, in terms of services or acknowledgement, and whether they think that civilians really have an accurate idea of what it means to be in the military.

Civilians

Simply put, every single veteran reported that civilians have no idea what it is like to be in the military, and that the general images and ideas they may have are very off the mark when it comes to what it is like to be in combat. One of them summed it up nicely.

Probably not. Um, they might have an inkling of what it is you know, to be in the military. They don't have a clue about what it is to be in combat. And there's really no way to relate it, you know, the people who have served in combat, can't usually find the words to communicate it and make some sense without sounding crazy.

Another felt that civilians don't seem to want to know what it's like.

I think some people do, but I think there's a lot of stuff that goes unsaid. And I feel that way because of, some people look at the news, and you know, I see this a lot, when you like, go in an airport or something, and there's something about the military that's on that's kind of important, I'll be sittin' there watching it or something, and somebody else will kinda glance at the TV, and they're like 'man, why do they keep showing this crap?' You know, if you maybe give a shit, pardon my language, but I mean, everything would change if mortars started landing in their backyard.

This subject, who completed a tour of duty in Iraq, had the unfortunate experience of being spit on by a child; confused and shocked, he looked to the child's parents, who

looked back at the subject unapologetically and said "Why?" I asked him what he made of this interaction, and what he thought the parents meant by asking him "Why?" He said he didn't know, and he wondered the same himself. I was surprised and shocked to hear that the appalling treatment of the Vietnam veterans has apparently translated to the current Iraq War veterans as well.

Another subject talked about how civilians have no idea what it's like for servicemen and women to prepare their families for their departure overseas. He said he saw many people having to organize and plan for the unknown, and he witnessed the stress it put on many of his fellow servicemen.

One subject expressed it succinctly when I asked about it, saying "No, they don't have to dodge the bullets." And one of the WWII veterans talked about the current situation in Iraq.

Well, I think that most of the civilians right now have no idea what's really going on in Iraq. And it's not affecting any of their lives hardly at all, and ah, these poor guys are over there; I read most of them think they're defending the United States from something, and I can't see what it is. I, as far as I'm concerned, ah, getting rid of Saddam Hussein I don't think was worth the life of one young American boy. I don't think we should go out and risk people's lives unless there's a threat to our homes or our way of life and I don't think we're doing a darn bit of good for the United States in Iraq.

Services for Veterans

I asked what kinds of attention or services they felt that veterans should be getting, or if they felt that veterans pretty much get what they need. Many of them specifically thought more services for injured veterans as the most pressing need. One subject felt that veterans should take priority for government funds, that they should get vocational training to help them get jobs, and that there should be transitional housing for

those who don't have a place to live after they get out, a place "to kinda unwind, get their head right, before they just jump into the world again, you know?"

Um, non-combat veterans, they don't really need much. They can take care of themselves, I mean, I don't really believe that you know, they should have to do so much for us non-combat veterans; I think you should get out of the military, land on your two feet and go forward. I mean, get a job, and take care of yourself. But the people that are coming back from combat, you know, they've been through some shit, they have mental things, they've seen things and done things that they're never gonna be able to forget, you know, especially the ones that are wounded, they need to be able to be taken care of. You know, they went over, they fought for the country, they fought for our freedom, the least we can do is take care of them. You know, especially the ones that are disabled; they need—I mean I've seen these reports where they give them like, they lose a leg, and they get a five percent disability? No. They need to be taken care of a little bit more than that. You know, it's just, it's just ridiculous.

Another subject reported that he thought veterans were getting what they needed. One subject felt that he himself was getting what he needed, mainly through the GI Bill, which was paying for his schooling. He did acknowledge that injured vets may need more services, but he wasn't sure if he could really answer or make generalizations for the injured veterans. Another participant didn't have any particular opinions on the subject, but said that he has noticed that different VA hospitals in different areas get vastly different reputations for service. One subject stated his feelings that veterans are not being treated fairly.

To answer your question, no I do not think veterans are being treated fairly today. Especially the veterans that are wounded in the Iraq War. Their wounds, while they're not fatal, the fatality rate today is ah, less than it was, even in a minor wound many times in WWII would be turned fatal. But today these are survived like the energizer bunny and many of them are handicapped, and I don't think they are being treated right.

Another subject said that it varied, that many do get exactly what they need, and many do not.

Well, I don't think I'm in a position to have a good opinion of that, although I don't think that um, I don't think that the wounded get, I'm going to say, all their services, all they need. I'm not sure they *can* get what they need. Some of them do; some of them get pretty good service for a while; awful lot of them wind up all alone someplace. And the big to-do about Walter Reed. If that's an example for the government running a health program, we're in big trouble.

And this subject said something similar about most of them getting what they need, but the injured probably not getting as adequate care as they deserve.

I think so, but...those that were injured or deaf from shell shock or different things, should get more care. 'Cause they're probably never going to be the same again as they were before they went in, so they deserve all kinds of aids in my book.

One WWII veteran expressed his concern for the Vietnam Veterans.

I don't know, it seems to me they're taken pretty well care of. I think they are. Medication, I know when I go down, it's mostly Vietnam guys, I know there's very few of us (WWII vets) left, and some of them look down on their luck and need to be taken care of, and others are getting along and look just fine like I am. So I think they're doing a pretty good job...It was a different kind of war. The boys from Vietnam, they sure took a shellacking. They were made the scapegoats. They're acting like these boys were criminals.

Summary

The data from this chapter presented the thoughts and experiences of nine United States veterans, who served in various war eras, WWII, Vietnam, and Afghanistan and Iraq. The findings fit into themes, and the themes presented in the first section included the decision process, why they chose their branch of service, and peoples' reactions to their decision. The themes in the second section were about the veterans' expectations of the military prior to going in, their general experience while they were in, and what coping skills they found useful during times of stress. The themes in the third section talk about their reflection on their military experience, and include what they were most proud of, and how they feel now about their decision to join the military. And finally, in

the fourth section, the themes are about their ideas of what kinds of services veterans need now, and how they feel that civilians don't have an accurate idea of what it means to be in the military. These findings will be discussed further in the Discussion Chapter, in concert with the knowledge from the literature. I will also talk about my interpretations and thoughts on this research project as a whole, including my own biases and the strengths and limitations of this study.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

This chapter will focus on the major findings of the nine interviews conducted with United States veterans from different war eras, and it will discuss whether the major findings from this study confirm or contradict the current established literature. The discussion will be framed by a few of the themes from the Findings Chapter that were the most compelling. The themes that stood out are factors that influenced the decision to join, reflection on their decision now, what qualities they took from the military, and what they feel veterans need today. I will then talk about the strengths and limitations of conducting this kind of research study, including my own biases. Finally, implications for the field of Social Work will be discussed, including why this population and topic is worthwhile to study and how it can inform clinical work.

Major Themes and Findings

I began by asking for demographic information from each participant. One of the questions was about socioeconomic status of the veterans' families, which was an important piece of information because of the assumption that if people join because of career and educational opportunities, it may be because they did not otherwise have money for those things. However, I think that this question would have more weight if the participants of this study were all from the more recent Afghanistan and Iraq conflict; all of the WWII veterans were growing up during the depression, and so there was very little variance between their socioeconomic statuses. Most people at that time were

struggling, and it did not seem to make much of a difference to the subjects whether they went out and got a job, or joined the military. One subject from WWII said that he did want to go to college and that he would not have been able to do that unless he went into the military and used the GI Bill, but that patriotism was the primary reason for joining, not economic elevation. An Iraq War veteran said that the pay he received while in the Army was much lower than what he could have earned outside of the military, so again, he did not join for monetary reasons.

The main question of this study was how the men made the decision to join the military. They had several reasons that mostly matched up with those found in the literature review. Patriotism was a big reason for some of them, especially the WWII veterans, who were spurred into action after the attack on Pearl Harbor. I asked if it being wartime or peacetime was an influence, and was surprised to find the veterans' answers split. All served during wartime, although not all of them participated in combat; however, awareness of war seemed to be very individually based. Some subjects felt the draw of the call for assistance from the country requesting their service. Other participants had a feeling something would happen, that America would make a move in the direction of war, and did not feel swayed either way in their decision to join or not to join.

I imagine the shock of the attack on Pearl Harbor was much like the experience of 9/11 for my generation, yet the subjects from the current Iraq War reported that the war was in their general consciousness, but not a major factor in their decision to join. One of the subjects said that if he had known 9/11 was going to happen, he would have definitely joined a different service that would have ensured him combat duty. Most of

the WWII veterans felt a strong sense of duty towards their country, but it was made clear that it was a sense of duty, not a desire to go into combat and fight and kill people that was motivating them one way or the other. They did not want to put themselves in danger. They felt that military service was something they should do for their country and accept the risks that went with the duty.

The reality of the possibility of a draft is inherent in the event of war. Many of the subjects were well aware that they were probably going to be drafted, and that if they were, they would be placed in the Army, in infantry. They did not want to do this, so enlisting ahead of time gave them the chance to have some choice about their job and their living environment. This was also found in the literature, as well as for those who were drafted and indeed were placed in infantry positions in the Army, and often saw much more combat than enlistees or officers (Ebert, 1993).

For the men who joined during WWII, the two who became pilots were influenced first and foremost by their desire to fly. This is true as well for the Vietnam veteran who was also a pilot. Their reasoning corresponds with the findings in the literature review (Ambrose, 2001), that an early fascination with planes and aviation at a young age was a strong motivating factor for joining the military. They talked about Charles Lindbergh being the hero of young boys everywhere, the ultimate adventurer, and about the "pure pleasure" one subject said he felt when flying.

Job opportunities and the chance to go to school were cited as influences in the decision to join, although these did not seem to be as primary as avoiding the draft, and sense of duty. Jobs and education played a part in the two veterans who at the time of joining up, were not doing very much with themselves. They were in jobs that felt

unsatisfying, and they hated school. They felt like they had to do something with themselves, and that the military would be a good choice to help them figure out what they wanted to do with their lives. One WWII veteran said that lucrative jobs were very hard to come by, even though he had a college degree. Another WWII veteran said that he would not have been able to go to school had he not been able to use the GI Bill. However, for those two WWII vets, their primary reasons were avoiding the draft, and patriotism, respectively. Having a stable job and the chance to go to school were secondary factors. For the younger veterans, having nothing better to do, wanting to travel, go to school, and secure a job are much more common themes, and is also supported by the findings in the literature (Wood, 2006).

I asked whether recruitment officers were an influence on their decision to join, and most said no. One WWII veteran was approached by a Marine recruiter, and subsequently joined to avoid being drafted. An Iraq war vet said he went to a recruiter's office with a friend to talk about going into the Army Reserves, and then decided "spur of the moment" to go full active duty, but he said that the recruiter was not the main influence. Another Iraq era veteran was approached by a Marine recruiting officer, which he said did cause him to begin thinking about joining, and after talking it over with his family, decided to join the Air Force instead. I would consider these two the only ones of the nine subjects who were truly influenced by recruiting officers. The literature by Alison and Solnit (2007), said that the recruitment movement is very strong at this time, and that schools that allow recruiters onto their campus are much more likely to have students decide to join the military than those schools that do not allow recruiters to come visit, and that the same goes for towns with a large recruitment presence. I did not

find this to be such a strong factor, however, it is significant that two out of nine subjects were influenced in this way.

Another interesting influence in the decision to join is whether the veteran has or had veterans in his family. Ancharoff, Munroe & Fisher (1998) stated that trauma symptoms from combat stress could be passed generationally, in either direction. There have been reports that veterans from earlier war eras are being triggered by the Iraq War, and by their own sons' symptoms of PTSD. There was also other literature of veterans' narratives in which some said they were influenced by their father having been in the military, even if it was not necessarily a positive experience for their father (Terry, 1984). Reading about this made me wonder if having a veteran in one's family was an influencing factor in deciding to join. I asked this question and found that most subjects did have veterans in their families, however most subjects said they did not talk in depth with those family members about their experiences. For some participants, it was a big influence in joining, and for others it was not at all. It seemed that for the ones who reported they were not influenced, the veteran in their family could have been either a close relative or a distant relative. Most participants reported a grandparent, uncle, or father who was a veteran. It did not seem to make much of a difference whether the participant knew the relative very well or not. For those who were very influenced by having a veteran family member, it was their father who was the primary veteran they knew, in addition to other family members. As stated in the literature, the subjects' family members did not have to necessarily have a positive feeling about the military, or have had a positive experience being in the military for it to have an influence on the subjects to join. I thought this was an interesting aspect of their responses.

I struggled with the decision to ask subjects about their general experiences while in the service. I asked specific questions such as what years they were in, what job they did, what coping skills they used, and whether they went overseas. There was the opportunity for them to talk about their experiences and the things they did while they were in the military. Also, the opportunity to speak with five WWII veterans does not present itself very often, and I wanted those narratives to be rich in information and dialogue that younger generations do not hear very often. Many of the nine subjects were natural storytellers, and all of them expressed their pleasure in talking with someone new and showing me articles, photographs, and videos of them during and after their military service. Without going into some of their experiences, both day-to-day and extraordinary, the interviews would have been too short, and I would not have received the rich and fascinating information otherwise. Much of the unexpected information would present itself during these parts of the interview, and it helped set up the subjects' ability to reflect on their decision to join.

Every subject reported that looking back on their experience, they found it to be positive, and that they did not regret joining the military. One subject greatly disliked being in, and counted down the days to his discharge. He did not regret his decision, however, and he stated that he would not discourage someone else from joining. He was able to appreciate what he had learned from his experience. A common theme in the responses to what subjects took from their experience in the military was a new respect and consideration for people, and a greater measure of self-confidence.

Asking the men what they were most proud of about their military service was the most poignant question of the interview; I was very moved by many of their responses.

Often, there was a long, thoughtful pause, and I got the sense they were trying to convey something to me that I perhaps would never be able to understand. The major themes were simply completing their service successfully, doing a well at their job, and for those who were in a warzone, making it home alive. Getting home alive was a response specifically from the World War II veterans. Others felt exhilaration and pride at a homecoming event, an event to honor their service, or when they performed at events in front of large crowds of people. Some of these veterans thought that their service was a considerable accomplishment, and other thought it was just standard and expected, and not amazing at all.

I asked each participant about their opinions on veterans today getting the services they need, and I was surprised that many of them talked about veterans from war eras other than their own. They were concerned about all veterans, not just their peers. The fact that they were concerned about all veterans was not what surprised me, it was that they did not talk about their own peers first as those who should take priority in care and services. WWII veterans talked about Iraq War veterans, and Iraq War veterans talked about Vietnam War veterans, and so forth. They all said that injured veterans should be treated with care and respect and that they should have access to whatever services they need. There was a strong feeling that injured veterans are not getting what they need, and that there is a stark difference in quality of care between VA hospitals. This reflects what has been in many recent newspaper articles and on news reports on quality of care for injured veterans. A few subjects also talked about the appalling treatment of Vietnam Veterans, and how they were treated as "scapegoats" and "criminals". A few subjects expressed their anger over this, and that we have hopefully learned from those times.

Expectations and Biases

It was interesting that many of the subjects were able to acknowledge the challenges of being in the military, especially those who were in a combat zone, and yet they still said that they had good lives. They went on leave to places like Australia, India, Maui and Florida. They dated women, joined country clubs, and played golf. They got married, had children, and generally continued to have a life outside of the military. This information was surprising for some reason. I expected that while they were in the military, that they would have no time for anything else, although now I see that was an unrealistic expectation. I also expected to have similar findings to those of Kleykamp (2006), which found that people's reasoning for enlisting in the military are "associated college aspirations, lower socioeconomic status, and living in an area with a high military presence" (Kleykamp, 2006, p. 272). My findings did not suggest this. I specifically asked about military presence or a recruitment office presence in the participants' towns or schools, and they said it was not a strong factor for their decision. Four participants did state that they had college aspirations, and planned to use the GI Bill. One participant had been offered a full scholarship to a state university before he enlisted, and he declined it in order to join the Army, and subsequently used the GI Bill. I think it is safe to say that all of the WWII veterans came from families of lower socioeconomic status because of the effects of the depression and the difficulty in finding jobs, however, only one participant stated this as a deciding factor in his enlistment. Of the participants from more recent war eras, none came from financially unstable families.

Another surprise that I think came from a bias on my part, was that many of them were not very stressed out while in the military. One of my questions was about what

coping skills they used while they were in the service, and it confused a lot of them. Some of them would ask me, "Coping skills in reference to what?" I realized that it was my assumption that being in the military would be stressful, and that they would figure out ways to cope with that stress. When I became more specific, and just asked them if they were ever stressed out, several said that they were not. I sensed that it was adaptive to not allow themselves to feel too stressed, because they really could not do much about their situation, especially if they were in a combat zone. It seemed that they were able to simply accept whatever may come, and that worrying about something they could not control would do them no good. I would then revise my question and ask them instead what they would do for fun, and I interpreted their leisure activities as a form of self care, which can be a good coping skill, but is not necessarily because of feeling stressed.

One of my expectations was that more of the participants would have negative associations with the military, either as an institution, or in their own experiences, and that they would have more incidences of mental health issues if they had participated in combat. This is suggested in the literature (Shay, 1994), and in many studies that look at rates of PTSD in combat veterans (Solkoff, N., Gray, P., & Keill, S., 1986; Price, 2007). However, I did not ask participants whether they had a mental health diagnosis or whether they had been exposed to traumatic events while they were in the military. A few of the participants shared some extraordinary experiences that could be described as very frightening, but they did not characterize them as traumatic, and it was not within the scope of the interview to explore their trauma histories.

Strengths and Limitations

The strength of employing this type of exploratory study is that I was able to conduct very in-depth interviews with each participant. The interviews lasted at least an hour, and were filled with very thick descriptions of their decision process and experiences in the military. There is a benefit to learning about this subject through the subjects' own voices. By reading their own words, one gets a deeper sense of who these nine veterans are, where they come from, and how they reflect on their decision now. The interviews gave voice to the veterans' stories, and showed a positive perspective on the decisions to join and life before and after the military. The participants seemed well adjusted, both emotionally and financially, and all reported smooth transitions home after the military.

Limitations of the study were that only white subjects were interviewed. Interviewing only white veterans, and having five WWII veterans, one Vietnam veteran, and three Iraq war era veterans was not intentional. This is because I received more participants through snowball sampling and word of mouth methods than I did from getting volunteers from the flyers that were posted. Participants would also introduce me to people they knew who they thought would like to participate. Because of the lack of diversity, no issues of racism were discussed in the interviews. It is not to imply that racism did not happen while these subjects were in the military; the literature states that racism did and still does occur in the military, as well as sexual assault and other forms of traumatic events, however, none of this came up during the interviews.

Recruiting was not difficult because veterans make up a large part of the population, and everyone seems to know at least one veteran. However, recruiting a

diverse sample was difficult; homeless veterans and veterans who are in residential treatment facilities are not easy to get access to. The geographic areas where my participants lived were mostly white as well, which probably also influenced the sample.

Implications

The study has implications for the field of social work because it can help give clinicians a better understanding of working with veterans. Countertransference with personal values and political views are always possible issues for clinicians working with this population. Clinicians may make assumptions about veterans who chose to join the military voluntarily, such as that they like the idea of war, that they want to fight and kill people, or that they join because of a disturbed background, or because they are simply uninformed and do not think it through before signing up. It is not to say that some people don't join for those reasons, however, I would hope that this study would challenge clinicians to think about their own assumptions, and ask their veteran clients about their decision process before making such conjectures.

Many veterans, including combat veterans, are living very good lives since being in the military. There is often the assumption that veterans have extreme feelings about the military, either hating the institution or being pro-military zealots. This assumption is, in itself, extreme. Many veterans experience very intense, frightening, traumatic events, and do not develop PTSD, and many adjust to civilian life just fine. Again, this study should challenge those expectations and shed a positive light on how the military can provide life changing experiences for people. The veterans I spoke with talked of feeling more self-confident, thankful for the discipline they learned, and proud of what they did for their country. The findings of the study, and ultimately, the message I hope

readers take away from this study is said very plainly in the title; that the experience of veterans is very individual and that "They were neither typical...nor unique" (Ambrose, 2001, p.29).

Conclusion

Talking with these men, who had different feelings about the military, different political views, and different personal values, demonstrated that despite their differences, that there were many common themes in their decisions to join the military. It showed that while the motives of these subjects may have been different, the feelings about the experience, looking back, were strikingly similar.

In World War I, psychologists found that "the talking cure" was healing for veterans who had suffered shellshock. Since then, we have learned many different ways of treating veterans, as well as how to simply relate to them. Listening to their narratives, over time, has become more popular, in order to preserve their stories as personal pieces of collective history. We also know a lot about who veterans are now, as they walk into our offices, or as we meet them on an airplane or on the street, yet we do not know about who they were before they went in. It is a goal and a commitment in social work to look at the person as a whole, to understand the story that brought the veterans to this point in their lives. As a profession, we can gain significantly by understanding the factors that influence veterans' decisions, expectations, and reflections about the military. We must continue to challenge our own beliefs and assumptions about this population, both as social workers and in society as a whole.

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Appendix A

HSR Approval Letter

January 15, 2008

Kelly Brogden

Dear Kelly,

Your revised materials have been reviewed and you have done a fine job with the amendments. Your project is now presented in a more focused and clear way. All is now in order and we are happy to give final approval to your study. When you send a hard copy to Laurie Wyman for your permanent file, be sure to delete the inserted notes to the reviewers. They were very helpful but you don't want them in your final materials.

Please note the following requirements:

Consent Forms: All subjects should be given a copy of the consent form.

Maintaining Data: You must retain signed consent documents for at least three (3) years past completion of the research activity.

In addition, these requirements may also be applicable:

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of the study (such as design, procedures, consent forms or subject population), please submit these changes to the Committee.

Renewal: You are required to apply for renewal of approval every year for as long as the study is active.

Completion: You are required to notify the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Committee when your study is completed (data collection finished). This requirement is met by completion of the thesis project during the Third Summer.

Good luck with your project.

Sincerely,

Ann Hartman, D.S.W.

Chair, Human Subjects Review Committee

CC: Shella Dennery, Research Advisor

Appendix B
Informed Consent Form

11/05/07

Dear Potential Research Participant:

My name is Kelly Brogden and I am a social work student at Smith College School for Social Work. I am conducting a study on veterans to learn about how they made the decision to join the military, and what aspects of their life experience influenced this decision. The data collected will be used for a thesis, for the Masters of Social Work requirements at Smith College School for Social Work, and for possible future publications and presentations.

As a subject in this study you will be asked to participate in a face to face interview, or a telephone interview if you reside outside of the Bay Area. The interview will take about 45 to 60 minutes, will be audiotaped, and will be conducted by me in a small meeting room in either the VA downtown clinic or the San Francisco Public Library, or on the telephone, or in your home. Questions will focus on your experiences growing up, how you decided to join the military, or your perceptions of joining, and how you now reflect on that decision. I will also ask you demographic information about yourself such as your race, ethnicity, age, where you grew up, years in the service, and branch of service. You are being asked to participate in this study if (a) you are male, and (b) you are a veteran of the armed services, and (c) you chose to join the armed services. If you are female, a current military personnel, or were drafted, you are excluded from participating in this study.

The potential risks of participating in this study are minimal. The possibility that you might feel some uncomfortable emotions while talking about your experiences is slim. I do not intend to ask you about painful military related memories, such as combat stories, in order to keep the risks of participating minimal to none. In case you feel the need for additional support after participating in this study, I encourage you to talk to your VA counselor.

A benefit to participating in this study is being able to tell your story and having your perspective heard. You may also benefit from knowing that you have contributed to the knowledge of social workers and other mental health clinicians. It is my hope that this study will help social workers have a better understanding of veterans' experiences and how we can better serve veterans' needs. Your participation is voluntary. Unfortunately, I cannot provide any financial compensation for your participation in this study.

Strict confidentiality will be maintained, as consistent with Federal regulations and the mandates of the social work profession. Confidentiality will be protected by coding the information and storing data in a locked file for a minimum of 3 years. Your identity will be protected, as names will be changed in the analysis of the data. Your name will never be associated with the information you provide in the questionnaire or the interview. When brief illustrative quotes or vignettes are used in the final thesis and presentation, they will be carefully disguised. The data may be used in other education activities as well as in the preparation for my Master's thesis. I will be the only person to see the information before it is encoded. I will be transcribing the data myself, and will not employ a transcriber. My research advisor will have access to the information only after all identifying information has been disguised. Interviews will be tape recorded with your consent, and tapes will be coded numerically to ensure your confidentiality. Tapes will be kept in a locked in a secure location for three years in accordance with federal regulations. After that time, they will either continue to be locked in said location, or destroyed by me.

This study is completely voluntary. You are free to refuse to answer specific questions and to withdraw from the study at any time. If you decide to withdraw before the report is written on March 1, 2008, all data describing you will be immediately destroyed. If you have any concerns about your rights or about any aspects of the study, you are free to call me at _____, or the Chair of the Smith College School for Social Work Human Subjects Review Committee at (413) 585-7974. Thank you for offering your time and willingness to participate in this relevant study.

YOUR SIGNATURE BELOW INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ AND UNDERSTAND THE ABOVE INFORMATION; THAT YOU HAVE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, YOUR PARTICIPATION, AND YOUR RIGHTS, AND THAT YOU AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

SIGNATURE OF RESEARCHER

DATE

If you have any questions or wish to withdraw your consent, please contact: Kelly Brogden.

Please keep a copy of this for your records.

Appendix C

Letter to possible participant outside Bay Area

Dear Veteran of the United States Armed Services,

My name is Kelly Brogden and I am in the process of completing my Master's thesis at Smith College School for Social Work. My interest has long been drawn to the lives of veterans. I have invested a lot of time and effort learning about veterans through many hours of reading and listening to veterans' experiences. I have noticed that there is much information on the experiences of veterans during and after their service, but very little regarding their life before the military. I want to know how men make the choice to enlist in the military.

I am planning on conducting interviews with open-ended questions. It will take approximately 60 minutes and no longer than 90 minutes, and will be digitally recorded so that I may later transcribe the interview. All of the personal information used will be disguised to protect your privacy.

Although I planned to do only face-to-face interviews, I am happy to also conduct telephone interviews. You are receiving this letter because you are a male, you are a veteran of the United States Armed Services, you enlisted voluntarily in the military, and because _____ suggested to me that your story would be interesting and beneficial to my study. If you would like to participate, please contact me and I will give you more detailed information.

Sincerely,

Kelly Brogden
Smith College School for Social Work

Appendix D

Interview Guide

Demographic Information

1. Age
2. How do you identify culturally and ethnically?
3. Where did you grow up?
4. What is your sexual orientation?
5. Now I'm going to ask about your socioeconomic status growing up. What was your family's approximate income: \$0—10,000 per year, \$10,000—30,000 per year, \$30,000—60,000 per year, \$60,000—100,000 per year, or over \$100,000.
6. Do you have siblings?
 - a. Birth order?
7. What was your educational background prior to joining the military?
8. What were your parents' levels of education and occupation?

General Interview Guide

1. What influenced you when you made the decision to join the military?
School? Media/politics? Friends? Family? Money?
2. Did you enlist during peacetime or wartime? Did that influence your decision?

3. Do you/did you have veterans in your family? Did that influence your choice to join?
4. Which branch of service were you in?
5. How did you choose that branch of service?
6. How many years were you in the service?
7. Which years were you in the service?
8. Did you go overseas or stay in the U.S.?
9. How old were you at the time of entrance in the service?
10. What kinds of social support did you have before going into the military?
11. How did people in your life react to your decision to enter the services?
Positively? Negatively? Did their reactions matter to you at the time?
12. What were your expectations of the military? Did they change? If so, how soon did they change?
13. Are you currently service-connected? If so, for what?
14. What was your highest rank?
15. What type of discharge did you have?
16. What coping skills did you use during your time in the military?
17. How do you feel now about your decision to join the military?
18. What are you most proud of about your military service?
19. How have you used your experiences in a positive/healthy way?