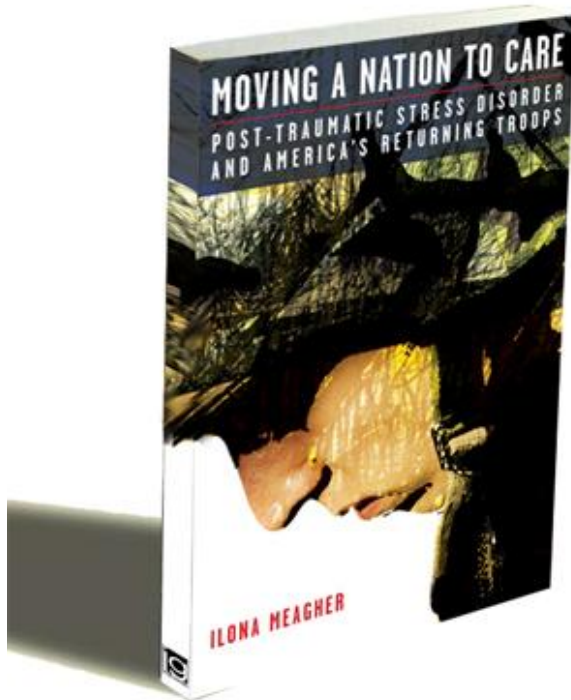


# Moving a Nation to Care

*Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and America's Returning Troops*



Moving a Nation to Care:

*Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and America's Returning Troops*

**By Ilona Meagher**

Foreword by Robert Roerich, MD

Introduction by Penny Coleman

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## Contact

Ig Publishing

Robert Lasner

Ph/Fx: 718-797-0676

[igpublishing@earthlink.net](mailto:igpublishing@earthlink.net)

[www.igpub.com](http://www.igpub.com)

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'support the troops' should read this important book," –Paul Rieckhoff, author of *Chasing Ghosts*, and Executive Director of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA)

Once called shell shock or combat fatigue, post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, in our returning combat forces is among the most catastrophic of issues confronting our nation today. Yet, despite the fact that nearly 20-30 percent of the over half million troops that have left the military since 2003 have been diagnosed with conditions such as PTSD, and that many who suffer symptoms are unlikely to seek help because of the stigma -- even reprisals -- attached to coming forward, our government's silence and sluggish response has been deafening and deadly.

***Moving a Nation to Care: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and America's Returning Troops*** is a grassroots call to action designed to break the shameful silence and stigma and put the issue of supporting the successful reintegration of our returning troops front and center before the American public. In addition to presenting interviews with Iraq and Afghanistan veterans and military family members directly feeling the effects of post-deployment stressors (through hypervigilance, anxiety, anger, avoidance and even suicide), this book will be the most comprehensive resource to date for concerned citizens who wish to understand the complex political, social and health-related issues of PTSD, with an eye toward "moving our nation to care" to do what is necessary to help our fighting men and women achieve a successful transition to civilian life.

# *Moving a Nation to Care*

*Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and America's Returning Troops*

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## **Author Bio**

**Ilona Meagher** is editor of the online journal *PTSD Combat: Winning the War Within* and initial spark behind the ePluribus Media *PTSD Timeline*, a comprehensive database of press- and independently-reported OEF/OIF PTSD-related incidents. By all accounts, ePluribus Media, a citizen journalism initiative, is the only group tracking cases of possible, probable or confirmed reports of post-combat reintegration difficulties, making them publicly available for further research, study and reporting. Their work has been accessed by government bodies such as Senator John Kerry's office, dozens of media outlets, researchers, journalists and veterans organizations.

A former 15-year domestic and international flight attendant with a major air carrier, Ilona is a citizen journalist for ePluribus Media and a contributing writer for General Wesley Clark's Clark Community Network Troops & Vets series on PTSD. She has co-authored the three-part series, "Blaming the Veteran: The Politics of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder," with D.E. Ford, MSW, and retired Naval Commander Jeff Huber, and contributed nearly 100 online commentaries on the topic of combat PTSD/reintegration to various online communities, most significantly ePluribus Media and Daily Kos. Her body of work has received the attention of FOX News, USAToday, Tacoma News-Tribune, New York Times, St. Petersburg Times, The American Conservative, NPR (St. Louis), WBBM (Chicago), KTVK-TV (Phoenix), KWMU-TV (Seattle), Greensboro News-Record, The Raw Story, Buzzflash, Firedoglake, Think Progress, Progressive Radio Network, Air America, Operation Homefront's CinCHouse, Veterans for America, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America and more.

In the spring of 2006, Ilona's work drew the attention of New York publishers Robert Lasner and Elizabeth Clementson, owners of Ig Publishing. In April 2006, they offered her the chance to write a book on the plight of our returning veterans. Her completed work, *Moving a Nation to Care: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and America's Returning Troops* arrives in stores in May 2007.

Ilona is a Chicago-area native and bilingual second-generation American, her parents fleeing to America following the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. Her father is a veteran of both the Hungarian and U.S. armies, and a 1956 'Hungarian freedom fighter' after picking up arms against Soviet forces on the streets of Budapest. She currently resides in the Rockford, Illinois, area with her husband, attending Northern Illinois University as an Honors student completing a degree in journalism, writing on and advocating for our military troops and families, and hoping that more Americans will extend their hearts and energy to those scarred by war.

**Penny Coleman**, contributor of *Moving a Nation to Care's* Introduction, is author of *Flashback: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Suicide, and the Lessons of War*.

**Robert Roerich, MD**, contributor of *Moving a Nation to Care's* Foreword, is one of the world's experts in trauma therapy and PTSD and is vice president of the National Gulf War Resource Center.

# Moving a Nation to Care

*Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and America's Returning Troops*

by *Ilona Meagher*

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## Jacket Blurbs

"Ilona Meagher is a powerful advocate for American combat veterans of all generations. With mental health issues facing hundreds of thousands of returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, *Moving a Nation to Care* brings desperately needed attention to the devastating hidden costs of war. Anyone who wants to 'support the troops' should read this important book." **Paul Rieckhoff**, author of *Chasing Ghosts* and executive director of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA)

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"In an affecting exposé, Ms. Meagher documents how bad planning in the Iraq War wasn't confined to the battlefield. It is causing unnecessary suffering for the troops when they come home. For too many soldiers, suicide becomes an option. In *Moving a Nation to Care* another tragic layer of the Iraq War is revealed through Meagher's meticulous reporting. This is a must read for returning troops and their families. Ms. Meagher's book will save lives." **Trish Wood**, author of *What Was Asked of Us: An Oral History of the Iraq War by the Soldiers Who Fought It*

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"A meticulously researched book that is essential for any truly patriotic American who wants to delve beneath the generic headlines and shallow American talking points and discover the real costs of the war on our Armed Forces as well as our great country." **Zack Bazzi**, Iraq veteran and cameraman/star of *The War Tapes*

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"Ilona Meagher has created a battle plan to help our active military, veterans and their families to truly come home. Her extensive research, personal interviews and networking with others dedicated to fighting for veterans has produced this powerful book. Let us rally around the troops with actions and deeds geared towards healing and hope. It is the American way." **Robert Roerich, M.D.**, American founder of Roadmind University Online and vice president, National Gulf War Resource Center

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"*Moving a Nation to Care* offers more than a deep understanding of the nature of posttraumatic stress injuries, a saner approach to avoiding them, and a thoroughly researched, selective resource guide for those who must learn to live with them. It is an invitation to, and a living example of, participation and advocacy. It asks first that we listen to what our soldiers and our veterans carry, to do our best to understand and empathize. It asks that we honorably consider what we owe each other as citizens and then what we can do to realize a society of conscience and compassion and justice. It asks us to re-create ourselves in our own best image and to demonstrate who we are by supporting our troops in ways that are truly meaningful to them and their families. Because only out of that shared commitment, those reaffirmed loyalties and reexamined values, can our frayed social contract be renewed. This is a book filled with wisdom and love. It is truly a star in a troubled and confusing darkness." **Penny Coleman**, author of *Flashback: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Suicide, and the Lessons of War*

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"This book is an insider's look at the issues. It begs the questions, 'Are we honoring the sacrifices of the men and women who have served? Are we doing all that we can do to provide them with the tools to return to society?' If this book creates debate in Congress or causes a parent to fight for the healthcare of their loved one then it has accomplished its mission." **Steve Robinson**, Director of Veterans Affairs, Veterans for America (VFA)

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"Meagher has written an informative and tremendously powerful work. Highly recommended." **Mark Boal**, freelance journalist for *Playboy* magazine

"PTSD is not a new phenomenon. But this painstakingly footnoted and researched guide reveals the little-recognized cost of the embedded pain and suffering wrought on returning U.S. troops by a high-tech, frontless, victoryless, faith-based, quagmire occupation of Iraq. This work by a second-career journalist shows that passion, persistence and Internet-honed training can produce as fine -- and as timely -- a work as any traditional news organization." **Bill Densmore**, director of The Media Giraffe Project at UMass-Amherst

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"Going beyond mere yellow ribbons into the real support that returning troops need, this book is as easy to read as a newspaper and yet well-documented enough to keep on the shelf as a reference. After the Hollywood images of heroic war are long faded, in the real world the after-effects of killing and other traumas will remain with us for decades. We need to understand what we face, and this book does an excellent job of explaining that, along with what we can do to reduce the damage." **Rachel M. MacNair, Ph.D.**, author of *Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress: The Psychological Consequences of Killing*

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"*Moving a Nation to Care* is a road map of post-traumatic stress disorder's history, where the tidal wave of trouble is, and how it will be hitting our shores. PTSD left untreated can be fatal and the impact on the family devastating. Just because psychological wounds are not visible like lost limbs, the need for healing is great nonetheless. Our nation has spent over 700 billion to date to prosecute our wars, and a tiny fraction of that to treat the injured men and women who have served on the frontlines. This book is all the evidence the reader will need to demand that our nation care. We must leverage the same resources used to create the problem in making sure the soldiers are returned to the state they were as best we can." **H. Reese Butler II**, president and founder 1-877-VET2VET and 1-800-SUICIDE

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"Ilona Meagher has been at the forefront of bringing the plight of veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to national attention. *Moving a Nation to Care* gives us a thorough understanding of the syndrome, and a compelling view of the brave warriors who survived combat only to fall from its tragic aftereffects. A must read for anyone who understands that the worth of a nation is best measured by how it treats its wounded heroes." **Commander Jeff Huber**, U.S. Navy (Retired)

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"Ilona Meagher has done an impressive and important job in researching, assembling and chronicling the psychological suffering and neglect visited upon our new generation of veterans, their families and our nation. She assembles heartbreaking evidence from stories and statistics, journalism, social scientific research, historical record and first-person accounts. Our military servicemen and women are called to protect us. In turn, our duty as citizens is to help them return home and heal. *Moving a Nation to Care* sounds a citizens' alarm to action on behalf of our veterans. We all must answer its call." **Edward Tick, Ph.D.**, author of *War and the Soul*, *The Golden Tortoise* and *The Practice of Dream Healing* and Director of Soldier's Heart: A Veterans' Safe Return Initiative

# *Moving a Nation to Care*

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## ***Publishing Industry News***

### **TURNING ACTIVIST BLOGS INTO BOOKS**

Monday, September 25, 2006

By Calvin Reid

#### ***Publishers Weekly***

Ig Publishing, citing titles like Chelsea Green's *Crashing the Gate* and its own *Confessions of a Former Dittohead*, believes it has found a niche in turning blog posts into books—it will publish three more blog-based activist titles next spring. Cofounded in 2000 by Elizabeth Clementson, who serves as Ig publisher, and her husband, editor-in-chief Robert Lasner, the small Brooklyn indie press releases eight books a year. Its titles on progressive politics include *Dittohead*, which recounts the political transformation of author Jim Derych from a right-wing Rush Limbaugh "dittohead" to a liberal Democrat blogger (now on Huffingtonpost.com). The book, based on Derych's blog, has sold 10,000 copies since its publication in April and "is still selling," Lasner said.

The house has more blog-based titles in the works, beginning with *Framing the Debate*, a book on controlling the context and meaning of popular political discourse by Jeffrey Feldman (Frameshopisopen.com), coming in April 2007. Feldman is a disciple of George Lakoff, author of the bestselling *Don't Think of an Elephant*. **In May 2007, Ig will release *Moving a Nation to Care* by Ilona Meagher (Ptsdcombat.blogspot), which deals with the problems faced by troops returning from Iraq who are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.**

And in June, Ig will publish *Steeple Jacking*, by two United Church of Christ ministers, John Dorhauer and Sheldon Culver (Talk2Action.com). Their book surveys longtime organized efforts by right-wing religious groups to infiltrate, destabilize and take over liberal church congregations.

All the books will have 10,000-copy first printings, Lasner said.

"We look for blogs focused on a single issue or theme," Lasner said, "rather than just general commentary." Basing each title on an ongoing single-issue blog serves to build an audience online. "Our marketing doesn't start from scratch," explained Lasner. "These bloggers are committed and are going to write about these issues anyway—so promotion doesn't begin with the book and it won't end after the book is out."

Equally important, said Lasner, is that with elections looming, activist bloggers want their books out fast to engage the public—often much easier for a small press to do. "These books are ideal for small presses," he explained. "It will be less than a year between the signings and publication of these books. We could have published them in three months if we didn't need to prepare for Consortium, our distributor." "Ten years ago these people wouldn't have been authors," Lasner added, "but blogs are helping to turn regular people into activists and authors and giving them the power to fight back."

**Article online at** <http://www.publishersweekly.com/article/CA6374598.html?text=ig+publishing>

# *Moving a Nation to Care*

*Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and America's Returning Troops*

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## **Press Release**

Post-traumatic stress disorder -- a psychiatric disorder that can occur following the experience or witnessing of life-threatening events such as military combat, natural disasters, terrorist incidents, serious accidents or violent personal assaults like rape -- is one of the most serious problems facing our returning combat troops. As the March 12 issue of *Archives of Internal Medicine* reveals, one-third of returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans who have sought help from the Veterans Administration through 2005 have received a mental health or psychosocial diagnosis. As more than 40,000 have been diagnosed with PTSD, ***Moving a Nation to Care*** is an important and timely book.

Written with an eye toward "moving a nation to care" about our fighting men and women as they work to return to civilian life, author Ilona Meagher has put together an essential resource for citizens, veterans, military family members and elected officials who want to understand the complex political, social and health-related aspects of PTSD. "The scandal at Walter Reed highlights the need for this book," says Robert Lasner, publisher of New York-based Ig Publishing. "People have been angered to hear of how veterans have been neglected by our government. One of the problems is that there hasn't been a definitive book that explores the plight of those with psychological injuries. Until now."

A mix of hard-hitting reporting and heartbreaking personal accounts of troops who are suffering with—and dying from—PTSD, ***Moving a Nation to Care*** is an "insider's look at the issues of PTSD," says Steve Robinson, director of veterans affairs at Veterans for America. "If it creates debate in Congress or causes a parent to fight for the healthcare of their loved one then it has accomplished its mission." Trish Wood, author of *What Was Asked of Us: An Oral History of the Iraq War by the Soldiers Who Fought It*, adds that "This is a must read for returning troops and their families. Ilona Meagher's book will save lives."

Ilona Meagher will be doing a national tour in support of the book, including stops in Boston, Philadelphia, New York, St. Louis, Denver, Boulder, Seattle, Oceanside, Berkeley and Tempe. Media wishing to interview Ilona Meagher, or seeking an opportunity to review *Moving a Nation to Care*, should contact the publisher or author directly. Purchase ***Moving a Nation to Care*** from Amazon.com at <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0977197271/>

### **Contact Publisher**

Ig Publishing  
Robert Lasner  
Ph/Fx: 718-797-0676  
<http://www.igpub.com>

### **Contact Author**

Ilona Meagher  
Ph: 815-885-4650  
<http://ptsdcombat.blogspot.com/>

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## **Review**

### **MOVING A NATION TO CARE**

Wednesday, February 14, 2007

By Mark Fleming

#### ***Unsolicited Opinion***

*Moving a Nation to Care: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and America's Returning Troops* is a timely and important reminder that war's costs are often more subtle than the obvious dead and wounded casualties. Regardless of one's view of the wisdom of any particular war, author Ilona Meagher clearly demonstrates that the psychological wounds of war require as much attention as the more visibly injured. Achingly illustrated with examples of soldiers' experiences after returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, *Moving A Nation to Care* is a wake-up call to the wider public who may be tempted to dismiss the impact of post-traumatic stress disorder as something that veterans must simply "get over" upon returning to civilian life.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is nothing new; it has been a consequence of war since ancient times. Nor is it limited to combat veterans. Ms. Meagher quotes the National Center for PTSD which defines it as "...a psychiatric disorder that can occur following the experience or witnessing of life-threatening events such as military combat, natural disasters, terrorist incidents, serious accidents or violent personal assaults like rape." Any such trauma is likely to remain with individuals who experience them and affect their ability to function in society. But unlike accidents or even assaults, military combat occurs by the conscious decision of the nation. In going to war, society asks men and women to violate one of the most basic commandments: thou shall not kill.

In combat, the individual must be able to kill other human beings. Ms. Meagher shows how the modern American military trains soldiers to ignore this fundamental taboo. In the maelstrom of combat, when one's own and one's comrades lives are at risk, killing is a matter of survival. When the combat ends and the soldier returns to civilian life, the memories of those acts haunt many veterans, some more than others, often with tragic results. In contrast to the intensive training that conditions individuals to kill others, the military offers no opportunity for the soldier to decompress, no cleansing ritual to assist veterans in coming down from this extremely intense and even exhilarating experience.

Instead, individuals are left to fight their own personal wars as they relive and ponder their actions while the nation that sent them into combat holds on to an image of war as noble and gallant. The all too vivid examples of drug and alcohol abuse, domestic abuse, murder and suicide in *Moving a Nation to Care* show that families, friends and the veterans themselves often pay the high cost of combat. If anything, the examples are overwhelming. I found myself dreading each new name because all too often the name introduced a story that ended in death. As difficult as reading these stories may be, however, the examples are necessary to bring attention to something society would rather ignore—the full cost of war.

Fortunately, *Moving a Nation to Care* is more than a litany of death and despair. It is also the story of activists—veterans and their families—like James Blake Miller, a veteran of the 2004 Marine assault on Fallujah. A photograph of Miller, battle weary, his face covered in dirt and blood, became an icon of Iraq combat, the "perfect image of a valiant and virtuous warrior". These days "...outspoken and open to a fault, suffering with PTSD, Miller no longer represents the mythic soldier. Yet his bluntness is the dose of reality we need...[he] asks us to consider the costs of war for the individual rather than endlessly, and mindlessly, perpetuating the myths of gallant battles and Teflon warriors." Captain Stefanie Pelkey, the widow of Captain Michael Jon Pelkey who committed suicide as a result of PTSD from his year in Iraq is another activist. So are Kevin and Joyce Lucey, whose son Jeffrey also took his own life after returning from Iraq. These dedicated individuals are helping tear down the Defense Department's "wall of silence regarding PTSD" asking why, in preparing for war, was care for returning troops basically ignored?

For all that Ilona Meagher does in bringing this important issue to the public, even more significant, is the list of resources for concerned citizens presented in the final chapter. This chapter is Ms. Meagher's effort to "move a nation to care". It offers sources for understanding the experience of war, how to communicate with returning veterans, opportunities for political action and page after page of organizations offering assistance and support to veterans and their families.

As a Vietnam veteran whose combat experience was mild compared to so many described in *Moving a Nation to Care*, I can appreciate its value. We returned from Vietnam to a nation unaware of PTSD. Many of us were ourselves largely unaware of PTSD. All we wanted was to get on with our lives, only to find that the war we thought we'd left behind had come home with us. Patient efforts by activists finally forced the nation and the Veterans Administration to begin addressing this problem. As the stories in *Moving a Nation to Care* illustrate, much work still remains if America is to fully heal the psychological wounds of war. Ilona Meagher's thorough and well documented research is a valuable resource for all those who truly want to support the troops.

**About the Author:** Mark Fleming, aka Rez Dog, is editor of the online journal *Unsolicited Opinion* and co-host of the Air America/Progressive Radio Network's *About Face* program. A writer, policy analyst and veteran, his experience of Vietnam led to a lifetime of opposing war.

**Review online at** <http://unsolicitedopinion.blogspot.com/2007/02/moving-our-nation-to-care.html>

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## **Review**

### **IN THE AFTERMATH: A REVIEW OF MOVING A NATION TO CARE: POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER AND AMERICA'S RETURNING TROOPS**

Thursday, February 22, 2007

By Aaron Barlow

#### ***ePluribus Media***

Don't expect a pretense of "objectivity" in this review. After all, Ilona Meagher has been writing on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for a year now on *ePluribus Media*. Many of us have been involved with her in the work on the PTSD Timeline (a searchable database of reported Iraq and Afghanistan Vet PTSD incidents), on her articles and blog posts, and even on her book. Though I have been concerned in only the most peripheral way, I have applauded the work at every step -- and I continue to do so with the publication of this book.

Still, I can promise two things in this review: an honest evaluation and a personal viewpoint. After all, Meagher's book is an attempt to move Americans to action on veterans' rights: She is honest in her concern and this is a book on a topic that has much more relevance to our individual lives, even those of us with no immediate family members in the military, than many of us might think. What happens to the members of our military matters to our lives, no matter who we are.

Before getting to the book, though, I want to share the opening verse to one of the saddest songs I have ever heard. It's John Prine's 1971 "Sam Stone":

*Sam Stone came home,  
To his wife and family  
After serving in the conflict overseas.  
And the time that he served,  
Had shattered all his nerves,  
And left a little shrapnel in his knee.  
But the morphine eased the pain,  
And the grass grew round his brain,  
And gave him all the confidence he lacked,  
With a Purple Heart and a monkey on his back.*

Thirty-six years later -- a generation and a half later -- and things are no better.

If anything, they are worse.

And the Veterans Administration, the one organization in a position to do anything about it, is being choked to death by the twin forces of increased need and decreased effective funding. Meagher, through the stories in this book, makes that abundantly evident.

Now, the Veterans Administration has a special place in the hearts of my own family. To us, it was a cherished organization. My grandfather, who lost a leg as a National Guard officer in World War I, worked for the VA almost from the day it was established in 1926, eventually serving as its chief legal counsel in Ohio. My father graduated from high school in Brecksville, OH -- site of the VA hospital where my grandfather worked. The VA took care of my grandfather until the day he died in 1959, long after he'd been able to work. The VA did so well by him that none of us could speak of it without a hint of awe. For they *really* took care of him. He had dedicated his own life to the service of veterans -- and that dedication was repaid.

Tonight, I picked up my mother at the airport. In the car, I told her about this book, and about today's VA. She was shocked. She remembers the VA as it once was, the VA that had been her father-in-law's life-- not the sorry shadow of its former self that it has become. She also knows the way our country once treated veterans -- my father went to college (and met her) on the GI Bill. They bought their first house because of loans for veterans. Like many, however, she wasn't aware that veterans are no longer treated so well.

Meagher's book sets out to change that.

As Meagher writes, PTSD is nothing new. My other grandfather, a WWI artilleryman, hated high, shrill noises the rest of his life. His only injury came from mustard gas, but the psychic scars stayed with him the rest of his life. Once, some years after returning to civilian life, my father was hit by a car while riding a bike. He did a forward summersault and landed on his feet in a crouch with his hands in front of them as though holding a rifle -- shocking the people on the sidewalk. Neither of these men had severe symptoms that could be equated to PTSD (though their reactions were typical), but war was among "the things they carried" for the rest of their lives.

All veterans carry their wars with them. They cannot help it. We who remained at home need to respect that and provide much more for them than a pat on the back and commendation for a job well done. We *really* need to provide more for those who have been disabled by the war, physically, mentally, or both. And that, though she concentrates on PTSD (one of today's most crying yet unmet needs), is the point of Meagher's book-- whatever we think of a particular war, we owe it to the veterans to insure they have the services they need, and for the rest of their lives. They can't drop the war; we can't drop them (though we have).

Meagher's book is in three parts. The first two use personal stories to provide an understanding of PTSD for those of us who have never experienced it or war. This first part really has two purposes, to show that although PTSD is nothing new, it is a serious problem indeed. The second gets into the complexities of PTSD in contemporary American society, explaining why PTSD is different for veterans today, given the particulars of the contemporary Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. In the third part, she brings it home -- literally, discussing, among other things, the impact of quick transport, picking people up from Iraq one day and dropping them home the next -- without any time for adjustment. It's here, also, that she provides lists for the activism that she hopes her "call to arms" will make necessary in each of our hearts -- places to contact, things to do relating to easing the impact of PTSD. In many ways, these are the purpose of the book. The point is to give Americans -- all of us, but particularly the veterans facing PTSD and their families -- information on how to proceed both in dealing with the trauma and in forcing our government to deal concretely with the problem.

The style of Meagher's writing is breezy; there's no anger in the prose. Meagher lets the examples she presents speak for themselves -- and that's good. The outrage is in the violence that PTSD victims have experienced and then recreate (most often against themselves) -- and in the help that comes too little and too late, if at all.

If I have any criticism at all, it's the title of the book. *Moving a Nation to Care* is probably too timid. A title that really carries the anger that we should all be feeling about the treatment of our veterans, however, would never be accepted on bookstore shelves. This isn't only a book that each of us should read: it's a roadmap to what we all should be doing, if we have any respect for ourselves and for the people who are willing to do the dirty work that (whether we agree with the specific or not) they do at "our" request.

Buy it, read it, and get busy.

**About the Author:** Aaron Barlow teaches English at Kutztown University of Pennsylvania and, on weekends, runs his store/gallery, Shakespeare's Sister, in Brooklyn, NY. The author of *The DVD Revolution: Movies, Culture, and Technology* (Praeger, 2005), he is a board member and citizen journalist for ePluribus Media.

**Review online at** [http://www.epluribusmedia.org/reviews/2007/20070220\\_meagher.html](http://www.epluribusmedia.org/reviews/2007/20070220_meagher.html)

# Moving a Nation to Care

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## Review

### **EVEN THE BRAVEST GET PTSD**

Sunday, May 20, 2007

By Taylor Marsh

#### **Firedoglake Sunday Book Salon**

He was known simply as "the Marlboro Man," the "Face of Fallujah." No one knew his name. Everyone was introduced to the myth. Back home he was simply known as Smokey. He was 20 years old when the photograph was taken. It was the real life version of a recruitment poster. But Marine Lance Corporal James Blake Miller, a member of Charlie Company, 1st Platoon, 8th Marines, was also a flesh and blood man underneath the bravura of the soldier everyone saw and was now worshipping, even wanting to be like. How Miller became the myth is recounted in the first pages of Ilona Meagher's amazing book ***Moving a Nation to Care***. It's not the story George W. Bush and the Republicans pushing escalation want to tell, but it's the reality of war, especially the Iraq war as it is being fought today. The real life recruitment story as seen through the picture that became synonymous with military heroism and self sacrifice long ago crumbled in on itself. "The Marlboro Man," "the Face of Fallujah," the war hero, Smokey, now has PTSD.

Miller has now become the chronicler of another war--the war within. He now appeals to the country that declared him a hero because of a photograph, asking that they look beyond the image and see the human cost of war. "I want people to understand what PTSD is and what it can do to you--what it can do your life."

***Moving a Nation to Care***, by Ilona Meagher (p.10)

My uncle suffered from "battle fatigue." I'll never forget seeing him in the hospital with my mom when I was just a little girl. The once dandy of a man had shrunk to a shell of a human being. He flew bombing missions in WWII, my mom told me, with the never ending flights finally doing him in. Today battle fatigue is called PTSD. It is destroying our veterans and exploding inside families at alarming rates. ***Moving a Nation to Care*** tells the tale of what happens to our men and women who fight modern war. Battle fatigue has morphed into post traumatic stress syndrome, the soldier's illness that has the potential to deplete our armed forces like no man exploding bomb or EFP can.

"There's a strange pressure on these soldiers not to have any problems with what they are doing. It's that old idea that a real man and a true warrior will stand strong." - Psychologist and trauma specialist Michael Phillips

***Moving a Nation to Care***, by Ilona Meagher (p.93)

Warfare has changed. It started with WWII when nighttime battles were ushered in. During Vietnam our soldiers were introduced to guerilla combat. Today in Iraq (and beyond), our fighting men and women are now barraged with 360 degree asymmetric hell. But especially in Iraq there is never any time to recoup from battles; no moment to regroup after a skirmish. Extended deployments have only made matters worse.

"Unlike most conflicts where only front line troops face hostile fire, nearly all our service members in Iraq are being exposed to constant fear ... on a 24/7 basis for periods often lasting over a year at a time. The constant fear of dying is

overwhelming and it is taking its toll. They say the average infantryman in WW2 saw 44 days of action; the rest of the time was training and transportation. - Eric Massa

The other very real issue is that our soldiers are moving targets for everyone, because in the Iraq theater our soldiers don't know who is friend and who is foe. Being on guard 24/7 would deplete anyone's reserves and put your nerves on edge until you finally crack.

Now add female soldiers. As a strong proponent for women serving in combat positions, it's important to remember that women are indeed fighting and dying next to men, regardless of Mr. Bush saying they are not.

Contrary to President Bush's statement, "No women in combat," and current federal law that is meant to keep them far from conflict, women warriors are fighting and dying on today's battlefields. Indeed, the Army's 3rd Infantry Division has been collocating (i.e., placing side-by-side) women with combat support units since February 2005.

*Moving a Nation to Care*, by Ilona Meagher (p.95)

According to Ilona's research, women suffer from PTSD at rates "twice that of men." Women deserve the right to fight in combat, as far as I'm concerned, but we need to know the costs they're paying when they choose soldiering.

Much needs to be done to bring PTSD out into the light, but we've come a long way from Patton's day, when artilleryman Paul G. Bennett said he couldn't stand the shelling any more and got a face full of one general's rage for what he was experiencing.

"Your nerves, hell; you are just a Goddamned coward, you yellow son of a bitch. ... You're going back to the frontline and you may get shot and killed, but you're going to fight. If you don't, I'll stand you up against a wall and have a firing squad kill you on purpose." - General George S. Patton

But just because we've recognized PTSD doesn't mean that our soldiers feel any less ashamed when the diagnosis comes. Denial often sets in next. The image of the ever rough and ready, give 'em hell super human American warrior will likely never die. We must understand that our soldiers need the image in order to stay alive, but we also have to help them dismantle it when the shooting stops. Our ability to recognize the human suffering underneath is the only way to make our veterans whole again. ...

You can't see PTSD, but it's often right there in front of you. Just ask "the Marlboro Man." He'll be living with it the rest of his life. So will his wife and the wives and husbands, as well as children and siblings, of thousands of other soldiers. That is if these military marriages and families make it through PTSD together. The outcome is rarely certain.

He told the San Francisco Chronicle that he was grateful to those who paid for the wedding but that he had found dealing with day-to-day issues and stress from the war too much. "I love Jessica, I really do, but I can't be with her," he said. Mrs Miller told the paper she still hoped they could be together. "I think neither one of us recognised the scope of post-traumatic stress disorder and what it does to you and what it does to people around you," she said. "Now he's got to figure out how to deal with it before he can deal with me."

*Post-war stress too much for Marlboro Man's marriage*

The more we know about PTSD the more we can help.

**About the Author:** Taylor Marsh is a radio show talk host, national blog reporter and author who's been a consistent political, social and cultural force on TV and radio for over 15 years. She focuses on foreign policy, military and national security issues, but is a respected commentator on all things political.

Review online at <http://www.firedoglake.com/2007/05/20/fdl-book-salon-welcomes-ilona-meagher/>

# Moving a Nation to Care

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and America's Returning Troops

by Ilona Meagher

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## Review

### **BOOK REVIEW: ILONA MEAGHER'S "MOVING A NATION TO CARE"**

Saturday, June 16, 2007

By Susan G

#### **Daily Kos**

Political action and public engagement appeals to so many Vietnam (and now Afghanistan and Iraq) veterans because it helps them come to terms with their wartime experiences. With their activism, they dip back into the current of life, serving as witnesses to the painful tide of war, while attempting to find personal salvation and release.

With Friday's news that a Department of Defense task force is recommending that additional funding be provided to the mental health of our active-duty soldiers and returning veterans, it is hard not to credit our own Daily Kos member ilona with a smidgen of credit for keeping progressive activists' attention focused on one of the most overlooked aspects of the current Iraq conflict. Her consistent calls for political action and her creation of the collaborative ePluribus Media PTSD Timeline have served as an inspirational model for dedicated citizen expertise. And now her time has arrived to move into a new medium with the publication of her book, ***Moving a Nation to Care***.

Meagher's slim but powerful volume brings together the many strands of information about PTSD she has tirelessly pursued for the past several years in a comprehensive and readable fashion. Opening with the gripping story of the famed "Marlboro Man" whose picture was blasted around the world during the battle in Fallujah—worn, tough and dirty—who came home suffering from PTSD, she moves on to delineate the fascinating history of soldiers suffering from what has been documented for thousands of years under varying names ("nostalgia," "combat fatigue," "shell shock"). She traces the history of diagnosis and treatment from Roman times to the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, tracking the varied explanations, treatments and stigmas associated with the disorder.

Throughout the book, as she moves on to describing such aspects as clinical diagnosis and what exactly is happening in the brain as it deals with the aftermath of serving in a war zone, she weaves the personal stories of the men and women currently suffering from PTSD, as well as the accounts of the survivors of those soldiers who have taken their lives in response to the unrecognized and usually untreated disorder. The long-term, life-changing fallout from PTSD are explored in detail.

With every trigger and re-experience, depressive emotional and biological patterns or habits are set down. Modern psychology calls these patterns neural grooves. Eventually, people coping with PTSD being "organizing their lives around the trauma." Their work, their family relationships and their long-term health usually suffer as a result.

The current occupation in Iraq has created a larger class of PTSD sufferers than in previous conflicts for a variety of reasons. Some have to do with the nature of the so-called battlefield and the inability to distinguish friend from foe. A large number can be attributed, Meagher claims, to the fact that there is an inability in Iraq to have "safe" havens for personnel such as convoy drivers. Everyone serving is a target in this amorphous occupation, and everyone is a potential PTSD sufferer, a situation unique to this particular war. This also means that nearly every

service member, no matter how mundane the position or description of duties, must be on high alert—and may have to resort to killing. This fact has had enormous consequences:

This increased exposure to killing translates into a higher level of post combat trauma. [A study showed] ....the effect of killing on Vietnam veterans, and found that soldiers who had killed in combat—or believed they had—suffer higher rates of PTSD.

Combined with the stigma of reporting mental health problems, the cursory self-reporting upon return to the United States—undertaken right when soldiers return home and face the prospect of being held on stateside bases for extra time for evaluation before returning to their families—the Veterans Administration has been struggling with underfunding to create something of an epidemic that’s running beneath the radar of public knowledge. The lack of VA staff and facilities, the shame returning vets often feel and the lack of a central record-keeping base are multiplying the problem, one that will haunt America long after the Iraq invasion is over.

Testimony to the long-reaching affects of PTSD are evidenced by the unanticipated uptick in Vietnam vets reporting to the VA that images and news about the current conflict are triggering new cases of the disorder in previously undiagnosed vets from the previous war. And while the traditional military services at least have nascent programs to help their members and their families cope with the aftereffects of serving in a war zone, the National Guard does not—and National Guard members in this war already suffer from being less well-trained and less supported even as they bear a larger brunt of frontline experience than in any other American conflict in history. One of the most thought-provoking sections of the book considers how the speed of modern transport from battlefield to home has put extra pressure on those returning to adjust more quickly to the jolting transition to domestic life than ever before in history.

Plodding along by horse or train or ship meant that, instead of being thrown back into society without a chance to decompress and process their wartime experiences, soldiers could spend time dealing with what they had experienced in a safe and quarantined environment. But the development of air travel has short-circuited this important element of the healing process .... This has had a negative effect on the combat soldier, as they no longer have the necessary time to transition from life on the battlefield to life at home.

***Moving a Nation to Care*** is a serious, reverent look at a difficult and nationally ignored problem. As lawmakers and VA staff struggle to deal with the life and death traumas of war on sufferers and family alike, it would be easy for citizens to feel powerless in a situation over which they perceive themselves as having little control. Meagher has spotted this possible paralysis and offered a wealth of contact information for organizations formed to help citizen activists find ways they can contribute to solving the problem. And despite the starkly depressing nature of the subject and the formidable challenge it presents, she has also offered up signs of hope (as in the blockquote that opens this review) and in the following instance:

If there is one slim silver lining, however, it is that the struggles of Vietnam veterans are informing the way we deal with our current veterans. By sharing their hard-wrought experience, Vietnam veterans are helping to validate and confirm the feelings felt by today’s returning troops.

Battle-scarred warriors reaching across generations to help fellow soldiers while healing themselves as well is a wonderful model for focused activism for all of us. Meagher deserves kudos of the highest order for providing insight into the PTSD experience and listing the tools for citizens to help. As a resource for anyone concerned with veterans or mental health issues in general, ***Moving a Nation to Care*** is unequalled in its simplicity and scope.

**About the Author:** Susan Gardner, who blogs as Susan G as contributing editor at Daily Kos, is a freelance editor and writer and general manager of a special education curriculum company in California.

Review online at <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2007/6/16/14833/4848>

# *Moving a Nation to Care*

*Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and America's Returning Troops*

*by Ilona Meagher*

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## **Review**

### **BOOKWORMS: "MOVING A NATION TO CARE"**

Wednesday, July 4, 2007

By Norma Hovland

#### ***Bloomer [WI] Advance***

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that has....  
Margaret Mead

Suggested by a dear-friend, this book is a must-read for all patriotic Americans.

An incident in the author's personal life prompted her to begin researching depression/suicide and, along the way, she found an all-too-frequent incidence of depression/suicide among returning Iraq veterans, setting off an alarm that pushed her to probe further.

Her interviews with many of these veterans and their families are shared with the reader and reveal serious gaps for treatment in a timely manner often with tragic results. The issues of an overstressed - - and underfunded - - VA Health Care System continue to escalate, burning out of control, and need to be addressed seriously by the powers-that-be.

During World War II, PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) was often diagnosed as cowardice, a yellow streak, frequently resulting in an other than honorable discharge. However, Meagher's findings reveal that much has been learned in the ensuing years. Yes, PTSD is real and needs to be treated with empathy; our veterans deserve the best care possible. Indeed, it should be the American way, so let's rally behind the troops with actions and deeds toward healing and hope!

As Ilona Meagher readily admits, she is not schooled as a doctor nor a therapist, just an ordinary citizen concerned about our returning veterans, those suffering disabling injuries, PTSD and their families trying to cope. Or to heal from losing them, cutting short unfulfilled lives caused by the ravages of war, bringing to mind: There but for the grace of God go I....John Bradford

A thought for this Independence Day: As we celebrate this July 4th, let us be grateful to the veterans of all wars, many of whom paid the ultimate sacrifice to preserve our freedom. A copy of this book is being donated to our public library. Thank you, Ilona, for sharing your research and moving a nation to care.

**About the Author:** Norma Hovland writes the Bookworms column for the Advance, which has served the northwestern Wisconsin farm community of Bloomer for over 120 years.

# *Moving a Nation to Care*

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## **Review**

### **BUZZFLASH REVIEWS: MOVING A NATION TO CARE**

Monday, July 9, 2007

By Mark Karlin

#### ***Buzzflash***

Ilona Meagher is a product of the new citizen journalism.

Coming upon the plight of GIs with PTSD returning from Iraq, she decided to start an online account of the plight of troops with PTSD. In turn, this drew the attention of other blogs and websites. Eventually, she developed enough material for a compelling book that is a wake-up call to the nation to help those who served our country, but now are at high risk because of PTSD. In fact, estimates reach as high as 25% of our GIs returning from Iraq with varying forms of PTSD.

Of course, as Meagher confirms, the Bush administration has done extremely little to aid these combat veterans. In fact, it has remained silent about their needs. Meagher also explains how the Draconian methods authorized by the Bush administration to be used in the Iraq War, as well as the unknown mission of the conflict, have contributed to the high incidents of PTSD among returning soldiers.

Behind all the false patriotic rhetoric in "support of our troops," Meagher documents how returning GIs with urgent mental health needs are being basically ignored. Beyond the compelling subject matter of "***Moving a Nation to Care***," Meagher's book is evidence that citizen journalists are creating a new media that is more relevant, in many ways, than the mainstream media.

Meagher cares deeply about how this administration crafted a war that maximized the likelihood of increasing the occurrences of PTSD -- and then didn't provide adequate funding or support for its victims. Like wounded Iraqis, GIs with PTSD are just so much collateral damage to the White House.

What makes "***Moving a Nation to Care***" particularly significant is that it is grounded in personal accounts of how many GIs with PTSD arrived at where they are. This is a well-researched book that combines facts, details and personal accounts into a compelling call for assisting our own victims of a fraudulent war. Ilona Meagher truly supports our troops and cares about their well-being as they return to a country for which the Iraq War has been more faux jingistic sloganeering than real combat. Unlike Bush, Cheney and the self-serving pro-war, pandering GOP candidates for president, Meagher identified an injustice done to our troops and has sought to do something about it with the power of the pen.

That, our friends, is a true patriot.

Review online at <http://www.dailykos.com/story/2007/6/16/14833/4848>

# *Moving a Nation to Care*

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## **Review**

### **MOVING A NATION TO CARE, POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER AND AMERICA'S RETURNING TROOPS**

Wednesday, July 18, 2007

By Tracey-Kay Caldwell

#### ***BellaOnline***

What would it take to move our nation to care about our troops who are returning from war with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)? Ilona Meag[h]er lays out the argument, trying to help us understand the issue, the lack of response we as a nation have shown, and the solutions to dealing with the issue.

Meag[h]er takes us through the history of post-traumatic stress disorder, the lesson we have learned from each war, and how we are applying and how we are failing to apply those lessons in our current wars. She introduces us to soldiers like, Corporal Ken Dennis and Marine Private First Class Mathew G. Milczark who did not fall on the battlefield, but fell from their own hands; committing suicide, unable to come to terms with their war experiences.

We went to war unprepared to deal with the influx of returning veterans and their needs. According to Meag[h]er, "as of the end of 2006, one-in-four discharged Iraq and Afghanistan veterans (nearly 150,000) have filed disability claims, over 60,000 of which have been for mental health reasons." We have failed to provide adequate funds for the Veterans Administration to deal with these disability claims.

The Government Accountability Office in 2006 found that the Veterans Administration had based its budget requests not on the projected demand for health care services but on the amount the president was willing to request. Senator Daniel Akaka, ranking member of the House Veterans' Affairs Committee remarked, "This administration does not count caring for veterans as part of the cost of war." Leader of the American Legion, Thomas L. Bock said, "this budget model has turned our veterans into beggars, forced to beg for the medical care they earned and, by law, deserve."

There are good reasons for providing mental health care for our veterans early on, while they have the best chance to recover. According to Steve Robinson, Director of Veterans Affairs for Veterans for America, "If a 24-year old soldier with one child were to develop PTSD to the degree of unemployability, that soldier could receive compensation payments from the VA of over \$2,400 a month for the remainder of his life. Over an average male lifespan, such costs could amount to more than 1.3 million, not counting inflation."

Modern warfare creates stresses that increase the probability of suffering from PTSD. These stresses are from Time, using night vision goggles and other industrial age tools, soldiers are able to conduct around the clock operations, resulting in fatigue and sleep deprivation. Space, unlike traditional battlefields there is no front or rear lines; danger comes from all directions. Target, guerilla warfare conditions make it difficult to distinguish between the enemy and civilians. PTSD specialist, Dr. Arthur Bank in discussing the transition soldiers have to make back to civilian life said, "The biggest adjustment is going from 18-hour days, seven days a week, with no days off, to working a 40-hour week based on the clock."

Meag[h]er points out that, “Up through the Korean War the slowness of travel ensured a gradual re-entry for the soldier returning from combat. Plodding along by horse or train or ship meant that, instead of being thrown back into society without a chance to decompress and process their wartime experiences, soldiers could spend time dealing with what they had experienced in a safe and quarantined environment.”

Having made her argument for why we should care, Meag[h]er spends a chapter showing us how to make a difference. She provides resources for learning more, for communicating with veterans, for lobbying our politicians. She provides resources volunteering and making sure our veterans and their families have the information they need to cope with PTSD.

This book is an excellent resource for anyone concerned about our returning Veterans.

**About the Author:** Tracey-Kay Caldwell is the Democratic Party Editor for BellaOnline.com, as well as the Soldier Mom columnist for IraqSlogger.com and contributor to ScribblersRetreat.com.

**Review online at** <http://www.bellaonline.com/about/democraticparty>

# *Moving a Nation to Care*

*Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and America's Returning Troops*

*by Ilona Meagher*

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## **Press Clipping**

### **VETS' MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS INTENSIFY**

Tuesday , April 04, 2006

By Kelley Beaucar Vlahos

#### **FOX NEWS**

WASHINGTON — Blaming what they say is a shortsighted, under-funded system that does not learn from past mistakes, some advocacy groups say they are concerned that the federal government is unprepared to help the wave of troops returning from Iraq seeking mental health care. "We should have been ready for this," said Steve Robinson, director of the National Gulf War Resource Center, a veterans advocacy organization. "It's simple math: If there is an increase in demand, and there is not an equal increase in dollars to hire new people to buy more equipment or provide more services, the person who suffers is the returning veteran."

He and other critics point to recent Army statistics indicating that 35 percent of soldiers and Marines returning from Iraq sought mental health care and 19 percent were diagnosed with a mental disorder like post traumatic stress disorder, depression or anxiety within a year of coming home. "The high rate of using mental health services among Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans after deployment highlights challenges in ensuring that there are adequate resources to meet the mental health needs of returning veterans," reads the study, published by the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research in the March 1 Journal of the American Medical Association.

The numbers were based on screening and follow-ups of more than 300,000 troops returning from Iraq, Afghanistan and Bosnia from May 2003 to April 2004, leading many to surmise that the number with mental health problems has increased since then, since the rate of battlefield casualties among U.S. service members has also risen. "**[The study] is only marginally relevant to what condition our troops currently find themselves in,**" **said I.L. Meagher, editor of PTSD Combat: Winning the War Within. "A lot has changed since that time, including increased number of troop deployments ... and an escalation in [improvised explosive device] attacks."**

The Army study found that engaging in combat or witnessing people being wounded or killed is by far the greatest factor behind the diagnosis of mental disorders among returning service members. Rob Timmons, an Iraq veteran and Army Reservist in New York who sought private therapy after the war and now does outreach work for Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, formally Operation Truth, said the results of the study don't surprise him.

"Because of the type of war it is, everybody is a target," he said.

When troops deploy out of the war zone, they either return to active duty stateside, where they can seek help for emotional problems on their bases or they leave the military and seek assistance from the Veterans Administration.

According to VA statistics, 505,366 troops from Iraq and Afghanistan have left the military as of February. Of that number, 144,424, 29 percent, have sought VA health care, and 20,638, more than 14 percent of those, have been

diagnosed with PTSD. Symptoms of PTSD include hyper-vigilance, irritability, outbursts of anger, sleeplessness and fatigue, and can be accompanied by alcoholism, depression, anxiety and drug abuse.

**Meagher said an alarming rate of violent incidents, suicide, homelessness and unemployment among recent veterans has been documented, but the issue has not garnered much national attention. "We simply have not been the beneficiaries of that type of substantial coverage by the media these past three years," she said. "So, how exactly would the public be expected to be prepared for what's to come — in fact, what is already here?"**

The VA acknowledges the concerns, but insists it is prepared financially and with adequate human resources to handle the returning wave of patients with emotional injuries. "The VA has been a leader in mental health of all sorts, particularly in PTSD. We are very attuned to our responsibility for the full breadth of service," said Dr. Michael Kussman, principal deputy undersecretary for health for the VA.

Kussman said President Bush's 2007 VA budget asks Congress for a record \$80 billion — an increase of \$8.8 billion over 2006. Included in that is \$3.3 billion for mental health care, a \$340 million increase over 2006. "It's a precedent-setting budget that has increases more than any other (VA) budget in the past," Kussman said. "We believe we have the resources and are giving priority to these new veterans. We're encouraging them to come."

In addition to direct care at the country's VA hospitals and clinics, the VA has set up PTSD specialists in each of its facilities, he said. It is also employing recent veterans who "have an acute sense of the war" to reach out to other veterans in communities with high military populations. "They make sure these veterans have all they need," said Kussman.

But critics doubt the VA has factored in the increased demand the Iraq war will bring. The number of total patients treated in VA facilities rose by 22 percent in three years — from 4.1 million in 2001 to more than 5 million in 2004. "The administration and folks in Washington on both sides of the aisle totally low-balled everything that had to do with this war," said Paul Rieckhoff, an Iraq veteran and director of Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America.

Last year, Congress was forced to add \$1.5 billion in emergency funding to the budget after it discovered a huge shortfall in health care resources. "Right there was an indication that the overall number of veterans coming back with needs were underestimated," said Peter Gaytan, director of the VA and rehabilitation division of the American Legion.

He said the American Legion, which represents approximately 3 million U.S. veterans, generally takes the position that the budget is a "step in the right direction," but the VA will probably need more as the "needs are continuing to increase."

Republican Sen. Larry Craig of Idaho, chairman of the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, said the government is already meeting the new demands. "The president has always made it clear that military veterans are among his highest priorities, and this budget demonstrates his dedication to all who have worked in uniform," he said.

**In any case, advocates like Meagher say they hope the government will stick to its promises. "How loudly we cheered them onward as they laced up their boots has no relevance once they've done their job," said Meagher. "It's how well we took care of them when they return that really defines our true moral character."**

Article online at <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,190396,00.html>

# *Moving a Nation to Care*

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*by Ilona Meagher*

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## **Press Clipping**

### **MEDIA REFORM ON THE MARCH**

Sunday, July 30, 2006

By Kevin Howley

#### ***The Bloomington Alternative***

The summer heat isn't the only thing that has Americans looking for relief. Across the country, people are mobilizing against Big Media and all that it represents: an anemic public culture punctuated by crass commercialism and shoddy journalism. In recent weeks, thousands of so-called "ordinary people" have organized to slow, if not stop, an industry-led, lobbyist-financed juggernaut that threatens to decimate public access television and turn the Internet into an "information toll road."

Grassroots campaigns, like Save The Internet, put both the Congress and the Federal Communication Commission on notice: people from across the political spectrum want the public interest upheld in matters of communication policy. While a good deal of this organizing takes place online, media activists met face-to-face last month to promote a more democratic media culture. What was striking about these meetings was the passion, ingenuity and wherewithal of media reformers, independent producers and others working toward a more responsible, and responsive, media system.

Two of these meetings – the Media Giraffe Project's (MGP) inaugural conference at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst and the annual meeting of the Alliance for Community Media (ACM), held this year in Boston – demonstrate the necessity of, and possibility for, media reform.

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Housed in the journalism program at U-Mass/Amherst, the MGP is a new initiative dedicated to fostering "participatory democracy and community" by celebrating the efforts of individuals "making innovate, sustainable use of media." Also known as giraffes, these "above the crowd individuals" work in commercial, public service and independent media and aren't afraid to speak truth to power. Headlining the MGP conference was none other than Helen Thomas, the former United Press International correspondent, promoting her new book *Watchdogs of Democracy?*

For years, Ms. Thomas's quick wit and incisive questions were the only signs of intelligent life in the White House press corps. These days she's raising hell in her columns and on the lecture circuit, calling out presidents and journalists alike for misdeeds and misplaced loyalties.

Also on hand was former *60-Minutes* producer Charles Lewis of the Center for Public Integrity. Not one to pull punches, Lewis spoke eloquently about the dearth of investigative journalism in U.S. media these

days: a condition that threatens to undermine our democracy. Lewis observed that in the absence of a robust press willing to challenge authority, citizen journalists have taken up the slack.

**Take for instance the work of Ilona Meagher. An Illinois-based writer, her reports on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) for e-Pluribus Media illuminate the difficulties facing returning veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. The problems faced by today's vets rarely receive ongoing, let alone substantive, press coverage. Meagher's Website, "PTSD: Winning the War Within," not only covers this story in-depth, but also provides resources for returning combat veterans, as well as action alerts that encourage readers to learn more and to get involved.**

Then there was Michael Skoler, the Managing Director of Minnesota Public Radio's experimental project called Public Insight Journalism (PIJ). At a time when public broadcasting's credibility is sinking right along that of its commercial counterparts, PIJ reminds us just how vibrant and informative public radio can be when journalism is relevant to the everyday lives of ordinary people.

While PIJ seeks to include community members in newsgathering, the project limits public participation in setting the news agenda. Nonetheless, PIJ indicates that putting the public back in public broadcasting is a winning strategy: one that makes public broadcasters more accountable to local communities and helps ensure public broadcasting's long-term viability. ...

**Article online at** <http://www.bloomingtonalternative.com/subscribers/news.php?topicid=1046>

# Moving a Nation to Care

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*by Ilona Meagher*

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## **Press Clipping**

### **IRAQ, IN THEIR OWN WORDS**

#### **The ambivalence of wounded troops isn't always heard.**

Saturday, November 11, 2006

By Elena Lesley

#### ***St. Petersburg Times***

TAMPA – Charles Atkins chews a ham sandwich, his seared hands and shrapnel-gouged head encased in protective gear. A slip of a 22-year-old, he talks about war like it is a football game or a trip to the mall. "I just sorta did it," he says of his decision to go to Iraq. "I always liked the GI Joe cartoon."

During his 3 1/2 months in Iraq, the Oklahoma native survived a suicide bomber's attack. Now a patient at the James A. Haley VA Medical Center in Tampa, Atkins is preparing for a skull replacement and recovering from burns on 30 percent of his body. Like many wounded troops returning from Iraq, Atkins has mixed feelings about a war that has forever altered his life. "It's demoralizing over there, but someone's got to do it," he says and pauses. "It (stinks) for the people that do."

Despite divergent opinions, many wounded troops interviewed also shared one conviction: If the United States withdraws now, Iraq will plunge into greater chaos. The war itself was a central issue in the election Tuesday, but wounded troops were largely absent on both sides.

About 3,182 troops have been killed in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to the Department of Defense, while more than 22,600 troops have been wounded. Advances in medical technology have resulted in many more lives saved. But it also has meant troops coming home with more severe injuries.

The reaction among troops about the war is complicated and doesn't fit neatly with any political ideology.

Pete Herrick, 39, who was paralyzed from the neck down after three weeks in Iraq, says many members of the media won't talk to him because of their liberal slant, which doesn't mesh with his views.

"When they find out I don't want to bash the president," says Herrick, who lives in Fort White, "the interview's over." A political and military junkie, Herrick believes that years of sectarian religious violence would have continued in the region without U.S. intervention.

Norman Solomon, executive director of the Institute for Public Accuracy, blames the White House for the lack of publicity about wounded troops. "The Bush administration has worked hard to keep the president away from within photo-op range of the seriously wounded," Solomon says. "War enthusiasm thrives on abstraction. The wounded have become almost apparitions."

Some troops are reluctant to speak out for fear of losing their benefits or not getting a promotion, while others say it's not their place to comment on policy. "I'm a soldier," says Christopher Malone, 21, a Texas native wounded by a rocket. "I take orders." Malone wants to return to Iraq, chiefly to help his buddies still there. But he also believes the United States is "on the right course."

**Ilona Meagher has talked to service members and their families about the war as part of research for a book on post-traumatic stress disorder. "Just like in the civilian population, a disagreement exists in the military," says Meagher, who also runs a blog on post-traumatic stress disorder and advocates for more psychological services to help returning troops.**

Many of the troops interviewed shared ambivalent feelings about the war. Mike McKeown of Zephyrhills returned from Iraq last year with severe hearing loss. "If we pull out, someone like Saddam will just take over again and all those people would have been wounded and killed for no reason," says McKeown, referring to former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein.

But "there's also a part of me that wants to bring the troops home," says McKeown, 46. "My friends have died over there." Part of the uncertainty stems from the troops' inability to gauge whether Iraqis actually want them there and who exactly they're fighting. "It's hard when they shoot," says Mike Delancey, 21, a Pinellas Park resident recovering from a gunshot wound at Haley. "It's like fighting ghosts. You hear it, see it, but don't see the guy shooting at you."

Some troops hesitate when asked how regular Iraqis feel about having U.S. troops around. "Um, they're grateful" is a common response. Others are more direct. "They really hate us," says Alba Tanner, 21, a Louisiana native who was wounded by a roadside bomb. "Little kids threw rocks at us, and they had to learn that from somewhere."

Delancey says sometimes it was hard to distinguish welcoming Iraqis from those who might want to harm American troops. "Iraqis are friendly, all of them," he says. "They'll invite you in for chai (tea) and feed you like kings, and then later you'll find out they're an enemy. You don't know who's good and who's bad."

This kind of confusion can lead to atrocities, says Camilo Mejia, 31, of Miami, who made national headlines in 2004 when he refused to return to Iraq midway through his tour of duty. Mejia thinks the United States should immediately withdraw troops from Iraq. "You have good wars in mind when you go into the military, that you're going to fight the next Hitler," he says. "But in Iraq with the hit-and-run tactics, civilians are killed left and right. It messes people up in the head."

Some veterans, like Herrick, couldn't disagree more. The father of two decided to enlist before the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks - part of an "early midlife crisis" he jokes - and remains committed to the war in Iraq. "It fills me with pride to know my injury was in defense of someone's freedom," says Herrick, who moves his wheelchair using a mouth-controlled joystick. "I get chills."

As public opinion about the war has shifted over the last two years, he said he has noticed a difference in the way people perceive his injuries. "I used to have a lot of people saying I was a hero," Herrick says. "Now I sense that people look at me like a victim."

Ray Raphael, 83, a World War II veteran from Beverly Hills, Fla., is unsettled by his numerous conversations at Gainesville's VA hospital with troops who served in Iraq. "We're sending our children over there to be slaughtered," he says. "And for no good reason."

Delancey says he decided to join the army because it was a good way to save for college and plan a future. "Where I grew up, a lot of guys just had dead-end jobs," says Delancey, tossing a mini foam football in his hospital bed. "The guys who were doing well for themselves, who had nice houses and all, were prior military." But now that he's struggling to regain the use of his legs at Haley, Delancey can't help but second-guess the war. "Sometimes I think that we should pull out because there's not enough change and no reason to be there," he says. "But when I think of the faces of people I saw there, I don't want to abandon them."

Even after the attack left him with severe hearing loss, McKeown decided to stay and finish his last nine months in Iraq. "It was my job," he said. "My being there kept people alive." A good troop takes orders and helps his brothers, he says, even if he's not sure why they're fighting. "The people over there have been killing each other forever," McKeown says, sighing. "I don't know what the answer is. Wish I did."

**Article online at** [http://www.sptimes.com/2006/11/11/Tampabay/Iraq\\_\\_in\\_their\\_own\\_wo.shtml](http://www.sptimes.com/2006/11/11/Tampabay/Iraq__in_their_own_wo.shtml)

# *Moving a Nation to Care*

*Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and America's Returning Troops*

*by Ilona Meagher*

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## ***Press Clipping***

### **BLOGGER FROM FLIGHT TO FIGHT**

**NIU student publishes book on the plight of our country's returning troops.**

Wednesday, March 28, 2007

By Michael Swiontek

### ***NorthernStar***

DEKALB— Tragedy changes people.

**At surface level, Ilona Meagher looks like an average, attentive, 41-year-old non-traditional student.**

Meagher, a junior journalism major, possesses an overwhelming passion for shedding public spotlight on the post-traumatic stress disorder engulfing the souls of so many Iraq war veterans.

Tragedy changed Meagher's plans. Becoming a journalist, editor of an online journal and author of a book were not Meagher's original ambition in life - her life soared above the clouds, with a 15-year career as a flight attendant with American Airlines.

Her life, like those of many others, was firmly in place before the events of 9/11 shook the foundation of her existence.

Post-9/11 cutbacks put Meagher in position to take an early-out package. She created a freelance business specializing in Web design and copy editing. Then, one day, an article she read from across the country changed her life.

An article in Seattle Weekly shocked Meagher, prompting her to ponder several questions. Meagher, whose sister took her own life in 2000, learned that several Iraq war veterans committed suicide after suffering from PTSD. A self-proclaimed natural researcher, Meagher's quest to get answers drove her deeper into the questions.

Meagher discovered her passion for writing by her desire to advocate awareness of post-war PTSD. A citizen journalism cooperative, ePluribus Media, discovered her data online, and helped by compiling the database, fact-checking and editing. Meagher feels fortunate she has received so much help informing the masses on the issue.

The success of her online journal, PTSD Combat: Winning the War Within, has led to other ventures.

"All these incredible opportunities came to me," she said.

Tragedy also has changed Meagher's aspirations. One year ago, a publisher from New York contacted her, expressing interest in a book on post-war PTSD written by Meagher. The network of experts and journalists she developed a rapport with made the seemingly overwhelming task of writing a book without any formal training manageable, she said.

**Meagher's book, "Moving the Nation to Care," will be released by Ig Publishing on May 1.**

Recently, Meagher became a contributor to the Clark Community Network's Troops and Vets series, the blog of former presidential candidate Gen. Wesley Clark.

Though **Meagher** has no military experience herself, her father fought for both the Hungarian and U.S. military, giving her the foundation to pursue military topics, she said. She credits her husband, who still serves as a pilot with American Airlines, with giving her the ability to work on her blog unpaid.

A nonprofit company has contacted **Meagher** about potentially presenting her a grant for her blog work and her contribution to the PTSD database. "As difficult as it has been to juggle everything, I learn something with every class," she said. "No matter what the topic is, the more informed you are about a variety of issues, the more you are going to be able to understand a lot of concepts that are bigger than post-traumatic stress."

Meagher spends an average of three hours per day corresponding through e-mail with veterans and their families, editors, citizen journalists and other bloggers.

Even with the strong feelings and opinions presented on both sides of the Iraq war debate, **Meagher** has not chosen a public stance. "It doesn't matter what party affiliation you have, you can get PTSD," she said. "I have met so many people that are working hard on this issue - citizens, activists and veterans. While the data is depressing and hard, I have met so many incredible people through email and meetings - they inspired me."

**Article online at** <http://www.star.niu.edu/articles/?id=35871>

# Moving a Nation to Care

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## **Press Clipping**

### **HIDDEN WOUNDS**

*More veterans survive Iraq, but the war's signature injury isn't immediately apparent.*

July 2, 2007 Issue

By Kelley Beaucar Vlahos

### ***The American Conservative***

When Samuel Vaughan Wilson III speaks, he periodically stops midsentence to rub his jaw, still pained by the rocket-propelled grenade that ripped through his vehicle, grazing his face and singeing the nerves inside his mouth. It was one of several close calls during that year in Afghanistan: after one IED attack, he recalls with a medic's precision how, under heavy gunfire, he cut open an Afghan police officer's throat to clear an air passage, saving his life. He says with equal sobriety that his Army career is over.

"My father wants me to get screening [for Traumatic Brain Injury]. He thinks something is wrong," said Wilson, who served as a combat medic in Afghanistan with the 508th Parachute Infantry, survived four IED incidents, numerous firefights, and that RPG near miss. According to the recommendation for his Army Commendation Medal, Wilson was credited, in one incident, with saving eight lives and maintaining his composure under "the most extreme circumstances in a combat environment." But in September 2006, he left the military after 11 years under a rare medical discharge for post-traumatic stress disorder.

He now struggles to understand where his physical injuries leave off and the mental ones begin. His anger, restlessness, and sleepless nights are classic symptoms of both mild TBI and PTSD, which are provoked regularly during his day job as an emergency paramedic in Northern Virginia. "We've looked into it," he said, of possible TBI screening, "but I've gotten nowhere in the VA system yet."

Red-headed Wilson, 36, says he looks like Howdy Doody, but nothing about him is funny. The black ID bracelet of a platoonmate killed in action firmly around his wrist, he is at one turn intimidating and dark, at another vulnerable, self-deprecating, and visibly wracked with survivor's guilt. He's outrun death, but doesn't quite feel alive. ... "TBI is going to be the worst story in terms of returning veterans," said Paul Sullivan, an advocate with Veterans for America. He estimates that anywhere from 160,000 to 320,000 servicemembers and veterans are suffering from some degree of TBI today, "most of which are unscreened, undiagnosed, and untreated."

Wilson's story is hardly rare. Physically, soldiers like him look healthy, but they come home changed, confused about their circumstances and often too ashamed to seek help. If they are still on active duty, they worry that their brain injury or PTSD will be mistaken for a pre-existing personality disorder, which could result in a bad discharge. They are anxious about getting a good disability rating when they leave the military, as statistics show the Army is lowballing ratings for PTSD, TBI, and other injuries, meaning there is a good chance all they will get from Uncle Sam is a severance check.

Once out, they face a long waiting list at the Veterans' Administration and a lack of mental healthcare access in rural areas. Many contemplate or commit suicide, get divorced, leave their jobs, and even walk the streets, homeless. "The idea of okay, cheer them up, wave the flag, bring them home, and forget about them ... we're going to be paying for this for the rest of their lives. It's going to be a horrible bill that we're going to pay," said Wilson's dad, now a high-school teacher in quiet Farmville, Virginia. "If we've got any moral virtue left, we've got to pay it," he added. "We really didn't anticipate, as a country, and as a nation, the tremendous stresses on our medical system. It's a horrible thing."

But some people did anticipate it, and veterans from previous and current wars—call them “warriors for the wounded”—have been working endlessly and aggressively to ensure today’s veteran isn’t betrayed.

Take Sullivan, a Gulf War veteran who left his job as a senior researcher at the VA in March 2006, frustrated his distress signals were being ignored. “They went on record with the Boston Globe that I was ‘alarmist,’” he said of a March feature on the perils of the VA system. “I had no other choice but to pull the alarm.” The VA does not refute Sullivan’s research but winces at his interpretation.

With an estimated 5.5 million veterans being treated at the nation’s 1,400 hospitals and clinics each year—230,000 of them from Afghanistan and Iraq—and an estimated 470,000 more yet to move into a system that is experiencing a backlog of 400,000 disability claims and a six-month average wait for a medical appointment, it is hard not see fire on the mountain. “Everyone is giving lip service, but Walter Reed is just the tip of the iceberg,” Sullivan said, referring to the recent scandal at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, where soldiers were found languishing in moldy conditions, outflanked by a seemingly unsympathetic bureaucracy. Surveying the hundreds of thousands of new claims coming in, staff shortages, inefficiencies, and the increased needs of older veterans, he declares, “The VA is in a crisis right now.”

Enter TBI, which doesn’t always render a person physically disabled and fully dependent but if left untreated, can devastate lives. Thousands of times in this war soldiers close to a bomb blast have shaken themselves off and walked away to patrol another day. Months later, they return home and do not recognize the face in the mirror. “It’s like slamming a laptop against the wall,” said Patrick Campbell, 29, a National Guardsman who served in the 256th Infantry Brigade as a medic in Iraq from November 2004 to October 2005. While the computer may seem functional afterwards, small quirks like a broken backspace key or a jagged line down one side of the screen soon become obvious and render use slow, frustrating, and intolerable for the long term. “The concussive event—the wind and the pressure changes—it’s more damaging than the force of getting hit,” said Campbell.

He will tell you that in a single incident, an IED explosion causes an intense shockwave of pressure. When close enough, it can form tiny, destructive air bubbles in the brain and blow out precious wiring inside a soldier’s skull. Those not affected by the blast wave may be hurtled through the air, slammed around in a vehicle, or hit in the head with debris. Their Humvee might overturn. As described by some, any of this could throttle the brains like Jell-O.

In Vietnam, one soldier was killed for every 2.5 wounded; in Iraq the survival rate is one killed for every 16 wounded. But the effects of TBI may take hours, days—even weeks—to surface.

While at first glance Campbell looks as if he would be more comfortable in an armored Humvee than a downtown D.C. office space, but it’s soon clear his new posting is a good fit. Working fulltime for the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, which is steadily becoming the generational equivalent of such scrappy advocates as the National Gulf War Resource Center or Vietnam Veterans of America, his goal is to cast a floodlight on TBI’s effect on returning service members.

“There are a lot of people out there who have never been ‘right’ after an IED,” said Campbell, recalling one case in which a veteran had to carry around a notebook to write down everything he did, said, or had to accomplish because his short-term memory was shot. “Now they are at home and wondering why they are different.”

He recalls his own multiple “concussive events” in Iraq. One, an IED blast, left his ears bleeding and he and his buddy laughing over their luck. He went right back on patrol. Today, he plans to take advantage of the new mandatory TBI screening at the VA, wondering if those events contributed to his own diagnosis of PTSD.

“Not all people want to acknowledge that they have a problem. The symptoms are extremely close to PTSD,” which still carries a stigma, particularly among peers and the chain of command. It took Campbell a year and losing his best friend over his changed personality to finally seek help.

Thanks to lobbying efforts by groups like the IAVA, the VA announced in April that it will begin screening all incoming veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan for TBI. Now the pressure is on the Department of Defense, which only offers comprehensive TBI screening for the wounded coming into their hospitals, like Walter Reed.

If TBI is the silent affliction of this war, the casualty count should be the canary in the coal mine. As of mid-May, the military in Iraq suffered 14,804 injuries that required medical transport off the battlefield. This included 7,628 combat wounded and 7,176 non-hostile injuries, plus 19,589 “diseases,” which cover everything from a bacterial infection and mental disorder to cancer

and pregnancy, that also required medical air transport. In Afghanistan, 6,213 injured soldiers were evacuated from the field, including 743 combat-related, 1,458 non-hostile, and 4,012 diseases.

Symptoms of TBI can turn up in any of the these categories. According to various reports, of the 1.4 million who have rotated through Iraq and Afghanistan, anywhere from 10 to 30 percent have been exposed to a bomb blast or other head trauma, leaving them with at least mild TBI. A recent study by doctors at Fort Carlson Army base in Colorado found that 18 percent of their returning soldiers had incurred a brain injury in Iraq.

Some 60 percent of the veterans in the VA's Polytrauma Rehabilitation Center in Tampa, Florida, one of 21 centers handling vets with severe, multiple injuries, have a brain injury, according to ABC newsmen Bob Woodruff in a February series he put together after his own year-long recovery from an IED blast. Meanwhile, officials at the Defense and Veterans Brain Injury Center, the military's primary research and treatment facility for TBI, has treated 2,130 patients since 2003.

"That's just a small percentage of the total number, and the fact is, nobody really knows how many have mild [TBI]," said Col. Jonathan Jaffin, Commander of U.S Army Medical Research and Materiel Command at Fort Detrick, Maryland and a spokesman for the DVVIC. He said 70 percent of their cases are mild and those affected may, with the right treatment, recover or at least adjust to their disabilities. But it is not clear, according to doctors, how soldiers with cumulative concussive injuries will fare long-term. All seem to agree the body of research on non-fatal blast injuries is thin.

"Mild head injury for years had been somewhat neglected," Jaffin says, with standard testing for TBI often missing less severe cases. "So people would be suffering and being told they are normal." As the pervasiveness of TBI among returning service members became clear, he said, the military and VA began developing better ways to detect it—though advocates will dispute their commitment.

VA officials say they are treating nearly 400 veterans diagnosed with moderate to severe TBI, while overall they have seen more than 1,600 potential cases since 2002. They acknowledge, however, that the system has yet to compile statistics for mild cases or outpatients.

Meanwhile, symptoms of mild to moderate TBI go unchecked, crowded out by the more obvious injuries. Furthermore, misdiagnosing TBI—most likely mistaken for PTSD—is commonplace.

**"When it does occur, PTSD and TBI together can be especially difficult to spot. The problem lies in the overlapping symptoms—increased anxiety, short attention span, limited concentration, problems with memory. This overlap muddles things up," points out Ilona Meagher, author of *Moving a Nation to Care: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and America's Returning Troops*. "Once you have these kinds of errors on military records," she added, "it creates a whole other level of problems down the road for the veteran after they've returned home."**

That road is paved with the stories of men and women who find that the system is no more compassionate than it was for their counterparts returning from Vietnam a generation ago. The PTSD label is not only stigmatizing, but its symptoms are often mistaken for personality disorders and are blamed for behavioral problems like insubordination and substance abuse, resulting in a one-way ticket out of the military with no retirement pay or benefits.

"This time it's all about money—they just don't want to pay," insists Sullivan. But unlike previous wars, there is a small army of veterans' advocates, many who cut their teeth on behalf of Persian Gulf soldiers in the 1990s.

Steve Robinson, also with Veterans for America, packed his experience and reputation along with his bags and spent most of May around Fort Carson, pulling together a massive case accusing the command of erroneously discharging 276 soldiers for personality disorders. These servicemembers all suffered from PTSD, and many had accompanying TBI diagnoses. His organization is also investigating more than 40 current cases on the base. They include bad discharges but also complaints from soldiers that their brain injuries and mental-health problems were mishandled or ignored by superiors. ...

Fort Carson says there is another side to these stories. While the base hasn't denied struggling with TBI and PTSD—which according to reports has increased from 32 cases to 539 in the last year there—officials say none of the soldiers chaptered out for personality disorders were suffering from severe PTSD or TBI. Rather, their behavior, backed by a pre-existing condition found in their backgrounds, got them booted.

Robinson said his group chose Fort Carson as the first in five fact-finding missions because it had the most documentation to back up the soldiers' claims. However, "these problems are system-wide."

The disability ratings game has become a gauntlet for soldiers suffering from myriad physical and mental injuries. At the head is the Physical Evaluation Board, which assesses whether an active servicemember is still fit for duty and rates individual disabilities to determine the type of discharge and whether it warrants lifetime healthcare and retirement pay. A rating of 30 percent or more allows the soldier to be medically discharged with pay and healthcare. Anything beneath that buys a single severance check—and a U.S. News and World Report investigation found that nearly 93 percent of disabled troops were receiving low ratings.

The Veterans Disability Benefits Commission is reviewing these charges, and in April, it offered Congress some preliminary data that compared combined disability ratings from both the DoD and VA. The numbers showed that 81 percent of all disabilities between 2000 and 2006 were rated 0 to 20 percent by DoD. Out of 50,676 Army soldiers deemed unfit for duty, 27 percent received 0 percent ratings.

What is more striking are the differences between DoD and the VA, which uses its own ratings to assess healthcare and compensation. Focusing on comparative data for both institutions, the commission found that 59 percent of the time, DoD would give a soldier a combined rating of 0 to 30 percent, while the VA would take that same soldier and give him a rating of 30 to 100 percent. The disparity in specific mental health ratings were even more glaring.

VDBC chairman James Terry Scott told the Senate on April 12, “It is ... apparent that DoD has strong incentive to assign less than 30 percent so that only separation pay is required and continuing family health care is not provided.”

“We’re very concerned,” said Ron Smith, deputy general counsel for the Disabled American Veterans. His job is to represent veterans appealing their disability ratings. He is not lacking for work. He said lowballing typically hits low-ranking servicemembers who get smaller severance payments and are likely to spend them more quickly. Then there is a lengthy gap before their new claims at the VA are processed.

“They are playing fast and loose with disability ratings,” charged Larry Scott, a staunch advocate who runs VAWatchdog.com, noting that victims of PTSD and mild to moderate TBI are more likely than others to get the bureaucratic boot out the door.

At the end of this bottleneck, there is the VA system, where Vaughan Wilson waits today. After nearly nine months, the medication for PTSD given to him following his discharge from the Army is nearly gone. His six months of free health coverage through the military has expired, and even when he had it, he had no luck in finding a PTSD counselor in rural Virginia, where he was staying with his dad for the first few months of civilian afterlife.

Beset by ongoing nightmares, bouts of panic and fury, Wilson is slowly getting his life on track—he and his fiancée Joy are expecting a baby in October—but he knows he needs treatment, including a much delayed screening for TBI. Built to carry a soldier’s legacy, he looks anything but weak or insecure, but his eyes are sad and he’s wound like a top. He’s no fool—he has collected affidavits concerning his many commendations, his medical evaluations, and photos of carnage if anyone tries to question the validity of his story.

“The most frustrating thing for me are the reasons my claim has been held up,” he said, noting one case in which he mistakenly provided the wrong Social Security number for his daughter on the forms. “The people I’ve encountered at the VA are doing the best they can ... but there is too much of a paper trail” to manage and the bureaucracy is too massive, too tricky to navigate. “The disconnect was, there wasn’t a good handoff from the military to the VA,” he noted.

That disconnect is just one of the challenges facing the VA, which has treated nearly one in three returning veterans since the war on terror began. There is an average six-month wait for an initial appointment and four-month wait for disability claims. Appeals stretch over an additional year and a half, according to a March GAO report. “I’m not a hate-the-VA guy,” said Scott. “I’ve been in the system for 26 years and have gotten nothing but great care. ... [but] we’ve been fighting a war on the cheap and we are trying to care for our wounded on the cheap, too.”

VA officials say the new TBI screening is only a piece of an overall effort to improve diagnosis and treatment, reduce the backlogs, and close the VA-military gap. Paul Sullivan said advocates like himself will be there to make sure they make good, particularly on promises to respond to the challenges of TBI. Ignoring brain injury while it destroys veterans won’t do, he said. “We will try to put people in jail this time if they try to go that route.”

Article online at [http://www.amconmag.com/2007/2007\\_07\\_02/feature.html](http://www.amconmag.com/2007/2007_07_02/feature.html)

# *Moving a Nation to Care*

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*by Ilona Meagher*

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## **Press Clipping**

### **BEYOND THE BATTLE**

Monday, July 23, 2007

By Carey Peña

#### ***KTVK-TV Channel 3 (Phoenix, AZ)***

They were on routine patrol, but what happened next was anything but routine. One after another, rocket-propelled grenades slammed in to their Humvees. "The first came through the windshield, ripped through my ear and blew up in back of my Humvee," said Brent Phillips, a Marine. "I climbed out of my Humvee. I was shot in the arm with an AK-47."

It's a story about the day he and his fellow Marines were ambushed in Iraq. Phillips lost an eye in the attack. "My wife and my mom helped me get through that," he said. Four years later, he's still trying to get through it. "When he first got back, he was very jumpy (with) cars backfiring, fireworks. He could not deal with Fourth of July," his wife said.

Phillips said he was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress. "On a daily basis I hear the stories of the people," said Lori Highberger, chief of psychiatry at the Veterans Administration Hospital. "I hear all the gory details. I hear the things they don't feel comfortable telling anyone, including their spouse, ever, about their experience."

She said every day they get about a dozen new patients seeking help for post-traumatic stress disorder. They are military men and women who are trying to work through the powerful images that replay in their mind -- images of death and destruction. "There's things that you have to do in active duty that you don't necessarily want to do, but that's service to the country and that's really what makes me proud of the people who come to the VA," Highberger said. "They put their hearts on the line and they put their souls on the line too."

**Ilona Meagher, an author and activist, said there needs to be some sort of transition or a bridge to bring soldiers back. Meagher is a former flight attendant who began blogging about the war and the troops who suffer from post-traumatic stress. Her blog became so popular she...wrote a book called "Moving a Nation to Care."**

**In the book, she shares stories as told to her by the troops.**

**"They don't understand why it is they've been through this incredible experience," Meagher said. "They've been in Iraq and they come home and we are talking about Anna Nicole Smith and Paris Hilton. They don't understand that they've been through this really powerful experience and we are not engaged in it."**

Phillips doesn't wear the uniform anymore and because of his injury, he had to take a medical retirement. "Every day I miss the Marine Corps. It is something that I loved doing and that I wanted to do for the rest of my life," he said.

What is life like for Phillips and other troops beyond the battlefield trying to overcome painful memories?

Eric Castro, another veteran of Iraq, shares his story. "I grabbed it and I pulled myself along with the leg on the bench," he said. The attack was fast and furious. Castro and his fellow soldiers didn't have a chance. They heard a blast and knew they were being ambushed. The insurgents were firing at them with anti-tank weapons, designed to hit armored vehicles and explode.

One titanium rod, shot from a rocket launcher, seared Castro's leg and the legs of two soldiers sitting next to him. "My prosthetic is attached around the waist and there is no hip joint," Castro said. "I mean there is an artificial hip joint but no left leg. This is all padded." The last thing he remembers about the ambush is the guys in his squad pressing on his wound to keep him from bleeding to death. When he woke up, the 21-year-old Castro was at Walter Reed Medical Center. "This is the second time I met the president," he said.

Castro spent six months at the medical center. During that time, his hospital room was rarely quiet. A string of politicians and celebrities came knocking on his door, including Bruce Willis, Shania Twain and Cher. But none of them could erase the painful memories of the ambush and the painful reality of life without his left leg. "It is difficult, going out to the mall -- anywhere," Castro said. "If you wear shorts, you are going to get looked at. Sometimes they stare without noticing they are staring. They just look and look and I just keep on going."

Castro said he feels like he suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder off and on. "One of our priorities is to get these veterans seen quickly," Highberger said. She said a lot has changed in recent years. She said now, they aggressively reach out and recruit veterans in need of emotional support. "You need to have support and understanding of other people who have been in that situation, so you know what it's like to have seen people killed and have to kill," she said.

Perhaps nobody understands this better than veterans who served in Vietnam. Thousands suffered from severe post-traumatic stress disorder, but suffered in silence. "It used to be if you showed any signs of it, you were weak. I'm sorry if you have it, you have it," said Jeff Esser, who was finally diagnosed with post-traumatic stress.

He doesn't want younger veterans like Castro to suffer the way he did. "Most of those issues are getting resolved by Vietnam veterans that are going to the hospital and saying, 'Hey, if you need help we are here to help you,'" Esser said.

Castro is now 25 and going to school at Arizona State University. People might stare at him as he walks through campus, but Castro no longer worries about it, he says. And for those who stop him and ask him what happened, he'll tell them the story.

He'll tell them about the day he was ambushed -- a day that will always be there in his mind.

**Article online at** <http://www.azfamily.com/news/local/stories/KTVKLNews20070723.a40d9b62.html>

# *Moving a Nation to Care*

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*by Ilona Meagher*

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## **Press Clipping**

### **WHILE REAL BULLETS FLY, MOVIES BRING WAR HOME**

Thursday, July 26, 2007

By Michael Cieply

#### ***New York Times***

LOS ANGELES, July 25 — On a night four years ago, five soldiers back from three months in Iraq went drinking at a Hooters restaurant and a topless bar near Fort Benning, Ga. Before the night was over, one of them, Specialist Richard R. Davis, was dead of at least 33 stab wounds, his body doused with lighter fluid and burned. Two of the group would eventually be convicted of the murder, another pleaded guilty to manslaughter, and the last confessed to concealing the crime.

Now some in Hollywood want moviegoers to decide if the killing is emblematic of a war gone bad, part of a new and perhaps risky willingness in the entertainment business to push even the touchiest debates about post-9/11 security, Iraq and the troops' status from the confines of documentaries into the realm of mainstream political drama.

On Sept. 14, Warner Independent Pictures expects to release "In the Valley of Elah," a drama inspired by the Davis murder, written and directed by Paul Haggis, whose "Crash" won the Academy Award for best picture in 2006. The film stars Tommy Lee Jones as a retired veteran who defies Army bureaucrats and local officials in a search for his son's killers. In one of the movie's defining images, the American flag is flown upside down in the heartland, the signal of extreme distress.

Other coming films also use the damaged Iraq veteran to raise questions about a continuing war. In "Grace Is Gone," directed by James C. Strouse and due in October from the Weinstein Company, John Cusack and two daughters struggle with the loss of a wife and mother who is killed on duty. Kimberly Peirce's "Stop-Loss," set for release in March by Paramount, meanwhile, casts Ryan Phillippe as a veteran who defies an order that would send him back to Iraq.

In the past, Hollywood usually gave the veteran more breathing space. William Wyler's "Best Years of Our Lives," about the travails of those returning from World War II, was released more than a year after the war's end. Similarly Hal Ashby's "Coming Home" and Oliver Stone's "Born on the Fourth of July," both stories of Vietnam veterans, came well after the fall of Saigon. "Media in general responds much more quickly than ever before," said Scott Rudin, a producer of "Stop-Loss." "Why shouldn't movies do the same?" He said his film was deliberately scheduled to be released in the middle of the presidential campaign season.

That impetus for immediacy is driving other filmmakers and studios as well. In October, for example, New Line Cinema will release "Rendition," in which Reese Witherspoon plays a woman whose Egyptian-born husband is snared by a runaway counterterrorism apparatus. Paul Greengrass, the director of "The Bourne Ultimatum," in which the bad guys belong to a similar rogue unit, is adapting Rajiv Chandrasekaran's book about the Green Zone in Baghdad, "Imperial Life in the Emerald City," for Universal Pictures.

Brian De Palma's "Redacted," focusing on an Army squad that persecutes an Iraqi family, is to be released in December by Magnolia Pictures. And Sony Pictures is developing a film based on the story of Richard A. Clarke, the former national security official and Bush administration critic.

Among the new films, "Valley of Elah" is sure to be one of the most closely examined, thanks to Mr. Haggis's credentials — he was nominated for an Oscar for writing "Million Dollar Baby" and was nominated for another as co-writer of "Letters From Iwo

Jima" — and because of his opposition to United States policy in Iraq. "This is not one of our brighter moments in America," Mr. Haggis said in a telephone interview from London, where he is still working on the film's music. "We should not have gotten involved."

Still, Mr. Haggis insisted that "Valley of Elah" — the title refers to the site where David fought Goliath — was not intended to enforce his point of view. Rather, he said, it is meant to raise questions about "what it does to these kids" to be deployed in a situation where enemies are often indistinguishable from neutral civilians, and the rules of engagement may force decisions that are difficult to live with.

Despite some obvious fictionalization — the Fort Benning case did not involve the authority-challenging local detective and single mother played by Charlize Theron — the film hews closely enough to fact that Mr. Haggis is considering a dedication to Specialist Davis. But whether the case truly speaks for returning veterans will not be easily settled, even with help from Warner Independent. The studio plans to supplement some of its promotional screenings with panel discussions of post-traumatic stress disorder, a factor raised in the movie.

"The issues are similar to what a lot of us are coping with," said an approving Garrett Reppenhagen, an Iraq veteran who saw "Valley of Elah" last week at one of the first such screenings in Washington. Mr. Reppenhagen, a member of Iraq Veterans Against the War, helped recruit viewers for the screening.

By contrast, Dennis Griffee, a wounded veteran who is national commander of the Iraq War Veterans Organization, said he turned down a request to become involved with the film after learning that Susan Sarandon, a vocal opponent of the war, had a prominent role. "At the very least it is offensive," Mr. Griffee said of what he sees as a widespread refusal to acknowledge the troops' pride at achievements in Iraq. He added that virtually every member of his platoon wound up in college, not jail, on return.

**Ilona Meagher, who wrote "Moving a Nation to Care: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and America's Returning Troops" (Ig Publishing) and has joined Warner's promotional effort, acknowledged that the Davis case was among the most extreme of some 170 stress-related episodes she had documented since 2005. "We all know that human beings respond/are moved by stories that are more extreme in nature," Ms. Meagher wrote in a follow-up e-mail message.**

In listing its Top 10 crime stories of last year, in fact, The Columbus Ledger-Enquirer in Georgia counted only two involving the 25,000 soldiers who are typically stationed at nearby Fort Benning. Edging his film away from the real case, Mr. Haggis shot mostly in New Mexico and operated without military approvals that would have been required at Fort Benning. He originally wrote the script for Warner Brothers, which eventually agreed that the movie should be financed by Summit Entertainment, NALA Films and Samuels Media Capital on a budget that has been reported at about \$23 million. The companies are clearly banking on the considerable appeal of Mr. Jones and the potential for awards to overcome perceived audience resistance to Iraq-theme movies.

MGM took in only about \$44,000 in domestic ticket sales with Irwin Winkler's "Home of the Brave," another returning-vet picture that was released late last year. "We couldn't get anybody to go see it" despite positive test screenings, Mr. Winkler said. He speculated that the audience might prefer a longer interval before viewing events as troubling as war.

Polly Cohen, president of Warner Independent, views Mr. Haggis's film in broader terms. "To me, it's a father-son story," she said. For Mr. Haggis, however, selling that story brings some complications: His movie does not see its son quite the way the real-life father sees his own.

"My son saw some war atrocities over in Iraq, and they had to murder him in order to keep it quiet," said Lanny Davis, a retired Army staff sergeant whose efforts sparked the investigation at a time when his son was assumed to be absent without leave. The atrocity question did not figure significantly in the real-life trial, but the movie puts a twist of its own on the issue.

On another point, however, Mr. Davis had no quarrel with Mr. Haggis. "I've been thinking about flying my own flag upside down," Mr. Davis said. "This isn't my America, the one I stood up for."

#### **Article online at**

<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/07/26/movies/26movi.html?ex=1188964800&en=c816a1d97abaec8e&ei=5070>

# Moving a Nation to Care

*Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and America's Returning Troops*

*by Ilona Meagher*

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## **Press Clipping**

### **PTSD — GET HELP - BEFORE YOU NEED IT**

Monday, August 6, 2007

By Tranette Ledford

#### **Operation Homefront - CinCHouse**

In domestic disputes, by the time a woman dials 911, she's out of options.

In a crisis, by the time a woman starts randomly calling therapists begging for an appointment, she's desperate. These are the lowest points — and they're being faced daily by spouses whose husbands come home vastly different men. Casie is one of many. An Army wife, she was married only seven months when her husband deployed to Iraq. Now, he's home. He's different. And she's scared. "I heard other wives say their husbands came home strangers," Casie said. "But I knew it wouldn't happen to us. Now, we're right there. About once a week, I think I might have to call the police."

Casie's husband has not been medically diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder. But his behavior mirrors the symptoms. "He still goes to work, but I don't think anyone knows how he's really doing," she said. "He comes home, he drinks, he gets mad and then he loses it."

Casie, like many military spouses, has a tremendous challenge. Without a formal diagnosis, her husband is not getting help. She feels paralyzed, afraid to contact his commander because it might hurt his career and afraid to contact his family — or hers — because it might make things worse.

"My family said I jumped into marriage too quickly," Casie said. "But this isn't about how long I knew him. And his family, well, if he knew I talked to them, he'd kill me."

**Casie's situation — and that of her husband — are at the heart of Ilona Meagher's new book, "Moving a Nation to Care." It is a comprehensive look at the prevalence and stigma of PTSD among returning veterans and a call for society to get upfront and personal about it. The book includes interviews with veterans and experts and a host of resources for help. It's also a reminder that more help needs to be available. "There were once cultural rituals in place to help warriors when they returned," Meagher said. "Our society has lost this."**

To get it back, **Meagher** believes the nation has to understand what veterans and their families are facing — then work together to find solutions. It is slowly beginning to happen. **Meagher** cites organizations and ongoing programs. She also offers ideas for military spouses heading down the long road paved by the consequences of combat. "While he's deployed or even before, it might be a good idea to look for someone to talk to and to have a place to go for support," she said. "It can be a one-shot visit or a couple of weeks. You can go in and get the support you need to stay strong."

Having a trusted ally in place during deployment assures it's there later if it's needed.

### *Call the police before there's trouble*

According to **Meagher**, military families are generally hesitant to call the police during disputes or problems at home, because they don't want their husbands arrested or their careers put in jeopardy.

The solution? Contact the police before there's an emergency. Most police departments have community relations units with officers who commonly interact with members of the community in non-emergency settings. Ask to meet with one or have one speak at a gathering of military spouses. Then ask questions. "How will they deal with a domestic dispute if a loved one is having a PTSD episode? Have they trained their personnel in dealing with the special situations that may arise after troops return? Have they considered reaching out to military families? They are in a position to connect with veterans by organizing a monthly BBQ or bowling or whatever else they may come up with," **Meagher** said.

In addition, suggest that local police drop by to welcome home veterans to make an introduction during a time when there's no crisis.

### *Visit the ER before you're sick*

**Meagher** has been approached by nurses and others in the medical community who explained that hospitals and local clinical facilities sometimes have programs for veterans and their families. If they don't, ask about creating one. Ask if there is special care or practices for dealing with PTSD episodes or personnel trained in understanding it. According to Meagher, many of these professionals want to help — they just may not know the extent of need in their community, or they may not have been asked.

### *Get political*

PTSD is not a partisan issue. Political leaders may need to be educated about their veteran communities. Learning about PTSD led the governor of Vermont to start a program for returning veterans. Now, every member of the Vermont National Guard and every active-duty veteran of Vermont is visited personally by an outreach worker when he or she returns from combat. In many cases, veterans find it easier to talk openly in a social rather than clinical setting.

Consider contacting the mayor or city council representative. They often have constituent service providers and even discretionary funds for start-up programs. Let them know what their community needs.

### *Create a personal mobilization plan*

Along with the assistance provided by the military community, there are — or could be created — resources within each community. It starts with being vocal. "Gather with as many in your area who have similar concerns, and work to make your own community as prepared as possible for the needs of returning troops and their families," **Meagher** said.

This can include contacting the local newspaper or writing an editorial. It could mean e-mails or letters to organizations that advocate for communities. Get in touch with them. And remind these organizations and individuals that this is a nation's war. And as such, healing must come from the society to which its service members return.

**Article online at** <http://www.cinchouse.com/SpecialConcern/PTSDGetHelp/Options.htm>

# *Moving a Nation to Care*

*Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and America's Returning Troops*

*by Ilona Meagher*

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## **Press Clipping**

### **ILONA MEAGHER, NIU'S 'CITIZEN JOURNALIST,' BECOMES VOICE FOR VETERANS WITH PTSD**

Tuesday, August 28, 2007

By Tom Parisi

#### ***Northern Today***

**Summer didn't exactly provide a break for NIU's Ilona Meagher.**

Since the spring semester closed, Meagher published a new book, embarked on a cross-country speaking tour and cemented her reputation as a leading voice for combat veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Meagher has been quoted widely in the media, ranging from The New York Times to Pat Buchanan's magazine, The American Conservative. In August, she served as a panel member, along with Gen. Wesley Clark, at the annual convention of the popular liberal blog, the Daily Kos. She even received a phone call one morning recently from presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich, who said he was moved by her book.

These would be heady accomplishments for any faculty member. But Meagher isn't a professor, she's a student at NIU – a junior studying journalism. "It's been an incredible journey," Meagher says from her home office in small-town Caledonia, northeast of Rockford. A 41-year-old former flight attendant, Meagher is not a traditional student nor is she a traditional journalist.

Her work would best be described as "citizen journalism" – the use of blogs and new media by people at the grassroots level to collect, report, analyze and disseminate news and information. And while her role as an advocate for victims of PTSD became more prominent this past summer, it wasn't achieved overnight.

Her book, "Moving a Nation to Care: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and America's Returning Troops," was the result of a year of intense research, but her journey really began in August 2005. That's when she read a story in Seattle Weekly titled "Homefront Casualties."

The article focused on seven homicides and three suicides in the State of Washington involving active troops or veterans of Iraq. One incident in particular struck a nerve with Meagher. Army Specialist Leslie Frederick Jr. had served with distinction in Iraq. Stateside, he became among the first soldiers to receive the U.S. Army's new Combat Action Badge. Less than two weeks after receiving the award in a formal ceremony, he committed suicide.

"I wanted to know what happened to him, so I started digging," Meagher says. "And I wondered how much this was going on. I realized that PTSD affects not only soldiers but also their families, employers, churches and communities." She began collecting media reports of combat-related PTSD incidents.

Eventually her work developed into the “PTSD Timeline” that is now maintained by ePluribus Media, a citizen-journalism initiative. The only public collection of possible, probable and confirmed reports of post-combat reintegration difficulties, the timeline has been accessed by dozens of media outlets and government offices.

“That’s the most significant contribution I’ve made on this issue. No one else was keeping track of this information,” **Meagher** says. “All types of news media, from The New Yorker to the New Republic, have used the database in their reporting.”

**Meagher** also launched an online blog, “PTSD Combat: Winning the War Within.” In the spring of 2006, her work drew the attention of Ig Publishing in New York, which asked her to write a book on the plight of returning veterans. Meagher devoted herself to the project, reading all she could on PTSD and interviewing veterans, their family members, veterans’ advocates and medical experts.

“Moving a Nation to Care” was published in late May 2007.

“The whole point of the book is to bring the average person, just like me, up to speed on the issue of PTSD,” Meagher says. “I also wanted to provide a resource for veterans and military families while pointing out why average citizens should care about the issue and what they can do about it.”

The book frames present-day debates over PTSD in the context of history. Meagher found mentions of combat stress in ancient Greek writings and eventually chronicled 80 different names for the disorder, including nostalgia, hysteria, shellshock, buck fever, combat fatigue, battle reaction and disorderly action of the heart. Her studies at NIU helped as she researched and wrote the book – and worked to publicize it.

“So many of my professors went out of their way to help me,” **Meagher** says. “They gave me opportunities to practice my presentations and broadcast news of my work to others. And they gave me personal assurances that I could accomplish my goals.”

In Communication Professor Jeff Chown’s class, Meagher studied films on Iraq, learned about Middle East history and participated in intense discussion about representations of the war. In an honors class taught by English Professor Steve Franklin, her work would crop up in discussions about the great thinkers throughout history and their views toward war. Franklin, himself a veteran, took an interest in her work outside of the classroom as well.

“Ilona is really engaged in life, in terms of politics, policy and contemporary and moral issues,” Franklin says. “She provides an exemplary example for students and citizens.”

Communication Professor Laura Vazquez led Meagher to resources for her book and helped her prepare for speaking in front of a camera. Meagher also presented her work to students in the classes of Instructor Jason Akst. “My students were just stunned,” Akst said. “What she’s accomplished so far is a testament not only to her work but also to the rise and possibility of citizen journalism.”

**Meagher** continues to be active as an advocate for PTSD. She recently visited Walter Reed Army Medical Center, which is giving copies of her book to military chaplains. Just last week she served as a panel member on a discussion of PTSD that followed a screening in Chicago of “In the Valley of Elah,” the story of an Iraq War veteran’s disappearance, starring Tommy Lee Jones and Susan Sarandon.

Akst says he expects more great things from Meagher in the future. “I’ve already asked her what her next book is going to be about,” he says.

**Article online at** <http://www.niu.edu/northerntoday/2007/aug27/meagher.shtml>