MY TOUR IN HELL

A Marine's Battle with Combat Trauma

David M. Powell

What People Are Saying about *My Tour in Hell*

"Powell describes his tour in Vietnam with the Marines in great detail which sets the stage for his personal journey home with all the painful memories and problems that surface with someone who has gone to hell and come back to tell about it.

"His autobiographical work is a must read for veterans who remain stuck between two worlds—the physical reality of civilian life while the psychological, emotional and spiritual life remain on the battlefield half a world away. Healing is painful but so necessary to reintegrate those two worlds into one. Healing is not forgetting; healing is making sense of the past in order to live life in the present with a restored hope for the future. Powell articulates this process very well and has given a tremendous gift to the combat veteran community of any generation."

Father Philip G. Salois, M.S.
Founder, International Conference of War Veteran Ministers
(*formerly the National Conference of Viet Nam Veteran Ministers)*
National Chaplain, Vietnam Veterans of America

"The connection of David's problems in his current life and his Viet Nam experiences is one of the clearest descriptions of how trauma affects our lives I have ever read. *My Tour in Hell* is a tribute to David's unwillingness to give up on himself in the face of great unhappiness."

—Laura W. Groshong, LICSW (Seattle, WA)

"Years in combat zones, group psychotherapy with combat vets diagnosed with PTSD and TIR training qualifies me to recommend this book. *My Tour in Hell* attests to David's journey from the boundary of a Marine grunt's PTSD despair to the horizon of integration, risk, and new meaning. Those in the helping professions will learn how the negative emotional 'charge' of trauma can be partially or totally eliminated through the adept facilitation of Traumatic Incident Reduction."

—Sister Kateri Koverman, LISW, ICDC

"Powell presents a brutally honest and riveting account of one man's descent into the dehumanizing realities of war. However, the journey is worth it to relive his dramatic ascension and redemption from the abyss through the life changing, powerful, and therapeutic techniques of Traumatic Incident Reduction." — Rev. James W. Clifton, LCSW, PhD

"Powell begins and ends with hope, and with a method that helped him to finally, and fully, resolve the many traumas he endured. He gives the reader a litany of incidents of trauma, and shows how the whole context of the battlefields, surrounding regions, and finally even home comes under the cloud of a hell many men and women shared with him, a hell that is being created many thousands of times in modern times. The book deserves to be read by therapists, veterans, and their loved ones."

—Rene Ely, M.Div., LMFT

"*My Tour in Hell* is an insightful insider's view of the traumatic events that occurred during the Vietnam War and the devastating after-effects that can follow. For those not familiar with the symptoms of PTSD, this was a vivid and clear view of how this disorder disrupts the lives of those who suffer from it untreated. Definitely a valuable read for anyone who works with this population or who have family or friends who are struggling with PTSD." —Kirsten Krohn, MFT

"Not every ex-soldier suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. The ones who do are the sensitive, caring people exposed to the brutalizing conditions of war. David Powell is one of these people, as becomes obvious to the reader of his book.

With young men and women currently exposed to danger in the Middle East, this veteran's story is relevant to today. With utter honesty and integrity, he shows the terrible effects of war. However, his story ends on a high note, because Traumatic Incident Reduction has finally allowed him to cope with the consequences."

—Robert Rich, MSc, PhD, M.A.P.S., A.A.S.H.

"David Powell's book held my interest throughout the entire read. As a therapist working with US military, I was particularly intrigued by the therapeutic technique utilized and would love to have the opportunity for training. I was most impressed that the author did not present himself as totally recovered, but as functionally recovered with a new quality of life. I will definitely use the book with soldiers and family members."

—Sally Wright, LMFT (Baumholder, Germany)

"This book provides a first-person account of how combat trauma evolves and is a testament to the power of Traumatic Incident Reduction. *My Tour in Hell* is an invaluable resource for working with combat trauma survivors." —Judy Bronson, PhD, NCC

"David's story demonstrating how possible it is for anyone who has suffered traumatic stress to have healing and recovery vis-à-vis Traumatic Incident Reduction. We plan to start an 'Adopt a Veteran' program so any Vet who wants a copy of your book can have same."

—Mary Murphy, MA, NHA, Former VA and Prison Chaplain

"*My Tour In Hell* is a riveting account of unimaginable pain, suffering, and healing. David Powell takes the reader step by step through his painful metamorphosis from a young, idealistic recruit to an uncaring, angry trauma survivor, and finally to an inspiring, compassionate crusader. His message is one of hope and healing. Through the use of Traumatic Incident Reduction (TIR), David is able to process and release the toxic memories of his tour in Vietnam. His story will challenge the belief that people cannot heal from horrific circumstances. TIR provides a gentle methodology for confronting traumatic images and then releasing them, enabling the user to move the memories into the past. One only wishes that he had encountered this treatment modality much earlier in life, before suffering through the many years of broken relationships, lost jobs, and substance abuse."

—Patricia Sherman, Ph.D., LCSW www.HealingIsPossible.com

"I picked up this book one night and couldn't let go of it until 3:00AM. I served in the Israeli Defense Force and it brought back so many memories! This book offers one of the best, most intimate descriptions of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that I have ever read precisely because the author is a fellow sufferer, not a smug psychiatrist or theoretician. His style of prose—direct, matter-of-fact, and unflinchingly honest—also helps. Above all, this book is about hope. There are glimpses of humanity amidst the worst atrocities and there are effective therapies to coax the victims of war back into peace and life. It worked for the author who has endured decades of trauma-induced ruination and instability in everything from marriage to business. If he was salvaged, so can us all."

—Sam Vaknin, PhD, author of *Malignant Self Love: Narcissism Revisited*

"*My Tour in Hell* is a wrenching book to read as the author bares his soul, revealing the gruesome details of his combat experiences and the personal aftermath as he struggled for decades to deal with the PTSD blighting his life. His final recovery through innovative therapy is a triumph and a new beginning. Read it to better understand the Vietnam Vet and the little support they got after their tour in Hell."

—Chuck Chriss, www.Olive-Drab.com

"*My Tour in Hell* is the first book in *The Reflections of History Series*. It is a very powerfully written autobiography by David W. Powell about his horrific experiences while serving in Vietnam and how his life drastically changed upon his return to the states. The horrors that Powell had to endure while in Vietnam caused him to experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). As a result of this disorder, he is unable to maintain steady employment, healthy relationships, and he has difficulties with his emotions. The disorder also affects his ability to sleep, and keeps him stuck in a hypervigilant state.

"I highly recommend this book for people who are either experiencing PTSD or are close to someone that has it. I think that Rehabilitation Counselors who work with military veterans would also benefit from reading this because it will give them a greater understanding of what these veterans have gone through. War Veterans would also gain something from reading this book because they will find that they are not alone in dealing with the trauma created by their experiences.

"I asked a disabled Marine Vet if I should share this book with my nephew while he is in Iraq. I wasn't sure if it would be too much for him to read while he is involved in combat. The Marine felt that it would be good for him because it talks about the problems and symptoms that he might experience and most importantly how to deal with them. *My Tour in Hell* shows that there is hope for people that are experiencing PTSD."

—Paige Lovitt for *Reader Views* (5/06)

"This book could be helpful for some Vietnam vets that I saw in an earlier work setting. The book is well-suited to the audience of is folks struggling with combat-related PTSD. Powell is succinct, sometimes blunt in his writing. This is not great flowery prose, but it is not intended to be either. We certainly have a political environment that is averse to making comparisons between Iraq and Vietnam. Powell remains free of the politics involved which will allow his words to reach a wider audience."

—Jason Hobbs, LCSW, MDiv

My Tour in Hell

A Marine's Battle with Combat Trauma

By David W. Powell

Book #1 in the *Reflections of History Series*

Modern History Press

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My Tour in Hell: A Marine's Battle with Combat Trauma

Book number one of the Reflections in History Series

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Reflections of History Series

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This series provides a venue for contemporary authors who have lived through significant times in history to reflect on the impact of events and lessons they learned from them.

1. *My Tour in Hell: A Marine's Battle with Combat Trauma* by David W. Powell
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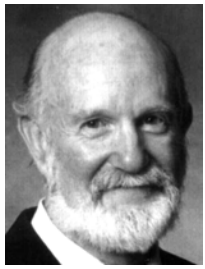
"Those who cannot remember the past
are condemned to repeat it."
George Santayana in *Life of Reason* (1905)

About our Series Editor, Robert Rich, Ph.D.



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Robert Rich, M.Sc., Ph.D., M.A.P.S., A.A.S.H. is a highly experienced counseling psychologist. His web site www.anxietyanddepression-help.com is a storehouse of helpful information for people suffering from almost any way we can make ourselves and each other unhappy.

Bob is also a multiple award-winning writer of both fiction and non-fiction, and a professional editor. His writing can be found at www.bobswriting.com. You are advised not to visit him there unless you have the time to get lost for a while.

Two of his books are tools for psychological self-help: *Anger and Anxiety: Be in Charge of your Emotions and Control Phobias* and *Personally Speaking: Single Session Email Therapy*. However, his philosophy and psychological knowledge come through in all his writing, which is perhaps why three of his books have won international awards, and he has won many minor prizes. Dr. Rich currently resides in Wombat Hollow in Australia.

Table of Contents

Photos, Maps, and Illustrations i
Acknowledgments iii
Foreword by Tom Joyce v
Preface xi
Chapter 1 — Welcome to Hell 1
Chapter 2 — Operation Rio Blanco 23
Chapter 3 — The New Guy 35
Chapter 4 — The Sixth Commandment 45
Chapter 5 — These are My Demons 53
Chapter 6 — R&R Honolulu and a Look Back 67
Chapter 7 — An Office in Hell 89
Chapter 8 — Back in the USA 105
Chapter 9 — Return to Civilian Life 113
Chapter 10 — Post Traumatic Stress Disorder 123
Chapter 11 — Traumatic Incident Reduction (TIR) 137
Chapter 12 — Recovery 149
About the Author 159
Appendix A — Study Guide 163
Suggested Reading 168
Appendix B — FAQ from the National center for PTSD 169
Appendix C — Vietnam/Military Glossary 175
Index 179

Photos, Maps, and Illustrations

Strategic view of Da Nang and Delta Co. TAORs. 2
Typical UH-1 Medevac operation (10/16/1969) 7
Drying out the M20 rocket launcher on a sunny day outside my tent. ... 9
Disassembled M-20, Korean War 11
Marine Corps enlistees train with M20, Korean War 12
Point man signals "danger ahead" on a patrol 15
Sergeant Tom Mizell 19
Bravo Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines load into CH-46 24
Operation Rio Blanco battle orders 26
Hill 41 TAOR Map 29
Taking a break in the Ville 30
VC wrapped in duct tape, found deceased 31
Heading out on a patrol from Hill 41 36
Suiting up for another patrol 47
Girl at sandbag site (01/17/1967) 50
Ville at the base of Hill 41 53
VC committed suicide in a tunnel rather than facing capture 56
A Viet Cong prisoner awaits interrogation 58
On patrol, spread out to avoid being an easy sniper target 60
Hill 55 TAOR 62
Prestridge on patrol 64
Kathy visiting me during boot camp graduation 71
Downtown Honolulu in 1967 73
Marine boot camp graduation photo of David W. Powell 82
Kenny Haas with his M60 machine gun 93
Receiving my Purple Heart (07/06/1967) 99
Vietnam protests become common on campuses nationwide 109
1st Degree Black Belt Certificate 116
Combat history – Expeditions – Awards Record 160
DD214 (Discharge Papers) 161

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Gerald French, a fine gentleman and friend, who contributed to my mental health recovery as he played the role of my "Facilitator" and I the "Viewer" over the course of time we spent in one-on-one Traumatic Incident Reduction (TIR) therapy sessions in Menlo Park, California in 1989. Without his skills and professional abilities, I would not have been able to retrieve more than a few obscured, unresolved traumatic episodes I experienced in Vietnam.

Tom Joyce, a good friend, excellent listener, and fine author, befriended me during my time spent with Mr. French, and afterwards, as I was engaged in the TIR process. I am extremely grateful that he wrote the Foreword to this memoir. I am also proud that he let me quote a passage he crafted, which discusses my recovery of a buried traumatic experience.

Pieter Van Aggelen, a friend and fellow combat-experienced Marine Infantryman, who introduced me to Mr. French.

Terry Tully, a friend and fellow combat-experienced Marine Infantryman, who served in the same Da Nang war zone in 1968 that I did in 1967. He encouraged me to submit my PTSD claim to the Veterans Administration and Social Security.

Joe Miller, a combat-experienced American whom I met in the VA group in Menlo Park, California, and remains a friend to this day.

Last, and first of all Susan M. Dettlaff, a beautiful woman, whose heart is bigger than "all outdoors." She quietly stood by my side as I worked on this piece. She endured, without mentioning it to me, the darkness, sadness, and pain I experienced as I retrieved these memories, re-experienced them, and filed them back in my memory bank.

To the other relatives, friends, and associates whose names I did not mention in this acknowledgement, I offer my profound apologies and regret that I inadvertently made no mention of you.

Foreword by Tom Joyce

I remember thinking he was the kind of guy you'd expect to see keynoting a sales convention. Executive material—smartly dressed; blue-eyed; mid-forties; strong, square jaw and neatly trimmed blond hair. To look at him, you'd never have suspected that David Powell had literally been through hell.

It was April of 1989, and I was attending a conference of the Institute for Research in Metapsychology in San Francisco, where my friends, Gerald French and Dr. Frank A. Gerbode, were reporting on a technique they called Traumatic Incident Reduction, or TIR. On Saturday afternoon, David Powell—a Lance Corporal with Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines of the 1st Marine Division at Chu Lai and Da Nang—spoke most eloquently about his combat experiences in Vietnam between October 1966 and November 1967, his subsequent years of struggling with the nightmare of post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD], and his rough-shod treatment at "Club Fed"—the Veterans' Administration state-of-the art hospital in Menlo Park during the late 1980s. "It was not as advertised," David reported, contrasting the VA's medieval approach with his hi-tech experience as a TIR "viewer". I was hooked.

TIR has its roots in Josef Breuer's "talking cure—a recalling or re-experiencing of stressful or disturbing situations or events which appear to have precipitated a neurosis."[1] Sigmund Freud used it as his working model for psychoanalysis, noting that the key to a recent disturbance lay in an *earlier*, similar trauma, sometimes an entire chain of incidents.[2] But Gerbode and French went a step further, employing repetitive and gradient aspects of Behavior Therapy "desensitization," and wrapping it compassionately in Carl Rogers' "person-centered" model, wherein a therapist refrains from offering any authoritative interpretation of his client's experiences. In TIR, the patient/doctor model is obviated: a client is the "viewer" and his therapist is the process "facilitator".

It seemed to have worked wonders for David. After his presentation, I collared him in the hotel lobby and asked if he'd be willing to let me interview him in depth about his experiences. David agreed, and we spent hours together. He began to introduce me to other vets he'd met at the Menlo Park facility, and six months later, I'd taped interviews with twenty-odd soldiers, psychiatrists, and VA staff—including the director of their

PTSD program. This visceral, eye-opening exploration culminated in a piece called "Back Into the Heart of Darkness", which was subsequently rejected by *Rolling Stone*, *Mother Jones*, *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, *Atlantic Monthly*, and *Harper's* as "biased."

But in retrospect, bias turned out to be a euphemism for compassion fatigue. In August of 1990, our young men and women began leaving for Saudi Arabia to form a "Desert Shield" along the border of Kuwait against the evil Republican Guard of Saddam Hussein, and nobody in the American media wanted to hear the complaints of traumatized Vietnam "losers" at a time like that.

• • •

Richard M. Nixon wrote, "No event in American History is more misunderstood than the Vietnam War. It was misreported then, and it is misremembered now. Rarely have so many people been so wrong about so much. Never have the consequences of their misunderstanding been so tragic."[3]

Despite my differences of opinion with our late, former president on most other issues, I couldn't agree more with his statement about Vietnam. But then, I was sitting in a high school classroom at the time, while David Powell was *there*—literally in the thick of it. Insult was added to injury when he came home to public condemnation instead of a tickertape parade, and then spent the next thirty years having to contend with popular myths and misconception about the undeclared war he'd fought in the jungles of Southeast Asia.

It needs to be said that the American military did *not* lose the war against the North Vietnamese Army [N.V.A.] and Viet Cong. In fact, the accord calling for a peaceful reunification of the country was signed in Paris on 27 January 1973. All parties agreed to a stalemate. The last American troops departed on 29 March 1973, and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam [A.R.V.N.] held Saigon until 30 April 1975, when it fell—quite violently—to the N.V.A., who had signed the treaty.[4]

Contrary to popular misconception, two-thirds of the men and women who served in Vietnam were volunteers, whereas two-thirds of those in World War II were drafted.[5] And despite my own educational deferment, the Vietnam War was not fought by the poor and uneducated: 79

percent of the troops had a high school education or better. It's also a myth that a disproportionate number of African-Americans were killed in combat: 12.5 percent of the casualties were black, 86 percent were white, and 1.2 percent were of other races.[6]

It's been implied—often by vets of other conflicts—that the fighting in Vietnam was less intense than World War II. But in fact, the average infantryman in Vietnam had to face 240 days of combat in a one-year period, while the average South Pacific G.I. saw 40 days in four years.[7] Of the 2.59 million Americans who served in Vietnam between 1964 and 1973—about a million of whom saw combat—58,169 were killed, and 304,000 were wounded. The percentage of amputations and crippling wounds was 300 percent higher than in World War II. 75,000 Vietnam veterans were physically disabled,[8] and according to a four-year study conducted by the Research Triangle Institute for the Veterans' Administration, an estimated 480,000 suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.

PTSD is not unique to Vietnam Veterans. During World War II, not only was the pre-induction psychiatric rejection rate nearly four times higher than that of World War I, psychiatric casualties were 300 percent higher[9] but were accorded non-clinical terms like "shell shock" and "battle fatigue". At one point in the early 1940s, more men were being discharged for "war neurosis" than were being drafted.[10] 23 percent of the men who suffered from battlefield psychological breakdowns never returned to combat. During the Korean War, owing to immediate on-site treatment provided, psychiatric evacuations dropped to six percent of total casualties. But in Vietnam, psychological breakdowns were at an *all-time low*—only twelve per thousand.[11]

An acronym called DEROS [Date of Expected Return from Over Seas]—meaning a soldier's tour of duty only lasted twelve months, or thirteen if he was a Marine— contributed to this apparent improvement. So did drugs like marijuana, opium, and heroin. And soldiers caught self-medicating were given swift administrative discharges. Thus the whole question of psychological trauma was neatly—and deceptively—avoided. The Defense Department's official neuropsychiatric casualty rate in Vietnam was significantly lower than in either Korea or World War II.[12]

But DEROS had its downside: in contrast to World War II, where men spent weeks—sometimes months—returning from battle, decom-

pressing aboard ships, sharing their experiences with understanding peers, and were honored as heroes when they arrived back home, the Vietnam veteran endured a solitary flight and hometown hostilities. While the elation of survival suppressed early symptoms of PTSD in most Vietnam veterans, for far too many, feelings of restlessness, mistrust, and cynicism evolved into depression, insomnia, flaring tempers, and a morbid obsession with memories of combat.

It wasn't until the mid-1970s that the Forgotten Warrior Project, funded by the Disabled American Veterans, produced a landmark study of the long-term social consequences of combat exposure. As a result, PTSD was formally recognized by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980.

Although its etiology is still passionately debated, the symptoms of PTSD are broadly acknowledged to include flashbacks, nightmares, hyperarousal, exaggerated startle reaction, explosive outbursts, extreme vigilance, irritability, panic symptoms, and sleep disturbance. Complications often include alcohol and drug abuse, chronic anxiety, unemployment, divorce, depression, and increased risk for suicide. In 1988, it was estimated that 40 percent of Vietnam veterans had a drug problem, and nearly half had been divorced at least once.[13]

• • •

As a result of my enthusiastic "bias" toward the efficacy of TIR in treating the root cause of PTSD rather than merely alleviating its symptoms, David Powell's struggle with the past was published only in trauma newsletters and websites for the next fifteen years, until Victor Volkman included "Back Into the Heart of Darkness" in his groundbreaking anthology *Beyond Trauma: Conversations on Traumatic Incident Reduction* (2004) . Even now, the accounts of some of the men I interviewed are raising controversy among special interest veteran's groups who, like the "Swiftboaters," want to rewrite military history to conform to their mythology. In the face of this, David has decided to tell his full story—the one he spent decades trying to forget.

The fact that this book is now in your hands speaks volumes about David's extraordinary honesty and bravery. *My Tour in Hell, A Marine's Battle with Combat Trauma* is his sometimes cold-blooded account of thirteen months in Vietnam that had an indelible impact on the rest of his life.

Reading about David's early days as a cocky Kenpo Karate champ all the way through to his painful years of post-war trauma—and yes, unapologetic bias about modes of therapy—I'm particularly proud of him, because I know how difficult it was for David to speak about these things—let alone write about them.

His account comes at a particularly poignant moment in American history, a moment when our country is being led by a Commander in Chief and his cadre of academic ideologues who not only avoided military service—in Vietnam or anywhere else—but have managed to embroil our troops in a quagmire all too reminiscent of the horrors in Southeast Asia, and sell American voters the simplistic promise of "Iraqi Freedom" as if it were a brand of soft drink. Have we really forgotten the lessons of our own history? Walter Cronkite's scathing condemnation of Nixon's "Vietnamization" policy? Country Joe McDonald's "Fish Cheer?"

David Powell has not forgotten the lesson. He will never lose sight of it, or stop pointing it out, and after reading *My Tour in Hell* you'll understand why. Even though our current administration—in the comfort of their armchair chariots—will never have a clue what David means by *semper fidelis*, one can only hope his no-holds-barred candor will be of some solace to the veterans of our current misunderstood, misreported, and misremembered conflict when they come home to its lingering memories.

— Tom Joyce,
January 2006

End Notes

[1] *The Oxford Companion to the Mind,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987)

[2] Freud, Sigmund, *Two Short Accounts of Psychoanalysis*, (tr.) James Strachey (Singapore: Penguin Books, 1984), p. 37

[3] Nixon, Richard M., *No More Vietnams* (New York: Avon Books, 1994)

[4] *Information Please Almanac*, (Boston & New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996)

[5] McCaffrey, Barry R., speech given Memorial Day 1993 at Vietnam Memorial in Washington D.C. [reproduced in *Pentagram*, 4 June 1993]

[6] Combat Area Casualty File [CACF] November 1993, Center for Electronic Records, National Archives,

Washington, D.C.

[7] Ibid. McCaffrey

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[9] Figley, Charles R., *Stress Disorders among Vietnam Veterans: Theory, Research and Treatment* (New York: Brunner/Mazel, 1978)

[10] Tiffany, W.J. & Allerton, W.S., "Army Psychiatry in the Mid-60s" (American Journal of Psychiatry, 1967, 123: 810-821)

[11] Bourne, P.G., Men, Stress and Vietnam (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970)

[12] The President's Commission on Mental Health, 1978

[13] HealthCommunities.com

Preface

Are you a survivor of severe trauma? Then this book is for you. I have written this memoir so you can understand my own traumatic experiences in combat and in my life after returning from the killing fields of Vietnam.

I will take you with me through my journey into, through, and out the other side of trauma. I am, and will forever be, a recovering casualty of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD[1]). The United States Veterans Administration has rated my disability at 100%, *total and permanent in nature.* The Social Security Administration has also rated my disability at 100%, totally unemployable. I am grateful for these considerations, and I am positive that I retain my creativity, trustworthiness, and good will toward others.

There is closure and healing for us casualties, as my story shows.

I hope you will find the journey interesting, especially if you have not ***been there, done that*** and wondered what it would have been like to serve your country as a combatant in the chaos and fog of the Vietnam conflict. Although I served just thirteen months in 'Nam during 1966-67, I have seen enough grief, suffering, and atrocity to last a lifetime. I have witnessed the very worst inhumanity that mankind can dish out, a callous disregard for the lives of others and self without limit. It was an environment so heinous that men would set off live hand grenades *against themselves* just to escape its grip. It was only my faith in God that carried me through to the end of my tour in hell.

The next two decades following my return continued to be hellish and painful for me. The personal cost of my disability was immense. Before the war, I had a wife, a decent job, friends, and even a house in the suburbs. After the war, I held as many as eighteen different jobs in the space of ten years and left two different sets of children to grow up without their dad. I was both afraid of my anger and embarrassed by my severe startle reactions, hypervigilance, and lack of emotional control. That's what 100% disability means to me.

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[1] See the Frequently Asked Questions about PTSD, from the National Center for PTSD, in Appendix B.

In late 1988, I was introduced to a psychological therapy known as Traumatic Incident Reduction, which has vastly improved my mental health and probably saved me from committing suicide… Yes, I was in that much mental anguish. TIR also helped other combat vets I have known personally, including my friend Pieter who had hit rock-bottom, using heroin to self-medicate.

Since therapy, I have discovered a richness in life that is worth embracing. I have found infinite patience and empathy for the travails of others. I have reclaimed my mental health and my self-respect. My self-esteem is strong and growing. I am happy and able to have relationships again.

I believe that many, many others have also experienced traumatic episodes in their lives, and I respect that. This book has been written for those men and women who served their country in battle, have returned with loss of limb, senses, and/or have psychological wounds. It is also written for the people that love them, and is also relevant to anyone who has suffered severe trauma: survivors of criminal assault including rape and domestic violence, or natural disasters, terrorist action, and so on.

Survivors
by Siegfried Sassoon

No doubt they'll soon get well; the shock and strain
Have caused their stammering, disconnected talk.
Of course they're 'longing to go out again,' —
These boys with old, scared faces, learning to walk.
They'll soon forget their haunted nights; their cowed
Subjection to the ghosts of friends who died,—
Their dreams that drip with murder; and they'll be proud
Of glorious war that shatter'd all their pride...
Men who went out to battle, grim and glad;
Children, with eyes that hate you, broken and mad.

Craiglockhart, October 1917

1 Welcome to Hell

Combat is a living hell that can induce profound traumatic stress in veterans. In my opinion, I had more than my share of traumatic experiences. I served in the Marine Corps with Delta Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Marines, of the 1st Marine Division at Chu Lai and Da Nang. Come along with me and I'll tell you some of what I saw and did in 1966 and 1967 in Viet Nam.

I'll also tell you how my life was impacted in very negative ways and how I found help some two decades later.

I was in Chu Lai, South Vietnam, on November 7th, 1966, which was about one month after arriving in country. Ironically, exactly a year from that day I'd leave that hellhole and return to the United States, the country I was proud to serve and protect.

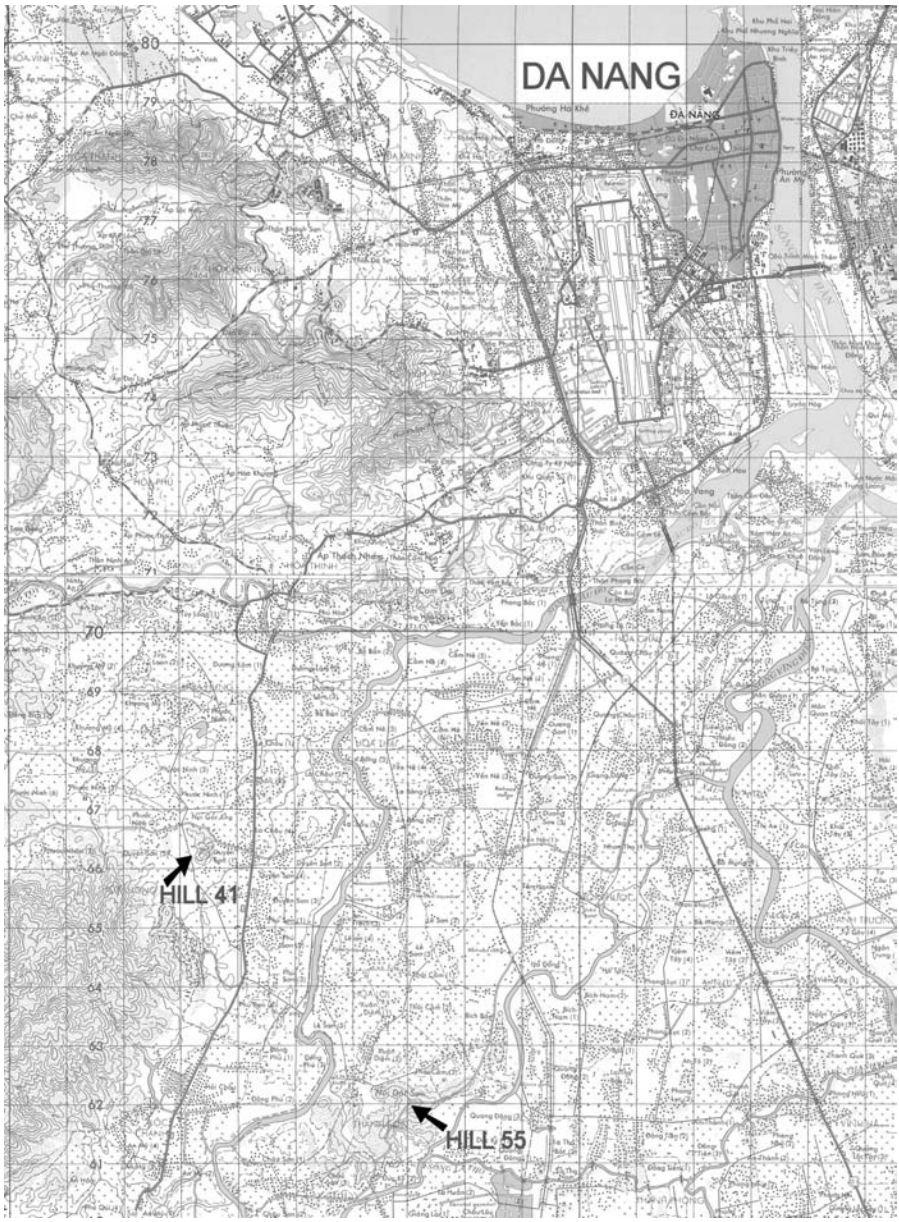
My MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) was 0351, or anti-tank assault man. My primary weapon was the M20 3.5 inch Rocket Launcher. I'd been in country with Delta Company for two weeks but I only knew the last name of my team leader, Jones.

Jones had been in Vietnam five months before me. He was a quiet, down-to-earth black guy. He was a bit taller than me, and he spoke low and softly, like he didn't want anyone to notice him. Jones was concerned about Jones getting home in one piece, and alive. We all had that same goal.

I'd met five other men who lived in the tent I then called home, but I'd forgotten their names at that point.

I was going on my first company-sized *search-and-destroy* mission that day. I'd be in the countryside for the next seven days. I was edgy and afraid of the unknown I was going to know intimately.

I wore my boot camp issued boots, trousers, and shirt. My helmet, flak jacket, rifle, bayonet knife, and backpack were field-worn. I had picked up



Strategic view of Da Nang and Delta Co. TAORs.
Scale: 1 grid square equals 1 km (0.62 miles)
Map courtesy of USGS.