

# Understanding Military Culture

## A Primer in Cultural Competence working with military members and families

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# The Vignette

A vet, after struggling with reintegration issues finally sought counseling. During the biopsychosocial intake he was asked what he did in the Army. He explained that he was an infantryman. The counselor asked what's that and he explained that he was one of the warfighters who were the trigger pullers and their job was to locate the enemy and overwhelm them with superior fire power. She asked what war he was in and he advised that he had been fortunate that there was no wars during his time. And she retorted oh! so you did nothing.

Participant JF statement (2-192020)- I found the encounter troubling

# Objectives

An overview of the US military, its customs, and culture

Understanding the culture to remove barriers, aid in rapport, and offer common language

Caveats in dealing with veterans

Understand the most frequent disabilities encountered in combat veterans

Improve outreach to veterans

# Who is a veteran?

- Any person who served on active duty in any branch of the armed forces of America (Title 38)
- Department of Veterans Affairs eligibility for services:
  - **A Discharge from active duty under other than dishonorable conditions.**
  - **Many benefits require wartime service defined as:**
    - WWII: 7 Dec 1941-31 Dec 1946
    - Korean War: 27 June 1950-31 Jan 1955
    - Vietnam War: 5 Aug 1964 (or 28 Feb 1961 if in-country)- 7 May 1975
    - Gulf Wars- (including Desert Storm, OIF/OEF): 2 Aug 1990

# Why do people join the military?



# Common factors across branches

- Each soldier, Marine, airman, sailor have their own story
- Each soldier, Marine, sailor, airman have many stories in common
- Not just a job but a way of life
- Duty, Honor, Country
- No matter how short or when, the experience remains an important factor in their life

# Defined Structure

- Military life is regimented and predictable
- Defined Chain of Command
- Right versus wrong
- Doctrine and regulation
- Engrosses entire life on and off duty
  - Feelings of loss when structure goes away



# D.O.D (Department of Defense)

- There are nine uniformed branches
- Approximately 3 million total in service
- Civilian controlled
  - Commander-in-Chief is the POTUS

Mission is to provide for defense and security

# US ARMY

- Mission- Fight and win wars with sustained land domination across a full-range of military operations
- Senior service- Oldest and largest branch (Guard has been in existence longer)
- Active Duty: About 540K which is 49% of total force, primarily combat and combat support units
- Army Guard: 360K or 33% of total strength, combat and combat support
- Army Reserve: 205K which is 18% of force strength, combat support and combat service support



# US MARINE CORPS

- Americas 911 Rapid Deployment Force, seizure of or defense of advanced naval bases for projection of land operations
- Soldiers of the sea-Established in 1775 to serve on-board frigates as naval infantry. Today always on-float projects power from the sea. Smallest branch yet has served in every U.S. conflict
- Active duty: 195K or 83% of total Marine forces
- Marforres- 39K Reserve Marines 17% of total force
- Frequent deployments



# US NAVY

- Mission: Projection of power from the sea. Strategic and tactical delivery of combat power from the fleet
- Formed in 1775 but disbanded in 1783. Reformed in 1797 to fight Islamic pirates on the Barbary coast.
- Active Duty: 317K, 83% of total naval strength
- Navy Reserve: 62K 16% of total force
- Have had non-traditional roles in the global war on terrorism



# US AIR FORCE

- Mission: Tactical air combat support and strategic air lift to attain and control superiority of airspace
- Formed as part of the Army until split off from the Army Air Corps in 1947. Became own branch
- Active duty: 333K or 65 % of total air forces
- Air Guard: 105.7 K 21% of forces
- Air Force Reserve: 71K 14%



# Other Branches

- US Coast Guard- Active 42k, Reserve 9K
  - Under Department of Homeland Security, significant role in protection of our seas and ports
  - Can be transferred to the Navy during time of War
- US Public Health Service commissioned corps- 6K
- Space Force- 6434
- Merchant Marine - 5800
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration commissioned corps (300)

# Military Operations

- Global War on Terrorism
  - Afghanistan-OEF Operation Enduring Freedom, 2001- present
  - Iraq- OIF operation Iraqi Freedom 2003-2010
- ISIL- Islamic State Militants Syria and Iraq Operation Inherent Resolve
- Korea
- Vietnam
- Horn of Africa
- Homeland Defense

# Military Structure

## Rank

- Commissioned Officer: overall management, planning, and leadership, generally must be college graduate
  - Pay grades- O-1 to O-10
- Enlisted: Specialists of the military, those who carry out the missions
  - Pay grades-E-1 to E10
  - Non-commissioned officers (NCO) enlisted who hold a position of authority and leadership
    - Pay grades- E-4 to E-10
  - Warrant Officers: Highly skilled technicians
    - Pay grades- W-1 to W-5

Specialty: MOS Military Occupational Specialty; AFSC Air Force Specialty Code; NEC Naval Enlisted Code



# Core Values



Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, integrity, courage



Honor, Courage, Commitment



Honor, Courage, Commitment



Integrity, Service before self, Excellence



Honor, Respect, Devotion to Duty

# Mottos

US Army- This We'll Defend

US Marine Corps- Semper Fidelis Always Faithful

US Navy- Non Sibi Sed Patriae Not for self but country

US Air Force- Aim High-fly-fight-win

US Coast Guard- Semper Paratus Always Ready

Merchant Marine- Acta Non Verba Deeds not Words

# Status

- Active Duty- Full Time military
- National Guard- part timers 38 days/year
  - AGR are full time
  - Dual role- State and federal
  - Army and Air Force only
- Reserves- Part timers, also have AGR
- Merchant Marine

# Branch Differences

## Individual Cultures

- Rivalries
- Marines vs Army, Marines vs Navy, Marines/Navy vs everyone, Everyone vs Air Force

## Uniforms

- Branch Specific

## Rank/Insignia

- Mostly different, hard to distinguish rank structure

# Common Humor about Differences

- **How to Tell the Difference Between the Branches of the US Armed Forces!**

If you give the command "**SECURE THE BUILDING**", here is what the different services would do:

- The **NAVY** would turn out the lights and lock the doors.
- The **ARMY** would surround the building with defensive fortifications, tanks and concertina wire.
- The **MARINE CORPS** would assault the building, using overlapping fields of fire from all appropriate points on the perimeter killing everyone inside
- The **AIR FORCE** would take out a three-year lease with an option to buy the building.

# Other Humorous Examples

## Recruit Training

- Marines rise at 0500, train until 2200
- Army rises at 0600, trains until 1900
- Navy rises at 0900, trains until 1100, lunch until 1300, train until 1600
- Air Force rises at 1000, breakfast in bed, lunch at 1200, nap at 1400, train until 1500

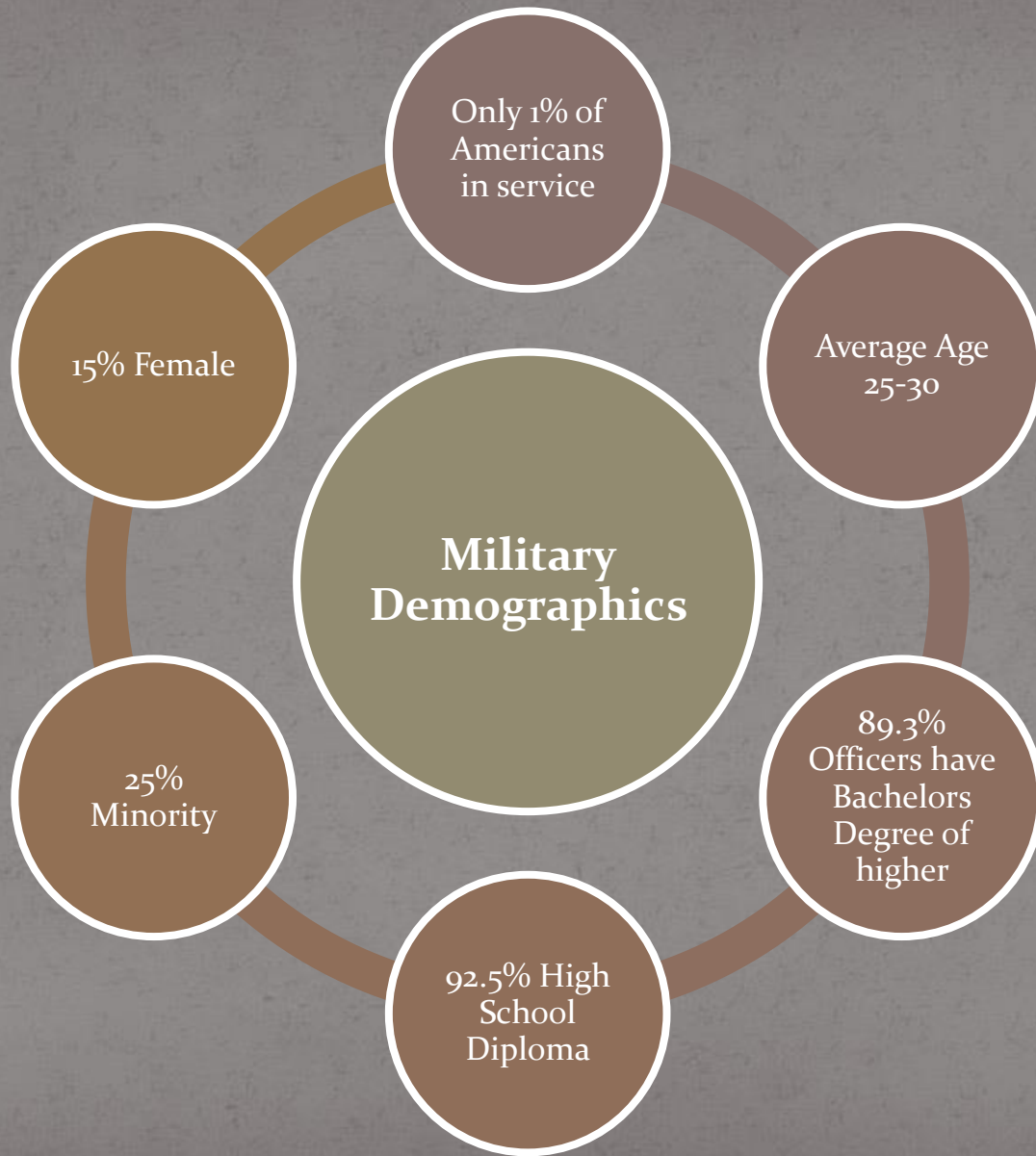
# Differences Between Conflicts

- **WWII- Deployed for duration**
  - Dying at a rate of 670/day
  - Reunions are rare but meaningful
- **Korea- Very unpopular, most won't discuss it**
  - Treated poorly even by service organizations
  - Considerable undiagnosed PTSD, SUD
- **Vietnam- Army 12 month tours, Marines 13 month**
  - Vilified at home and even by VSO

# Differences Between Conflicts (Continued)

- **Gulf War- Desert Storm, OIF, OEF**
  - Many severe wounded due to improved mortality
  - Welcomed home
  - Mental health issues are better addressed and less stigma but still problematic
  - Multiple deployments
  - Older demographics
  - Greater utilization of Guard and Reserve assets





# Positive Military Experience

- Leadership skills under all conditions including high stress
- Maturity and Focus
- Confidence
- Team Player, Cohesive
- Good Follower, Good Leader

# Positive Attributes

- Excellent oral and written communicators
- Inculcated to life-time learning
- Decision making
- Critical thinking
- Mentoring
- Team building
- Trainer
- Interpersonal skills, protect team
- Operating safety, Risk Management

# Positive Attributes (Continued)

- Dependable, consistent
- On time every time
- Detail oriented
- Persistent
- Project management
- Motivating others
- Goal oriented

# How to talk to veterans

- Thank Them (but see point 4)
- Listen non-judgmentally
- Ask open ended questions about their service, symptoms, and disabilities
- Be aware of probable feelings of shame, survival guilt, re-enter civilian life issues
- Don't make promises you won't or can't keep
- Engage families and friends as often as possible and offer services to family as well

# How NOT to talk to veterans

- NEVER try to say “I know how you feel”
- Don't share your view of the politics of war
- Do not rush to judgment or push the vet into anything
- If suicidal, get an expert immediately
- Don't ask for details of the traumatic event(s)
- Don't tell them they were lucky
- Don't make decisions for them
- Careful of their personal space

# Combat Related Injuries

- Mortality rates by conflict
  - WWII 30%
  - Vietnam 24%
  - OEF/OIF 10%

NOTE: > more soldiers survive so greater incidence of long-term injury or disability

- OEF/OIF
  - » 97% of injury is from explosion, IED
  - » 50% to head/neck
  - » 20% have some TBI

# OEF/OIF Signature Wounds

Eyes

Traumatic Brain Injury

Lower Extremity

Amputation

Repetitive/Serial  
Brain Injury



# Effects of exposure to combat

- Increased risk of PTSD
  - Increases with multiple deployments
- Increased risk for depression and increased suicide ideation
- Increased risk of alcohol or other SUD
- Increased exposure to injury, TBI, Mental Health
- Problems are not mutually exclusive

# Issues of Re-integration

- PTSD
- TBI
- Social Adjustment
  - Loss of purpose/mission (CM)
  - Loss of Brotherhood (distinguish from friendship)
  - Emptiness, guilt, isolation
- Suicide Ideation

# What is PTSD?

- **In simple terms - an anxiety disorder on steroids**
  - ≈ Emotional instability following stressful event
  - ≈ Trauma so severe it overloads the usual resilience and protective factors
  - ≈ Creates a memory so overwhelming that it causes emotional outburst and depression when reminded of the event

# PTSD Symptoms

- Intrusive
  - » Re-experience
  - » Nightmares
- Avoidant
  - » Detachment
  - » Loss of libido
- Hyper arousal
  - » Can't sleep
  - » Grouchy, angry
  - » Loss of concentration
  - » Hyper vigilant

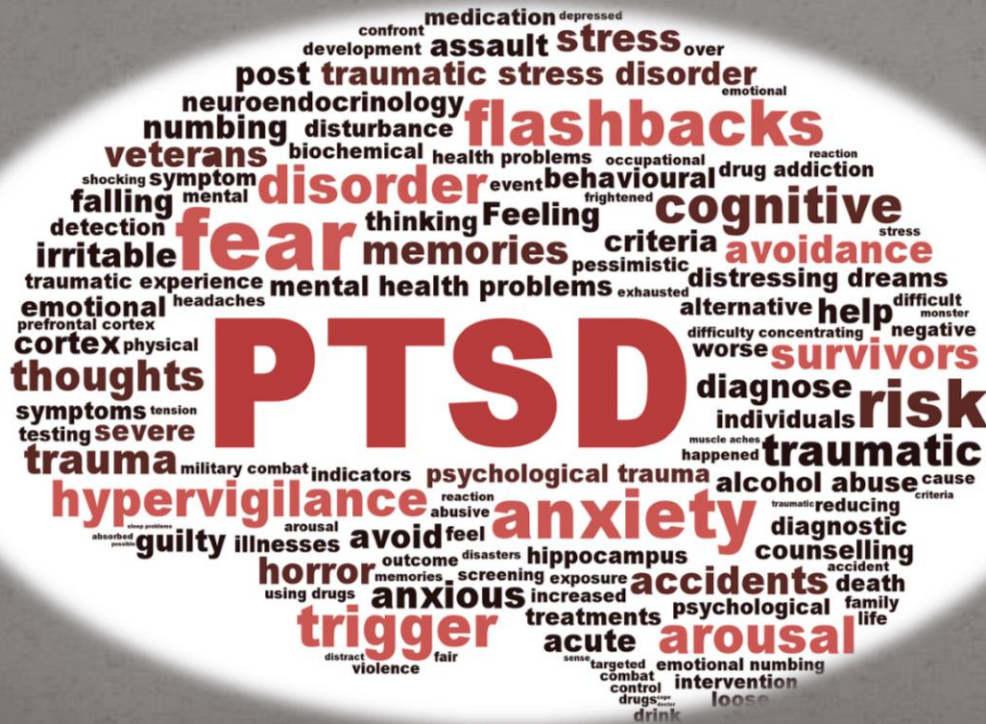
# Panic Disorder

- Fear of losing control
- Choking
- Chest pain
- Rapid heart rate
- Nausea



# PTSD and TBI

- Overlapping signs and symptoms



# Treatment

## PTSD

- Anti-depressants, beta blockers, (long term)
- CBT Psychotherapy for warrior, family

## TBI

- Mild case may resolve without treatment
- Severe case may be long term
- Need rehab services, case management
- Counseling for new expectations



# Veterans Outreach

- County Veteran Service Officers (CSO)
- Education
- Veterans Service Organizations- VFW, DAV, Am Leg
- Military installations and FSG's
- CBOC'S
- Job Fairs
- TAP programs

# Outreach Continued

- VHA
- VBA
- Rural Health
- Farmer-Veteran Coalition
- Homeless shelters
- VA VR&RE or DVR
- Newsletters
- Yellow Ribbon events
- Stand-downs
- Blue Star or Gold Star mothers
- Other veterans
- Social medias or networks

Questions?

