

# After the Battle Has Been Fought...

By Mariève MacGREGOR

It was once called "soldiers' heart." What a brave, tragic title. Then they called it "shell shock." A little more true to the fact, but it still lessens the reality of the condition. Then "war neurosis" and "combat fatigue." No one could really figure out exactly what was wrong with the men and women who 'came home,' but they knew there was something and hoped it would pass with time. Shock, fatigue; these are elements of life which come and go in our lives. Neurosis is psychological condition where a person has trouble coping with everyday life. It had nothing to do with preconceived trauma. What these patriots faced was not a passing phase, it was Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

After returning from war, more than 20 per cent of all veterans suffered from some sort of trauma. About 1 in 20 veterans from World War II still suffers from extreme-trauma side effects today. Nightmares, flashbacks, disturbed thoughts, withdrawal from everyday life. Most of these people could not go back to work. They could not function within family life as they had once done. They were antisocial, distracted, irritable, jumpy, and had concentration problems, all symptoms of PTSD. The government would compensate these people with money. It was all they knew to do. If sufferers of war shock never got better, they were considered mentally disabled.

Family and friends of PTSD victims did not know how to handle the situation any better than the government did. They felt the individual was selfish, robotic, unfeeling. As far as many were concerned, the person they once knew was not who had returned to them. Because the victim was withdrawn, family members and friends often withdrew as well. Many victims then turned to drugs and alcohol to cope with their disturbed thoughts. They wanted to block out the images, make themselves forget, make it so it never happened.

When a person suffers from PTSD, they have either witnessed or experienced one or more extremely



violent events, and have trouble dealing with it. It is confusing and it distorts the mind. Why did it happen? How could it have happened? Is it my fault? Why didn't I stop it? The human mind needs to make sense of things it doesn't understand, especially when those things are mentally distressing and personal. So it will recall and recall the events, trying to make it make sense, trying to make it right, justified. Make it ok. But without help and support, it never becomes ok. It gets worse. It gets heavy on the person and starts to crumble over them. This thought pattern is harmful to an individual, and over time will build up inside a person to create what is known as PTSD.

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The effects of PTSD are as true today as they were in the past, though now there are better methods of coping. The government of Canada, through the Department of Veterans Affairs, has researched and developed ways of fighting the trauma, fighting the nightmares and the depression. It starts off small, with eating healthy meals, doing exercise, establishing a daily routine. These things may seem redundant, but people with PTSD have

receded from these sorts of things, and getting back to them takes a tremendous effort. People with PTSD need an incredible amount of encouragement and support and understanding from their family and friends. The best way of dealing with PTSD is to educate oneself and those close to oneself on the disorder and to understand it. This was not possible until very recently.

As mentioned, people are still suffering from PTSD in today's society, and they aren't only the veterans of wars long-combated and won. People are witnessing very disturbing images in the Middle East right now. Somewhere, people are watching young children get raped and women get beaten bloody and killed in vicious ways because they are worthless and unvalued. Many Canadians overseas at the moment are part of a peace force as opposed to a military troop. They are utterly helpless in these situations and have no power to stop the violence as they are witnessing it. In many

respects, military personnel today witness much more horrific, unethical acts than the veterans of past wars. This is not to make the Holocaust less terrifying, or any other acts of treachery suffered by millions of people because of war, but today's traumatic experience is just that much more cold-blooded, that much more violent, that much more extreme.

Survivors of the war zone need an outlet for what they have experienced while they were there. Today there are a lot of government plans which don't simply compensate the victims' sufferings with money but attempt to work through it. The new methods may also be used to help veterans from WWII who have been suffering from PTSD for the last 50 years.

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There is a new understanding of the psychological effects war has on a person in today's world. There is new hope for the men and women who gave a part of themselves to fight for their values, their freedom, their families, their beliefs, and their country. War has been mentally destroying people long before the time of the Ancient Greeks. It is about time that something was done to help win the war that people fight, after the fighting is done.



**British marching through Peronne**