

PRAISE FOR *MOVING A NATION TO CARE*

“This book is an insider’s look at the issues. It begs the question, “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

“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. *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., Director of Soldier’s Heart: A Veterans’ Safe Return Initiative, and author of *War and the Soul*, *The Golden Tortoise* and *The Practice of Dream Healing*

“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. 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**, author of *Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress: The Psychological Consequences of Killing*

“Ilona Meagher has been at the forefront of bringing the plight of veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder to national attention. *Moving a Nation to Care* is 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)

“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.”—**Mark Fleming**, Editor, *Unsolicited Opinion*

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MOVING A NATION TO CARE

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**POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER
AND AMERICA'S RETURNING TROOPS**

ILONA MEAGHER



Brooklyn, New York

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Printed in Canada
First Paperback Edition
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Please direct inquiries to:
Ig Publishing
178 Clinton Avenue
Brooklyn, NY 11205
www.igpub.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Meagher, Ilona.

Moving a nation to care : post-traumatic stress disorder and America's returning troops / by Ilona Meagher ; introduction by Penny Coleman.

p. cm.

ISBN-13: 978-0-9771972-7-9 (alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-9771972-7-1

1. Post-traumatic stress disorder--United States. 2. Iraq War, 2003---Veterans--Mental health. 3. Afghan War, 2003---Veterans--Mental health. 4. Iraq War, 2003---Psychological aspects. 5. Afghan War, 2003---Psychological aspects. 6. Veterans--Rehabilitation--United States. 7. Veterans--Mental health--United States. 8. War--Psychological aspects.

I. Title.

RC552.P67M43 2007

616.85'212--dc22

2007005216

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6. THE RUMSFELD REVOLUTION IN MILITARY AFFAIRS

"Power is increasingly defined, not by mass or size, but by mobility and swiftness. Influence is measured in information, safety is gained in stealth, and force is projected on the long arc of precision-guided weapons. This revolution perfectly matches the strengths of our country—the skill of our people and the superiority of our technology. The best way to keep the peace is to redefine war on our terms."—George W. Bush, September 23, 1999¹

HUBRIS

In a campaign speech delivered at the Citadel on September 23, 1999, presidential candidate George W. Bush outlined the powers he would grant his secretary of defense, should he become Commander in Chief. Whoever Bush appointed would receive "a broad mandate—to challenge the status quo and envision a new architecture of American defense for decades to come."² Seven years later, on November 6, 2006, the man selected by Bush to oversee this new type of military ("faster, lighter, more lethal") sent out the last in a long line of his infamous communiqués. In a confidential memo addressed to the White House, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld admitted for the first time that the strategy in Iraq was

not working and that a course correction was necessary. “In my view it is time for a major adjustment,” Rumsfeld wrote, adding that, “[c]learly, what U.S. forces are currently doing in Iraq is not working well enough or fast enough.”³

The admission that all was not well in Iraq was at jarring odds with Rumsfeld’s past jousts over the media’s use of terms like “guerilla war,” “counterinsurgency,” and “civil war” to describe the unraveling situation in Iraq. “Recast the U.S. military mission and the U.S. goals,” Rumsfeld wrote in the memo, suggesting that the Bush administration wage a campaign to lower the American people’s expectations of what victory in Iraq would look like. “Announce that whatever new approach the U.S. decides on, the U.S. is doing so on a trial basis. This will give us the ability to readjust and move to another course, if necessary, and therefore not ‘lose.’”⁴

Whether the memo was written for political purposes or reflected a genuine change of heart, it was nevertheless a breathtaking turn for a man who had long resisted any change to his Iraq policy. Instead of reacting to the situation on the ground, Rumsfeld had spent much of the war “arguing powerfully for his mistaken point of view,” a point of view that was always dangerously optimistic. British defense expert Andrew Rathmell spoke of this “optimism” back in 2005: “This unwillingness to challenge assumptions and question established plans persisted during the course of the occupation, giving rise to the ironic refrain among disgruntled coalition planners that optimism is not a plan.”⁵

In reality, war is immensely unpredictable, and can rarely be controlled by those who wage it. As Andrew J. Bacevich wrote in *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War*, “[s]ince the beginning of the industrial age, war has time and again proven itself to be all but ungovernable.”⁶ Rumsfeld’s Achilles Heel was that he failed to prepare for, or react to, the unwanted outcomes and unexpected setbacks of warfare. The root of many of these

problems can be traced to the massive restructuring that Rumsfeld put the military through, which Army Chief of Staff General Peter J. Schoomaker described in 2004 as the “most important and controversial reorganization in decades,” one that would “affect virtually every soldier in the service.”⁷ Bacevich sketched out Rumsfeld’s general vision of how the new military would look in *The New American Militarism*:

... General Tommy Franks initially conceived of the global war on terror as a series of Desert Storms—large scale, deliberately planned offensives permitting the United States to bring to bear overwhelming force. This prospect did not find favor with Secretary Rumsfeld and his top civilian advisers, who advocated a bolder approach, one that placed less emphasis on large mechanized formations and greater emphasis on air power supported by special operations troops, and lighter, more agile ground forces. The general offered plodding orthodoxy; the defense secretary wanted novelty and dash.⁸

Rumsfeld’s ideas for “novelty and dash” were based largely upon the work of Andrew Marshall, a longtime government defense official who developed a philosophy of warfare known as the “Revolution in Military Affairs,” or RMA. Believing that traditional ideas of warfare were no longer relevant in the modern, lightning-fast information age, the RMA advocated changing the military from a large, slow-moving force into something that was “lean, nimble and, above all, ‘smart.’”⁹ In this new model, protecting “one’s own information systems and being able to degrade, destroy or disrupt the functioning of the opponent’s information systems,” should be America’s chief military goal.¹⁰ When Rumsfeld was named Defense Secretary in 2001, he immediately tried to implement the

ideas of the RMA. However, he made little headway until after 9/11, when President Bush's declaration of a global war on terror, with its corresponding nontraditional battlefield methods, allowed Rumsfeld to put Marshall's ideas into action.

Unfortunately, half a decade of warfare in Afghanistan and Iraq, "which was supposed to prove the operational effectiveness of the new RMA and to set the U.S. military on the path of 'transformation,'" has instead shown the severe limitations of the philosophies of the RMA.¹¹ Instead of the quick victories that were predicted back in 2002 and 2003, we find ourselves involved in a Vietnam-like guerrilla war. However, as things deteriorated in Iraq, rather than trying to chart a new course, Rumsfeld continued advocating for his failed strategy. As reporter and author Thomas Ricks wrote, "[Rumsfeld] was focused on transforming the military, seemingly unaware that history almost certainly will judge him largely on his mishandling of the Iraq war."¹² Retired four-star commander and decorated Vietnam veteran, Army General Barry McCaffrey was even harsher in his assessment, saying that "[Rumsfeld's] legacy will be one of bad judgment and arrogance that has put this country in a position of great strategic peril . . . as things started to go badly, Rumsfeld and his team went from arrogance to denial, disingenuousness, and finally blatant lying about the state of things in Iraq and inside the U.S. military."¹³

MORAL FAILURE

In the end, Rumsfeld's greatest failure was not one of strategy but of morality, as he neglected the most important responsibility given to a defense secretary, that of properly protecting and supplying the troops in his care. The list of Rumsfeld's mistakes in this area is endless: inadequate body armor for soldiers in combat; overtaxed troops serving extended and multiple deployments; the use of

National Guard and Reserve forces as fully activated combat troops; ignoring the advice of his generals as to adequate troop levels. Rumsfeld's strategic misjudgments and subsequent unwillingness to change course have left our combat troops without the necessary physical and emotional tools that they need to successfully fight a war. Jonathan Shay, noted author and VA psychiatrist, says that there are three "supports" that the military is obligated to provide for its combat troops, none of which is adequately provided by the new military model that was championed by Rumsfeld:

1. In-depth and realistic training in what they will face in battle, and the proper equipment to do their job
2. Unit community and stability (cohesion)
3. Capable, moral, and reinforced leadership

The name that Shays gives to these supports is "thémis," Greek for "what's right." He says that the lack of these supports can trigger combat stress. "Military psychiatrists have been telling us at least since World War I that these three things can prevent some (not all) of the life-long symptoms that can follow prolonged heavy combat."¹⁴ During his tenure, Rumsfeld continually failed to do "what's right" for our combat troops, and the consequences of his actions have had a detrimental effect not only on the physical and psychological well being of our soldiers, but on our military's capabilities as a fighting force. As Frederick Kagan of the conservative Enterprise Institute said, "When Rumsfeld took office, a lot of us cheered that here was someone who was going to take control of the U.S. military and help transform it. But you have to say that because of a number of bad judgments, the force Rumsfeld is handing off to Secretary Gates is de facto much weaker than the one he inherited."¹⁵

CONSEQUENCES

“We did not ask our soldiers to invade France in 1944 with the same armor they trained on in 1941. Why are we asking our soldiers and Marines to use the same armor we found was insufficient in 2003? The failure to provide the best equipment is a serious moral failure on the part of our leadership.”

—Col. Thomas X. Hammes, U.S. Marine Corps (retired)¹⁶

Sergeant Perry Jefferies was awarded both the Bronze Star and the Legion of Merit during his twenty years of service in the United States Army. During the initial invasion of Iraq in March 2003, he served with the 4th Infantry (“Iron Horse”) Division, sharing responsibility for over 400 troops and more than a hundred vehicles as they made their way over the fiery sands of the Sunni Triangle. History will remember the 4th ID for capturing Saddam Hussein on December 13, 2003.¹⁷

Previously an instructor at the U.S. Army Armor School in Fort Knox, an experienced veteran like Jefferies was in an ideal position to judge the effectiveness of the “new” military that Donald Rumsfeld had put into place. His judgements were not positive. “We are told that we have to be ‘weaned’ off of bottled water,” he wrote in a letter home, “since we have only 2 of our 4 water trailers . . . this will be interesting.” In addition to the water shortage, his unit also lacked basic hygienic necessities, like showers and bathrooms, and each soldier was limited to two MRE’s (Meal Ready to Eat) per day. Furthermore, supplies like oil and spare parts were in short supply. “I watched America provide doors, floors, windows, plumbing, sewage disposal, and air conditioning for Iraqi troops while American soldiers on the same compound struggled with none of these things,” Jefferies, now retired, remembers. “It wouldn’t be right to keep convicts like this but it’s okay in the Rumsfeld Army.”¹⁸

Jefferies’ anger at the lack of basic military supports has been echoed by many other service members. On December 8, 2004, during a Q & A session with Secretary Rumsfeld in Kuwait, Specialist Thomas Wilson of the Tennessee National Guard mustered the courage to stand and voice a concern that was weighing on everyone’s mind. “We’re digging pieces of rusted scrap metal and compromised ballistic glass that has already been shot up, dropped, busted—picking the best out of this scrap to put on our vehicles to go into combat,” he said. “We do not have proper armament vehicles to carry with us north.”

Rumsfeld looked into the sea of sand-brown uniforms before him. “As you know, you go to war with the army you have, not the army you might want or wish to have at a later time,” he shot back. Reloading, he added, “You can have all the armor in the world on a tank, and a tank can be blown up. And you can have an up-armored Humvee, and it can be blown up.”¹⁹

FATAL CONSEQUENCES

The longest continuously serving regiment in the United States Army, the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment deployed to Iraq in March of 2003. Known as the “Dragoons,” the 2nd ACR’s job was to provide reconnaissance and security for the 1st Armored Division. Sweeping out on patrols during the opening months of the invasion, the cavalrymen of the 2nd ACR conducted cordon and search operations, in the process arresting former regime elements and confiscating weapons. They also shut down a counterfeit dinar-printing operation.²⁰ Among their members was 20-year-old Specialist Leslie Frederick Jr. from St. Joseph, Missouri.

Though not trained to be an urban peacekeeping force, the regiment did its best to adapt, repairing war-damaged roads and sewers, building schools, and delivering humanitarian packages of food, clothing and toys. Yet, no matter the efforts on their part,

the pace of the insurgency continued to quicken. On August 19, 2003, eastern Baghdad's Canal Hotel complex, which housed the headquarters of the United Nations, was bombed. Twenty people lost their lives, another seventy were injured, and the shock wave blasted in the 2nd ACR's windowpanes a half mile away.²¹ In October, Sadr City's Baliyda Government Building was taken over by Moqtadr al-Sadr's forces. The 2nd ACR rode in and recaptured it. Later that month, the "Ramadan Offensive" kicked off with a mortar attack on the Abu Ghraib police station, as emboldened insurgents targeted the newly trained Iraqi forces and high-value targets like the Rasheed Hotel, where the Coalition Provisional Authority was headquartered. On the second day of the sacred Muslim observance, four more Baghdad police stations and the offices of the International Committee of the Red Cross were rocketed. Within two weeks, countless Iraqis were dead, along with sixty U.S. troops. One Special Forces soldier said it "felt like the whole city was blowing up."²²

Like Perry Jefferies' 4th ID on the Iran-Iraq border, the 2nd ACR operated a training school, the Iraqi Civil Defense Corps Academy at Camp Muleskinner. By February 2004, 1,500 forces had been graduated, which gained the attention of Secretary Rumsfeld. The mood was high as he swooped in by helicopter on February 24 to tour the facility, stand for photos with the troops and pass out his official commemorative coins. "I am so proud of you all for what you are doing for your country," the Secretary said. "The future of Iraq is in your hands."²³ Two weeks later, when 116 noncommissioned officers, the "backbone" of the ICDC, graduated from the academy, there was a sense of accomplishment and closure.²⁴

Like the rest of his fellow soldiers, Leslie Frederick looked forward to the end of his twelve-month tour and his return home. However, as the day of striking tents neared, Moqtadr al-Sadr's group, the Mahdi militia, still had not been fully contained. As a

result, on April 8, 2004, Frederick and the entire 1st Armored Division got word that their tours were to be extended by three months. Paul Rieckhoff describes the feelings that soldiers experience when their tours of duty are extended:

I have never seen so many grown men cry as when an extension was announced in Iraq. Extensions crush morale. Especially for Guardsmen and Reservists. My unit was extended at least four times. . . . Jobs are pushed back, birthdays are canceled, academic semesters are missed, marriages are ended, kids are crushed. Families back home take it especially hard. They are planning their lives around their soldier or Marine coming home around a certain time. They prepare everything around that time. Then it is yanked out from under them. It is unnecessary, even cruel. It damages the forces, encourages people to leave the military, and ultimately creates a weaker national defense.²⁵

Heading south to Najaf and Karbala to measure swords with Sheik al-Sadr's militia, Frederick and his fellow cavalymen were forced to retrofit their skills yet again as wide-open spaces replaced the compact city streets they were used to patrolling.²⁶ Finally, after several months of fighting, al-Sadr agreed to disband his militia. For its work, the 2nd ACR earned two Presidential Citations. Frederick, who was wounded, received a Purple Heart and a Bronze Star. On a sweltering July 4, 2004, *CNN Sunday Morning* covered the close of the cavalry's notable tour by taping their "casing of colors" (flag folding) ceremony at Baghdad's airport. Frederick was on his way home at last.²⁷

However, after fifteen months of constant adjustments while in Iraq, upon their return home, the members of the 2nd ACR found

out that they would face even more adjustments, courtesy of Donald Rumsfeld's military reorganization. The unit was to be transformed into a Stryker Brigade Combat Team, its base of operations shifting from Fort Polk, Louisiana, to Fort Lewis, Washington. Since radical change of this kind increases stress, the Army committed to "taking care of its soldiers during this time of transition." The move got underway for the 3,900 soldiers and their 11,000 family members during the winter of 2004-2005.²⁸

As a result of the transition, it would be at Fort Lewis, not Fort Polk, that Leslie Frederick Jr. would stand before Army Chief of Staff Peter J. Schoomaker on July 15, 2005 to receive the newly created Combat Action Badge. The award recognizes those who engage or are engaged by the enemy during combat operations. Schoomaker, himself a former 2nd ACR squadron executive officer, told the twelve soldiers who were honored that day, "I can't tell you how proud I am of this Army and these soldiers." A week earlier, pinning the first handful of badges on troops in Washington, D.C., Schoomaker said of those receiving the commendation, "They represent our Army, the total Army, all the way across them, every piece of them." Of the decoration, he added, "The Combat Action Badge will go down in history as a very, very esteemed representation of the Warrior Ethos, of what being a soldier and a warrior stands for."²⁹

Though this accomplishment must have been a source of great pride, the Iraq War and the effects of Donald Rumsfeld's subsequent military realignment had brought change, and the resulting stress, to every facet of Frederick's life. While every soldier is susceptible to breaking under these kinds of pressures, Frederick was especially vulnerable; estranged from his wife and child in the wake of his 15-month deployment, his divorce became final the week after his decoration ceremony. Four days later, on July 26, 2005, Frederick lifted a gun to his head, putting an end to a short but distinguished

life and career. A family member stated at the time that the "stress of having to kill while in battle really got to him."³⁰ Buried with full honors, Fort Leavenworth's Military Honors Detail playing Taps and firing off a 21-gun salute, his aunt Glenda Wilson, tears in her eyes, called her nephew a hero.³¹ Another hero lost to the pressures of coping with warfare, exacerbated by the stress of dealing with the shortcomings of Rumsfeld's new military.

First published in the *U.S. Cavalry Manual* in 1923, "Fiddler's Green" is an anonymously penned ballad that describes the mystic place where cavalymen go after they are killed in action. It is still used today to memorialize the deceased.

Fiddler's Green

Halfway down the trail to Hell,
In a shady meadow green
Are the Souls of all dead troopers camped,
Near a good old-time canteen.
And this eternal resting place
Is known as Fiddlers' Green.

Marching past, straight through to Hell
The Infantry are seen.
Accompanied by the Engineers,
Artillery and Marines,
For none but the shades of Cavalymen
Dismount at Fiddlers' Green.

Though some go curving down the trail
To seek a warmer scene.
No trooper ever gets to Hell

Ere he's emptied his canteen.
And so rides back to drink again
With friends at Fiddlers' Green.

And so when man and horse go down
Beneath a saber keen,
Or in a roaring charge of fierce melee
You stop a bullet clean,
And the hostiles come to get your scalp,
Just empty your canteen,
And put your pistol to your head
And go to Fiddlers' Green.

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