

# VETERANS: A journey between two worlds

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returning to school where he is pursuing a major in psychology while reacquainting himself with the relatively mellow lifestyle of a student.

Weikel graduated from high school in 1999 and amidst the situation he was in, decided to enlist in the United States military. As a naturally gifted individual, Weikel excelled in school and translated that success to the military where he served in Fallujah with the Echo Company 2nd battalion 25th regiment. After serving in an infantry unit for two terms, he faced strong emotions when he learned he would be returning home.

"First thoughts, how am I going to adjust? Who is going to do this job?" said Weikel. "When I left Iraq for good, the unit taking over Fallujah lost eight Marines before we left theater."

"It doesn't matter who you are, you always come back changed," said Jerry Chronister, a Penn State Harrisburg student who also served in the war in Iraq.

Chronister first volunteered to go into Iraq in 2003 and served two terms of infantry service, also as a member of the U.S. Marines with the Echo Company 2nd battalion 25th regiment. He enrolled in Penn State Harrisburg in 2007 and has made adjustments in returning to the lifestyle of a student.

"Over there it's 'go go go', and when you come back, it's really hard to wind down," said Chronister. "I welcomed the transition. This campus here is really mellow."

Chronister recalls the excitement that was felt when his company initially learned that they would be leaving the conditions of war to return home.

"My company found out about one week before we would start leaving our area of operation," he explained. "Everyone was excited. The heat and operational tempo made days seem like weeks and weeks like months."

From that point on, Chronister made another change in his life that has proven for many to be significant and difficult. It is commonplace for veterans returning from war to face significant physical, emotional and relational disruptions, as a result of what is known as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

In addition to the casualties and physical injuries, the hardships that continue to affect veterans after military discharge exemplify how war can damage or destroy lives. Veterans must face the battle of returning to the lifestyle they once lived while coping with the horrors of war that remain in their memories.

With Chronister, the once familiar feeling of everyday took time to readjust to. He explained how he felt when he returned from war for the first time.

"Major culture shock," he said. "It took awhile just adjusting to being state side and being able to walk around without my rifle and body armor on. Being able to sleep in a bed and do what I want. In Iraq, besides on a base or patrol, you can't go anywhere!"

He cited sleep as one of the biggest changes, saying that in combat, it is impossible to get a

The Harrisburg Vet Center can be reached via phone at 717-782-3954  
Battlemind Training Web site: <http://www.battlemind.army.mil>

regular sleep pattern. Sometimes, he said, he went for days without sleep.

Jerry realizes the damaging effects of PTSD in veterans and emphasizes how important it is that help is available for veterans returning from war. While studying at PSH, he is pursuing a major in psychology and is considering a potential career in that field as a counselor for veterans.

There are a wide range of factors that make it impossible for a civilian to imagine how the life of combat must feel, and it is for that reason that assistance programs for veterans must include other veterans who have faced the same struggles.

Programs to help veterans deal with these struggles are available in a variety of forms. One program, Battlemind Training II, was designed to help veterans understand certain emotions or instincts they might be feeling after returning from war. Covering topics from anxiety related symptoms such as aggression and hypervigilance, to the need to carry a weapon at all times, to alcohol abuse, this program is designed to help veterans understand why they may be feeling or behaving in certain ways or patterns.

Other programs assist veterans by taking a more personal approach and providing direct counseling. Vet centers, which are located all across the United States, assist veterans and their families by allowing them to express how

they are feeling and adjusting.

Jan Yupcavage, a veteran of the Vietnam war, has been working with the veterans administration for over 26 years. After earning a masters level counseling degree, Yupcavage has specialized in therapy for war veterans and now works as a therapist at the Vet Center in Harrisburg.

"The vet center and the Veterans Administration work together to provide a safe setting where the veteran can express their experiences and their emotions related to their experiences," said Yupcavage. "Our goal is to diminish the emotions that are related to the experience."

Yupcavage, who served in the Vietnam war in 1968, understands the struggles that veterans face when dealing with PTSD. He explained that in war, the human body begins to react naturally to the life or death scenario, and with adrenaline pumping in the body all day every day, instincts begin to change.

"When you are in a war zone, your senses are in full alert, whether you are aware of it or not," said Yupcavage. "You get rest, but you don't get sleep. You are up instantly, as soon as there is an odd signal."

Therein lies the obstacle that veterans must overcome; reverting the body and mind as closely as possible to a pre-war state.

"The challenge is, for the individual, to transit from a war zone mentality to a more peaceful

society at home," he explained.

Yupcavage, like Chronister, stresses the importance of programs like the Vet Center.

"I'd like to see more veterans, especially the newer veterans from the Iraq and Afghan wars take part in a debriefing process, even if it is for one or two sessions to express themselves and to be aware of how helpful the vet centers can be to them and their families," said Yupcavage.

Having served in that particular war, he holds another thing in common with veterans of out current war; he has participated in a battle that created much public dissent in the United States.

Both the war in Iraq and Vietnam have been questioned by our public, yet Yupcavage believes that our men and women serving should always be respected, by both supporters and opposers of the war.

"One of the lessons learned from the Vietnam War is to separate the war from the warrior," said Yupcavage. "We must honor the participant, the veteran."

To do otherwise would be to ignore how much our men and women of service have sacrificed in the name of our country. Parents, spouses and siblings alike have dedicated themselves to protecting our country by fighting bravely and following orders that have been given for the safety of our country. Our collective debt to them is beyond measure.

## Pa. vote said to go smoothly despite long lines

By MARC LEVY  
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

HARRISBURG, Pa. (AP) — Voting in Pennsylvania ran smoothly, despite some long lines at universities and complaints about poll workers struggling to handle a flood of first-time voters, election officials said.

"There's no such thing as a perfect election," said Pedro Cortes, the Pennsylvania secretary of state. But, "it was a very good election for our voters."

The Philadelphia district attorney's office, which was responding to election-related complaints in the state's largest city, fielded far fewer phone calls than it did during the 2004 presidential election.

Many were minor scrapes between partisans at the polls, although the office did restore a handful of Republican election observers after they had been kicked out of polling places by Democratic election officials, spokeswoman Cathie Abookire said.

Long lines cropped up around the state, and voter rights groups repeated complaints about hours-long waits at many university polling stations, including Penn State and the University of Pittsburgh, and at some minority-heavy precincts in Delaware County.

Cortes said reports by voter rights groups that many university students were being forced to vote by provisional ballot were

exaggerated or unfounded.

Some polling places, however, were handling long lines of first-time voters well after the polls closed at 8 p.m. At West Chester University and Lincoln University, the wait stretched for hours because poll workers were stuck double-checking the registrations of many people in line whose names were entered in the state database after the voter lists were printed, said Agnes O'Toole, assistant director of Chester County voter services.

In Bucks County, two polling stations were kept open an extra hour after a construction crew caused a gas leak that stopped voting for an hour during the afternoon.

Elsewhere, poorly trained poll

workers failed to give provisional ballots to some people whose names should have shown up in registration books, but did not, voter rights advocates said.

Philadelphia also fended off a lawsuit that sought to order it to immediately count its emergency paper ballots, which are distributed when voting machines malfunction. Instead, the city will start counting them on Friday, as it normally does.

The Philadelphia district attorney's office did not get a complaint about one incident that drew a lot of attention: a man in Black Panther attire holding a night stick who stood at the doorway of a polling station.

Fox News reported that a

Republican election observer called police and that officers escorted the man away from the area. A Philadelphia police spokeswoman confirmed that police responded, but would only say the officers took no official action.

Still, the scattered problems were such that Pennsylvania should adopt an election system that either includes early voting, Election Day registration or no-excuse absentee ballots, said Barry Kauffman of Common Cause Pennsylvania.

"There are certainly some glitches within the mechanics of the system, but I think there are also some systemic problems, especially when you have this large of a population voting," Kauffman said.