



Statement by

Corporal Woodrow Allan Carmack Sr.
United States Marine Corps, Medically Retired

before the

Senate of Canada
Veterans Affairs Sub-Committee

Ottawa

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Woodrow Allan Carmack, Sr.

Mr. Chairman, Honourable Senators,

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee today.

My name is Woody Carmack. I am the Co-Founder and present Adjutant of the Vietnam Veterans In Canada, a service organization for Vietnam Veterans and their families.

My military service was with the United States Marine Corps. In 1966-67 I served as a rifleman and scout with the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment in central Vietnam.

My appearance here today is on behalf of the Vietnam Veterans In Canada, a registered charitable society, based in the Province of British Columbia. Founded in 1986 as an outreach/support group for those touched by the Vietnam experience, the organization has continued that focus to this day. We presently have 648 Vietnam Veterans on our mailing list.

Some 40,000 Canadians served with the American military forces in Vietnam. We believe that as many as 400 were killed in action, and another 4,000 physically wounded. However, these figures do not represent the end of the story.

Many Vietnam Veterans adjusted well following their American military service. But many have not.

The reason is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

PTSD is not just a problem for the Veterans; it effects their Wives, their Children and every other aspect of their lives.

Stress disorders in veterans of military service is not new. "Shell shock" was the

name in World War I. During World War II and Korea, "Battle fatigue" was the common term for PTSD.

It was not until 1980 that the medical community began to use the term Post Traumatic Stress Disorder and recognize that specialized treatment was necessary.

Brought on by events outside the normal range of normal human experience, PTSD is characterized by;

Anxiety or nervousness

Depression or deep sadness

Nightmares or flashbacks in which the veteran re-experiences traumatic events

Jumpiness, especially to sounds that remind the veteran of the war

Trouble getting close to other people at work, or in social or family situations

Trouble sleeping

Trouble concentrating

Avoidance of certain memories

The need to calm down by self-medicating, using alcohol or drugs.

In 1988, the only study ever conducted of Canada's Vietnam Veterans (Stretch, Robert H., Major, U.S. Army, Ph.D.) drew some startling conclusions;

- The major distinction between Vietnam Veterans residing in Canada and those who reside in the United States is the fact that the Canadian Veterans' problems with PTSD have not diminished over time, they have become worse.

- In terms of Chronic PTSD, the rate for Canadian Vietnam Veterans is 2.3 times higher than for the U.S. civilian Vietnam Veterans.

- The increased prevalence of PTSD among Canadian Vietnam Veterans seems to be associated with post-war factors. It may be that being ignored by society is just as devastating to the readjustment process as outright hostility and rejection if there are no means of getting help to the veteran.

- While Vietnam Veterans in the United States may have had a tougher time with public opinion and attitudes than many Vietnam Veterans in Canada, at least

U.S. Vietnam Veterans have had access to supportive veterans' groups and treatment available from the U.S. Veterans Administration. Canadian Vietnam Veterans have had neither and appear to continue to pay for their service.

I have attached Major Stretch's full report to this statement.

For many of us not a single day goes by that the dragon of Vietnam does not raise its head. All it takes is the sound of a helicopter, the smell of certain foods, the sight of refugees, just to name a few. For many, when the night comes it is a time of anxiety. This has been the way it is, month after month, year after year, with no end in sight. I would suggest that many veterans, in a very real way, still haven't made it home from Vietnam.

It has been reported that more than twice as many Vietnam Veterans have committed suicide than were killed in the war. I am personally aware of many who cling to life by the barest threads.

Others are killing themselves slowly through heavy use of drugs and alcohol.

Many have held 50 to 70 jobs since their return, or simply can not work at all due to the insidious effects of PTSD.

HOW PTSD IS TREATED IN THE USA:

In 1979, the United States Congress enacted Public Law 96-22 which provided for specialized readjustment counselling for Vietnam Veterans through storefront operations. These nearly 200 "Vet Centres" located generally in major population centres provide individual, group and family counselling.

The Vet centre program has been very effective. I personally credit the staff of the San Diego Vet Centre with saving my life in 1980. Their compassion and understanding enabled me to see that I was not unlike many other veterans. Prior to that I was starting to suspect I was "crazy". Being able to listen to the experiences of other Vietnam Veterans, as well as share my own enabled me to begin to turn my life around.

In some areas, which are distant from vet centres or VA medical facilities, the VA may provide readjustment counselling to veterans through a contract/fee arrangement with community counsellors, psychologists, social workers, or other professionals. Several State Veterans Agencies administer similar programs.

Contract Counselling is the only practical way to deal with the Canadian Vietnam Veteran's PTSD problems. These contracts have been issued on a regular basis for more than ten years by the U.S. Veterans administration.

Surely, these type of contracts can be issued to qualified counsellors here in Canada. My understanding is that the counsellors are only paid when they actually see Veterans. It is piece work on their part.

A well respected Vietnam Veteran counsellor from Bellingham, Washington, Hayyim Grossman, himself a Vietnam Veteran, is ready, willing, and able to undertake a pilot project in British Columbia at any time.

Mr. Grossman informed me that he is also available to train Canadian Counsellors to deal with Combat Related PTSD. This is very important. The secret to a successful counselling program is in the counsellors themselves. They must be able to gain the confidence of the Combat Veteran, otherwise it simply will not work.

There are any number of horror stories involving Veterans who have sought counselling from professionals who do not have a practical understanding of combat related PTSD here in Canada.

We seek nothing from the Canadian taxpayer.

Canada's Vietnam Veterans served the people of the United States faithfully and with honour, during a most difficult period in history. America called and they went. No questions asked.

We believe the sole responsibility to act on this matter lies with the Government of the United States. There is no need for any type of legislation. No treaties need to be amended. The contracts just need to be issued. It should be a matter of making the United States Government aware of the situation and asking them to

do the right thing.

We are asking this committee to request the Government of the United States to begin a contract/fee basis counselling program as soon as possible.

On behalf of the Vietnam Veterans In Canada I would like to thank the Senate of Canada for the support it has given to the Canadian Vietnam Veterans National Memorial. The Memorial will certainly help the healing process.

I am now prepared to respond to questions.

Thank You.