

Book Review

Title: *The Stress of Combat, the Combat of Stress: Changing Strategies Towards Ex-Service Men and Women*

Author: Roy Brook

Publisher: Eastbourne, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2010

Cost: Hard Cover, \$32.50; Soft Cover, \$24.95 from Amazon. 344 pages

ISBN: 978-1-84519-407-9

Reviewer: Katherine Li

The story takes place in Britain and is about Roy Brook, an ex-service member with 20 years of prior service whose mission it was to identify ex-service members who may not have been receiving their fully entitled military benefits. He began working at the Ex-service Mental Welfare Society, Combat in 1994 after answering an advertisement in a local newspaper. The Society was founded shortly after WWI to help servicemen and women recover from service-related physical and mental disabilities. According to Brook, “50,000 cases were handled in the first seventy years and there are 3,000 current cases” (pp. ix-x). Brook began his journey by interviewing patients at Tyrwhitt House, one of three short-stay houses in Britain. From there he covered one million miles reaching out to men and women who had served their country as military personnel or peace-keepers.

The book is organized chronologically so the reader is able to understand changing attitudes over time about combat stress; during the American Civil War (for example) it was viewed as cowardice and malingering. Since the Vietnam War, it has come to be called Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). By retelling the many stories of the people he encountered along the way—from those who had loving spouses to help care for them to ones who had been abandoned—we discover Brook’s remarkable compassion. He strove to reach out to as many people as possible to ensure that those entitled to benefits were receiving them and to help those who were not getting them. Throughout his work he was cheerful and optimistic about the goodwill of the Ex-Services Mental Welfare Services, but was also saddened by some of the circumstances in which he finds some people living.

The target audience of this book is prior military service members who may be suffering silently from physical and/or mental injuries as a result of exposure to combat. In learning that they are not alone, it may encourage and embolden them to be proactive about pursuing service-related benefits. The way *The Stress of Combat, the Combat of Stress* adds to the existing knowledge—and its most important message—is that it highlights the importance of the role of the advocate. Ex-service members need to advocate for themselves or have an advocate who understands the War Disability Pension to be able to advocate on their behalf. While “demand for the Society’s services has risen by 53% over the past three years,” it is important to know that “the average time between a serviceman or woman being discharged and seeking the Society’s

help is 13 ½ years” (p. vii). The work is interesting because it reads like a Robin Hood-type of adventure.

I recommend this book be used as a textbook in Social Work, Psychology, Public Health, Education, Military Science, Disability Studies, and Sociology classes. It is also accessible to a general reading audience of family members and friends of military ex-service members who want to become more informed.

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