

Book Review: *Veterans in Crisis* by Steve Lansing and B. Wayne Quist (2024)

Luc Sala, in his book *PTSD and Identity Conflict* (Boekencooperatie, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2021) referred to PTSD as the “hidden curse of our times.” He believes that the prevalence of the disorder has grown to pandemic proportions and continues to increase. The number of natural disasters as well as the human-caused ones have multiplied in recent years. The untreated disorder takes its toll on the individual and his or her family in terms of substance abuse, failure to maintain employment, physical illness, suicide, homelessness, incarceration, and untold suffering for the victim and those around him. The amount of economic and social resources devoted to managing it is tremendous and is of concern to governments, insurance companies and the healthcare system.

It is in this context that Steve Lansing, PhD, LICSW and Colonel B. Wayne Quist, USAF Retired, both Vietnam veterans living in Minnesota, set out to create a book to inform veterans of the nature of the disorder, illustrate its manifestations throughout recorded history, encourage them to seek professional treatment, and provide suggestions to keep from falling into an attitude of hopelessness and despair.

The book [“Veterans in Crisis” volume one] is divided into three sections. The first deals with the physical, psychological, and behavioral manifestations of PTSD. An inspection of military culture reveals that it tends to foster PTSD by suppressing and mischaracterizing it, whatever virtues that culture might otherwise possess. The authors describe the nature of combat and the prolonged stress that it engenders until it, inevitably, becomes unbearable. They treat alcohol and drugs as coping mechanisms that veterans have used for managing combat stress throughout the ages and the effects of the disorder on spouses and children. The second part of the book masterly reviews the history of PTSD, its commonalities and differences, from ancient battles on through the many American wars, to the current Ukrainian War. A treatment of the “unthinkable” possibilities of nuclear and biological warfare is included.

The second volume of the book is devoted to the life course of Joe Haan, “God’s Angry Man,” a WWII combat rifleman with Patton’s Third Army. Colonel Quist developed the narrative from the subject’s letters, poems, war records, and the memories of his friends and relatives. It is an amazing story of resilience in the face of childhood trauma compounded by the rigors of combat, including fighting at the Battle of the Bulge, spending three days in a foxhole with a dead 18 year-old German soldier, and liberating a Nazi concentration camp. The reader learns of the thoughts, musings and feelings of Joe, a self-taught man, through his amazing poetry, songs, and journal entries. After the war, Joe worked the high steel, continued to read his poetry, sing his songs, and discuss his war-honed philosophy. Those who spent time with him, discussing anything from war to evolution, history, paleontology, geology, or religion, would call him “mesmerizing.”

The manner in which the material is presented is not the typical approach of non-fiction books. It seems to have a “telegraphese” style, with call-outs, quotes, pictures, references to movies and books interspersed here and there to highlight the topic under

consideration. While this might be off-putting to some, it is probably helpful for the intended reader to keep his/her attention and interest, wondering what will come next. There are frequent injections of helpful comments to the reader, assumed to be suffering from PTSD, introduced by the phrase "To Be Empowered, the Doc Says..." followed by a quote or an injunction. For example,

To Be Empowered, the Doc Says...

Concrete strategies for getting unstuck and moving forward:

- *Experiencing a midpoint slump? Break up your project into smaller, discrete goals, rewarding yourself for the completion of each.*
- *Paralyzed by perfectionism? Strive for excellence instead.*
- *Tend to isolate? Assemble a crew of people and invite their feedback before, during and after each step in your process.*

There are frequent vignettes from veterans and historical figures recounting their combat experience and its effect on their psyche and functioning with enough context that the reader should be able to identify with the story-teller. Pictures of equipment, war scenes and especially the faces of men after battle will also help to rekindle some of the feelings the reader may have been suppressing.

Finally, the book is not intended as do-it-yourself therapy. It is, instead, an awareness and knowledge builder with the goal of getting the PTSD sufferer to seek professional help. The document is replete with references to resources in the community and national organizations for support in the veteran's journey to wholeness.

Having myself treated veterans with PTSD for many years in the Veterans Administration (VA), I highly recommend this book.

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