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FOOTHILLS

Milestones: First book Marine's tale: 'My Tour in Hell'

> Vietnam war medal-winning veteran had another battle to fight after discharge — post-traumatic stress disorder <

By Ali Vinci

ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Tucson, Arizona | Published: 09.07.2006

David W. Powell lived with post-traumatic stress disorder for more than 20 years before he was successfully treated. The Foothills resident and ex-Marine details his experiences and struggles in his new book, "My Tour in Hell: A Marine's Battle With Combat Trauma."

The first-time author, now 65, enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in 1966 to avoid the draft. He left his hometown of Pasadena, Calif., where he worked as a computer programmer.

Powell calls his decision to enlist "real dumb" — he figured he would be able to use his computer knowledge working behind the scenes. He was not prepared to fire rockets at the enemy in the jungles of Vietnam.

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"I had virtually no idea what I was going into," he says of the war he fought for 13 months. "It was 100 percent, 24-7 kill or be killed."

After a two-year enlistment, Powell returned home and was awarded a combat ribbon and a Purple Heart in 1967. However, in spite of being commended for his actions and bravery, Powell struggled with the after-effects of what he calls a "life-altering experience."

At the time, post-traumatic stress disorder was not commonly classified or even understood, leaving Powell virtually on his own to deal with the harsh results of war.



David W. Powell enlisted and spent 13 months in Vietnam before he was killed," he says.

David Sanders /

More Photos (1):



The book

• "My Tour in Hell: A Marine's Battle With Combat Trauma" by David W. Powell, published by Healing Press at lovinghealing.com through www.arizona.com

• More information on PTSD, stress reduction, or TIF at www.tir.org.

Tell us your first



After trying traditional therapy treatments for more than a year, Powell had experienced no progress, therapy leaving his "mental wounds reopened." It was soon after his failed attempts at therapy that Powell was introduced to a less-common method of treatment, traumatic incident reduction, or TIR, in 1989.

According to the official TIR Web site, the treatment was developed by Frank A. Gerbode in 1984 based on the works of Sigmund Freud and Carl Rogers. TIR is a one-on-one, person-oriented method in which the practitioner and the client "meet to discuss one item and one item only," says Powell of the nontraditional treatment.

Through re-experiencing the events of a trauma, the patient is able to comprehend and resolve whatever experiences they have been repressing, according to the TIR philosophy.

Powell spent less than 20 hours — a total of 15 sessions — doing TIR therapy at Stanford University, compared to the 16 months he attempted traditional therapy. By using TIR, Powell was able to experience an "uplifting, spiritual feeling," he said, calling the treatment "phenomenal."

Powell moved to Tucson in 1993, then moved to Napa, Calif., in 1998 for five years before returning to Tucson to escape the "turmoil and financial struggles of California," he said.

A retired data-processing professional, Powell says he made the decision to begin writing his book two years ago, not long after the war in Iraq began. "I saw service people coming back in utter silence," said Powell. "I wanted to be a voice for post-traumatic stress disorder. I wanted to be an information source for them, their

It's your first, and we want to document it.

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about it. If you're having a "first," send
il about it to Foothills Star editor Tiffany
tkjos@ azstarnet.com.

from "My Tour in Hell," Chapter 2

**ew of a CH-46 chopper is landing in
field):**

ur turn came to land, the tailgate
To the left of our probable landing site
another chopper that had been shot up
ad. Its engine was spewing flames and
The pilot tried to lift off, but his chopper
sunk into the mud and sputtered to a stop. The
chopper pilot and crew quickly abandoned ship
and ran for cover with our men.

As we descended, I heard a couple of bullets
pierce the skin of our chopper. We hovered
three or four feet above a rice paddy. All the
men jumped out the back and ran for cover,
except me. I was last man in line to go. I had
started down the tailgate, but my pilot
panicked. I deduced he probably thought he
was going to be shot down, too.

He suddenly lifted up about 30 feet before I
reached the end of the tailgate. A chopper
crewman hollered to the pilot that I was still
onboard. The chopper quit climbing and
hovered for a few seconds. Here was another
"slo-mo" episode I endured.

*I can't leave Jones down there without his A-
Gunner! I'll have to jump!*

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families and other people whom to PTSD is a mystery."

His book was published by Loving Healing Press, which is owned by a friend of Powell's.

Differing from traditional war memoirs, Powell chose to write his book in the second person.

"I wanted to go through the events as I experienced the trauma, trying to illustrate how unresolved trauma can become not just a disorder, but a full-blown disease," he says. "My voice says there is hope and help. You don't have to try to fix yourself."

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