



MORE THAN CONQUERORS: WHEN WARRIORS COME HOME FROM WAR

By Scott McChrystal

Only days removed, but thousands of miles from the fighting, he was finally home.

As his plane touched down at the San Francisco Airport, his mind wandered to the dark places war had taken him.

For months on end he had endured seemingly endless days battling scorching heat, humidity, thirsty mosquitoes, monsoon rains and an enemy he would never fully understand.

At only 23 years of age he had seen things no person should ever see. Friends had died and been severely injured before his eyes. Bullets had whizzed past his head. Close calls with booby traps had almost cost him limbs. And his hands had been used to take lives.

Now that he was home he didn't know what to expect.

NO PERSON IS AN ISLAND. YOU MAY FEEL ALONE AND DISTANT FROM OTHERS, BUT IN REALITY THERE ARE PLENTY OF PEOPLE TO WHOM YOU CAN TURN.

The thought that his khaki uniform was the kind of calling card that might draw the ire of civilians angered him. After what he'd been through he certainly didn't want to deal with anyone with an opinion on what he'd done in Vietnam.

For a moment he considered changing out of his khaki uniform into his street clothes. That way there would be no chance of anyone calling him a "baby killer." But then he thought better of it. He was a lieutenant in the U.S. Army. He was proud to be a soldier, and he had volunteered to serve his country. Popular or unpopular, America was at war by orders of civilian leaders, not military.

Even so he maintained a steady clip as he cut through the terminal. In the baggage area he would grab his duffle bag then dart to the bus stop where he would catch a bus to Capitola. If all went well he would step onto the bus without incident.

I'm not ashamed of who I am or what I have done, he told himself. I'm an American soldier. If someone wants to heckle me they'll quickly discover they've picked on the wrong guy.

An hour later he sank into his seat on the bus. No one had badgered or taunted him. He couldn't recall any sideways glances or snarky remarks. His pride was intact and, most importantly, he hadn't hurt anyone.

Nearly four decades later

many things have changed — including the soldier who came home from Vietnam still looking for a fight.

I know because I am that soldier.

I was not a Christian when I walked through that airport in 1972. But a year later during premarital counseling with Ralph Holt, a minister at Fort Bragg in North Carolina, he led me in the sinner's prayer. I accepted Jesus as my Savior, and where I would spend eternity was finally settled.

That decision changed my life, and I came to the realization that God had a plan and purpose for me that would include a loving family and a career as a chaplain in the Army.

Admittedly, some things haven't changed since I came home from Vietnam.

Conflict still exists. War is still part of life. Since 9/11, thou-

sands of men and women have deployed into harm's way as part of our nation's war on terrorism.

Our military continue to deploy to places of conflict. Some die. Others get wounded. Fortunately, most survive and return home.

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But coming home from war is a mixed bag.

Reentry back into one's regular life can be like entering a battlefield. The kind that is mostly friendly, but still laced with landmines.

From one veteran to another, I express heartfelt gratitude for your service and sacrifice. On the whole, the citizens of our great land appreciate your efforts. Your sacrifices are what keep our nation free. Your blood, sweat and tears have contributed significantly toward keeping America such an amazing country in which to live and raise children.

As one who has experienced both deployment into hostile territory and the subsequent challenges of returning to friendly territory, I offer the following 10 observations for your consideration.

1. Accept accountability and responsibility. It's your job to accept responsibility for doing your part in the transition from combat zone back to normal life.
2. Avoid the victim mentality. You are not a victim, and though you can't always control what happens, you can control your response to whatever you face.
3. Recognize that deployment has changed you. One of your main tasks is to discover how you have changed and adjust accordingly.
4. No person is an island. Sure, you may feel alone and distant from others, but in reality there are plenty of people to whom you can turn — family, friends, neighbors, church, the VA, and numerous other helping agencies.

5. Make an effort to connect. Take the initiative and reach out to others. People can't help you if they don't know you need help.

6. Try to be understanding of those who have not fought. Most Americans need your help to understand what you have experienced because they haven't been there.

7. Realize that life at home is different from life at war. Compared to the demands of life in a combat zone, many issues and activities of normal life may seem insignificant or trivial. These feelings will diminish as you adjust. Just be patient with others and yourself.

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Admiral Veron Clark:

FAMILY foundation



Admiral Vernon Clark USN (Ret.) served as the 27th Chief of Naval Operations, leading the U.S. Navy from 2000-2005. Clark is the son of E.M. and Estella Clark, lifelong Assemblies of God ministers and ministry leaders.

"My parents provided me with a rich and wonderful spiritual heritage," Clark says. "Their faith and love, coupled with the teachings of the church, no doubt set me on the right course for life."

Clark's career in the Navy called on his family to make sacrifices.

"Separations were longer and harder in the early days," remembers Clark's wife, Connie. "Today, there's e-mail, but during Vietnam we could only afford one phone call during a deployment which lasted nine months. It was just a 10-minute call. We would send

each other cassette tapes so

we did not forget what our loved one's voice sounded like."

"I have found plenty of opportunities to practice my belief in prayer," Clark said during his years as CNO. "The Navy offers incredible challenge. When we get placed in positions of leadership we are responsible for mission accomplishment, for the manner in which our nation is represented, for the conduct of people who are assigned to our commands, and for outcomes, which can include matters of life and death. The Scriptures say, 'We have not because we ask not.' I have learned the wisdom of asking for wisdom, for guidance ... and for help." **tpe**

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

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FROM WAR

8. Warriors need a genuine welcome home. Yes, you need to feel welcomed back home and appreciated for your service. As a human being, you should not deny this need. But realize that others may not always know the best way or most appropriate way to express their gratefulness.

9. Tell your story. You are not a robot. You've just returned from a war zone. Process your experience by telling other people your story.

10. Warriors need peace with God. God has created you with a purpose. Have peace with God and others. Help, grace, wisdom and peace will come from reading your Bible, time in prayer, and meeting with a pastor, Christian counselor, or some other person who knows God in a personal way.

Welcome home! Thanks for your service to our nation. Remember that attitude and perspective are crucial to the process of adjusting to life back at home.

"In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:37-39, NIV). **tpe**

Chaplain Col. (Ret.) SCOTT McCHRISTAL serves as the military/VA representative for the Chaplaincy Department of the Assemblies of God.

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