

# Surviving the trauma



Joseph Cook

Joseph Cook of Baytown came to Crockett in September to pay his dad's (Harold Cook, World War II veteran of Grapeland) taxes. Here's his story:

I was with 1<sup>st</sup> squad, 1<sup>st</sup> fireteam. My job was to walk point. This was during the midpoint of 3/3's RVN service.

I waited 39 years to go back to the VA. When I registered with the VA in 1969, the doctor told me my hearing loss and my right hand did not qualify for any help.

Over the years many of my friends, all veterans, told me I needed to go back to VA. I took a lot of convincing. Finally, a veteran I worked with convinced me it was necessary. I said OK.

My initial evaluation was for PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder); my right hand, and tinnitus in both ears. I was awarded a 60 percent disability rating; 50 percent was for PTSD.

I found out in August 2005 what PTSD was. I was verified by the VA in December 2005 and was accepted into therapy at the

VA Hospital in Houston on Feb. 20, 2006. I went to therapy five days a week for 42 weeks.

The therapist taught us all of the ways PTSD can affect a veteran's life: the anger, anxiety, withdrawal, vigilance, nightmares, lack of emotion and many more. Then they told me about how families are affected as secondary PTSD.

How, because of me, they can experience many of the same symptoms. I found out how I had been hurting my family for 39 years. It broke my heart. I apologized to my wife and both of my sons for working all the time; withdrawing from them and ordering them around, I found out I was still living in battlefield/survival mode.

I still walk perimeter, sleep in short hour segments, sit with my back to the wall, and have problems trusting others and withdrawing from crowds or loud noises.

I am working on recognizing the symptoms and triggers. My wife informed me she wouldn't take any more of my "crap," and "take that damn hat off." This still upsets me, but I'm working on it. We are getting along better, because she is a remarkable woman.

One of the biggest things I found out about PTSD is that there is no cure. The only thing we can do is to be alert to the triggers and allow our families help us deal with the effects.

Other veterans told me about the help that is there. We have to reach out to other veterans by whatever means we can. I have one vet friend/brother that won't even talk to me or return phone calls.

I guess I'm going to have to camp out in his yard to make contact with him. I have found another Army vet that went over to Vietnam on the same ship as I at the same time. He has told me that I am the first and only one who has

reached out to him and encouraged him on how to find help.

My son tells me the things I have shared with him are far-reaching. He was buying a house in California, and in talking to the Realtor, found out she was convinced her vet husband was anti-social.

My son told her about PTSD and her mouth fell open. She said the symptoms fit him to a "T." She realizes he had a real

problem and needs help, thinking he was just "that way."

We as brothers have to reach out to others. I am a man, a man's man, and I can cry now. I learned to cry the day in 1992 when I put my son on the plane bound for MCRD San Diego. He and I are closer now than ever before and I can say I love him as a son and as a brother.

I salute all my brothers and I love you as my brothers.

Cook was a Lance Corporal in the Marines in 1967. His unit was nearly annihilated on April 30 during the Battle of the Hills in Vietnam where he suffered battle injuries.

He received the Purple Heart, Vietnam Service Award, and other prestigious service medals. Before a lot was known about PTSD, the condition was referred to as battle fatigue or shell shock.

Cook has helped many veterans by sharing his insights about PTSD and telling others where to go to get help.

