



VETERANS FOR PEACE  
HUMBOLDT BAY  
CHAPTER 56

# THE FOGHORN

MAY  
2015

*“Cutting Through the Fog of War”*

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## Wilderness as Therapist

*A growing number of veterans and researchers are racing to understand nature’s power to heal.*

*Tay Wiles Feb. 16, 2015*

One of the environmental movement’s most legendary characters was also a traumatized war vet. You might remember George Washington Hayduke for his inventive, destructive antics, but he was also a man who measured road miles by the number of six-packs it took him to drink while driving and whose mind often wandered back to Vietnam. “What’s more American,” Hayduke wonders in Edward Abbey’s novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, “than violence?”

The fictional Hayduke had a real-life model: a former Army medic named Doug Peacock. Peacock served in Vietnam during his 20s, and as he went through the violence of that war, the thing he carried was a map of the Northern Rockies. He brought it out during rare quiet moments and imagined himself in its contours, rolling over the sharp granite creases of the Wind River Mountains or the grassy meadows north of Yellowstone Lake. When he returned from the war, he returned to nature, studying grizzlies for several decades and fighting for their federal protection, as well as for that of other threatened species. These days, the 72-year-old activist and writer has become a new role model, not just for greens, but for a new generation of veterans.

“What they need to do is go out and immerse (themselves) in the wild,” he said recently. “Let it wrap around you. See what it does to you.”

The idea of wilderness as therapy for veterans is nothing new. In recent years, a growing number of such programs are springing up around it. But in order for it to work on the scale that’s needed, its supporters are going to have to get the military behind it. And that’s where the difficulty lies.

There are some 21 million American veterans today, 4 million in the West alone, who have served in places from Vietnam to Iraq to Afghanistan. Half of Iraq and Afghanistan vets have received mental health diagnoses including post-traumatic stress, which can lead to high rates of alcohol or drug abuse, domestic violence and suicide. In 2010, an estimated 6,000 vets committed suicide — on average 16 a day, and 20 percent of the U.S. total. More soldiers have died from self-inflicted wounds than service members died in combat between 2002 and 2013.

The federal Department of Veterans Affairs is supposed to help, but the agency seems overwhelmed. Treatment rates have improved in recent years, but 242,000 vets report not receiving treatment within four months of requesting it. The VA predicts it will treat 6.6 million vets in 2015.

A persistent lack of funding and increasingly common and hard-to-treat problems like traumatic brain injury have combined with bureaucratic red tape to breed distrust among veterans about the agency’s effectiveness. A national scandal last year, when it was revealed that the VA had exaggerated how quickly it was treating people, made things even worse. A recent survey showed that almost a third of veterans with PTSD or traumatic brain injury now drop out of treatment, citing lack of progress, and the same number never bother to ask for help.

Meanwhile, a growing number of vets are finding ways to help themselves — particularly in the wild. A leading proponent of this approach is Stacy Bare, a 36-year-old Iraq War veteran and the director of Sierra Club Military Outdoors, a prominent wilderness program for veterans. At 6-foot-7, broad-boned and with an impossibly deep baritone voice, Bare is an imposing figure, one who is inspiring to many service members finding their way through trauma. A climber, skier and mountaineer, who likes to end his emails with the message “Stay stoked!” Bare is well aware of the benefits of nature.

“We know intuitively that outdoor recreation can provide a quantifiable mental health benefit,” he says. “But for policy and for funders, we

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have to make sure that we have strong monitoring and -evaluation behind it.”

That’s because, while there are a growing number of one-off partnerships between outdoor organizations and local VA hospitals, the VA as an entire agency is not fully on board with wilderness as therapy. And that’s because Bare and others can’t prove that it works. “Across the board, people haven’t done a good job showing the results,” he says. “We’ve done a lot of nice things for veterans, but what are the things that really work?”

Right now, there’s a wide range of existing wilderness programs for vets: The VA partner Wasatch Adaptive Sports gets them skiing and camping outside Salt Lake; Project Healing Waters takes them fly-fishing around the country; Idaho-based Higher Ground hosts eight-week sports camps for vets and their families; the Army’s own Warrior Adventure Quest teaches “alternatives to aberrant behavior,” such as paint ball, rock climbing and scuba diving. Outward Bound Veterans and Sierra Club Military Outdoors take hundreds of vets outdoors each year.

But just because these kinds of programs appear to be working doesn’t mean that researchers understand how. And until that happens, it will be hard to create a coherent, officially sanctioned program, especially through the VA writ large.

“I think there’s interest, but there is not necessarily a national acceptance of adventure-based experiences within the VA,” says psychologist David Scheinfeld, director of research for Project Rebirth, a nonprofit that develops healing programs for first responders and vets, who recently became a post-doctoral fellow for the VA in Austin, Texas. “The VA needs data showing it’s effective, safe, that it’s worth -supporting.”

Scheinfeld is working to provide that data. Last fall, in partnership with Outward Bound, he studied the psychological impacts of outdoor experiences for veterans. Though not yet peer-reviewed, that study is one of the closest examinations of the value of nature in treating war trauma. Scheinfeld observed how anxiety, sense of purpose and other health indicators changed for 199 vets before, immediately after and one month following an outdoor experience, such as mountaineering or backpacking for a week. The majority of veterans showed improvements, including increased willingness to seek professional help, lower rates of depression and enhanced feelings of social connection, though some of those changes tapered off after a month.

This kind of research could also help assuage critics who say outdoor companies and guides stand to profit from more widespread programs.

“The VA (is) very data-driven,” says Jennifer Romesser, a clinical

psychologist at the Salt Lake VA, who helps run veterans outdoor programs. “That’s why this research is so important.”

Stacy Bare and a growing number of “stoked” vets know this, so they are working hard to get the VA the data it needs to act. Bare is now helping with a three-year pilot study, bringing together Sierra Club Military Outdoors, Outward Bound, Project Rebirth and Georgetown University.

The study will gather groups of nine to 12 veterans and integrate therapeutic outdoor experiences with more traditional mental health treatment, testing the effects while researching ways to partner with local VA centers. (The first group will spend a week in April rafting Cataract Canyon in Utah with Outward Bound.)

As part of the three-year study, 37-year-old Josh Brandon, who served three tours in the Iraq War, is establishing research hubs in Washington state. Like Bare, Brandon is sold on nature as therapist.

Brandon served as an infantry officer in the Army in his first tour in Iraq — “like the guys on TV, who are dirty, have rifles and are getting into street fights.” As an advisor to Iraqi forces in 2006, he saw civil war and ethnic cleansing in Baghdad. By the beginning of his third tour in 2009, he was drinking pretty hard, but by the end of it, he told me, “I came home with ‘death eyes.’”

He tried the VA, but at the clinic in Lakewood, Washington, he saw soldiers with amputated limbs and gruesome scars, and “it scared the shit out of me,” he recalled. It also convinced him that other vets needed help even more than he did. He started getting together with Army buddies, doing crash courses with a local mountain guide, and then going out on expeditions, where teamwork and goals created a positive space for recovery. On his first attempt to summit Mount Rainier, he ran into 60 mph winds and rock falls. It was, he says, “awesome.” Somewhere along the way, the death eyes went away.

Brandon says his main goal remains getting vets the help they need. But he’s discovered an interesting fringe benefit: Not only can nature help vets, he says, but they can return the favor — by helping nature. And a recent survey showed that 75 percent of post-9/11 war vets who live in Western states favor federal protection of public lands. Much like Hayduke, Brandon has become a warrior for the wilderness. And he’s not the only veteran who feels that way, he says: “I call it defending our land a second time.”



## CONSIDER YOUR MEMBERSHIP IN VFP56

By Jim Sorter

*We are trying to collect past dues from members who have not paid in recent years. Your dues do not go to waste. We sponsor State legislation to get Depleted Uranium testing done on our returning soldiers, we use the funds to go into schools. We give DVD's and books to teachers and students to better inform them of choices they will have to make in their futures. We print up and pass out literature at special events to make sure both sides of the military problem are addressed, not just the pros. Our members go into schools from Del Norte County to Garberville telling personal stories about their terms in the service and speaking to students about alternative careers besides the military. We offer scholarships to those veterans who cannot pay for a membership in VFP56. We don't want anyone who wants to join to not do so for lack of funds. We also run a GI Rights Hotline for those members of the military and their families who want answers to questions about alternatives other than military service. Sometimes it 's a call just to talk to a person who is sympathetic to their needs.*

*We cannot do this without your membership. Local dues are only \$20.00 per year and National is only \$25.00 per year. Surely \$45.00 a year is worth the satisfaction of belonging to an organization people recognize and support. I don't know how many people come up to me daily who recognize the VFP logo on my hat and want to talk about our mission and what we stand for. They always leave impressed when I tell them of the things we do, not just on a local level but on a national level as well.*

*Please consider sending your membership in today or making a contribution to Veterans For Peace, P.O. Box 532, Bayside, CA 95524. Our treasurer will make sure the \$25.00 amount gets sent on to the National VFP Office. The \$20.00 local dues supports all of the above in our community.*

### Homeless Veterans appeal: An ex-soldier's mission to reveal the true face of war

**Ben Griffin uses his experience as an SAS trooper to show children that civilians are casualties too**

Serving the crown is a concept familiar both to convicts and soldiers. The former, for their sins, serve time at Her Majesty's Pleasure; the latter put their lives on the line in the defense of others. For some former armed forces members, the future on civy street can be as bleak, if not more so, than for those leaving prison. For former servicemen, especially those who have seen combat, the gunfire may have long since ceased but, out on the streets, their battle is only just beginning. According to a recent ForcesWatch study, post-traumatic stress disorder and alcohol misuse are three times as common among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans than in the general population, while other mental disorders – such as depression – are 90 per cent higher.

The question of how to respond to the horrors wrought by modern conflict is one that a former SAS trooper, Ben Griffin, has been grappling with ever since he left the military in 2005.

After a childhood defined by Commando comics and the Army Cadets, Griffin joined the Parachute Regiment, aged 19. "I went into the military as an ideological recruit," he recalls. "A true believer... I saw going to war and being a British soldier as the highest ideal one could achieve."

Throughout most of his career – he served in Northern Ireland, Macedonia and Afghanistan – he saw little to contradict this. It was only when he was deployed to Iraq, having survived the elite SAS's grueling selection process, that his faith in the military began to be seriously challenged.

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**Next VFP56 meeting will be held  
on Thursday, May 7th at  
7:00 PM.  
Meeting will be held at 24 Uni-  
tarian Fellowship Way, Bayside,  
Jacoby Creek Road. Veterans and  
non-veterans are more than wel-  
come to come and help us dialogue  
about what we together can do to  
bring about peace in this complex  
world.**



**Redwood Coast Peace Poetry & Art Project**

Post Office Box 532 ☪ Bayside, California 95524+0532

*Peace, even in times of unrest, should be the goal of all human communities.*

You are cordially invited  
to the  
**6<sup>th</sup> Annual  
Peace Poetry & Art  
Celebration**

Sunday, May 10, 2015  
5 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.

Unitarian Universalists' Fellowship Hall  
23 Fellowship Road  
Bayside, California

This event is free and open to the public.

Copies of the  
***2015 Redwood Coast Peace Poetry Anthology***  
will be available for a modest donation  
following the celebration.

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## GOLDEN RULE REPORT FOR MAY

To All:.....:

The steady drum beat pounding out our work cadence has been stepped up a notch. We're not at ramming speed yet but getting close. Only 60 plus days till The Rule is scheduled to splash.

Michael Gonzalez finished shaping and painting the main mast. We slid it out a small window in the corner of the work shop, all 36 and a half feet of it, it's now out in the sun light awaiting hardware. Mike is now working on the Mizzen which will hold all of the electronics; Radar, antenna, lights etc. Daisy Arquero, our rigger, has mastered the art of splicing wire rope and has assembled all of the blocks needed for the running rigging.

Dennis Thompson welded together a support structure that will hold up the mizzen mast but not interfere with the propeller shaft or the engine exhaust system. Jason Kraft is almost finished with the starboard toe rail. The port toe rail is in the paint shop where Karissa Osborne has been sanding and painting 3 days a week. Brekin is completing the bunks, settee and galley structures. All the parts have been cut, sanded and primed and will soon be assembled in the main cabin. Helen Jaccord purchased all the materials needed for the bunks and seat cushions. She has shaped the 3 and 4 inch foam to fit the V berth and both bunks in the main cabin as well as the seat cushions for the bench seats. The material is a sturdy and beautiful aqua marine Naugahyde. Helen is going to embroider the name "Golden Rule" in gold color on the seat cushions. How cool is that.

The gunnel and transom caps have been epoxied and permanently screwed into place. Gerry Condon and I have sanded and are currently applying the final coats of varnish. A Mahogany Gallows has been installed over the transom. It will support the Mizzen boom, stern light and life rings. Captain Ninehaus has wired into place out lets for 110 and 12 volt devises as well as hook ups for computers so crew members can work on their lap tops and Skype.

I hate to say it but we are pretty much out of money again. Several of us are using our own savings to buy materials and pay the few people we need to hire occasionally. Any and all help is greatly appreciated. To close out today, we need a small crew of folks to begin tearing down the boat house. If you can operate a screw gun and climb a ladder, we can use you. The boat house needs to be disassembled and cleared away so we can move the Rule onto the launch car. Call, write or just come by the boat yard and we'll get you organized.

Respectfully submitted by Chuck DeWitt,  
Restoration Coordinator "The Golden Rule Project"

Finn Town, Humboldt Bay CA.

**The National Board of Directors of Veterans For Peace just voted to donate \$8,000 (to meet an \$8,000 matching donation from the Rick Foundation), toward the final costs of restoring the Golden Rule and getting into the water on its way to the VFP National Convention in San Diego.**

**Make Waves!**

**Gerry Condon**

**National Board Vice President**

**VETERANS FOR PEACE**

*This is VFP's second investment in the Golden Rule Project having made a \$5,000 grant in December 2014.*

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As part of a Special Forces snatch squad tasked with picking up suspected insurgents and handing them over to the Americans, he began to worry about the legality of the war and the missions he was sent on.

After eight years of exemplary service, Griffin hung up his boots. He risked court martial doing so but, as he revealed shortly before he was silenced on the subject by a High Court injunction, he could no longer bring himself to carry out missions which were making Britain complicit in acts of “brutal interrogation” and “torture”.

Like many other veterans, Griffin – who is now more happily employed in the ambulance service – has suffered the afterburn of the battlefield. Although he doesn’t find the term “post-traumatic stress disorder” useful, referring to its symptoms instead as a “natural human reaction” to the horrors of war, he has his demons. But rather than allow himself to be consumed by them, he has harnessed them.

With the help of Veterans for Peace UK, Griffin has been turning his SAS-honed tactical skills to the task of educating the public about the true nature of war. With 142 veterans, whose experiences of conflict range from D-Day to Iraq and Afghanistan, standing alongside him, his organization’s perspective crosses continents and spans decades. This unique insight has left Griffin with few doubts about some of the costs of military service.

“Just being in a system where you’ve got hierarchy, peer pressure and a set of values completely at odds with the rest of society – it’s psychologically difficult both to enter and to leave. Just as it’s psychologically difficult to enter and leave prison.

“Add the chaos, the irrationality and the immorality of warfare on top, and people are going to be affected by what’s happened.

“You can do or witness terrible things in the military and they can almost be laughed off – they often are – but when a soldier leaves the military the hierarchy is instantly removed. And, over time, the peer pressure and the indoctrination start to drop away too. Then you start to look back on the things that you were involved in with different eyes.

“I’ve often thought since I got back from Iraq about the effect we had on the people we came into contact with. And not just the men that we dragged off to prison, but the younger boys who would have been there watching us, who would have been watching their family members being brutalized and dragged out – and maybe never saw them again, or didn’t see them for months or years.”

In 2008, he said: “I have no doubt that non-combatants I personally detained were handed over to the Americans and subse-

quently tortured. The information I have released is the tip of the iceberg.”

At the time, within 24 hours the Ministry of Defense served him with a permanent injunction, banning him from revealing any more. “I’ve often wondered how many of the people we traumatized went on to join Isis,” he muses.

This cycle of political and psychological violence, with its repercussions for both the British soldier and the communities he is deployed against, is one Griffin is determined to break. The nation’s classrooms are a key battleground in this fight for peace.

“Ask a child what it’s like to be in a war,” says Griffin, “and they’ll tell you what it’s like to be a soldier in a war. ‘You might see your friend be killed.’ ‘You might be killed.’ ‘You might have to kill someone.’ But none of the kids in the workshops I run ever – or at least very rarely – answer the question as if they were a civilian in a war, or think about what it might be like to have their country invaded. Our children are definitely thinking about warfare in terms of what it would be like to be in the military.

“One of the purposes of our workshops is to get children to think about what it might be like to be on the end of British or American military power, to take them out of that zone where they’re thinking purely in terms of our own military and think about what it must be like to be on the end of that. And that’s what we are trying to achieve – to get people to think outside of nationalistic terms.

“Think of it like climate change. If we stopped burning petrol tomorrow the world would still heat up for 20 or 30 years. But just because it might take a few decades is no reason not to do it. We need to look at militarism and war in the same way.

“If we stop interfering in the Middle East, there is still going to be a time period where we are going to experience the repercussions of the actions that we’ve already taken.

“It will take time, but eventually the effects of the pollution we’ve released will disappear.”







**Veterans For Peace  
Chapter 56**

Phone 707-826-7124  
Email: VFP56@aol.com  
WE'RE ON THE WEB:  
<http://www.vfp56.org>

**COORDINATING COMMITTEE**

**Rob Hepburn, Steve Stamnes  
Steve Sottong, Jim Sorter,  
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Ernie Behm**

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# LET US HEAR FROM YOU!

If you would like to submit an article, opinion, comment or response to anything you have read which might interest the members of VFP-56, please e-mail it to [turtldnccer@aol.com](mailto:turtldnccer@aol.com), in word format, or mail to Jim Sorter at 1762 Buttermilk Lane, Arcata, CA 95521. Submissions will be included on a first come basis until the newsletter is full. Late arriving submissions will be archived for future issues.



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## **The GI Rights Hotline**

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**Call for information from a network of nonprofit  
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**The service is free. The call is confidential.**

**You have the right to keep one copy of this or any other  
information at any time (DOD Directive 1325.6).**

Veterans For Peace  
Chapter 56  
P.O. Box 532  
Bayside, CA  
95524