



Chaplain 's Corner



Living With Survivor Guilt

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483rd SPS, Cam Ranh Bay AB,
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At some point, a combat vet with PTSD symptoms will give a godlike status to friends who died in the war. Whether they were good men or not, the dead will suddenly be raised to a much higher esteem than the veteran gives himself. They were better men; they would have made more of their lives if given a chance. Why am I still here and they are gone? What is my purpose? They could have done it better. If I would have done something different, they might be alive.... This is natural. PTSD leads to depression, and depression leads to low self-esteem, which leads to making everyone, especially dead war friends, seem bigger than life. For many veterans, this can also, whether they know it or not, be the time to resolve their feelings about letting dead friends go.

Most combat vets did not have time to grieve during the war. When someone died they accepted it, and pushed back sorrow or any emotional reaction. But those emotions remained inside all those years... and then they are released, veterans suddenly hit the low point of their lives. A veteran needs to learn at how to look at the positive side of surviving instead of the negative. This can be hard when times are rough and the future seems bleak. Maybe you survived so your children can grow up to do great things. Maybe you will do great things. If the country collapsed next week, you wouldn't run around in a panic. You would be able to protect your family, and hope. You would be a survivor, just like you were in the war. When dealing with PTSD, the veteran can work through guilt feelings to a realization that surviving war is something that can be turned into positive feelings.

It takes time.

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