

PTSD In WWII

**Greta
Haas**

Causes for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

This is a mental condition which develops after one has witnessed a severely traumatic event. It is unsure what causes PTSD to develop, but it is theorized it is related to stress hormones. After a long period of time, PTSD affects the brain and causes the part of the brain which handles memory to shrink.

What events can cause PTSD?

PTSD can be caused from nearly any traumatic event, however not every individual will develop it during the same event. Shootings, war, combat, accidents, sexual abuse, and much more can cause PTSD.

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Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental condition which was just recently accepted by the medical community. However, it is diagnosed by the symptoms and many can acquire it under different circumstances. Many events can cause post-traumatic stress disorder such as shootings, war, combat, tragic accidents, sexual abuse, and many other traumatizing events. The exact physical cause for this disorder is not known, it is however hypothesized that "traumatic events put the body into a survival "fight or flight" mode, in which body releases stress hormones (adrenaline and norepinephrine) to provide a burst of energy while pausing some of the brain's other tasks, such as filling short-term memories."¹ Therefore, these hormones are constantly heightened, and those who are diagnosed with PTSD also have enhanced fear and emotions. Over time, the part of the brain which handles memory shrinks in people possessing PTSD. The reason for this, however, is unknown.

¹History.com Editors, "PTSD and Shell Shock," October 02, 2017, accessed March 30, 2019, <https://www.history.com/topics/inventions/history-of-ptsd-and-shell-shock>.

What are symptoms of PTSD?

- ◆ Shaking
- ◆ Nightmares
- ◆ Irritability
- ◆ Flashbacks
- ◆ Rash/Violent Reactions

The symptoms of PTSD vary in different people, however, some of the constants are easy to spot. "People with the disorder may experience PTSD symptoms such as frequent fear, stress, and anxiety stemming from the traumatic event. They may relive the event through flashbacks or nightmares and have intense, disturbing thoughts and feelings related to the event. They sometimes avoid people, places and situations that remind them of the trauma."¹ These are some of the symptoms which follow PTSD, and a first-hand account from Victor Gregg speaks of increased irritability and memory loss. "I suffered similar violent outbursts for the next forty years and each time I had no memory of the commotion I had caused."² Though at the time, this condition was not yet recognized and caused Gregg to go through punishment for these actions which he had seemingly no control over.

¹History.com Editors, "PTSD and Shell Shock," October 02, 2017, accessed March 30, 2019, <https://www.history.com/topics/inventions/history-of-ptsd-and-shell-shock>.

²Victor Gregg, "There Was No Help for PTSD When I Left the Army in 1945 - but We Still Don't Do Enough for Our Veterans Today," The Telegraph, November 09, 2015, accessed March 30, 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-two/11983763/There-was-no-help-for-PTSD-when-I-left-the-Army-in-1945-but-we-still-dont-do-enough-for-our-veterans-today.html>.



How Does PTSD
Tie Into WWII
?

Victor Gregg

A first-hand look on WWII

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¹Victor Gregg, "There Was No Help for PTSD When I Left the Army in 1945 - but We Still Don't Do Enough for Our Veterans Today," The Telegraph, November 09, 2015, accessed March 30, 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-two/11983763/There-was-no-help-for-PTSD-when-I-left-the-Army-in-1945-but-we-still-dont-do-enough-for-our-veterans-today.html>.

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-Victor Gregg

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Victor Gregg was a young man born in the United States who enlisted in the United States Paratroopers in 1937 when he was eighteen years of age. He fought for the entirety of World War Two, and arrived home in 1945 but was demobbed in 1946. During his time in the war, Gregg was captured and taken as a prisoner of war in Arnhem. "On a work detail I had sabotaged a factory and been sentenced to death. On the night of 13 February 1945 I was in Dresden waiting execution."¹ As Gregg awaited his execution in his cell, suddenly something horrifically miraculous happened, a bomb was dropped and blasted his prison open. He rushed out into the streets and was able to escape. He recalls the time saying "The days that followed changed me more than anything that I had seen in all of the rest of the war. From that time onwards I felt I had to oppose authority whenever and wherever it raised its head. It was only after many years that I realised how much heartache and misery my anger caused to those I loved."² Though Gregg had made it out with his life, the thousands of lifeless eyes he had seen and deaths he had caused and witnessed would haunt him for the rest of his life.

¹Victor Gregg, "There Was No Help for PTSD When I Left the Army in 1945 - but We Still Don't Do Enough for Our Veterans Today," The Telegraph, November 09, 2015, accessed March 30, 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-two/11983763/There-was-no-help-for-PTSD-when-I-left-the-Army-in-1945-but-we-still-dont-do-enough-for-our-veterans-today.html>.

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What Did Gregg Experience?

Harsh Reactions

When Gregg felt threatened or especially his loved ones he would react quickly and violently, and never even remembered it happening.

Short-term Memory Loss

When Gregg would react violently or have an unreasonable reaction it was similar to having a seizure, he would black out nearly and have no recollection of the event.

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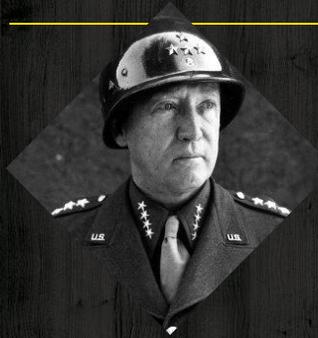
Victor Gregg already had a wife, Freda, once he returned home from the war. He recalls a night out during which one of his violent episodes took place, the first of what would be several. Gregg recounts the story saying that a distant male relative made a comment about Freda which made her clearly uncomfortable. However, Gregg remembers what happened in a "series of blurred movements"¹ stating that he essentially attacked the man. During another instance, Gregg was sentenced to fourteen days in Brixton Prison for attacking a man who had hit Gregg's eight year old son, Alan. Gregg speaks of the trial saying "The magistrate, one Mr White, said: 'It is the court's duty to protect society from the unruly and violent behaviour of our local thugs.' I wasn't a thug — I needed psychological help — but it wasn't available. A lot of us returning soldiers had mental problems but were dismissed as 'nutcases' or 'off their rockers'. I suffered similar violent outbursts for the next forty years and each time I had no memory of the commotion I had caused."² Gregg had no help and no clue that what was happening to him was something which could have been prevented and was not caused by him. This was to be realized some forty years later, after many more of these outbursts had already occurred.

¹Victor Gregg, "There Was No Help for PTSD When I Left the Army in 1945 - but We Still Don't Do Enough for Our Veterans Today," The Telegraph, November 09, 2015, accessed March 30, 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-two/11983763/There-was-no-help-for-PTSD-when-I-left-the-Army-in-1945-but-we-still-dont-do-enough-for-our-veterans-today.html>.

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General George Patton



"Don't admit this yellow bastard...There's nothing the matter with him. I won't have the hospitals cluttered up with these sons of bitches who haven't got the guts to fight"

-Patterson

"General George Patton was notable in his lack of sympathy for the psychological afflictions of soldiers. He is said to have slapped two soldiers who were recuperating in a military hospital while yelling to a medical officer, 'Don't admit this yellow bastard...There's nothing the matter with him. I won't have the hospitals cluttered up with these sons of bitches who haven't got the guts to fight.'"¹

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"Every Man Has His Breaking Point"

The many names:

Before PTSD was recognized in the military and psychiatric world, it was called many things:

- ◆ Combat neurosis
- ◆ Combat exhaustion
- ◆ Battle fatigue

What Changed?

- ◆ No correlation between mental health.
- ◆ All soldiers equally vulnerable.
- ◆ It seemed that all soldiers exposed to combat were affected.

How did they solve it?

- ◆ Rest in "safe areas"
- ◆ Trained extra personal
- ◆ Attempted to give psychiatric care
- ◆ Gave patients sedatives

PTSD was not always accepted as a genuine disorder until World War Two was upon the world. However, as staggering amounts of men came from the combat zones into the hands of confused doctors, it became clear that there was an issue. Doctors had completed screenings of men for their psychological health, however, even these men who were screened and shown to be quite healthy were diagnosed with PTSD. "In fact, so many soldiers were affected that psychiatrists were confronted with the reality that psychological weakness had little to do with subsequent distress in combat."¹ In response to the new found disorder, doctors in the military began attempting to help the men from the combat zones. Sadly, there was a lack of properly trained psychiatrists which meant that unqualified men were being trained in an attempt to aid those who were suffering.

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Training Video (20 October, 1943)

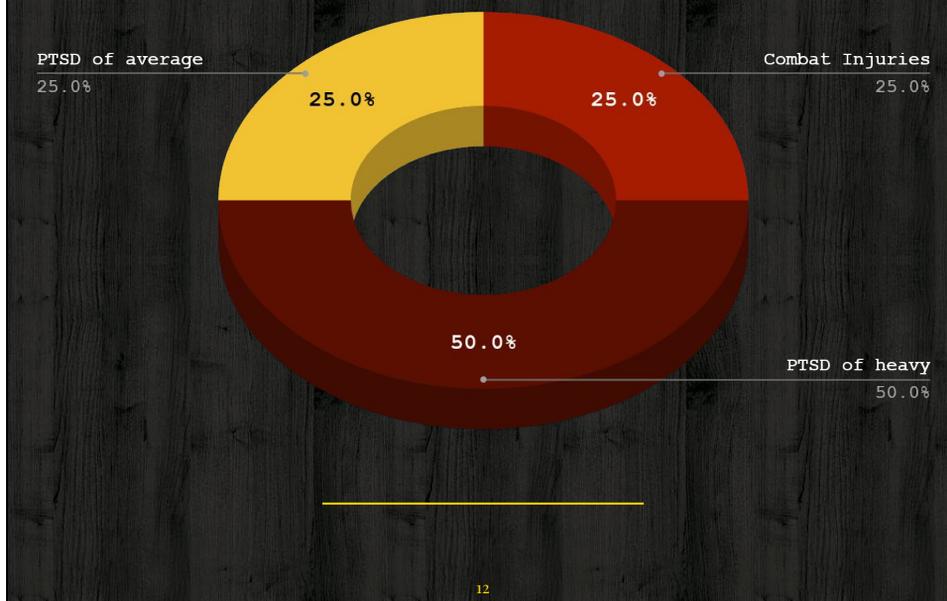


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Video above¹
26:03 - 29:37

¹"World War II," History of PTSD, December 15, 2011, accessed March 30, 2019,
<https://historyofptsd.wordpress.com/world-war-ii/>.

Causes of Casualties in Combat Veterans



"Overall, 50% of casualties were caused by war trauma for soldiers engaged in long, intense fighting."¹

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PTSD Now

- ◆ American Psychiatric Association included post-traumatic stress disorder in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-III (1980)
- ◆ PTSD is no longer considered an anxiety disorder
- ◆ PTSD is now in a category called Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders
- ◆ About 7.7 million American adults have PTSD, according to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America

As PTSD was further studied and put under tests, the American Psychiatric Association decided to include it in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. This was a large leap in the world of PTSD survivors and it gave them a way to reach out for help. There are now programs set up in an attempt to aid those who are in need of help, however, there is still a lack of support for the veterans of World War Two, as well as many other military personal suffering under PTSD.

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But even now, I don't think we are doing enough for our veterans. Their care should be a government priority, and it should not be left to charities like Help For Heroes to subsidise the cost. We are quick enough to send our service people, men and women, into the fray. But we must be equally willing to look after them one hundred per cent when they bring their battered minds and bodies home.

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Thank You

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