

WHERE MADNESS LIES:
HIDDEN CONSPIRACIES IN THE MILITARY SERVICE, DISABILITY AND TRIAL OF A
VIETNAM VETERAN

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I: Introduction

As a psychotherapist I have specialized in treating Vietnam veterans suffering Post-traumatic Stress Disorder since 1979. How a pacifist, vegetarian, anti-war activist became an expert in healing the hideous twisting of the psyche caused by modern warfare is too long a story to repeat here. Suffice it to say that I still protest that war by striving, personally and professionally, to live up to our old anti-war dictum, "Bring the boys back home."

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is the modern, quasi-scientific name now given to that conglomeration of wounds to the mind, heart and soul once called battle fatigue or shell shock. PTSD is certainly caused by the impact of contemporary warfare's horrific practices on the vulnerable psyches of young people caught in its maelstrom. PTSD can also be set in motion by a recruit's pre-combat training and can be severely exacerbated by his treatment on returning home. 2.5 million men and about 5,000 women served in Vietnam during the war. 1.5 million of these were in combat. It is estimated that there are more than one million diagnosed cases of PTSD resulting from that war.

Spending years in the privacy of the psychotherapy effort with men suffering the alienation, rage, pain, loneliness, purposelessness, drug, alcohol, intimacy and employment problems that characterize PTSD has afforded me an unusually deep glance into the secret life of the Vietnam War.

After years of brutal warfare, the American public became convinced that the Vietnam War was nothing like the idealistic and politically necessary effort that our politicians would have had us believe. What, in fact, it was, how that was hidden from us, and how our young people were manipulated into serving as pawns and often made crazy in the process - all this is not part of the popular story. Yet all this, when we listen closely to veterans' stories, can be revealed. Such revelations cast a painful light on the official operations of our country, the United States, as a culture of conspiracy responsible, in large part, for ushering us into an age characterized by alienation, manipulation, intrigue, hypocrisy, disillusionment and mistrust.

The effects of grand operations and movements of culture and history on ordinary people are best demonstrated through stories. Thus I offer this story, only one out of hundreds I know. My involvement with this particular man was uncharacteristically brief. But his story is among the most telling in its demonstration of the degree to which we are lost in a great labyrinth of conspiracy and dishonesty far more complicated and fragmented than it is possible to imagine.

II: "Am I Mad?"

Because of my expertise in treating veterans with PTSD, I was invited to evaluate a Vietnam veteran named Chet, temporarily incarcerated in the Vermont State Hospital.

One chilly, drizzly Thanksgiving weekend, I drove to the rambling brick buildings huddled close together in a small valley. I walked through long, dark hospital corridors until I arrived at locked wooden doors with mesh-lined windows. I signed in and waited.

Chet had violently assaulted his ex-girl friend and her boy friend. Driving past her house, he saw the boy friend's car parked outside. Quietly, as though he were sneaking into an armed enemy camp, Chet crept into the house and held both woman and man prisoner at knife point. He eventually let them go, left, and was arrested shortly afterwards. He was in this Hospital for psychiatric evaluation prior to his trial.

Chet arrived with a notebook and small pile of books under his arm. Tall and broad with thick arms and shoulders, a large nose and closely cropped hair, he looked like a professional football player. We shook hands as Chet eyed me with a deadpan expression. We were shown into an empty ward room with barred windows and scattered chairs. Pointing to a locked door, Chet asked if we could use a small private room. The aide looked at us suspiciously.

"It doesn't have windows," Chet snorted. "I can't climb through the grating and escape."

A nurse entered and opened the door. "Take all the time you want," she said.

"Some people are cool," Chet said.

"What makes her cool?" I asked.

"Not judgmental and not afraid."

We entered the small room containing only a short table and four plastic chairs. Chet put his books on the table - literature, history, self-help. He leaned back, stroked his chin, looked at me and said, "So you're here to figure out if I'm mad or telling the truth."

Before I could reply, he chuckled. "It's okay. Half the time I don't believe what I've been through either."

Chet questioned my previous experience with vets, then abruptly asked, "Have you known anybody who worked for the CIA?"

I had worked with two. Harry had often been removed from his regular squad to serve as a demolition expert for what grunts had called "The Company," the CIA. Tony had been in Vietnam and Cambodia "illegally" while his service records read "Kentucky."

"Did you believe them?"

"Yes," I nodded. "The only thing crazy about what they told me was what they had to do and how they were treated."

"Then maybe you'll believe me," Chet said. He then described his symptoms. Worst was a fierce rage set off at any sign of jealousy or betrayal. With a fondness for weapons, he was never without a gun or knife. He had intrusive memories of combat, "but not just from Vietnam. That's what nobody believes." He was mistrustful, treated people like enemies, was always suspicious. He often had flashbacks or blackouts.

In 1958, after regular air force training, he had been shipped to Spain. There, apparently because of his stealth and sneaky nature, uniformed strangers asked if he were interested in covert operations. These men, who would not identify themselves or their organization, told him that many governments practiced covert actions against United States' military targets or allies. Chet would be serving his country as well as the principles of justice and fairness if he would help them. They gave him an overseas phone number to call with a code to enter after dialing.

Chet eventually declared his interest and was flown to Germany for advanced training.

Chet spent the next two years receiving training in the use of specialized intelligence equipment, advanced hand to hand combat, assassination techniques and secret communications procedures. He was then flown home, discharged and reassigned to a National Guard unit to maintain a military affiliation. He was told never to report for routine guard training or duties. Rather, when needed, he would be contacted by special officers with regular military credentials.

In 1961 Chet went on a secret operation in Southeast Asia, entering Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. As with Harry and Tony, Chet had been ordered never to reveal the details of these operations. "The only thing I can tell you," he said, "is that that '61 excursion, before we were officially in Vietnam, is something the public never knew about. It led to a series of operations for me over the next ten years all over Southeast Asia and Africa. They involved delivering secret messages to operatives from other countries, setting up spying equipment, assassinating enemies or sometimes innocent village people in order to terrorize them into supporting our side - whoever that was. When I returned, I was paid very well, always in crisp, new bills. I was told not to file with the IRS and, as long as I was employed by them, would never have to again. The damn thing is -- they never told me who they were or why we were doing these ops. I just received my orders and equipment, rendezvoused with my team, carried out my op, then returned to Vermont to await my next op. It was systematic, orderly, purposeful. But I cannot say, to this day, who I was working for or why."

Chet's eyes flashed. "I don't have names" he said. "I can't prove it. I'm going to be all alone in court. But it would help to know what you think. Do you believe me or have I hallucinated my entire life? Am I mad?"

"If I believed you were mad, I'd have to believe that everything you're telling me is fantasy, hallucination, the product of your deranged imagination."

"That's what other people think," Chet said.

"What makes them think that?"

"Well, I act crazy."

"How do you act crazy?"

"When somebody argues with me, I automatically take a karate stance. I'm ready to kill before I realize I'm not in a war zone."

"You were trained to do that and practiced it for decades."

"Yeah. I was in the military for twenty years. I'm ashamed to say I was good at it. They taught me to go on automatic, not think of my victims as real people but as targets to terminate. Now I can't get these pictures of dead African women and children out of my head."

"Maybe your training is wearing off."

"Damn it. It's not supposed to," Chet blurted. He began to shake. "Those people weren't supposed to become real." He was straining not to cry. "There's no such thing as a cold blooded killer, you know. Killers are made, not born."

"You feel like you were made a killer?"

Chet nodded. "More than thirty years ago. I should never have accepted their offer. I didn't know what I was getting into, how it would control my life. Now look at me," he said, scanning the tiny room, pointing to the locked door. "The crazy thing is, I'm glad I'm in here. I'm sleeping well. No nightmares of dead women and children. No fantasies of sneaking through the jungle. No laying awake till dawn planning how I'm going to terminate my ex as if I were on a mission to Hanoi. In here, with no rights and no freedom, I feel safe. I can't hurt anyone and no one can hurt me. For twenty years, I was GI Joe, a sneaking, marauding killer on

a secret campaign to make the world safe for democracy. I had to be mean, cruel and audacious. I utterly convinced myself I was right and anyone who disagreed with me or our government deserved to die. I kept a constant vigilance over myself to maintain that rationalization. I could not permit a single question, a single doubt to enter my mind. But now," he spread his hands wide, "this is the fate of the great defender of freedom and democracy. The only place I'm safe and the only place the world is safe from me is behind bars."

Tears gathered in the corners of Chet's eyes. He wiped them with one big finger. "Doc," he said. "I learned my profession very well. It makes me unfit for society. I can't function and society doesn't want me around. That's what this criminal procedure is about. By society's standards I am mad and dangerous. I don't blame the civilian system for thinking that way about me."

"What you're telling me is that the way you think, feel and behave isn't the result of a deranged mind."

"That's right," Chet said. "What I am is the result of a careful, systematic and brutal program of physical and mental training, all in the name of American ideals. Tell me, please, is this a one way ticket?" He slapped the top of his book stack. "Can my mind be retrained? Can I ever be human again? Isn't there a hospital or an institute where they reverse the process I went through? Or am I going to end up in a prison with common criminals or else a loony bin for the hopelessly ill?"

I looked long and hard at Chet. He was not asking questions very different than those asked by other vets. He wanted to be understood and believed, useful and productive. He had learned his job well and was in despair that, now that he was older and his mind was not so narrowed and numbed, he could function neither as mercenary, soldier nor citizen.

Chet seemed to have an intensified version of PTSD. His mind and heart had been restructured through intensive training for the needs of inhuman and brutal covert intelligence operations. He may have been susceptible to such behavior from childhood or he would not have been singled out. But, like the adolescent combat experience itself, his covert training and experiences put the final defining stamp on his identity development. Chet could have been many things. Like other vets, much of his anguish was that he ended up this way. Now, under the eyes and guardianship of both the psychiatric and legal systems, he did not want to be condemned for what he had been made. He wanted another chance.

I wanted to tell him that the dehumanization process was not irreversible. But I could not tell him that there were programs for men like him or a guided road back. There could be. In a culture that cherished its members, he would not be trained for an inhuman and technical use, then tossed away when no longer serving that function. But he had received special attention only while he had served special military needs. Now the only attention he would get would be to prevent him from carrying that careful and expensive training back into everyday society. It had cost the United States about \$50,000 per man per year to keep us in Vietnam. How much more had Chet's education cost? What would be the cost of a program created to bring him home? Why wouldn't anyone, individual or institution, foot such a bill?

I told Chet that I believed reshaping a man with his training and experience was possible but that it did not happen in our present society. I knew of no existing programs for deprogramming and rehumanizing former intelligence operatives and I could not promise Chet anything.

"I guess I knew that," he nodded, "It's what I've experienced since my arrest. Nobody in the hospital or legal system is willing to deal with my pain and rage for what it is. How do we

educate the mental health and justice communities to PTSD? How do we let people know what military service in today's world really is and does?"

He stared into my eyes. "I wish I could be part of such an effort. But what really matters about today's visit is whether I make sense to anyone. If I don't, then I stop making sense to myself. Can you understand me, Doc?" he asked.

I nodded. I promised to tell his psychiatrist that clandestine training and operations such as Chet had experienced were factual even though unrecorded and unsubstantiated by witnesses or service records.

"Thank you, Doc. That means a lot. At least I can stand by my experience."

"You can do that," I said. "But you will be evaluated according to our culture's normative standards, not your special ones. You will be judged within the public's context of ignorance or denial."

"I know. But inside I have to know that I'm not a deranged psychopathic killer. Inside, I have to fight to stay sane, no matter what psychiatrists or district attorneys say about me. I only wish the public knew what I know. I only wish that we were really a democracy, that the people kept check on the activities of the government. People just don't know what they do, what I did, in their names." He looked at me again. "Could I meet some other guys who were also operatives?"

"Yes, men like you, with your service history, really are around, though secretive. I could introduce you to a few."

Chet chuckled. "We'd have a lot to say to each other. Maybe we had the same boss men or went sneaking through the jungles together. Who knows? At least I'd meet a few others who went through the same experiences. That would help me feel sane."

Chet offered a firm handshake, "It's time for my Thanksgiving dinner, an institutional slice of cardboard turkey and tablespoon of cranberry sauce. Quite a celebration."

I left the hospital, driving silently through the late gray afternoon. Chet did not seem so different than most of the other traumatized vets I had worked with, only more severely distorted and confused because he had been more rigorously trained, involved in clandestine operations for so long, and ordered into silence and secrecy. He was an intensified version of combat veterans, a living example of what would have happened to them, or any of us, who had stayed in the combat zone for two decades. I was sad that this was Chet's thanksgiving, his reward. I was sad that, in all likelihood, he would suffer the fate he feared most - hospitalization or imprisonment. He probably would be wasted by an arm of the impersonal system in whose name he had wasted others. He had lost his individuality long ago, was unable to be responsible for himself. He had committed criminal acts but did that make him a criminal? Our country shaped its man to its secret needs, abandoned him when he could no longer serve them, then blamed him for his condition. The number of wasted men I had met over the years was beyond comprehension. Each one deserved my tears.

III: MADNESS ON TRIAL

The following summer, I received a phone call from the lawyer appointed as Chet's public defender. Chet was being tried on three counts of assault, battery and breaking and entering.

Released from the hospital, on probation and awaiting further evaluation, Chet had driven past the home of his old girl friend's new boy friend. "He had a blackout or went berserk or

something like that," the attorney said. "He broke in, held his girlfriend and her man at knifepoint for a few hours, then left peacefully. Chet has no money, so they turned him over to me. I've never represented a veteran before. We have a week to prepare. Can you help?"

I explained what I knew of Chet's Post-traumatic Stress Disorder but wanted to do a more in-depth interview to see if it was connected to this incident. The attorney would ask the judge for a stay of trial in order to arrange such an interview.

Vietnam vets are imprisoned on criminal charges two to three times in excess of their numbers in the general population. Vets had been trying for years to use Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and its symptoms - especially flashbacks to combat events - as a legal defense. Only in the last few years had any pleas based on PTSD proven successful. In 1990, a New York City court had found a Vietnam vet not guilty of a major crime because of his PTSD. That case reportedly established the precedent in New York for accepting PTSD as a valid legal defense.

"Does PTSD make a vet crazy?" the defender asked. "Are they psychotic? Are we talking about an insanity defense?"

"A Vietnam vet with Post-traumatic Stress Disorder isn't insane," I said. "He is in touch with ordinary reality. But if his PTSD is severe, it's as if he were living in two worlds at once. Memories and feelings of combat are always there, pulling at him. If present stress is severe enough, or reminds him of service experiences strongly enough, he loses his connection to our shared reality. Sometimes he'll feel and act like he's in Vietnam, even though he sees he's not. He may go into a flashback and actually see himself in combat."

"So it's like temporary insanity," the lawyer said. "In a flashback, Chet was temporarily insane and not responsible for what he was doing. If we argue criminal insanity, Chet will be incarcerated in a hospital for the criminally insane and lose all his rights. But if we argue temporary insanity under specific conditions, we might be able to save him from a criminal record and from prison."

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On a sunny July afternoon, two state troopers escorted Chet into my office wearing hand and ankle cuffs attached by a thick, tight chain. The troopers checked my office to make sure there was only one door, then guarded the door from an adjoining room. The big, burly man I remembered looked sad, tired and subdued. He peeked up from under a wrinkled brow and waited for me to start.

"I'm glad to see you again," I said, "but sorry it's under these circumstances."

Chet shrugged his large shoulders. His manacles clinked. "I'm sorry to drag you into this mess," he said. "I felt safe in the hospital. I asked them not to send me out into the World without some kind of support. But they had no place to put me."

With only two hours together, I asked Chet to tell me everything he could remember about the incidents in question.

"I was in a blackout for most of the evening," Chet said.

"That's okay," I said. "Tell me everything you can remember in detail."

"I was driving down the highway and saw my ex-girlfriend Marge's car parked at her boyfriend Ivan's house. I pulled into the driveway, backed my pickup in, parking it toward the road."

"Why did you park like that?"

"In a hostile situation you have to leave yourself a means of escape."

"How did you know it was hostile?"

"I felt threatened and betrayed."

"What do you remember next?"

"I went into the house," Chet continued. "The boyfriend's son was on the phone. I went after him with a knife in a Clash 2 Ready position."

"What does that mean?"

"Approaching the enemy, ready to fight, feint and stab," he said. "There's a whole series of positions you learn that are a standard part of intelligence training. I've used it hundreds of times on ops."

"So your combat training was already taking over?"

"Yeah. I saw the boy and I didn't. I was in hostile territory, worried about my safety."

"What next?" I asked.

"The next thing I remember, I was standing over my ex with a knife. My trigger point was saying, 'You got her.'"

"Trigger point?" I interrupted.

"Military training again. It's the point at which you deaden your feelings and switch onto automatic in order to terminate."

"So you were standing over your girlfriend. You had her at knifepoint and you switched into combat mode?"

"Yeah. But I didn't see Marge. I saw a black woman in a pile of dead bodies. Then I saw two other women we terminated. The first was from a covert operation in Angola in 1967, the second two in Mozambique in '71. I was in Africa, not New York."

"If you were in full combat mode, why didn't you terminate?" "It wasn't quite full combat. Something was struggling to break through. Even though Marge is with Ivan, I still love her. I've always hoped we might reconcile and she might love me back. So I just stood there. I didn't want to hurt her."

"Even though you were seeing women you killed in Africa, your heart told you this was Marge and your love was strong enough to restrain your combat mode from switching onto full?"

"I guess so," Chet said. "It seems like Marge knew it too. The next thing I remember is Marge getting up and saying, 'He's not going to do anything.' Then she took my knife away without me resisting, and threw it on the balcony."

"What happened to combat mode? Wasn't it still hostile territory?"

"Marge must have seen the love coming through," he said. "At the last minute, my love for her defeated my training." His tired eyes blazed. "Listen," he said. "There is no such thing as a cold-blooded killer except one that has been made. People aren't born that way. The military and war made me an irrational and immoral person. I want to be of purpose and service. I'm broken hearted. I need help to become human again." Chet's chin fell forward. He began to sob.

I moved my chair next to his and sat knee to knee while tears ran down his cheeks. Soon he sniffed, shook his manacles and chuckled. "Look at this," he said. "I can't even blow my nose by myself."

I pulled some tissues out of a box and wiped his eyes, cheeks and nose.

"I'm sorry to push this," I said when he was calm again. "I respect your pain and want to help you with it. But we don't have much time. Tell me anything else you remember."

"After Marge threw my knife away, I put my hands on Ivan's shoulders and apologized. Then I went outside. Ivan walked with me. He stayed cool and calm. I climbed in my truck. As I pulled out of their driveway, I thought, if Marge or Ivan had acted like my enemy, I might

have terminated them. But they didn't, and I don't really want to hurt them."

"If you didn't want to hurt them, why did you go armed to Ivan's house in the first place?" I asked. "Why couldn't you just drive past it? Or talk rather than attack? How did the past and present get so mixed up that you went into combat mode?"

"Marge is just like America. I loved them both. I gave each my total, blind dedication. I would have done anything, even killed, for either one. I did kill for my country. But in the end, I was let down. Neither my girl friend nor my country gave back the loyalty and commitment I offered. Neither put themselves on the line for me. They promised to love and honor me, just like I did them. But they both betrayed me."

"How do you respond to betrayal?"

"It's the one thing that can pull my trigger point," Chet said. "I loved my country and so I let it make me into what it wanted me to be. My country taught me to express my love for it as a fighter, abuser and killer. This is how I love."

Our time was up. The troopers were at the door. Chet rose. We shook hands. I promised to do what I could.

"Thanks, Doc," Chet said. "But it isn't too bad. I cherish my freedom. It's what I fought and killed for. At least in jail I feel safe and secure and I'm not a danger. I just wish I could teach people what happens when men are treated and misshapen like they did to me. I wish I could be useful to society instead of a throwaway now that I'm not an operative any more."

I watched Chet slowly climb down the stairs, his chains clinking as he walked.

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Chet clearly had severe Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. Though no longer in the military, he acted, thought, felt, perceived as though he was. His behavior was usually non-threatening, and he was usually able to remain in present reality. But when an experience of threat or betrayal overwhelmed him, it threw him into the past and into combat mode. At those times, he could be threatening or dangerous. Even so, a spark of love and the desire to be of service lived in him that could be stronger than his training and disorder.

Chet's relationship with his girl friend duplicated his relationship with and feelings for the United States. He repeated with his girl friend the history he had with the country, going through parallel stages of love, devotion, service, disappointment, threat, abandonment and betrayal. This criminal matter with Marge and Ivan were the present chapter of his life. But his relationship to our country was an underlying and organizing blueprint.

The public defender was concerned that we make Chet comprehensible to a judge and jury who had never been exposed to PTSD, veterans, or such a case. He thought the plea of temporary insanity represented my findings. "The judge will be worried that he's a danger to himself and others."

"He can be when all the threatening conditions occur," I said. "But that doesn't make him a criminal."

"If he's a threat, the DA will push for prison."

"Prison would just reinforce his feelings of threat, abandonment and betrayal. It could make him more dangerous, not less."

"What else can you recommend?"

"He wants to be of service and his heart is alive inside all his confusion. Can we ask the judge to place Chet in a long-term residential treatment setting for vets with PTSD? If he's in a safe and secure treatment program where he can learn to surrender his military training and relearn appropriate human responses, he probably won't hurt anyone and he just might make it home."

"Then that's what we'll recommend."

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Summer crawled along. The defender called to state that "the DA is up for re-election, so he's out for blood. He wants to make the newspapers by throwing the book at Chet. He doesn't accept your report. In chambers with the judge, he argued like a madman himself that Chet is a sociopath and you have political motives for diagnosing Chet the way you did. Political motives! He's the one using this case for re-election. And he insisted on using his own psychiatrist, one with no experience with vets."

"That's bad," I said. "PTSD often goes unrecognized or gets buried beneath another diagnosis. Pathology is placed in the individual's early history while minimizing his war experiences.

I've heard this complaint from many vets. They've had a very hard time getting mental health and government officials to realize just how profoundly shaping their war traumas were."

"This DA is out to prove that Chet is a mad killer, not a disabled vet. But we'll have to wait for the other report."

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The DA's psychiatrist found that Chet had a severe personality disorder with a pre-existing tendency toward violence. The psychiatrist doubted any accuracy in Chet's reported military history, stating only that if it were true it would have merely exacerbated his already violent inclinations.

In Chet's words, the psychiatrist found him to be born, not made, a killer.

The DA would fight for the maximum penalty, 12 years in prison if convicted. He had a long list of prosecution witnesses - the psychiatrist, Marge, Ivan and others who could testify to Chet's erratic, moody and explosive temper.

"Who are the witnesses for the defense?" I asked.

"You," he said.

"That's all?" I asked. "I'm willing to testify, but the odds are stacked against us."

"Chet said he'll take the stand in his own defense. If he responds to threat and betrayal by getting threatening and spacing out, the DA will drill, harass and threaten him until he looks dangerous or crazy."

"So if I'm the only defense witness we're most likely to lose and if Chet takes the stand we're almost guaranteed to lose."

"That's what it comes down to, Doc."

"Can we get him treatment instead of prison?"

"It doesn't look like it."

"But prison will probably finish him off."

"I know."

"Can we minimize the damage? Some prisons have groups or treatment programs for vets."

"I can push for a sentence in one of those. Our best bet may be to plea bargain. If Chet pleads guilty to a lesser charge, we could get him off with only a few years in prison."

"Isn't there a better choice?" I asked.

"Not as far as the legal system goes," the attorney said. "I'll turn all this over to Chet. The final decision is his."

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Chet pleaded guilty to the single charge of attempted burglary, a charge that had not even

been one of the original. Marge and Ivan never thought that Chet was robbing them and burglary was never thought to be a motive. One more veteran's story had been buried and its official history rewritten.

I was confident that I saw his PTSD accurately, that it was being discounted and that this was, by now, a standard part of American war veterans' stories. But I also questioned myself. Did I minimize Chet's personality problems because of my sensitivity to his war-related disorder? I might not have paid enough attention, in our few hours, to exploring his childhood and adolescence. It was no accident that he had been singled out for intelligence during his training. He might have been prone to violence, susceptible to manipulation. How many such vulnerable young men were reshaped for covert purposes?

If I had de-emphasized childhood, I was equally sure that the DA's psychiatrist did not, in his two hours, give any credence to military traumata and their symbolic repetition.

Chet needed some kind of safe, secure, intensive program of rehumanization. He didn't need prison, but a program that would spend as much time and money defusing and reordering his mind in ways that were cooperative and pro-life as had been spent on making him a covert operative who could kill on impulse. But we did not have such programs. There was no place for a man like Chet. There was no place to bring such severely wounded men, to balm their hearts, resuscitate their spirits and bring them home with honor and worth.

IV

I am left with a Kafkaesque sense of the horrible and absurd. Chet wasted many lives and finally ended up with his own life wasted. The military, intelligence, mental health and criminal justice systems were all involved in shaping Chet's personality and fate. No operative of any one system understood the involvement of the others. No one was purposefully evil-intentioned, though evil was done because lives and destinies were destroyed.

Chet should have entered adulthood responsible for himself. But he lost his integrity and ability to self-regulate long ago, if not before, then in the military. These very losses made him an excellent operative. But he could not evolve into a citizen. Then other institutions took control of his life, shaped his destiny. The conspiracy in whose tangled snares he was trapped was devised and directed by no mastermind. It is just there, a haunting, complicated, noncommunicative, discompassionate superstructure, as Kafka predicted, to all our modern lives.

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I visited Chet in prison, where he carried the American flag in an honor guard and sought out other incarcerated veterans. He felt neither happy nor useful. "But at least," he reminded me, "I don't have to worry that anyone is in danger because I'm in town. If there's no help to bring me home and make me human again, this may be the best place for me."

I had ventured into and Chet was lost within the conspiratorial madness that no one runs but in which we all live and operate. It truly is made of people yet has a life and rules of its own. It oversees all our lives but becomes especially confusing and oppressive once we fall into its hallways and chambers. Chet now lives behind its bars, and he cannot tell this, his story.