

LAVAN & NEIDENBERG NEWSLETTER

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Mental Health Screening for Troops Lacking

Violent behaviors going unchecked, untreated.

New questions about how the U.S. Military protects the mental health of their troops have surfaced after [Rolling Stone magazine ran a story in its March 27th issue](#) regarding the tale of Bravo Company's 3rd Platoon, part of the 5th Stryker Brigade that was operating in Afghanistan's Kahdahar Province.

This platoon was responsible for one of the first widely publicized civilian kills conducted by Cpl. Jeremy Morlock and Pfc. Andrew Holmes. After the successful murder of a young farmer, the platoon continued on a 4-month killing spree that resulted in the deaths of at least 3 more civilians. The reports claimed the men had talked about killing a civilian for months prior to the first murder. Once the deed was done, they often posed for pictures with the body, mocking and celebrating their accomplishment.

This behavior among troops has been found to be more widespread than first imagined. Throughout several subsequent investigations one of the main issues many of our troops, both active and veterans, struggle with remained unattended: mental health.

One of the central figures in the killings, 3rd Platoon's squad leader Calvin Gibbs, was described by some as a "crazed killer with a pure hatred for all Afghans" while others said he was an "upbeat guy, very funny" and that he was well-liked and competent in his duties. Gibbs became involved with the 3rd Platoon at a time when morale was low and soldiers were bored. He had begun to show signs of extreme violence and pride in his kill record, and began to promote pleasure in killing insurgents among the platoon members.



*Cpl. Jeremy Morlock with Staff Sgt. David Bram,
Photo courtesy Rolling Stone Magazine*

Mental evaluations of these behaviors were few and far between, if performed at all. Alyssa Reilly, a medic who treated Morlock and Holmes, said the men bragged about the incident during the exam and later during a card game. Not only did the incident go unreported, but the men were never questioned on their mental well-being after they began circulating their gruesome tales.

Substance abuse contributed to the incidents taking place during these killings. Hashish was commonly used after the kills as the men sat around discussing the attack, and other drugs such as opium, Ambien, codeine, and phenergan were sometimes found.

Morlock was already regarded as a high-risk soldier following a charge of disorderly conduct after burning his wife with a cigarette a month before being deployed to Afghanistan in 2009. His record prior to joining the Army was such that he normally would have been passed on had the troop shortage not been so grave. His teen years involved drunken fights, driving without a license, and leaving the scene of a serious car accident.

The full story of the "kill team" began to unfurl as more incidents happened – staged kills, severed fingers as trophies, stoned bragging parties in the barracks. Finally, the issue came to a head when Pfc. Justin Stoner finally spoke about the dangerous behaviors while being treated for a beating the other men inflicted upon him to keep his mouth shut.

Investigations have been going on for nearly a year now without much in the matter of punishment, demotion, or consequence for those involved. Possibly the most disturbing factor of the interviews conducted on many of the men involved is the nonchalant attitudes they displayed toward their actions in the field.

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Mental Health Screening For Troops Lacking

Treating our troops before, during and after service.

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The concern now is that the Army is not doing enough to effectively screen, treat and prevent mental conditions among the troops. Proper evaluation for potential psychological conditions prior to enlisting could have saved soldiers like Morlock from developing the unstable behaviors that led to the killings. Routine evaluations of troop morale and mental stability while deployed could have also prevented many of these men from developing the dangerous mental states common among the “kill team” members.

Most importantly, many troops returning to the U.S. after tours in Iraq and Afghanistan are not adequately evaluated for return to civilian life, leaving many prone to developing serious mental conditions. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is common among veterans, yet little is still being done to effectively detect and treat this condition. PTSD can make it very difficult for many veterans to cope with life back in the States, which can often lead to substance abuse, violence, and even suicide.

Adequate care for both physical and psychological injuries sustained during military service is a right that all veterans have earned through their selfless service to our country. If you or a loved one has been denied veteran’s disability benefits for a disabling condition you can take comfort in knowing a veteran’s disability attorney at the Law Offices of LaVan & Neidenberg is here to help.

Contacting a Disability Attorney

At The Law Offices of LaVan & Neidenberg, P.A. we strive to help disabled veterans obtain the benefits they deserve after serving our country. No matter if you are a veteran who just returned from the Middle East or a seasoned soldier in your later years, you deserve medical care for the physical and/or psychological disabilities you may have suffered during your service.

The veterans’ disability attorneys at The Law Offices of LaVan & Neidenberg, P.A. would like to offer you a FREE copy of our [guide to winning your veterans’ disability claim](#).

When you are ready to file a claim for veterans’ disability benefits, our attorneys are here for you. To schedule a no cost case evaluation, [contact us today](#) to have your situation reviewed and to discover if a veterans’ disability attorney can help make the application and appeals process quicker and easier on you and your family – **1-888-234-5758**.

HEALTH NEWS

WebMD Partners with White House for New “Joining Forces” Veterans’ Health Program

On April 12th first lady Michelle Obama and second lady Jill Biden announced a new initiative to provide health support for military members and their families.

The program, “Joining Forces” is an awareness program that strives to encourage everyone from citizens to businesses to understand the challenges military families face during and after combat tours.

WebMD has joined the initiative with a new section of their website devoted to important health and wellness topics that military members and their families face. Their Medscape site for doctors will soon provide resources for contacting medical professionals who assist military families.

The new [Military Families Support Directory](#) is up and running with references to common disabilities found among veterans, news about advances in medical treatments for these conditions, and features on family support and health.

UCF Researches PTSD Treatment with Scent Therapy

The University of Central Florida has begun to develop new research regarding the use of scent therapy to treat veterans suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The study uses olfactory stimulation to simulate the “smells of Middle East combat zones” in a virtual reality situation. By leading veterans through a simulated traumatic experience while being exposed to smells common to a combat situation. Because scent is the closest of our 5 senses to be tied to memory it is their hope that this can help veterans come to terms with stressors and decrease the effects of PTSD.

Exposure therapy like this is not new in PTSD research and treatment – virtual combat situations have been developed to help veterans’ confront their experiences and deal with them in a controlled environment. The addition of scent therapy hopes to increase the progress researchers have already made using combat simulations to treat PTSD.

During these types of treatment, veterans are exposed gradually to traumatic experiences while talking about their anxiety and stress. This gradual, controlled confrontation allows therapists to safely evaluate what causes PTSD triggers and develop methods to alleviate the often disabling symptoms.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

May heralds the end of the school year for students with final exams, prom, and graduation. Summer break is right around the corner and it's time for great patriotic holidays!

CINCO DE MAYO – THURSDAY, MAY 5, 2011

A Mexican holiday also celebrated by many U.S. Citizens, this day marks the victory of the Mexican army over French troops at the Battle of Puebla in 1862. Many celebrations in the States include festivals, parades and celebrations of Mexican culture and heritage.

MOTHER'S DAY – SUNDAY, MAY 8, 2011

The second Sunday in May marks a day to celebrate and honor our mothers. The U.S. holiday date was established in 1914 and is a national holiday. Many families celebrate the mothers in their lineage with gifts, special meals, and outings. The carnation flower has come to symbolize Mother's Day – red if your mother is still living, and white if she has passed.

NURSE'S DAY – THURSDAY, MAY 12, 2011

Nurse's Week begins on May 6th and lasts through May 12th (Florence Nightingale's birthday) which has been designated as International Nurse's Day. This is a day to thank all of the nurses in the medical field who help keep us and our loved ones healthy!

ARMED FORCES DAY – SATURDAY, MAY 21, 2011

This day recognizes and honors all of the military branches who serve to protect our country. The holiday was created in 1949 to honor all 5 military branches at once. Parades, festivals, and air shows are common on this day and the longest running Armed Forces Day parade takes place annually in Bremerton, Washington.

MEMORIAL DAY – MONDAY, MAY 30, 2011

One of the major patriotic holidays, Memorial Day is a federal holiday observed on the last Monday of May. The weekend prior is known as Memorial Day Weekend and is a time for parades, barbecues, and festivals commemorating the soldiers who died while in service.

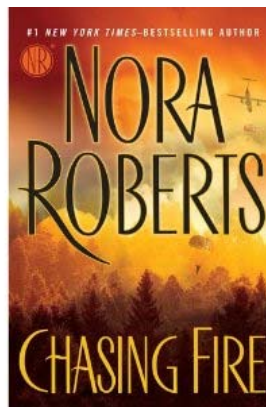
SIGN OUR PETITION FOR FREE MEDICAL RECORDS!

LaVan & Neidenberg is sponsoring a petition to change medical records fees in the State of Florida. Currently, patients are required to pay up to \$1 per page to obtain a copy of their own medical records. The Firm's legislative initiative proposes to **make medical records FREE for all individuals applying for disability benefits.**

Please join us in our fight and [sign our petition](#) today! Thank you for your support!

Book of the Month

Chasing Fire by Nora Roberts



There's little as thrilling as firefighting – at least to Rowan Tripp. The Missoula smoke jumpers are in Rowan's blood: her father is a legend. She's been fighting fires since her eighteenth birthday. At this point, returning to the wilds of Montana for the season feels like coming home, even with reminders of the partner she lost last season still lingering.

Fortunately, this year's rookie crop is one of the strongest ever-and Gulliver Curry's one of the best. He's also a walking contradiction, a hotshot firefighter with a big vocabulary and a winter job at a kids' arcade.

Everything is thrown off balance when a dark presence lashes out against Rowan, looking to blame someone for last year's tragedy. Rowan knows she can't complicate things with Gull-any distractions in the air or on the ground could mean the end-but if she doesn't find someone she can lean on, she may not make it through the summer.

National Memorial Day Events

- The annual auto races, Indianapolis 500 and Coca-Cola 600, take place on May 29th.
- The Memorial Tournament golf event begins on May 30th with the practice round and continues through June 5th.
- The National Memorial Day Parade will take place along Constitution Avenue in Washington D.C. on May 30th beginning at 2 p.m.
- The National Memorial Day Concert will take place on the western lawn of the United States Capitol building on May 29th beginning at 8 p.m. EST. Performances include:
 - National Symphony Orchestra
 - Kris Allen (American Idol Winner)
 - B.B. King (blues artist)
 - Daniel Rodriguez (tenor singer)
 - Hayley Westenra (classical singer)