



# Military Outreach USA

## Stand By Me Heroes

3020 Milwaukee Avenue, Northbrook, IL 60062

May 2021

### OUR MISSION

*Military Outreach USA is a faith-based Judeo-Christian organization focused on Veterans and First-Responder Communities, regardless of their denomination or beliefs, demonstrating the compassion, love and healing of Christ our Lord*



WHEN YOU CAN'T RUN YOU WALK,  
WHEN YOU CAN'T WALK YOU CRAWL  
AND WHEN YOU CAN'T CRAWL  
WE WILL CARRY YOU.



### A message from the General

**MG (Ret) James H. Mukoyama**  
President & CEO

Beautiful spring is here and God continues to bless and encourage us daily in our efforts to serve our Veterans, first responders and their families throughout the country. Your response to our first newsletter has been very positive and encouraging. Please feel free to share our newsletters with anyone.

With COVID restrictions continuing to lessen, we are hopeful that more individuals and families will be served and more will be encouraged to get involved. As you will see in this issue of our newsletter, our Veterans Exiting Homelessness Program (VEHP) has resumed in earnest with Move-In-Essential (MIE) items collections and donations by our network houses of worship, Veterans organizations, and community service organizations. And our Beds for Vets Program has already purchased more than two-thirds of all of the beds delivered in 2020 (which had surpassed the 2019 total).

Our Stand-By-Me-Heroes (SBMH) activities have likewise increased with interest in new states and expansion of current chapters.

And we continue our educational efforts regarding holistic healing and directly addressing the critical issues facing our military and first responder communities through our medical, psychological, social, and spiritual expert articles. This is supplemented by our Foxhole Soul Counseling training addressing suicide, caring for our volunteers, and women issues.

Finally, we are expanding our partnerships with other like-minded organizations serving our military and first responders. More to come on this subject in future newsletter issues.

Thank you for your continued prayers, interest, and support.



## A message from Chappy

**Chappy Ferrer**  
**Executive Director & Operations**

Our operations are focused on our Military, Veterans and First Responders guarding the gates of freedom. No matter your faith, race, color, religion, sex, national origin, disability, or age we honor your service as a grateful nation. Military Outreach USA serves our communities thru its Veterans Exiting Homelessness Program and Stand-by-me Heroes Chapters operating in 100% unanimity as servant-leaders or not at all. Visit our webpage, read our newsletter and consider supporting our mission.

**Veterans Exiting Homelessness Programs** includes Our Beds-for-VETS program. We have purchased 1,766 beds to date ensuring our heroes are not sleeping on the floor. We supply Move-In-Essentials in Illinois and Missouri, and seek volunteers and partnerships to expand to other states. To date we have provided \$1,282,016 worth of basic essential items to our homeless veterans, moving into a residence.

**Chapters.** Despite the challenges of COVID our Stand-by-me Heroes Chapters in AZ, FL, HW, IL, MO, NC and NJ pressed forward. We are proud of our teams and their effectiveness fulfilling their calling to impact the lives of our heroes. Also, our partnerships, with local VA Hospitals' HUD-VASH teams across the nation persevered and continued forward helping our homeless veterans.

**Free Training.** Our newsletter contains training materials to instruct organizations in reducing the dark number of 22+ suicides per day. Our grass-roots approach and 1:1 engagement continues to have life-saving impacts, the primary mission of Stand-by-me Heroes. This is a battle we cannot lose and affects our communities across the nation. The training articles from Dr.

Sawtelle and Dr. Beeman cover key issues regarding how to address moral injury, PTSD, anxiety and more come from their years of experience. *Worthwhile Women* by Leah McCool, encourages active and Veteran women.

**Stand-by-me.** We can train and certify Foxhole Soul Counselors providing 1:1 support and help to those seeking for someone to Stand-by-me. Contact us if you are struggling as we can help.

**Recruitment.** We seek folks with a calling to serve our Military, Veterans and First Responders. Our volunteers provide 4-10 hours a month and include civilians and Veterans. Our best practices and commitments have proven effective to our volunteers through actions, not words. Send us an email, visit our website, volunteer and start a program in your area. We have the plans and the processes and we are ready to mentor.

Visit [our website](#).

We are blessed!

Chappy

## *Veterans Exiting Homelessness Program (VEHP)*



We partner with Veterans Administration (VA) HUD-VASH Program and other organizations and individuals to supply new beds, pillows & linen as no hero should move from homelessness into a residence and sleep on the floor. Certain SBMH Chapters include a Move-in-Essentials (MIE) sub-program supplying household fundamentals needed to more successfully move into a residence.



*Jesse Brown VA picking up donations from a Move-in-Essential drive*

## *BEDS-for-VETS Program*



VAs across the country are going back to "normal" activities following the restrictions imposed during Covid. Caseworkers are actively placing formerly homeless Veterans into subsidized housing through the HUD-VASH program and many are beginning to come to Military Outreach for our Beds-for-Vets programs. The Veterans have qualified

for housing under this program and are grateful for the housing they receive, but the program does not include furnishings of any kind. Therefore, they move into apartments without any furniture - not even a bed to sleep on.

That's where we come in. As one of our foundational pillars, we are committed to making sure our nation's heroes are not sleeping on the floor and honoring their service with a gift of a bed with sheets and pillows. For many of these Veterans, this may be the first time they have owned a bed of their own. Just this month we placed beds with a husband and wife and their five kids who were all homeless, an eighty-something year old man, a Veteran with hip and back problems, and many others

We trust our contributions will help them rest easy in their new homes. Thanks to all of you who have contributed to make this happen for those who have received one of the 1,799 beds we have placed so far.

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## *Move-in-Essentials Collections*

Thank you to the Knights of Columbus St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Assembly and the members of St. Alphonsus Liguori Catholic Church in Prospect Heights, IL who organized a Move-in-Essential collection during Covid. Over a weekend they were able to receive donations valued at over \$5,700 of basic household items such as cleaning supplies, paper goods, dishes, pots and pans, laundry baskets, personal hygiene products, batteries, flashlights and towels.

These items were picked up by the James Lovell and Jesse Brown VAs and distributed to homeless Veterans transitioning from homelessness into housing. Veterans moving into empty apartments are grateful for the "little things" that make an empty apartment feel more like a home.



Men from the Knights of Columbus St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Assembly coordinating an outdoor Move-in-Essential collection at the St. Alphonsus Liguori Catholic Church in Prospect Heights IL



One of the UNITS containers was parked outside the church so people could drive up with their donations and remain safe during Covid.

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### A Hero's Story



*SSG Miquel Berlinger (ret) served 1943-1966 with the 65<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division known as "The [Borinqueneers](#)." His service spanned USAREUR France, EUSA Korea and Vietnam. This article was written by Philip "Chappy" Ferrer about his father.*

Following the Spanish-American war of 1898, the 65th Infantry Division was created. General MacArthur's plans for D-Day required the use of jungle fighters to search and destroy German units hiding and preparing to counter any invasion. Throughout Europe, from Italy to France to the liberation of Dachau, the Borinqueneers proved their steel. Following WWII, SSG Berlinger was reassigned to the Korean War and then to the Vietnam War. Finally, he retired in Lorain, OH.

Assimilation is the next challenge with Moral Injuries and PTSD. How does one effectively continue when most of the kids you grew up with were lost to war? The names of those Latin Americans that gave all for their country are inscribed in "El

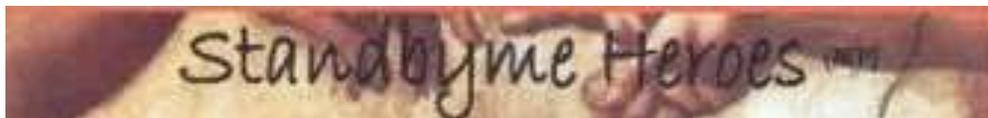
Monumento de la Recordacion" -- the Monument of Remembrance -- unveiled May 19, 1996, in front of the capital at San Juan, Puerto Rico.

My Pops was the first I sought upon my return from Iraq. With that hell behind me, I began to learn of the roadblocks that began and more that would come. Popi reminded me of the most important and simple solution to overcoming: with faith, family and friends you can endure. He also reminded me of my awesome wife, and I agreed. Additionally, he reminded me things are only complex if you make them so. A framework to healing mind, body and soul began to form.

Much changed from the day of my return home. We have never stopped joking about almost everything including his beloved Cleveland Indians and his hope. I kindly remind him of the Chicago Cubs. I once joked, "You must have remained in service because you were not good looking." He reminded me my mother did marry him. I replied, "Pops, Mom had not received her glasses at the time." When we visit we lift each other up, laugh and continue joking about everything. As we say to each other, "You can't fix stupid." As a kid I did not appreciate this hero, my hero, until my education in Iraq.

His Army friends told stories about this crazy man. Pops often went into the battle not looking back, as the mission was always paramount and must be completed. As an MP in Vietnam he often charged into large outbreaks of fights without backup. Constantly yelled at for not waiting for his LT and backup, most group fights had already concluded with Pops the only one standing with a smile. I still remember seeing Pop's smile and being embarrassed at the stories they told.

Popi has entered his late 90s and will soon receive his final promotion. Family reminds him of our love and honor for who and what he is and what he has accomplished for this great nation. Though the loss will be great, we remind him that we too will look forward to the next reunion in the sky.



This monument, honoring our Vietnam Veterans, has become 'The WALL of HEALING' as Veterans from WWII to present and our heroes serving today, come to D.C. or where the moving version is temporarily installed for a special event. Our passed heroes continue to look for us to bring them home and honor our heroes today in service.



Our Foxhole Soul Counselors (FSC) from our SBMH Chapters attend events and engage any who ask for 1:1 Soul Counseling. Not only are those who lost comrades continuing to hurt, but we must not forget the families and friends. We hear souls crying out for someone to 'Stand-

by-me.' Our Foxhole Soul Counselors are there to speak with anyone suffering from a soul pain, moral injury or PTSD.

Foxhole Soul Counselors focus on faith, not religion, to restore one's whole person and to walk with them as friend, as family. Help Line (847) 378 – 8262. Conversations are private, names are never released and you can use call sign.

## *How you can reach us!*

**SBMH Help line - 847-378-8262**

For additional information please email us at [Info@militaryoutreach.org](mailto:Info@militaryoutreach.org) or leave us a message on our website by [clicking here](#).

## *Stand by me Heroes Chapters*

### SBMH Northern Illinois



## **PTSD vs. MORAL INJURY Unmasking the Truth**

**Saturday, June 19, 2021  
10 AM - 2 PM**

**Cantigny Park Outdoor Pavilion  
1S 151 Winfield Road, Wheaton**

**PTSD vs. MORAL INJURY  
UNMASKING THE TRUTH**

**SATURDAY  
JUNE 19, 2021  
10 AM - 2 PM**

**CANTIGNY PARK  
Outdoor Pavilion  
15151 Winfield Road  
Wheaton, IL 60189**

**JOIN US FOR THIS FREE EVENT WITH  
KEYNOTE SPEAKERS & RESOURCES!**

**JAMES H. MUKOYAMA, II**  
Major General James Mukoyama, II  
is a retired US Army Colonel and  
has served in the US Army for over  
30 years. He has served in various  
roles including as a platoon leader,  
company commander, and as a  
senior advisor to the US Army  
in Afghanistan. He is currently  
serving as the Director of the  
US Army's Center for Military  
History and Heritage.

**CHAPPY FERRER**  
Chappy Ferrer is a retired US Army  
Colonel and a member of the  
82nd Airborne Division. He has  
served in various roles including  
as a platoon leader, company  
commander, and as a senior  
advisor to the US Army in  
Afghanistan. He is currently  
serving as the Director of the  
US Army's Center for Military  
History and Heritage.

**ZOEIE KRIENER**  
Zoë Kriener is a retired US Army  
Colonel and a member of the  
82nd Airborne Division. She has  
served in various roles including  
as a platoon leader, company  
commander, and as a senior  
advisor to the US Army in  
Afghanistan. She is currently  
serving as the Director of the  
US Army's Center for Military  
History and Heritage.

**WWW.SUPPORTOVERSTIGMA.ORG** **630-492-0308**

**FREE EVENT** featuring **Zoë Kriener**, founder of Support Over Stigma and an Illinois SBMH Director; **Chappy Ferrer**, 82nd Airborne, Founder of Stand-by-me Heroes; and keynote speaker **Major General James Mukoyama**, founder of **Military Outreach USA**, served in **US Army in Korea and Vietnam**,

Bring chairs and cooler or enjoy the food trucks and visit booths to learn about organizations helping Veterans in the greater Chicago area and beyond.

Families are welcome!

For more information go to [SupportOverStigma](http://SupportOverStigma.org), email [INFO@SupportOverStigma.org](mailto:INFO@SupportOverStigma.org) or call Zoeie at 630-492-0308.

Click here for [Moral Injury vs PTSD Event at Cantigny Park Flyer](#)

## Salutes - SBMH Missouri



Salutes SBMH Chapter founder Toni Wineinger, a civilian never serving in uniform, full of heart, compassion and action, is transforming the lives of veterans in West Plains, Missouri (Howell county) and surrounding communities.



The new kitchen and dining area for Salutes SBMH in West Plains MO.



Salutes' Food Pantry is stocked with items donated by the local communities to feed Veterans

Available to any homeless veteran no matter color, orientation, sex, religion and origin - we do NOT discriminate! Also, there will be no toleration of discrimination, and those not respectful will be escorted off the premises by Sheriff or Police. An intake procedure and phone interview are part of the placement process. Our certified Foxhole Soul Counseling and other community supports are non-judgmental. Our heroes are loved and supported following a path of restored hope.

Salutes is relocating from their 14K square foot facility and moving into a 32K square foot facility because Veteran homelessness is rising. This expansion will add rooms, a larger Thrift Store, Computer Lab & Project Management Training Center, a larger community food pantry, library, recreation room, large kitchen/dining room, showers and counseling office.

Actions, not words, are what gets this job done. Toni is extremely grateful to the surrounding communities and counties that have stepped up with free labor, free materials and more. Imagine a 32k square foot warehouse with nothing and converting it into a rescue mission for our homeless veterans.

In this age of talkers who disappear like a vapor, there are committed people and organizations that follow through making a difference, the American way! Toni's success started with grit and vision. The influx of community support, through volunteering, donated materials and hard work all prove this is a grateful nation.

Faith requires action to grow and people and organizations in Howell and surrounding counties continue to demonstrate the love of God by their actions. All these efforts and contributions provide hope and help to mind, body and soul, reducing the number of 22+ suicides per day.

**Soul-hearted thank you to those who have helped and supported  
Salutes SBMH in West Plains:**

**Veterans organizations:** American Legion, Amvets, Combat Veterans, Disabled American Veterans (DAV), Veterans of Foreign Wars

**Civilian organizations:** Board of Realtors, Donahue Roofing, Elk Lodge in Thayer, Edward Jones - Cobb Family, Glenwood School, Gold Mechanical, Genesis Church, Mike Terry, MO and Mammoth Spring, AR, Genesis Church, Mt. Zion Baptist Church, National Federation of Republican Women, Ozark Health Center, St. Mary's Catholic Church, Union Grove Baptist Church.

**Contact Salutes SBMH by phone at (417) 861-6967. Follow Salutes SBMH on Facebook for announcements, donations and needs.**

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**SBMH Florida**



Chapter directors: Phil Jelen is in Englewood; Rick and Leah (Gwen) McCool are in Seminole FL

Phil Jelen received a Purple Heart for his service in Vietnam with the Fourth Infantry Division and worked with Veterans at Jesse Brown and Hines VAs in Chicago for 33 years. He has been with Stand-by-me Heroes since its founding. Now a full-time resident of Englewood, FL, Phil enjoys his retirement by visiting with Veterans in Florida state prison, in the homeless communities nearby, and through his VFW Post and the Knights of Columbus in Grove City FL.

Rick McCool, Master Sergeant, USMC 1972-1993, Retired. Hello, Great Americans, from the Tampa Bay area in Florida! As a retired USMC Master Sgt/E-8, I am also active in many other organizations. The Major B.F. Hickey Marine Corps League Detachment 57 in St. Petersburg, the local Gideons International St. Pete West Camp as current VP, President of our homeowners association in Seminole. My wife, Gwen (Leah) organized the Seminole Military Outreach/Stand-by-me Heroes small group at our local Seminole Assembly of God church which has hosted clothing drives for Veterans at the VA Bay Pines and other Vet organizations in our area.

We understand the many pressures and problems Veterans and their family and friends face constantly. In our own home, our son, a Marine Veteran who served two tours in Iraq struggles with VA disabilities (severe anxieties, sicknesses related to the Middle East War). Our 24 year old daughter deals with mental illness. Please keep them in your prayers.

We actively seek out all people and pray on the spot with them. Our mission is to seek opportunities to lead them to Christ with the leading of the Holy Spirit. We want to help them realize the great plan God has for them. Connecting them to the Local VAs, churches and other Veteran organizations helps them fulfill a life of success, prosperity and joy in this journey we are all on.

**The Tampa Marine for Life Network and the Tampa VA Network are joining forces for a local networking event. No speeches and no sponsors - just good, old-fashioned, in-person networking.. Meet with military veterans and locally owned Veteran businesses. Everyone is welcome!**

**The event will be held outdoors and all health and safety protocols will be in place.**

**Thursday, May 27, 2021 5:00 PM - 7:30 PM EDT**

**Hula Bay Club, 5210 West Tyson Avenue, Tampa FL 33611**



WWII Veteran Arthur St. Germaine celebrated his 98th birthday in April at Red Lobster with Phil and Diane Jelen.

Help Heal Veterans kits are available free to Veterans. To request one or more kits, email [Healvets.org](mailto:Healvets.org) or contact [phil.jelen.pj@gmail.com](mailto:phil.jelen.pj@gmail.com)

Phil distributes these to Veterans in VFWs, hospitals, prisons and elsewhere at no cost. Mr. St. Germaine has made many of these birdhouses, wallets and keychains for his grandkids and friends.



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## The Chaplain's Corner

The purpose of the Chaplain's Corner is to challenge, to restore, to endure. There is HOPE! We simply incorporate a faith-based approach that has worked for millennia eliminating religiosity, academics and theories. We are fearfully and wonderfully made and gifted by our God to overcome all obstacles. Veterans and First-Responders may suffer from Moral Injury, PTSD and/or TBI as an unfortunate part of the job. Through a faith-based approach, and a little help from our Foxhole Soul Counselors, we implement a grass-roots approach that helps anyone suffering by restoring body, mind and soul.

Our God created us with three key elements: body, mind and soul. Focus only on the body and mind and you treat only part of the problem. But focus on all three elements and you rescue the whole person. This fact is supported by the dark number of 22+ suicides per day across the Veteran community. This number has not diminished despite bureaucrats and their use of statistics.

Where to begin? Adopt Psalm 139. Yes, we promote a faith-based, spiritual foundation along with physical activities as the body and mind need resistance, through exercise, to grow. In recognizing these three elements we must add a simple plan. Fail to plan and you have already failed. Thus, start each morning and end each evening thanking God for opportunity. You may not see it now, but faith will abound and open doors.

Recognize that God's focus has always been on His creation. He stands next to you, before and behind you and there is nowhere you can hide, in hell or in the heavens, as He is ever-present. Do you ask, "Why have I not heard Him?" Perhaps you were looking the wrong way, or you surrounded yourself with too much noise and could not hear His soft voice.

You will need a mentor or coach, a Foxhole Soul Counselor. These individuals have learned to manage their own PTSD and Moral Injuries and they will help you develop a framework toward recovery. Your past experiences can be leveraged to get you through the jungle, to change your path. "What if I fall again?" Get back on your knees, look up and be thankful; get to your feet and place one foot in front of the other. We can walk with you. Walk in the knowledge of Psalm 139 and HOPE!

We are all individually gifted, and if you are homeless, you've already learned how to survive. All people will have bad days, but with a little help from your friends, building a spiritual foundation, your mind and body will recover.

Contact us via email at [info@militaryoutreachusa.org](mailto:info@militaryoutreachusa.org) or call our Helpline (847) 378-8262. There is HOPE!

We are Blessed!

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## Foxhole Soul Counseling



### *New Normal - Masks*

#### **Dr. Leigh Sawtelle**

*Leigh is a director of the North Carolina chapter of Stand-by-me-Heroes. She has a degree in counseling, MA degree and PhD in psychology and been a licensed minister for more than 25 years. Dr. Leigh has worked with an ambulance service, served in a head trauma/rehab unit and assisted-living homes as well as 1:1 counseling and patient*

*care during Covid. Her passions include the special needs community, Veterans, autistic individuals and rescuing pets.*

The phrase *new norm* takes on many meanings in today's world. Now we have become comfortable shopping for groceries online, going to parks and seeing infants and children wearing masks. School sports now have teams playing in masks. NFL- coaches are coaching behind masks. Visiting family through windows of assisted living places. I do not like this new norm. I do not like wearing a mask.

Funerals are virtual, meetings and church services are virtual. We have many opportunities to hide behind our visible and invisible masks.

Years ago, Michael Jackson wrote about the "man in the mirror", who he really is when no one is watching. My challenge for this issue is ... Who is the person behind the mask? Who is the man or woman in your mirror? Who are you when you are wearing a mask and who are you really when the mask comes off? It is time to be the same person on either side of the mask. Look into your mirror and take off your mask. Do you like who you see?

We can take off our mask and stop hiding. Stop being afraid. What you do still matters, and you still can make a difference in the lives of those around you. Use these days to grow not grumble. Care does not criticize those who are different, scared or even have radical ideas (some even in our own families).

This time in history reminds me of reading about the civil war where brothers and fathers fought on different sides and killed each other over differences of how the world should operate. Families were divided due to a belief system they chose to adopt. The civil war did not unite families, it did not make friendships stronger, it did not heal historical wounds. Too many were sacrificed, too many fences were not mended.

Let us make better choices in today's war on our thoughts and speeches, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram posts. No action or word spoken, written or tweeted is worth losing a friendship or family member. We need to check our egos and attitudes at the door of mercy and prefer our brother over ourselves. We can agree to disagree. Do not argue just for argument's sake.

**We need to lower our mask and find our authentic selves again.**

Let us create our own “new norm, when the mask is no longer there to hide behind”.

[Click here for Man in the Mirror lyrics.](#)

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**Leah Gwen McCool**  
*SBMH Director Florida Chapter,  
Veteran Sergeant U.S. Air Force,  
M.A. in education from Liberty University*

### **Worthwhile Women: How Can I Help?**

**Consider** a defining moment when you realize you are like the fuel tank in the Sport Utility Vehicle (SUV) that needs refueling. Briefly, a signal indicating low fuel catches the driver’s attention, but personal reasoning skills provide a safety net as the vehicle cruises past multiple gas stations. Determined to push through, the driver makes the call to travel a short distance, but does not anticipate the detour in the road that will require additional driving time. With the depletion of fuel, the vehicle comes to a halt and the driver’s original plans are now on hold.

In this scenario the driver could be within a safe walking distance to a gas station, or he or she could call a friend for roadside assistance, but the individual will be required to act. Anxiety, frustration, and anger could consume this driver, but he/she should work diligently to solve the fuel-related problem. Signs and indicators are manufactured in automobile factories worldwide. It is the human factor that will often determine the efficacy of good decisions. **Consider** the environment, and assess situations. Signs will **communicate** a message. Ideally, motorists should strive to be self-disciplined, responsible drivers to avoid fuel shortages on the highway, but remaining **consistent** as a responsible driver can lead to the optimum driving experience. **Consideration, communication, and consistency** are guidelines for abundant living, effective relationships and ethical business practices.

Having an empty fuel tank is problematic. Connecting to the source of regeneration and purpose can provide abundant energy and a joyous and uplifting spirit. “How can I help you?” Has someone asked you this question? Possibly you asked someone how you could be of service, hoping a blueprint would be presented with step-by-step instructions. Often people in need are overwhelmed, and you may be the only person to be the source of light and hope. Having a willing spirit to help others is a gift. Recognizing a need is invaluable, and reaching out to those in need is a calling.

First, consider the environment. Being cognizant and sensitive to the person, and the place will be beneficial in forming healthy and healing relationships. Relationships require time and trust. Considering others before yourself is most admirable, but be careful to take care of yourself as you minister to others; check the fuel tank daily.

Second, communication is paramount in every situation, trial and triumph. In the military, the chain of command is always in operation. The highest-ranking officers communicate to subordinates, and likewise, the lowest in rank must follow the chain of command, make requests and report to designated superiors. Lack of communication is

not an option. Open lines of communication allow individuals the opportunity to clarify and confirm statements, analyze information and make educated decisions necessary for the greater good.

Third, a healthy consistency is necessary for effective relationships. Whatever the venue of choice - the gym, the basketball court or a favorite park - take advantage of the time shared to be an active listener, consider the perspective of others, communicate with kindness and compassion and be consistent. The best “you” can be an inspiration to someone hurting and in need of a friend. The Greek philosopher, Aristotle wrote, “Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all”



### ***Francis “Doc” Beeman***

*Doc Beeman is an SBMH director in the greater Chicago area and provides pro bono biblical counsel and soul care to active military, veterans, first responders and their families. His professional education includes general and surgical medicine, clinical psychology, neuropsychology, and group & individual therapy. Serving with the MACV-SOG in Vietnam as*

*U.S. Navy Combat Corpsman, he experienced firsthand the impact combat has on a person.*

My discussion today focuses on: Observing – Inquiring – Listening – Guiding: specifically on how to have a conversation and how to respond to a person you believe is considering suicide as an alternative to the pain they are currently experiencing.

A major focus of Military Outreach USA is to positively impact the number of brothers and sisters who believe ending their life is the answer to the struggles in which they are engaging. As you seek out and interact with the Veteran community, let them know that you are a part of an organization that is established to serve the needs of our Veterans. Your unique role in this organization is to walk alongside Veterans who are experiencing emotional and spiritual challenges, and to support them as they work to resolve the turmoil they currently experience.

### **Observing**

As you move about your daily life, both at work and socially, you encounter Veterans and their spouses and family members. Your goal as a Foxhole Soul Counselor (FSC) is to be open to developing a relationship with these brothers & sisters. As you come to learn their life’s stories and the highs and lows they are currently experiencing, you will begin to better understand the behavior you are observing and the expectations they have for the future.

***The root cause of suicide is hopelessness.***

We have all learned how to keep our real feelings to ourselves. Many times the narrative we hear is more about maintaining or promoting a positive story about how we’d like our life to be – not the reality of how we actually view our life situation. As

FSCs, we must learn to listen and accept the story we hear, while looking for evidence to support or deny the narrative. We all experience curveballs in our life. It's not the curveball, but how we respond to it, that keeps us optimistic or leads us to suicide. As FSCs, we must follow the windup and the pitch, and understand the explanation regarding the response to what life throws at us.

### **Inquiring**

Relationships take time, so we must be patient and know that our support and genuine concern will bear fruit. Many suicides result when the sufferer believes that s/he is irrelevant or a burden to the people in their family or community. The fact that you are pursuing a heart-felt relationship with this person is extremely beneficial to their well-being. Over time you will come to understand the real emotional and spiritual intensity of your new friend. As the relationship progresses, you will be able gauge, more accurately, where they are on the "Hope-Full — Hope-Less" scale. Asking thoughtful questions can be seen as a sign of respect, or as an uninvited intrusion into their personal business. It's essential to tread carefully in the early stages of your relationship and allow your friend to take the lead and set the speed. Until they know how much you care, they won't care about how much you know. Focus on building trust by asking questions that seek to learn their life's experience, and discovering their reaction and response to these experiences.

### **Listening**

Continue to ask about the day-to-day life of your friend. Eventually, sometimes quickly, sometimes slowly, you will come to sense the emotional/spiritual condition of this person. As you listen and observe, you may sense a subtle change in behavior that causes your gut instinct to say, "What's going on with him/her today?" Don't dismiss this feeling; start paying focused attention for deterioration in the person's mental – emotional – spiritual health. Most of us tend to keep the feelings that burden us buried deep inside. We want to appear to be in control. We want to project a calm and "together" persona even when we know our inner world is crumbling around us. Getting an accurate read of someone's mental/emotional condition is difficult. Follow your instinct, what you're seeing may be the tip of the iceberg. Don't dismiss the possibility that something significant is taking place inside the person's thinking. Listen carefully for evidence of hopelessness, or expressions of being a burden, or of no value or importance.

Taking action on the choice of suicide as the solution for what is troubling this person does not instantly happen. It only appears "unexpected" to us simply because we were unaware of our friend's true mental/emotional/spiritual state at the time. In hindsight, we generally discover numerous warning signs that this person revealed that we simply overlooked, or dismissed. As Foxhole Soul Counselors we need to learn the warning signs, and be constantly alert for them in the behavior and conversations with our friends.

An important thing to remember at this point is to actually to hold back on offering solutions. This is a time to really listen and let the person share what has been going on and what it means to them. Careful listening may reveal not only what is going on, but provide you with insight regarding their thinking and perceptions, and where they believe the solution to this situation can be found. It's not the time to be criticizing the

person or to be debating the value of life. Offering quick fixes or minimizing their problems isn't helpful. This should be more a time of listening, supporting and asking follow up questions to allow them to talk further. Asking them about suicidal thoughts is very important if you're beginning to suspect that they are experiencing an increased level of stress, or hopelessness. As this person is revealing what is currently going on in their world, if you sense a sign of hopelessness, ask them if they're having suicidal thoughts. If they are suicidal, it's very important at this point to encourage them to seek some kind of help.

### **Guiding**

It is sometimes believed that asking the blunt question: "Have you ever had thoughts of suicide - or hurting yourself?" will lead to introducing suicide as an option to this person. This is not true, although asking the question may be difficult for you at first. Having the difficult talk regarding the taking of one's life can be challenging, but it is essential to the process of walking them away from the suicide ledge they may be approaching.

From the outset, you have demonstrated your genuine concern and empathy. You have demonstrated your desire to walk with them, and work together through the difficulties they are experiencing. You have been asking them to share difficult things with you; things that they may regret, or feel shame for having thought, said, or done. You have to have developed your relationship to a point where they can honestly discuss their feelings of hopelessness, fears, despondency, and desires to end their own life. By demonstrating that you truly care about them, and that you will not judge them, their feelings or behaviors, you are now ready to share your recommendations and next steps.

If you have come to believe, or even suspect, that they are considering suicide you must respond as if this fact is true. Your primary responsibility is their safety. Driving them, not sending or advising they go to the local emergency room, is one option for next steps. Get support for providing a safe environment that can direct your friend away from acting on their suicidal intentions. Stay with them as you help them reach out for help. If they are reluctant to visit the emergency room, encourage them to allow you to place a call to the Veterans Crisis Line (1-800-273-8255 – press 1) and listen to the emergency response counselor on your speakerphone. You can also reach for help from the Veterans Crisis Center by sending a text message to 838255.

### **Persevere.**

Do not assume "someone" will help if you don't. Leverage the power of the relationship you've built. Don't underestimate the influence you have to encourage them that seeking help is in their best interest. Reassure them that asking for and receiving help is a sign of strength and wisdom. Remind them that you will be with them every step of the way, and that addressing the thoughts that are driving them to end their life will be a new beginning of a long and happier future.

Thank you for your service, and thank you for caring enough to help a Veteran (or other First-Responder) in their hour of need.

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## Need Help?

**SBMH Help line - 847-378-8262**

**For additional information please contact us at [Info@militaryoutreach.org](mailto:Info@militaryoutreach.org) or email us on our website by [clicking here](#).**

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