

Solutions

Part #1 (individual work):

According to the texts, what wartime events caused veterans to develop PTSD?

- life in a war zone,
- violence of combat,
- death of friends,
- feelings of guilt,
- experience in POW camps

Explain why many veterans of the Korea or Vietnam War were not diagnosed as being traumatized on their return from war.

- no real support when they came home from war,
- wartime experience was something they had to deal with on their own,
- PTSD wasn't recognized as a medical condition,
- soldiers were expected to "go back to normal life quickly and get on with it"

Explain why PTSD often comes out or becomes worse when veterans reach a certain age.

- social isolation, mounting health problems and declining cognitive functions that often go with old age might make PTSD symptoms worse or bring them on,
- illness, disability, retirement, death of a spouse etc. cause stress, which in turn might bring on PTSD,
- loss of "coping mechanisms", e.g. work or hobbies,
- taking stock of one's life can bring back unpleasant memories,
- former POWs might experience nursing homes as restricting or even confinement

List some of the symptoms that traumatized veterans might experience.

- withdrawal from family and friends,
- depression,
- sleeplessness,
- deteriorating (work) performance,
- risky behaviour,
- being prone to fits of rage or anger,
- alcohol/drug abuse,
- suicidal thoughts

- re-living wartime experience, especially after "triggers" (e.g. loud noises),
- feeling numb and detached,
- reluctance to address problems and difficulties in talking about them or even expressing emotions

Part #2 (partner work):

How much do these results apply to Walt? Could he be suffering from PTSD?

How do other people see Walt? Describe Walt through the eyes of his children and their families, Father Janovich, his friends, his new neighbours' first impressions of him...

family: grumpy, quarrelsome, constantly nagging at his sons, stuck in the 1950, impossible to get along with, family feel unfairly done by

Father Janovich: keeps his distance to the point of rudeness, unwilling to share information or admit to any emotions apart from anger at Janovich's "intrusion", seems to favour traditional values

friends: good mate, easy to have a laugh with, friendly bantering, no show of emotions

neighbours: rude, racist, not interested

Watch the conversations between Walt and Father Janovich on the one hand (DVD 00:17:20—00:19:50; 00:27:11—00:29:17) and Walt and Thao on the other hand (DVD 01:36:10—01:37:00). What does Walt reveal about his wartime experience?

- active service in Korea
- killed people ("We shot men. We stabbed them with bayonets, hacked seventeen-year-olds to death with shovels. Stuff I'll remember till the day I die. Horrible things, but things I live with.") → claims to have come to terms with it
- but shaped by his life in a combat zone: ("When we were in Korea and a thousand screaming gooks came across our land..... we didn't call the police. We reacted.") → some wartime reactions are still there in his everyday life
- In the conversation with Janovich, Walt hints at an incident in which he did something horrible without having been ordered to ("The thing that haunts a man the most is what he isn't ordered to do.")
- Walt confesses to Thao that he deliberately shot a young Korean soldier who was going to surrender. To him, this has "soiled" him for the rest of his life. ("You want to know what is like to kill a man? Well, it's goddamn awful, that's what it is. The only thing worse is get a medal of

valor for killing some poor kids that wanted just to give up. That's all. Yeah, some scared little gook just like you. I shot him right in the face with that rifle you were holding in there a while ago. So no day goes by that I don't think about it. You don't want that on your soul. I got blood on my hands. I am soiled.")

Now try a final assessment. Would it be correct to assume that Walt is suffering from PTSD?

There is some evidence to suggest that Walt might indeed be suffering from PTSD: withdrawal from his family (although not from his friends), his reluctance to show any emotions, being permanently grumpy....

However, Walt doesn't show other tell-tale symptoms - he doesn't seem to be depressed, doesn't seem to be suffering from insomnia, there isn't any drug abuse etc.

Therefore, a final verdict is hard to give.

His attitude to his time in Korea seems to be **ambiguous** rather than completely traumatized:

- On the one hand he feels guilty and full of remorse for what he did there, he refuses to let Thao kill someone and doesn't "shoot it out" with the gang....
- ... but on the other hand he seems to be proud of having served his country, he carries his army lighter with him, he still uses Army weapons of that period (M1 Garand rifle, Colt .45 pistol), he keeps the medal he was given for shooting an unarmed enemy soldier, he falls back into behavioural patterns learned in Korea (the incident with the gang trespassing on his lawn, Thao trying to break into the garage...), he doesn't seem to mind his past when he confronts the gang for the first time ("In Korea, we stacked fucks like you five high and used 'em for sandbags", "I'll shoot you in the face and sleep like a baby") etc.

In the first two texts we have learned that in the past PTSD was neither properly recognized nor acknowledged as a medical condition. Veterans were expected to "pull themselves together and get on with it". It seems likely that Walt's traditional code of masculinity doesn't really permit him to openly admit to any PTSD-related problems. After all, he doesn't really share his personal emotions with anyone but Daisy the dog ("We miss Mommy a lot, don't we?") - so why should he admit to any wartime traumas?

The fact that he "confesses" to Thao shows how close he has grown to him.