

More Than a Memory: Reflections of Viet Nam

Victor R. Volkman, Editor

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Reviewed by Dr. Michael Philliber for Reader Views (11/08)

Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) is the new kid on the block, or is it? Certainly, the diagnostic category may be new, but the emotionally tumultuous concoction behind it seems to have been around since the dawn of human consciousness. Victor Volkman has compiled a bundle of stories and poems from Viet Nam veterans who are struggling with PTSD, for decades now, after their involvement in combat. “More Than a Memory: Reflections of Viet Nam” is part of the Reflections of History series put out by Modern History Press. This short, 221-page paperback dossier places in the reader’s hand a bundle of firsthand accounts on the personally harrowing struggles of over 15 authors, in the form of narrative and verse.

The one major theme that gradually dawns on the reader is that almost every writer in “More Than a Memory” is rehearsing their battle with PTSD. From hyper-vigilance and anger to depression and self-medicating drug abuse, each participant bares their bleeding soul. Many of the accounts are about the gruesome events of combat, loss of friends, violent actions of fellow GIs under constant stress, individual fear, the absurdity of leadership decisions, and numerous regretful events that still feed on the writers’ psyches. These veteran combat soldiers and Marines bring out the grueling and gory death they lived through, in brusque and harsh detail. These are not sissies! These are men who need relief, who want release, and some of whom have finally found reprieve.

If there is any aspect that detracts from the theme of “More Than a Memory” it is the short piece promoting the left-leaning American Servicemen’s Union (ASU). With this article smack in the center of the book it taints the whole work. If the volume has not been pulled together to show the ‘rightness’ of the ASU, then this particular chapter deflects from the real theme of the manuscript. Either way, this section turns “More Than a Memory” in directions probably not intended by the editor or the writers.

Overall, this is an important resource for those professionals or family members trying to help combat veterans struggling with PTSD. It may also be a step closer to healing for those veterans wondering what is happening to them, who worry if they’re normal, and where might they go for help. I highly recommend “More Than a Memory.”