

TILDEN PRODUCTIONS

“The soul at war is characteristically distorted along all its essential functions; how it locates itself in the cosmos and identifies itself with moral and spiritual principles, how it views the everyday workings of the world and processes and evaluates experiences and what its relationship is to its own instincts. War stamps the soul with an indelible imprint and makes it its own. The souls that once went to war are forever transformed.” War and the Soul, Dr. Edward Tick, Quest Books, 2005.

Background

For over two hundred- and forty-years Americans in uniform have committed their lives and those of their families to the security and freedom of our land and lands around the globe. Our country’s history is replete with examples of their dedication during times of peace and war. Collective recognition on a national level of the extraordinary sacrifices made by generation after generation of patriots is not only appropriate, it is crucial to our national character and values.

A History of Service

Veterans, who served in World War II, Korea, the Cold War, Vietnam, Desert Storm and Iraq and Afghanistan in combat or at home, along with their families, make up one third of our nation’s population. From eighteen to eighty, one in five adult males in America is a Veteran. Women have served in all of our nation’s wars from combat nurses to front line combatants and today make up 16% of our armed forces.

The challenges facing our nation’s Veterans span all generations. America’s over 100,000 homeless veterans have served in every war since WWII, and the military’s anti-drug cultivation efforts in South America. Nearly half of homeless veterans served during the Vietnam era. When our troops returned from Vietnam, they bore the brunt of an unpopular war with little public recognition and honor. During the Cold War, our nation’s military community was virtually “out of sight and out of mind” yet served with dedication and sacrifice. The last twenty years, spanning America’s longest shooting wars, have given fresh witness to the courage, sacrifice and honor of our military forces, whether they served “in theater” or at home, and renewed reason to support their return to civilian life.

The Latest Toll

The physical and mental toll on service members and their families from multiple deployments over the past decade is being felt in communities across the country. This population, both men and women, Active, Veteran, Reserve and National Guard, are at high risk for unemployment, substance abuse, bankruptcy, divorce, incarceration, homelessness and suicide.

In 2020 suicides among Veterans occur at the rate of 17.6 per day, accounting for close 20 percent of suicides in the US, yet the military make up only 1 percent of the population. Moreover the number of deaths by suicide among military service members increased alarmingly in the fourth quarter of 2020, according to the Defense Department's latest quarterly report. The military recorded 156 deaths by suicide among all services, including active-duty, National Guard and Reserve troops, from Oct. 1 to Dec. 31 last year. That is a 25% increase from the 125 such deaths that occurred in the last quarter of calendar year 2019.

According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, there are roughly 22 million veterans in the general U.S. population. The number of veterans from our recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is expected to surge to 3.9 million by 2021, and there still are 7.2 million veterans from the Vietnam War alone. Roughly 30% of our newest veterans have a service-related disability and almost 8% live in poverty. 16% of our older veteran populations are similarly injured and 7% are living in poverty.

David Rudd, dean of the College of Social & Behavioral Science and scientific director at the National Center for Veteran Studies at the University of Utah, thinks it is because "The warrior culture does not embrace psychological injury. Large percentages of those suffering choose not to pursue care. The net result is an increase in personal suffering, high divorce rates, escalating numbers of service members dying by suicide, and families left to grieve tragic and unnecessary losses."

The level of alienation was quantified in a recent study by the Pew Research Center called "The Military-Civilian Gap, War and Sacrifice in the Post-9/11 Era". The study found that some 84% of post 9/11 veterans say the public does not understand the problems faced by members of the military or their families. And the public agrees, but by a slightly lower majority (71%). These results reflect substantially more reported alienation than during the aftermath of the Vietnam War according to the Pew

study. The results are especially alarming in the face of an overwhelming concentration of effort to support veterans.

The Response

Moreover, the outpouring of response to the newest generation of veterans has been so extraordinary that its breadth and complexity actually adds to the problem. The nation is overflowing with donors, private and public who want to demonstrate their concern. There are over 45,000 active Veterans Service Organizations in the nation today. Admiral Michael Mullen, former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, calls this a “Sea of Goodwill” of American support and notes in his White Paper by the same name, “How do you connect that sea of goodwill to the need?”

For generations, Veterans of Foreign Wars and American Legion posts have been as integral to American political culture as pancake breakfasts, town squares and state fairs. In advocating for veterans — among the country’s most revered and coveted voters — the groups have wielded unquestioned power on Capitol Hill and inside the White House.

Now, nearly a generation after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, the oldest and largest veterans’ service organizations are seeing their influence diluted, as newer, smaller organizations focused on post-9/11 veterans compete for money, political influence and relevance. Many of the old V.F.W. halls remain outposts of fellowship over beer, while younger veterans prefer community centers with healthier and more practical assets, like Wi-Fi, child care and job training. Today, social media has replaced physical spaces as a place where veterans congregate.

The newer organizations reflect cultural shifts in a smaller community of younger and increasingly diverse veterans who are replacing the older, predominantly male veterans — many of them having served because of a draft for now long-ago wars. Leaner and more financially efficient than their predecessors, these newer veterans’ organizations focus on issues such as education and job training rather than on brick-and-mortar meeting spaces for veterans to gather or on resources spent lobbying in Washington. Half of veterans are now under the age of 65 which means they have different cares, they have different interests.

In addition, many officials of the newer organizations say, their goals are to integrate veterans back into civilian communities where they feel misunderstood and have lost

ties, while helping civilians who have had little contact with veterans — active-duty troops make up less than 1 percent of the United States population — understand their experiences.

The epidemic of alienation and loneliness in society writ large is magnified in the younger vets' community. Many post-9/11 veterans served five, 10, 15 years, and they are looking for connection and community and support. They require new ways to bridge the gap between military and civilian and provide a lifetime continuum of support to our returning troops.

Veteran organizations can be like Sears, using the same business model with diminishing returns. Or, they can reinvent themselves and their business models to remain viable, and focus on issues that appeal to all generations to remain relevant. Developing ways to recognize and replicate the most effective programs providing the best care and compassion, resources and focus for all veterans from all conflicts to ensure their success after reintegration will empower our communities, build capacity and, hence, strengthen our nation.

Body, Mind *and* Spirit

There has always been consensus that the total well being of an individual requires that their body mind and spirit be in balance. In the past decade service members have endured multiple deployments under the harshest of conditions, making it difficult, if not impossible, for their bodies, minds and spirits to stay “in synch”.

“PTSD is not a disorder, it is an injury”

General Peter Chiarelli, Former Vice Chief of Staff of the US Army, “Retired General Takes Up Fight Against PTSD”, King 5 News August 22, 2012

It is the nature of war that some service members return to communities wounded, ill or injured but all, to some degree, return with a bruised or injured soul. Whether or not they saw battle or bear the scars of battle, their sense of self, or spirit, has been indelibly impacted. Moreover of the three components, body, mind and spirit, it is the spirit that can be overlooked in the transition from military to civilian life because of its essentially ephemeral nature and connection with religion and faith - separation of church and state.

It is also the case that while education, employment and quality health care are categories used to recognize and organize these unprecedented levels of national

support, a category less recognized is the care and healing of the spirit. Healing the spirit is an intimate, individual and deeply personal endeavor and one that is often accomplished in community and ministry. Yet it is only within the past year that the impact of our nation's faith-based ministries on returning service members has been quantified.

“The formula for healing the war-wounded soul is simple: surround trauma with soul. Its application may be the most difficult and important work we ever undertake.” War and the Soul, Dr. Edward Tick, Quest Books, 2005

Faith

The Pew Report's "The Difficult Transition from Military to Civilian Life", December 8, 2011 applies metrics to the importance of faith with significant results. "Higher levels of religious belief, as measured by frequent attendance at religious services, dramatically increase the odds that a post 9/11 veteran will have an easier time readjusting to civilian life. According to analysis, a recent veteran who attends religious services at least once a week has a 67 percent chance of having an easy re-entry experience."

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has supported faith-based organizations focused on veterans since June 2004 when it established the Center for Faith-based and Community Initiatives. The objective was to remove regulator and contracting barriers to enable faith-based and community organizations to access resources they need to provide social and community services. After President Obama's February establishing the President's Advisory Council for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships, the VA center name was changed to Center for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships (CFBNP).

Timeless Approaches to Honor, Recognition and Community

Programs that acknowledge and act on the profound importance of body, mind and spirit being in balance make lasting, significant and positive impacts on individual service members, their families and their communities. As stated in the 1887 motto of Troy University, we are searching for recognition of the importance above and beyond specific services to "educate the mind to think, the heart to feel and the body to act." But what type of programs will heal the invisible wounds of war and address the moral

injuries that are the result of a population that has endured decades of trauma and stress? One profound and singularly unique way to house the content of these programs would be to *virtually lasso* such familiar and universal institutions as museums, concerts, radio and simply talking together sharing experiences.

Why Virtual?

Today's younger generation of veterans spend much of their time online. It stands to reason, therefore, that programs that leverage the power of the internet will have a greater impact on this community. The need is for particularly innovative and humanitarian services to support the healing and integration of the bodies, minds and spirits of our veterans. These virtual programs and services demonstrate tangible, innovative and humanitarian best practices that work in collaboration with their communities to build capacity and to make a tangible difference in the lives of veterans of all generations. They give clarity and purpose to the mission while making it possible to scale quickly and efficiently.

Tilden Productions

The mission of Tilden Productions is to acknowledge, inspire and lift up the hearts and minds of our veterans, active duty, military family members and first responders in ways that create a supportive environment, encourage community collaboration and capacity- building. Tilden Productions used cutting edge virtual technologies to create content that is universal and timeless through the arts, history, education and holistic healing of the mind, body and spirit.

Who We Are?

Tilden Productions is led by an experienced and dedicated team with decades of experience in the arts, literature, business and history. We have proven success growing thriving programs from start-up to maturity. Our leadership has sustained national prominence in the field of veterans' organizations, performing arts, both live and virtual, and project management. It is complemented in its administration, governance,

and community engagement by senior experience in all aspects of military culture, the military and veterans' communities.

What We Build

The Community Design that bridges the Military/Civilian Divide

Honor, Recognition and Capacity Building through History, the Performing Arts Education and Personal Story Telling

Wars linger, even if they are behind us. For each of dead, for each of the more than graves and names on memorials and for the hundreds of traces and relics found, letters and more recently, emails written, for each of the millions affected (physically or psychologically wounded, reunited with loved ones, returned home unscathed but never forgetting their experiences) there is a story of grief, pain, courage, ordeal and resilience. Somewhere in recesses of a desk drawer, in neatly tied piles of letters gathering dust in an attic or basement, in scrapbooks and audiotapes, in emails stored on a hard drive are the memories of a nation, from its birth to today. For the living both individuals, communities and nations, healing best takes place holistically addressing the body, mind and *spirit*.

Tilden Productions seeks to conserve, recognize and celebrate these moments of America's history. Because the nature of war does not change over time, our projects are designed to be universal and contemporary messages of peace, and therefore important social missions.

The Center for War Letters, The Behind the Lines podcast, The Vet Chats, The Patriotic Concert, The Virtual Museum and our educational outreach programs are all based on expressing and honoring those who sacrificed so much both on the fields of battle and on the home front.

The Center for American War Letters

The Center for American War Letters (CAWL) is a unique and extensive manuscript collection of war letters from every American conflict, beginning with handwritten missives composed during the Revolutionary War and continuing up to emails sent from Iraq and Afghanistan. These personal war-related correspondences are a vital record of the collective memory of the American people, as witnessed and articulated by service members, veterans, and their loved ones, who experienced these wars firsthand.

The Center for American War Letters is committed to the ongoing collection, preservation, and promotion of these incomparable records of the American experience through various projects and media.

- Documentaries and video recordings of troops, veterans, and their families telling their stories in their own voices and/or reading their letters
- Traveling exhibits
- Articles and books that incorporate the letters
- Educational guides to assist teachers and community leaders with the interpretation of these primary sources in the classroom
- Additional materials that will encourage Americans to recognize the extraordinary historical, cultural, and literary value of these irreplaceable documents

Ultimately, the Center will work to expand its collection and strive to become the nation's largest and most preeminent archive of personal wartime correspondences.

The Virtual War Letter Museum

The world's first entirely virtual museum, the **Museum of American War Letters** (MAWL). We were able to secure an NEH grant which will help us build the entire museum, and we recently opened with the **Vietnam Wing**, to coincide with National Vietnam War Veterans Day (this past March 29th). MAWL is and will remain free and accessible online to anyone, anywhere. MAWL will also offer customizable Memorial Wings for individuals or entities such as military units to display their correspondence, photos, video and memorabilia. There's a link to the museum at: www.MuseumofAmericanWarLetters.org.

The Behind The Lines Podcast

“**The Behind the Lines Podcast**,” subtitled “The Greatest War Letters Ever Written — and the Stories Behind Them,” focuses on not just extraordinary war correspondences, but the riveting stories about and behind them. We want these episodes not only to “entertain,” for lack of a better word, but to also educate by putting a human face on the sacrifices our troops and their families have made and continue to make. We are also hiring young veterans who are also voice actors to do the readings of the letters. These are difficult times for all actors, and, in light of our focus, we want to make helping veterans/actors our highest priority. For more information, including a short but informative “sizzle” reel about the podcast, please visit: www.BehindtheLines.us.

The Concert

From 2012 to 2018 Tilden Production team members have designed, written and produced numerous patriotic concerts celebrating Memorial Day (broadcast annually on PBS to 10 million viewers as well as live to an audience of 350,000) and Veterans Day (held at Washington National Cathedral and the Mormon Visitors Center. Additional concerts include the Spirit of America series produced by the US Army Orchestra at the Horizon Center and the Anti-Defamation League’s annual Concert against Hate held at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. These concerts are a combination of patriotic and inspirational arrangements performed by a full symphony orchestra, choirs and nationally recognized solo performers of song and the dramatic arts in combination with a keynote address by a special guest regarding veterans and the need to support military service members and their families as they transition to civilian life. The concerts focus attention to the mission of successful outreach efforts while encouraging immediate positive impact, community collaboration and capacity building in services to veterans of all generations.

Today, the numerous elements of these large and complex concerts, like many annual awards ceremonies, are produced in various locations and then edited and streamed live on the internet and television.

The Vet Chats

The National Vet Chat program is based on the Alcoholics Anonymous 12 Step model of open yet intimate and confidential gatherings where the main objective is to listen and share personal experiences in order to heal body, mind and spirit. Using meeting technology refined during the COVID Pandemic such as Zoom, WebEx and Google Meet, Vet chats are held on a weekly basis. All military service members and military family members from all generations of service are welcome. The Vet Chat program is augmented by a Vet Chat “how to” tool kit for those interested in developing a Vet Chat program in their virtual community.

Vet Chat Lessons Learned To Date

- Vet Chats Work
- The confidential model of AA is a successful basis for the chats.
- Vet Chats work virtually as well as in person.
- Active Duty, Veterans and Military Family members of all generations come together to share and support one another.
- The critical importance of giving the returning combat veteran, particularly those who have served in Iraq and Afghanistan, to begin the process of telling his/her story to like- minded people who can encourage them and guide them in a loving, healing and accepting manner cannot be overestimated.
- The recognition that their experience offers them a unique perspective on life and that their suffering is not meaningless but redemptive is key.
- When the guilt, trauma and isolation our veterans feel is shared, healing begins.
- Communication, compassion and community are critical tent poles in smooth transitions to civilian life not just for veterans but all military service family members as well.
- Active Duty and Veterans are the first to say “No one else can understand if they haven’t worn a uniform”
- United States Department of Veterans Affairs “I’m good but are you ready to listen?”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YPFo9EvUUvA>

- Vet Chats allow the military member or veteran to deal with his or her anger, isolation, and other problems with people who he / she was trained to trust and depend on.

Our Educational Outreach

Tilden Productions' "Teacher's Guides" are educational outreach programs for secondary and college students. The guides would feature some (at least one per war, for smaller conflicts, and numerous for the larger ones) of the war letters, journals and emails, along with informative text to help "humanize" history and make it more personal and, therefore, more memorable. (I.e., it's one thing to have to memorize a series of dates and events; it's another to read a letter by a soldier who just survived combat and is describing what happened to a friend or loved one.) The guides will be free and downloadable as a pdf for teachers (and parents) nationwide.

