

Ghost in the Ranks: Forgotten Voices & Military Mental Health

John Whelan

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This is a vital, compelling call to better understand, protect, and care for veterans and military servicepeople.

Ghost in the Ranks: Forgotten Voices & Military Mental Health, John J. Whelan's follow-up to *Going Crazy in the Green Machine*, continues the author's examination of the psychological pressures that military servicepeople face.

Whelan's text reveals that military training and the experience of serving in the military can mix with personal history and personality to exacerbate PTSD and other all-too-familiar forms of mental illness. It examines the inconsistencies, such as not admitting weakness yet constantly working to overcome it, and moral dilemmas, like those that come from inflicting civilian deaths, of military life that make it hard for veterans to recover and process their experiences.

Each chapter begins with a real-life story of a person facing mental struggle and illness related to military service and then unpacks each story, examining causes and effects of the issues that the stories represent. Those stories are not only emblematic of issues, but of populations and groups of real people. It is these raw human voices that achieve the book's greatest impact.

The stories highlight common situations and issues, but they're not heavy-handed. Whelan balances narrative quality—strong dialogue, setting, and character—with awareness of the underlying issues. The chapters are well paced, delving into their stories with enough depth but moving forward to the overarching theme at the right time. The stories carry, not surprisingly, a wide range of emotions, and Whelan captures each emotion well in the pithy, often painful, titles of each chapter, including "Left by the Side of the Road," "Am I a Good Man?" and "Someone's Going to Pay."

Whelan, a veteran himself, is a psychologist specializing in the military and veterans in Canada. His experience and expertise lead to startling, salient observations, such as that "military training, ideals, and values can present such stark differences and fundamental changes to one's personality that we can become entirely different versions of ourselves." While it is becoming more commonly acknowledged that mental health is a serious issue for military servicepeople, Whelan has the wisdom and care needed to help his patients and his readers heal and understand.

Whelan has an admirable purpose—to build understanding and rally a community, in and out of the military, to help servicepeople cope and achieve health—and the stories and insights he shares accomplish that goal quite well. People in the mental health field, military leadership, and, perhaps most of heartrendingly of all, families of struggling veterans will grow in compassion and understanding through Whelan's wisdom.

Ghost in the Ranks is a vital, compelling call to better understand, protect, and care for veterans and military servicepeople.

MELISSA WUSKE (May 27, 2016)

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