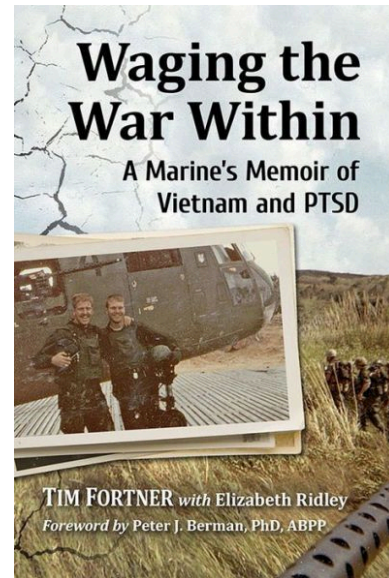


Vietnam vet pens memoir of overcoming PTSD

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Tim Fortner only spent four years in the military; 14 months of that time in Southeast Asia. Little did he know, after he left the Marine Corps in 1972, he would spend the next four decades struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Last month, Fortner's book "Waging the War Within: A Marine's Memoir of Vietnam and PTSD," was released by McFarland Books. It details his days "in-country" and his years after — including his success and failures in the private sector.

The 72-year-old veteran moved from Santa Cruz to Brookings, Oregon, in 2010 before settling for good in Smith River in 2013.

Fortner said he didn't set out to write a book about his exploits.

In 2007, he sought help from the Veterans Administration for a sore back and diminishing hearing.

"I'd been around jet and turbine engines that took its toll," he said of his days as a door gunner in a CH-46 helicopter in Quan Tri, Vietnam. "But for my knee and ankle and back pain, I had no documentation."

He did have lots of photos taken with his Instamatic 110 camera with time stamps on the negatives. His mother kept the photos in a scrapbook. The photos generated memories, and Fortner started writing them down.

His list of events and dates ended up at about 75,000 words, and his veteran services officer suggested he see a psychologist about PTSD. Fortner didn't like the idea.

"I'm a guy. I don't get PTSD. I also don't ask for directions or put the toilet seat down," Fortner said. "When he broached that I got pretty hot."

He relented, though, and eventually a psychologist diagnosed Fortner with PTSD. The Smith River man never considered any of his experiences in Vietnam to be traumatic. But seeing the psychologist helped him understand the cumulative impact.

"Hindsight being 2020, yeah, you start looking back, it was real sobering. It made sense. I was never married. Alcohol abuse. Insomnia. By themselves, didn't mean anything. But you start adding them up, and you start thinking there's too much here to ignore," Fortner said.

After his military service, Fortner ended up installing tennis courts around the world, then began working his way up through the ranks in the field of motorsports.

"I started polishing wheels for somebody and graduated on up," he said.

By 1993, he formed Fortner Motor Sports, restoring vintage Formula One race cars. "I used to tell people if I could, I'd do it for free," Fortner said. "It's one of those kinds of jobs. It's been a fun ride."

It took Fortner more than a decade to transform his 75,000 words into a memoir. "Waging the War Within: A Marine's Memoir of PTSD and Vietnam" can be found in bookstores or ordered from online retailers. More information about the book is available at the publisher's website: mcfarlandbooks.com/product/waging-the-war-within/

"It's going to be interesting for me to see how it's accepted. If it helps one person, doesn't have to be a veteran, just anybody with PTSD, I'll consider (that a) success," he said.