

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Response to 2nd Lt. Noelle Walker's "Cognitive Therapy for Soldiers Suffering From Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury"

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Cognitive Therapy for Soldiers Suffering From Posttraumatic Stress Disorder and Traumatic Brain Injury

2nd Lt. Noelle Walker, Illinois Army National Guard



A young man named Daniel Somers, in love with his high school sweetheart, Angeline Booth, married in the early age of eighteen. Two short years later he was off to the races, enlisting into the National Guard and deployed to Afghanistan shortly thereafter for thirteen months. Between 2001 and 2007, he served in over four hundred combat missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, returning home for the last time in 2007. According to a document repository from the U.S. House of Representatives, Daniel Somers killed himself on 10 June 2013 at only thirty-one years of age. He left a letter of explanation to his wife before committing the act that was later brought to public light: "My mind is a wasteland. Filled with visions of innocents harmed, innocent lives lost, and crying families, even with all of the medications the doctors dare give". He serves in the name of others. In 2015, the Department of Defense reported that 266 active-duty soldiers and 200 reserve component soldiers killed themselves. This data presents an enormous deficit in soldier resilience with respect to handling posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression. In 2010 a study published in *Military Medicine* titled "Spiritual Fitness" found that, "spiritual fitness is key to ensuring optimal force readiness and protection and enhancing resilience and recovery following combat-related trauma. The early identification of spiritual risk factors in individuals can minimize future dysfunction and negative impact on the unit." This "spiritual fitness" observed in a pilot in the Army's Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness standard is imperative to soldier resilience. In 2014, the *New York Times* described the results of a study that compared two groups, one of which received therapy for suicidal thoughts and one that did not. The article reported that "therapy prevented 145 suicide attempts and 50 deaths by suicide in the group studied," a reduction of 26 percent. For that reason, the Army now implements mandatory preventative, cognitive therapy for all soldiers in order to increase spiritual fitness, strengthen resilience, and prevent soldier suicide. **Soldier Resilience: The Problem** CNN reported in March 2014 that "about 49

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In your May-June 2018 edition of *Military Review*, there was an article by 2nd Lt. Noelle Walker, "Cognitive Therapy for Soldiers Suffering from PTSD and TBI." While I understand that all articles within *Military Review* are solely the opinions of each individual contributor, I believe this article is extremely misleading for our military population. The article seems to suggest that the Army should implement "mandatory and preventative" cognitive therapy for all soldiers. The issue with this statement is that therapy is a treatment—indicating that there is a symptom (or symptoms) that we (providers) are treating. We do not conduct any type of therapy in a "preventative" manner. While 2nd Lt. Walker makes valid points regarding suicide and PTSD, she is not a licensed provider (as far as I can ascertain from her credentials). There are

certainly preventative measures that we can take as a military to prepare our soldiers for the rigor of war, to include programs to bolster characteristics such as grit or resilience. Therapy is not one of those measures. I am concerned that an uninformed commander or soldier may read this article and attempt to submit themselves or their soldiers for "preventative therapy." This article also discredits the behavioral health profession as a whole, suggesting that we provide nothing more than what a layman may identify as a "life coach," someone who does not typically possess provider credentials, a license to practice, or a graduate level degree. I urge you to consider the message that an article like this may send to our soldier population. ■

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