From big ideas to small moments

Part 1. (2 mins.) Brainstorm a short list of “big ideas” that you associate with military service—for example: courage, patience, independence, discipline, etc.

Part 2. (8-10 mins.) Choose ONE of the words on your list, and make a cluster map. Write the word in the middle of a page and circle it. Then, draw lines to other circles representing specific memories of the military and other associations you have with this word.

Part 3. (20 mins.) Choose one of the associations you recalled while meditating on this word, and compose a scene in which you attempt to recreate what happened for the reader and reflect on what it meant then and means to you now. How does your small moment relate to the big idea you started with?

Fourth of July Fireworks

John Dykes, a 10-year Army veteran deployed four times to Iraq, gained national media attention for placing a sign in his yard that read “Combat Veteran lives here: Please Be Courteous with Fireworks.” Here’s his story excerpted from the website Military with PTSD (http://militarywithptsd.com/an-explosion-of-kindness/), which resulted in the start of a national awareness campaign called an “Explosion of Kindness,” which is meant to call attention to the triggering of PTS by fireworks.

Dykes, was first diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in 2003 after his return from his deployment during the invasion/liberation of Iraq. His unit was part of the initial push into Baghdad.

Dykes said, “I was told then that I did not have to deploy anymore, but there was no way that I was going to allow my brothers to go back and me stay home on the sidelines. The way I saw it, as long as I was deploying and fighting the enemy in their own backyard, they would be too busy to come attack my family in theirs. There was no easy deployment for us. No base or FOB. We lived among the Iraqis, moving from house to house constantly. Always surrounded and always outnumbered. I lost my very best friend in 2005 and several other great soldiers over my deployments. No exaggeration or lie. IED, small arms ambushes, and mortar/rocket attacks were a daily occurrence. Never saw a Subway, Burger King, or MWR show on my deployments. We were fighting a war and were constantly reminded of that.”

Dykes said he enlisted in the Army because, “It was a dream of mine since I was a kid.” His plan was to retire after 20 years military service; he
loved the Army and even called it his life. Dykes continued to serve until he was medically discharged in 2010 for physical injuries and PTSD. During his service, Dykes received a Combat Action Badge and the Bronze Star.

After his reaction to fireworks last year that left him completely exhausted and feeling like he was under attack and back in combat, Dykes decided to make a sign this year to let his neighbors know he was a combat vet and ask them to please be courteous with fireworks.

Dykes is receiving counseling for his PTSD at the VA, but like most veterans with PTSD, Dykes struggles with fireworks still and remains at the point where a firework blast can prompt symptoms that last hours. Among veterans, his reaction to fireworks is not unusual; often veterans with PTSD symptoms are triggered by both big pyrotechnics and little firecrackers.

Dykes said, “Courteous to me means remembering that you are not the only one living in your neighborhood/town/city. America celebrates our independence on the 4th of July. Not the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 6th, and 7th of July. Some fireworks are expected, and that’s okay. I understand. But, not 24 hours a day. PTSD and combat veterans aside, what about the new mothers trying to keep their babies asleep, the elderly couple that doesn’t need another heart attack induced, or the guy that works odd hours and gets sleep whenever he can? Courtesy is just that: remembering that there are other people in this world besides yourself and thinking of them.”

Dykes’ story went viral and sparked a dialogue about PTS triggered by fireworks and how communities, neighborhoods, and individuals can respond to the concerns of veterans with PTS.

What have been your experiences with the Fourth of July and fireworks? Have you experienced the kind of stress/reaction that Dykes describes? How do you choose to celebrate the Fourth of July?

Music of War

Write about the artists/songs/genres you consider part of your generation’s war and what you listened to in the field, before combat, during combat, at home, etc.

If your war has been featured in movies or other fictional media, consider what music was used in the most popular of those features. Do you agree or disagree with the choices? Why?