

## SHELL SHOCK - The Diary of Tommy Atkins - (PTSD)

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SHELL SHOCK - The Diary of Tommy Atkins by Neil Blower is published by Firestep Publications and can be ordered from Amazon:

[http://www.amazon.co.uk/Shell-Shock-Diary-Tommy-Atkins/dp/190848702X/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1318331720&sr=8-1](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Shell-Shock-Diary-Tommy-Atkins/dp/190848702X/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1318331720&sr=8-1)

On the 10th anniversary of the invasion of Afghanistan, ex-soldier Neil Blower explains why he had to write a novel about his experiences after he came home from war...

[http://www.williamaldridgefoundation.org.uk/images/fbfiles/images/Shell\\_Shock\\_\\_\\_Neil\\_Blower.jpg](http://www.williamaldridgefoundation.org.uk/images/fbfiles/images/Shell_Shock___Neil_Blower.jpg)

The pen is truly mightier than the sword. I can say this with confidence as I have wielded both in my 28 years. It is also true that the experiences of the latter have fed into the former.

That being said, I'm not a "war writer". I prefer to think of myself as a writer who's been to war, and still carries the scars. The scars I have as a result of my service to this country are not physical, but psychological: I have Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). I was diagnosed after I returned from Iraq - I will not go into detail about what I saw and did during that period, but I will say: no amount of special effects or the Hollywood touch can even come close to experiencing it first hand.

After I left the Army I found a passion for writing which culminated in me entering university last year to study for a degree in English literature and creative writing, which in turn led me to becoming published. My first novel Shell Shock: The Diary of Tommy Atkins tells the story of a young British soldier who returns home from Iraq and Afghanistan and suffers from profound PTSD. Written in the form of a diary it covers his first year back in "civvy street".

As a student of literature I was loath to write about the Army or war. I thought at the time it lacked anything creative and was something of a cliché. Then I came into contact with Combat Stress, the forces' mental health charity, which eventually persuaded me to try something creative to help with my treatment.

I had phoned them after six years of trying to deal with PTSD alone and putting my family through hell. The symptoms of PTSD are many - nightmares, uncontrollable anger, flashbacks, the abuse of drugs, alcohol and food to name but a few. I didn't want to admit I had a problem - I thought it was somehow weak or it made me a coward. I was wrong. I also thought that I was the only one who was feeling that way, that none of my peers felt the same. Again I was wrong.

Combat Stress sent a welfare officer and a psychiatric nurse to my home to talk to me and offer their help and support. What they said shocked me: they were helping 5,000 people, and the figure was rising by the day. PTSD not only affects the soldier, but his or her family as well. Combat Stress receives calls from children, asking them to come and help because "daddy keeps screaming in the night".

The dawning realisation of the depth and scope of the problem caused by PTSD lit a fire in me - I found inspiration and motivation in the one thing I was afraid of: writing about war and its effects on human beings.

It is a story that often gets overlooked, the story of what happens to soldiers when they return home. Certainly there are far more veterans and serving soldiers with mental scars than there are fatalities and

amputees, but it's because the injuries are unseen that this majority can be forgotten. We need to work to understand and be aware of what they are going through - this is where Tommy Atkins comes in. The name is used to represent all soldiers and has done for many years, which is why I chose the name for my young protagonist.

I finished the book and by some miracle I still don't understand I have got it published, with one pound from every copy sold being donated to Combat Stress. I wrote the book to raise awareness and I have always felt that the best way to do that is to entertain and engage.

PTSD when stripped down is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation. And I'm living proof that you can come to terms with and deal with the problem. There is life after war and there is life after PTSD (although there is no cure, you can return to a sense of normalcy). I'm now on the first steps to what I hope will be a long and satisfying career as a writer, a second dream come true: the first was being a soldier.

I'm often asked if I would go back to the army if the call came, knowing what I know of war. The answer is a resounding and unreserved "Yes". I really do not know why - Freud would have a field day - but that is a subject for another day and another novel.

[http://www.williamaldridgefoundation.org.uk/images/fbfiles/images/Shell\\_Shock\\_\\_\\_Neil\\_Blower\\_author.jpg](http://www.williamaldridgefoundation.org.uk/images/fbfiles/images/Shell_Shock___Neil_Blower_author.jpg)

AUTHOR: Neil Blower

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