

# Patrol Rifle Instructor Training Guide

## HOW COULD BARNEY FIFE EVER HAVE PTSD?

By Jeff Felts, March 2016 (written for a civilian audience)

When you go to work today, what are the chances that you will encounter the death of another person? In most cases this proposition is pretty farfetched, so let's take it down a notch. What are the odds that you will encounter another person or a child who has been maimed or dismembered?



The odds for most people encountering either scenario, a single time during an entire career, are extremely remote. However, if it has happened to you, or if it eventually does happen to you, it will be an event that you will never forget. In fact, that single experience may haunt you for the rest of your life.

Now, can you imagine facing these horrible realities on a regular basis for an entire career? For most people the answer is no way! Why would anyone do that? And when you ask them to associate a profession to this sort of constant traumatic stress, inevitably and rightfully, they align their expression with the horrors that our military personal and veterans experience during their combat tours.

I for one certainly agree with them, but there is one problem with that answer. The question included the words "regular basis for an entire career". This is where a disconnect exists not only for our citizens, but more importantly in my opinion, for our public servants as they don't reconcile with themselves that they can never "un-see", "un-hear", "un-touch" or "un-smell" 25 years' worth of never-ending, compounding, death and mayhem. With each death they encounter, the memories compound and they never go away. This is evidenced in part by alcohol abuse, attempts to use humor to cope, suicide and sometimes completely anti-social behavior, just to name a few symptoms.

Your firefighters, nurses, doctors and cops work every day in a world filled with death, dismemberment and chaos right here in good old Podunk, U.S.A. Unlike their military counterparts, your public servants' tour of duty is not limited to relatively short increments of time in the combat zone. The public servants' tour of duty never ends until retirement. It starts the day they are sworn in and from that day forward, they are barraged with death and dismemberment for the next 25-30 years with absolutely no breaks in between. In the case of your cops, they also have to deal with having a job where many people flat out hate them. Every month, sometimes multiple times, their peers are murdered somewhere in the good old safe zone known as the U.S.A. These

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factors justifiably lead to the fear that rests in the back of every cop's mind of never knowing when, where or how they are going to get physically attacked, multiple times throughout their career. Yet somehow, they are expected by everyone in society to magically compartmentalize their fears and horrible experiences, and man-up!

Every day throughout our great nation the Grim Reaper does his job thousands of times and his appetite never stops. When he takes his victims, whether it's naturally, by overdose, suicide, accident or murder, your public servants go into action to try and save a life or determine how the life ended.

So how hard can it be for Barney Fife in Perfectville, U.S.A.? Let's do a little math by saying Officer Fife responds to at least one death investigation a month (natural, O.D., suicide, accident, or murder) and two personal injury accidents where people are horribly disfigured. This would be a pretty slow jurisdiction by any cop's standards. In a 25-year career, Officer Fife would have responded to the scenes of at least 300 dead human bodies and at least 600 seriously maimed citizens (including children) at accident scenes. With every image, touch and smell, comes a memory that Officer Fife must deal with. Remember, Fife is not Superman; he's a person just like you, but he somehow has to compartmentalize his emotions so he can continue do his job and maintain "normal" relationships with his family and friends, as if he has never experienced the Grim Reaper's work.

The average citizen has no way of knowing what Fife has seen or done. What they know is how Hollywood portrays cops dealing with death predominately at murder scenes where tough homicide detectives never have a problem dealing with it. Conversely, every citizen understands and supports the efforts we all put forth in helping our combat veterans suffering with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as they served our country during a time of war. Therefore, they generally have a very hard time understanding why a guy like Officer Fife, who works as a patrolman in Perfectville, U.S.A., could ever have PTSD. They associate PTSD with combat veterans or public servants working in major metropolitan organizations, but not the Fifes of their respective professions.

More importantly, the Fifes of the world themselves often don't recognize that they need help for many of the reasons that the citizens do, until it's too late and they have done something to physically hurt themselves, committed suicide or irreparably damaged their careers and reputations.

I hope this article has enlightened you to the never-ending realities that all of your public servants' face on a daily basis. They need your support more than most will ever share.

Respectfully,

Officer Jeff Felts (ret.)