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Matthew Green, *Aftershock: The Untold Story of Surviving Peace*. Portobello Books, 2015.

336 pp. ISBN: 9781846273292 (Hardback). Price £20; 2016. ISBN: 9781846273315

(Paperback). Price £8.99.

*Aftershock* is an important and eye-opening study about the traumatic psychological effects of war on British military personnel. It deals with the harrowing ordeal some veterans and their families undergo in the aftermath of their exposure to war's realities. The book consists of two main parts. The first part explores the ways in which many British ex-forces, as Green puts it, are "still fighting wars in their minds" long after their involvement with the military had come to an end. Many soldiers returning from war can face a downward spiral, including alcohol abuse, relationship breakdown, angry outbursts, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (or PTSD), prison, homelessness and even suicide.

The second part of the book goes beyond understanding how war breaks people. Here the author uncovers the challenges ex-servicemen and women face when navigating the transition to civilian life and the networks of help available to them on their path to healing. Part II argues that while the NHS and various charities offer a good range of options, the lack of coordination between these competing resources often means that help doesn't reach those who need it most. Moreover, the treatment options traditionally offered by mainstream providers lag behind the most recent research into how trauma affects the structure and biology of the brain. Consequently, they fail to incorporate emerging methods of treatment that take these new approaches on board.

Green's book brings fascinating material to the reader's attention through a compelling, sensitive and often moving study. He undertakes the challenge of penetrating a

closed-off military subculture that is mostly out-of-reach for the general public. The author worked as a correspondent for Reuters and the Financial Times in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Africa. In 2003 he accompanied the US Marines into Iraq. While journalists are not permitted to speak to serving military personnel without the MoD's permission, Green is uniquely positioned to get as close as one can get to an insider view through his interviews.

*Aftershock* is a well-researched piece of investigative journalism, which features an impressive list of useful sources attached to each chapter. One will find the style oscillating between the scholarly and the anecdotal throughout. This is due to the book's structure, where interviews and first-hand accounts by veterans, their family members and mental health professionals alternate with the findings of up-to-date research on combat-related mental illness and its history. His interview subjects have participated in conflicts ranging from the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq to Northern Ireland and the Falklands.

The reader learns how our understanding of war's impact on the mind has evolved from "shell shock" during the First World War to PTSD as it is understood today. One of Green's observations is that throughout its history, military psychiatry has been going round in circles: the knowledge that is gained during war gets forgotten during peace and then rediscovered with the next bout of hostilities. The spontaneous way in which personal accounts are interspersed with historical and scientific material can give a somewhat informal feel to the book at times. This, however, does not diminish the value and relevance of the material presented, which acutely highlights an often underexplored issue: the private suffering which remains invisible behind the framework of traditional healthcare.

All in all, *Aftershock* is a timely contribution to the study of combat-related health with a potential impact in the public domain. Green hopes that the book will start a debate

on the way in which “mental health services might be reimagined to address a fundamental dilemma: how to reach those people suffering from conditions that, by their nature, make them reluctant to seek help.” *Aftershock* will be of interest to a broad audience that ranges from the general public to army personnel, military historians and historians of science to mental health professionals. Should the book’s wake-up-call reach the careful consideration of government officials, policy advisors and managers in the health services sector, the outcome could be hugely beneficial.

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