

# War & Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Abigail B. Calkin

- Calkin Consulting Center, Gustavus, Alaska  
Association Behavior Analysis Int'l, May 2015

“Few things are as painful as an invisible wound.”

Nelson Mandela



# Ed Mercer

- 4 October 1949 - 8 May 2015
- Sergeant Ed Mercer, 151<sup>st</sup> & 75<sup>th</sup> Rangers
- Vietnam, 1969-1970
- 54 reconnaissance missions in 51 weeks
- 100% permanent and total disability--PTSD

# Eggshells

Abigail B. Calkin, *The Soul of My Soldier* (2015)

From the neurons of a memory,  
Triggered by a smell, a word,  
a motion, perhaps something unseen  
and unknown  
synapses run at full throttle  
to protect from harm in  
war zones, but  
there is no war at home.

- Let us, let you, let me, take the power of emotion that lives in poetry and give it to people to change their lives of inner personal agony.
  
- Getting down to our brass tacks...
  - Definitions
  - Behaviors
  - Data
  - Methods to change

# PTSD Definition

- Direct or indirect experience of Stressor—
- Re-experiencing intrusive symptoms, e.g., nightmares
- Avoidance of triggering stimuli
- Negative alterations in cognition and mood
- Alterations in arousal and reactivity
- Duration
- Functional significance
- Exclusion

# Behaviors

- Urges
- Operants
  - Previous free operants turn into
  - Controlled operants
- Feelings
  - Physiological
  - Operant

# URGE

- An urge is the result of *respondent conditioning* the first time it occurs.
  - Around the corner—WWII, Vietnam, Iraq....
  - Physiological responses
  - No words attached.
- Thereafter, it is an operant response, i.e., a learned behavior with repeated consequences.
- However, it may occur again as a respondent behavior.

# Stimuli that elicit unhealthy responses

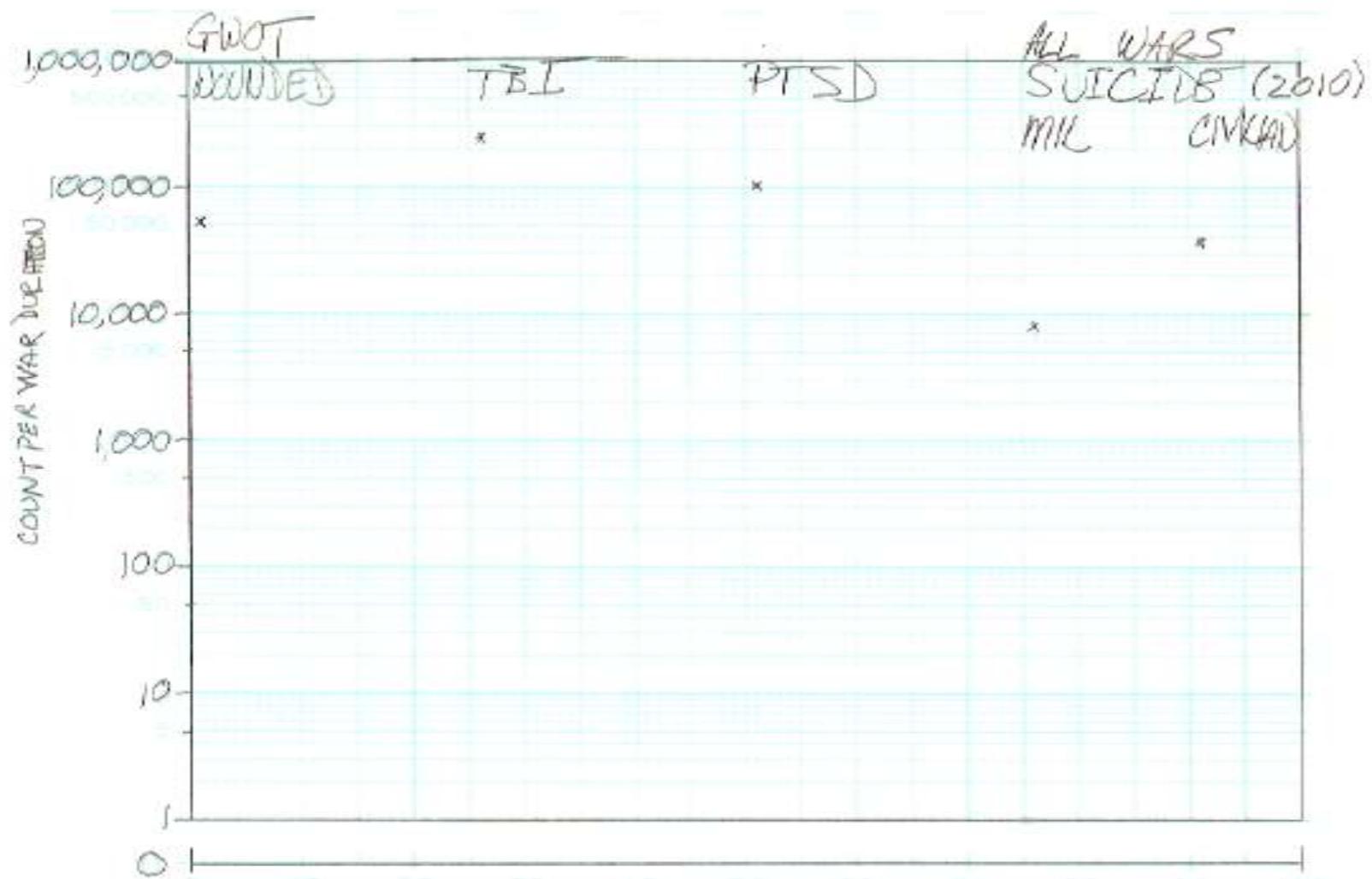
- Someone walks up behind the person
- Snow falls off roof and, going down, it catches the light
- Traffic congestion
- Loud noise
- Trash can
- Helo overhead
- Balloon bursts
- Crowded place
- Gunshot
- No full view inside restaurant

- Any of the preceding behaviors may have started off with an urge, e.g., seek cover when blown out of bed, increased pulse when IED explodes a pile of trash.
- The next time, however, it is an operant behavior now mixed in with the respondent behavior of the urge.
  - The result is that respondent and operant behaviors comingle while being reinforced.

# Operant behaviors emitted

- Yells
- Jumps
- Startles
- Smile dissipates
- Avoids crowds & noisy restaurants
- Turns suddenly
- Sweats
- Pulse increases
- Breathing changes
- Sits with his back to the wall

# Recent PTSD stats



SOURCES:  
 AB. CALKIN. [www.dauic.osd.mil/dcas...gwt...html](http://www.dauic.osd.mil/dcas...gwt...html) US MILITARY  
[www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org) CALKIN

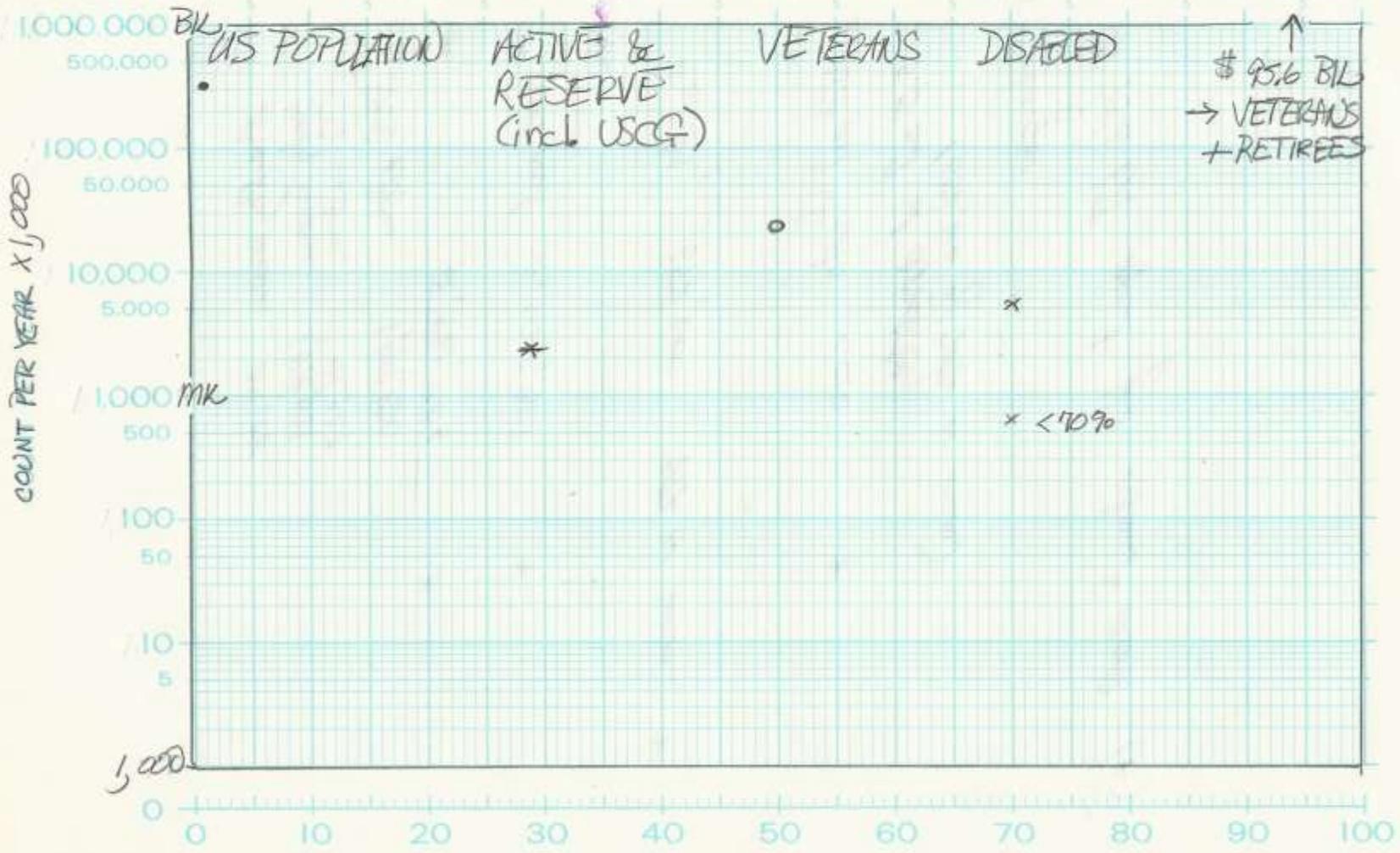
308.7mil  
2010

CALENDAR DECADES



TEARLY BEHAVIOR CHART (YR 2010)  
A. SELECT THE YEARS FOR WHICH YOU  
WANT TO COUNT DATA  
FOR THE YEARS 1-7 MARK HERE

0 2010 2010 2010 2010 2010 10



SOURCE: CENSUS.GOV

SUCCESSIVE CALENDAR YEARS

U.S. MILITARY

SUPERVISOR  
ADVISER  
MANAGER  
DEPOSITOR  
AGENCY

DoD

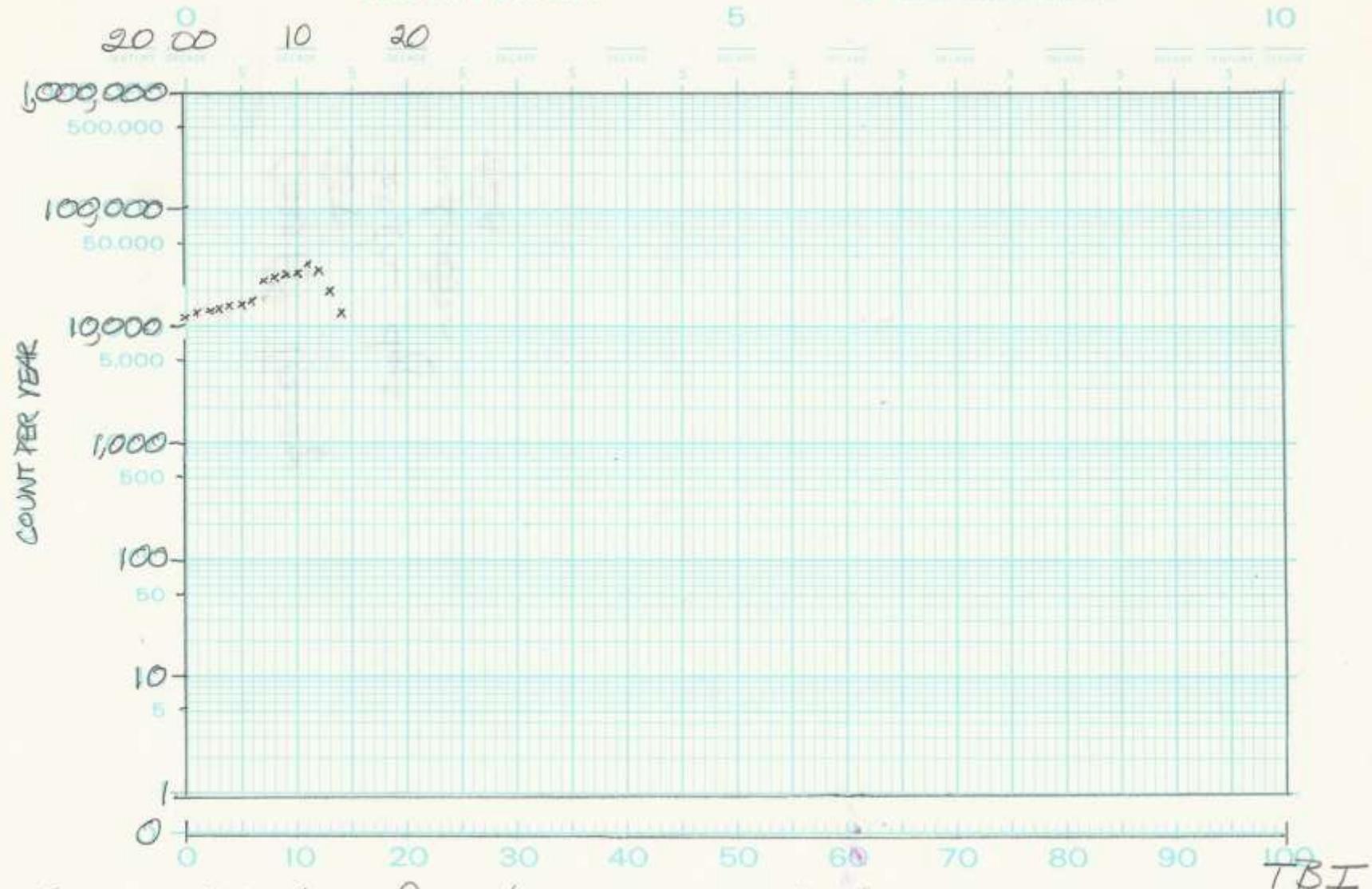
TIMER

DoD  
COUNTER

BEHAVIOR  
AGE  
LABEL  
COUNTED  
CHARTER  
CALKIN



CALENDAR DECADES

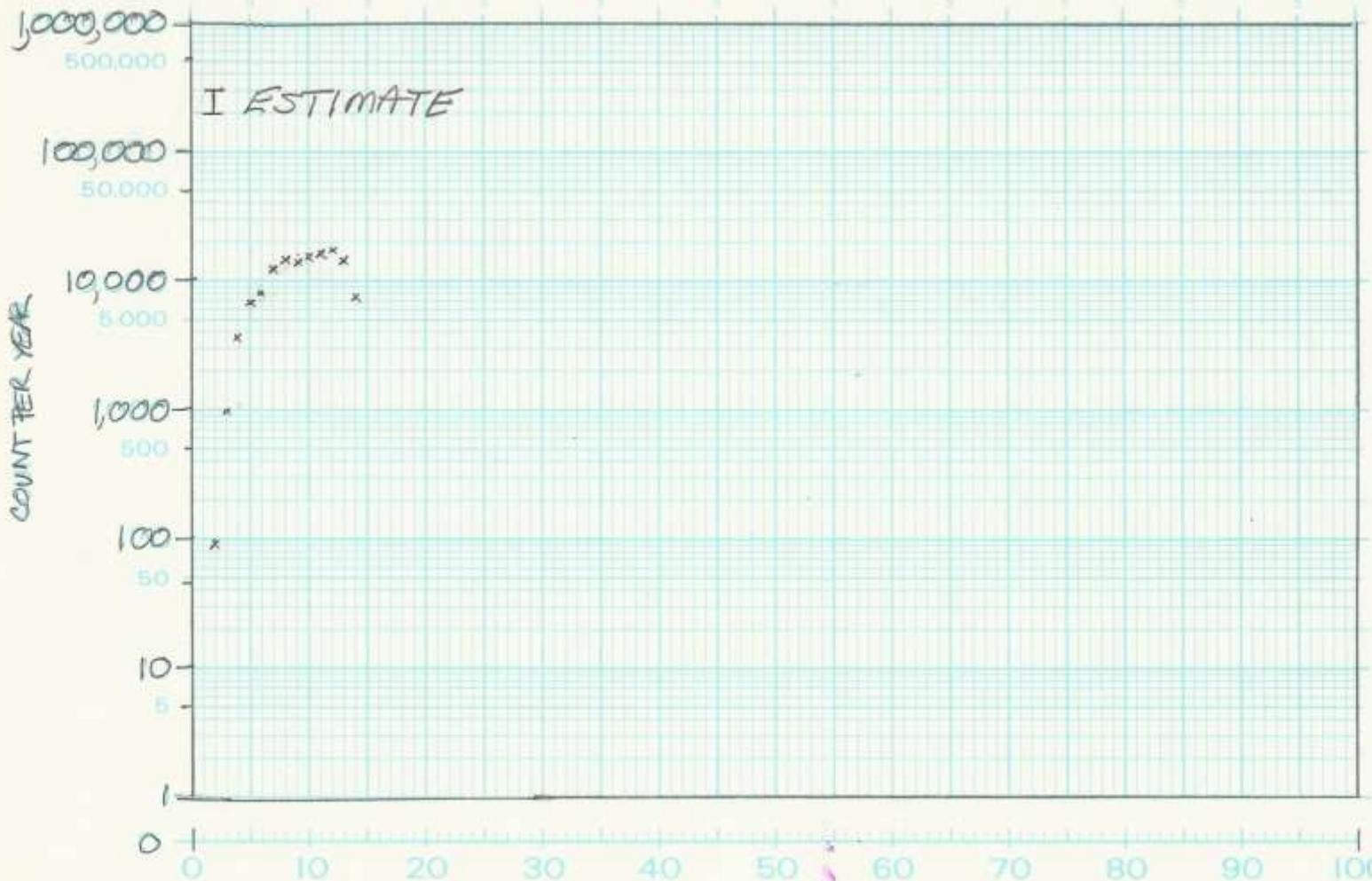


SOURCE: <https://www.fas.org/sqp/crs/natsec/RS22452.pdf>

ALL SERVICES  
MILITARY  
CALKIN

TBI

SUPERVISOR ADVISOR MANAGER BEHAVIOR AGE LABEL COUNTED  
POSITOR AGENCY TIMER COUNTER CHARTER



SOURCE: <http://www.fas.org/sgp/ors/natsec/RS22452.pdf>

SUCCESSIVE CALENDAR YEARS  
ALL SERVICES  
MILITARY  
PTSD  
SUPERVISOR  
AVIATOR  
MANAGER  
BEHAVIOR  
AGE  
LABEL  
COUNTED  
DEPOSITOR  
AGENCY  
TIMER  
COUNTER  
CHARTER

# Iraq & Afghanistan PTSD

- Over 300,000 veterans have PTSD.
- 200,000, or 2/3 of those, are not receiving treatment.
- A marine said “A one size fits all solution” is not the approach.
- From WW I, WW II, Korea they came home by ship—therefore, there was latency.
- In past wars there was combat zone and “home.” Now there is only combat zone and the flight home is hours.

# One size does not fit all.

- ABA
- CBT
- Cross Fit Training—Cogan Nelson, YouTube (Exercise)
- Inner behavior—self-respect
- Service dogs
- VA, friends, or buddies
- Does not include drinking or drugs

# CBT

## Cognitive Behavior Therapy

- EMDR (eye movement and desensitization & reprocessing)
- Stress inoculation
- Relaxation
- ACT

# How can applied behavior analysis help?

- PTSD is a confluence of behaviors
  - UCS → CS → paired with operants
- Use of 1-min timing procedures with inner behaviors...
- ...while sometimes also pairing them with public behaviors.
- Continued research needed.

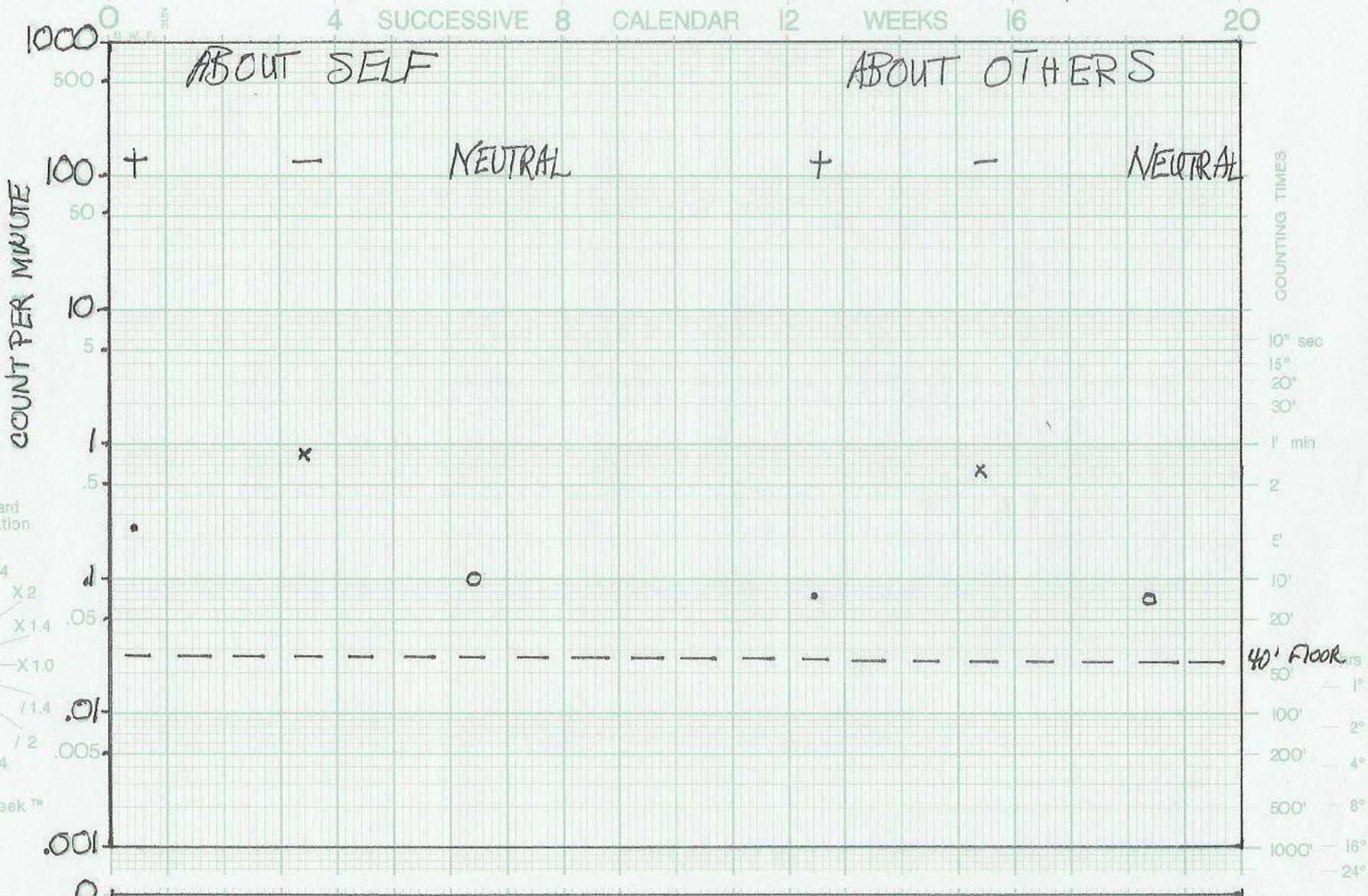
# ABA

## Applied Behavior Analysis

- Inner behavior
  - 1-min timing on positives
  - 1-min timing on self-respect
- Fleshing out the dimensions
  - Defining PTSD more behaviorally and precisely
  - Identifying specific behaviors

# Military Fort

- Three all-day workshops with the clinical staff working with active duty soldiers diagnosed with PTSD
- Opportunity to observe one therapy group for two hours
- 40-min record floor
- What one psychotherapist learned from the workshop...



**B. CALKIN**  
 SUPERVISOR  
 ARMY  
 ORGANIZATION

ADVISER  
 DIVISION

**PHIL FLANDERS**  
 MANAGER  
 PTD GROUP  
 ROOM  
 TIMER

**CALKIN**  
 COUNTER

**8 SOLDIERS**  
 PERFORMER  
**CALKIN**  
 CHARTER

**COMMENTS**  
 COUNTER  
 POSITIVE  
 XNEGATIVE  
 ONE/TOTAL

# Other

- Exercise
  - Cross Fit Training
  - Other
- Service dogs
  - Dog can sense distress before individual does
  - Dog then interacts with person with affectionate touch, which causes distraction from anxiety.

# Vietnam & PTSD

- The psychological risks of Vietnam for U.S. veterans: a revisit with new data and methods.
- Dohrenwend BP1, Turner JB, Turse NA, Adams BG, Koenen KC, Marshall R.
- A representative sample of 1200 veterans estimated that 30.9% had developed posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) during their lifetimes and that 15.2% were currently suffering from PTSD. The study also found a strong dose-response relationship: As retrospective reports of combat exposure increased, PTSD occurrence increased. (Science, 2006 Aug 18;313(5789):979-82.)

# PTSD from War

- US veterans are more apt to have PTSD by a x2 to x4 rate higher than civilians.
  - PTSD in the civilian population is 7.8%
- Aust N Z Journal Psychiatry. 2010 Jan; 44(1): 4-19.
  - US 15%-30%
  - UK Bosnia/Persian Gulf War- 3%
  - Canada—2.8% to 10.3% (3 tours)
  - Australia—5.4% (Gulf War)
  - Related to military? country? critical incidents? events?

# Reasons PTSD stats are poor

- We have numbers for
  - Suicide
  - TBI
- We lack numbers for PTSD. Why?
  - Denial
  - Fear
  - Lack of access to facilities, VA or otherwise
  - Not visible and, therefore, harder to identify
  - Mostly percentage estimates
  - Confluence

# What can ABA offer? (1)

- PTSD is a confluence of behaviors.
- Reduce or eliminate the negative or unpleasant inner behaviors such as
  - Suicide thoughts and urges
  - Aggression (toward self or others) thoughts and feelings
  - Depression

# What can ABA offer? (2)

- Use of 1-min timing procedure with inner behaviors...
- Pair with contrary
  - thoughts about reasons to live
  - Loving or complimentary thoughts toward others
  - List and repeat at least once per day good things in life; physical activity
  - Pair with outer behavior

# What can ABA offer? (3)

## ○ Continued research needed

- Definition—what are we looking for?
- Most effective ways to change the behaviors?

## WAR, LIKE ANY PROFOUND EXPERIENCE, CHANGES US.

It was June 2009 at an inn on Kachemak Bay, Alaska. Donna, someone I had just met, said, "Tell me about your camel."

*My camel? I live in Alaska. She's from Chicago, the wife of a poet, and it's her first trip here. People ask me lots of strange questions. Do you have electricity? Running water? An indoor toilet? My camel—do I also have a camel?*

Seeing my confusion, she touched her neck. "The camel. The camel around your neck."

I touched my gold camel. "My husband brought it back to me when he came home from the Gulf War." After the now-usual thank you for his service, she asked how he was.

Fine. From this one. He was not fine after two years in Vietnam . . .

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"Her appreciation for the sacrifices of American service members appears as primal and tangible as her respectful adoration of her husband, an Army veteran. . . . Calkin's description of her own marriage appears to be a metaphor for military service itself, whereby persistence and commitment to something larger than oneself delivers intrinsic rewards in spades."

—KENT A. CORSO, PsyD, OEF Veteran and President of NCR Behavioral Health

"Calkin deftly moves between prose and poetry in this affecting memoir of marriage. Ghosts of hard experiences weave through her words to reveal the power unresolved trauma wields on relationship. Ms. Calkin reflects themes common to us all by lifting her emotional stones to expose what lies beneath."

—NANCY HUGHES, PhD, LCSW



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THE SOUL OF MY SOLDIER

Reflections of a  
Military Wife

CALKIN



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"A beautifully written, deeply honest, and necessary book.  
This memoir blew me away."  
—ABIGAIL THOMAS, *A Three Dog Life*

# THE Soul OF MY Soldier

Reflections  
of a  
Military Wife

ABIGAIL B. CALKIN

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