

## Veterans' post-Vietnam health: Mental effects but mostly OK

Veterans who served in Vietnam suffer more depression, anxiety and alcohol abuse than their age-matched counterparts who served elsewhere, but their overall physical health, reproductive abilities and social adjustment are not currently impaired, says a new federal study. Results of the four-year study involving more than 15,000 veterans are likely to rankle some of those who have reported special problems among Vietnam veterans.

Researchers at the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in Atlanta found Vietnam veterans reported significantly more health problems and more birth defects in their children than non-Vietnam veterans, but that medical records for the most part failed to support their claims. Other conclusions from the study, summarized in the May 13 JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION and based on comparisons to non-Vietnam veterans, include the following:

- Vietnam veterans are clinically depressed roughly twice as often (4.5 percent versus 2.3 percent) and are more likely to have alcohol abuse or dependence (13.7 percent versus 9.2 percent). Among Vietnam veterans, about 15 percent had suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder at some time during or

since combat, with 2.2 percent having had the disorder during the month before their medical exam. But, at the time of study, the two groups of veterans were "similar in terms of level of education, employment, income, marital status and satisfaction with personal relationships," the authors say.

- Other than a 40 percent increased risk of hearing loss among Vietnam veterans, the scientists noted few differences in physical health between the two groups — although the Vietnam vets were almost twice as likely to rate their own health as "poor" or "fair." The detailed examination included tests for endocrine function, immunity and circulation. The report's authors acknowledge that, because the study was done 15 to 20 years after active duty, "most of the [medical] conditions of interest" may have been resolved earlier. No apparent increase in overall cancer risk was found, but the study did not include rare cancers. A separate CDC study is now looking at six cancers that may be associated with dioxin found in the herbicide Agent Orange, CDC physician Scott F. Wetterhall said in an interview.

- Vietnam veterans proved twice as likely to have low sperm counts, as well as a greater number of abnormally shaped

sperm cells. The average number of children, however, was the same in both veteran groups. The semen findings were the study's "biggest surprise," Wetterhall says. Other studies have found such sperm abnormalities may increase the time needed to conceive, but do not affect overall fertility. It seems unlikely dioxin caused the sperm changes, says Wetterhall, adding that an upcoming CDC report shows few troops were exposed to high doses of dioxin.

- Rates of birth defects were 5.9 percent for Vietnam and 5.7 percent for non-Vietnam veterans' children — based on hospital records for more than 3,300 births. An ongoing U.S. Air Force study is examining an excess of total reported birth defects among children of flight personnel handling herbicides.

The \$23.4 million CDC study included enlisted men who entered the U.S. Army from 1965 through 1971. Wetterhall says veterans who would have fit the criteria for inclusion in the study accounted for roughly 40 percent of all Army personnel serving in Vietnam. Of the 7,924 Vietnam and 7,364 non-Vietnam veterans interviewed by phone, about 2,000 from each group then had medical examinations at the same private hospital.

—D.D. Edwards

# Winston Churchill's Afternoon Nap

## A Wide-Awake Inquiry into the Human Nature of Time

By Jeremy Campbell

Science News Books  
1719 N Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20036

Please send \_\_\_\_\_ copy(ies) of *Winston Churchill's Afternoon Nap*. I include a check payable to Science News Books for \$8.95 plus \$2.00 postage and handling (total \$10.95) for each copy. Domestic orders only.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

RB901

*"A fascinating and responsible account of the recent discoveries in biochronology. I heartily recommend it."*

— Heinz R. Pagels  
Author of *Perfect Symmetry*  
and *The Cosmic Code*

Simon and Schuster, 1986, 432 pages,  
9½" x 6½", paperback, \$8.95  
ISBN 0-671-65717-8

### Discover:

- Why people who like to rise early are often introverts, while those who blossom in the evening tend to be extroverts
- Why changing to daylight savings time is like traveling on a jet plane
- Why water polo players are likely to excel in the afternoon, whereas golfers tend to peak in the morning
- What light, cocoa, conversation, and aerobic dancing have in common
- Why Winston Churchill juggled his wartime cabinet meetings so as to get a good nap after lunch