

## Global Battlefields and American Sidewalks

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from The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans ([www.nchv.org](http://www.nchv.org))

The U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) says homeless veterans are mostly males (2% are females). The vast majority are single, most come from poor, disadvantaged communities, 45% suffer from mental illness, and half have substance abuse problems. America's homeless veterans have served in World War II, Korean War, Cold War, Vietnam War, Grenada, Panama, Lebanon, Operation Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan), Operation Iraqi Freedom, or the military's anti-drug cultivation efforts in South America. Forty-seven percent of homeless veterans served during the Vietnam Era. More than 67% served our country for at least three years and 33% were stationed in a war zone.

How many homeless veterans are there?

Although accurate numbers are impossible to come by ... no one keeps national records on homeless veterans ... the VA estimates that nearly 200,000 veterans are homeless on any given night. And more than half a million experience homelessness over the course of a year. Conservatively, one out of every three homeless males who is sleeping in a doorway, alley, or box in our cities and rural communities has put on a uniform and served our country ... now they need America to remember them.

The Urban Institute, in conjunction with the National Survey of Homeless Assistance Providers and Clients (NSHAPC) done in 1996, projected that:

Each year, 2.3 million to 3.5 million people experience homelessness in America. By taking 23% of that range for veterans, that would indicate there are between 529,000 and 840,000 veterans who are homeless at some time during the year.

Mission: The National Coalition for Homeless Veterans (NCHV) will end homelessness among veterans by shaping public policy, promoting collaboration, and building the capacity of service providers.

Veteran Specific Highlights:

23% of homeless population are veterans

33% of male homeless population are veterans

47% Vietnam Era

17% post Vietnam

15% pre Vietnam

67% served three or more years

33% stationed in war zone

25% have used VA Homeless Services

85% completed high school/GED compared to 56% of non-veterans

89% received Honorable Discharge

79% reside in central cities

16% reside in suburban areas

5% reside in rural areas

76% experience alcohol, drug, or mental health problems

46% white males compared to 34% non-veterans

46% age 45 or older compared to 20% non-veterans

Over 225,000 veterans held in nation's prisons or jails in 1998.

Service needs:

45% help finding job

37% finding housing

Homeless Vets (No Longer) in Gainesville  
by Arupa Chiarini

Daniel Morse, known to everyone as "Big Danny," left this world Thursday, September 14, at a local hospital. He was 45 years old. Danny was a Native American and a veteran who served in the Special Forces. He was diagnosed with cancer last spring. He is survived by his wife Shirley.

You couldn't spend five minutes with Danny without finding out that he was a devout and ardent Christian. Earlier in his life he had battled alcoholism. Christianity was his path out of that particular Gehenna and he never departed from it. Two years ago he established a Christian camp in a patch of woods off the far end of 39th Avenue. Alcohol and drugs were forbidden at this camp and Danny held nightly Bible study around the campfire.

Danny and Shirley used to come to the Home Van food pantry about once a month, for supplies. Danny was very tall and large, and generally wore blue jean overalls. Shirley, who is from rural Georgia, wears long cotton dresses and always has on a bonnet of some sort. Together, they looked like the big, friendly Southern version of that famous painting, "American Gothic."

Danny loved to talk, especially in the areas of religion and philosophy. I had many a conversation with him. He often spoke about his most prized possession, a ceremonial sword similar to those seen in the movie "Brave Heart." His sword was taken away from him by a UPD officer who charged him with possession of a concealed weapon, a charge Danny didn't understand since the sword was hanging from his belt. He never got it back. Last Spring, when I heard he was sick, I sent him a care package by one of his camp mates. While I was assembling the package I found, in a donation bag, a large wooden cross with symbols carved on it. One of those symbols was a ceremonial sword. Of course, I sent it to him. It was one of those little "coincidences" that remind us we are all connected in this magical and mysterious universe.

Although I knew he was very ill, it never occurred to me that I would never see him again or have one of our long conversations about God, the universe, and the meaning of life. At least not here. We love you, Danny, and whatever trail you are walking now, our blessings go with you.

\* \* \* \* \* Jerry Corbridge died Saturday morning (November 18) from complications from a stroke. He was a Vietnam vet. He was also one of the respected elders in the homeless community. When times were hard he would dumpster dive behind Winn Dixie for food still good, and prepare big meals out in the woods, for everyone. He mentored newly homeless people, helping them survive. Jerry's final wish was for his remains to be taken to the Native American burial ground in Arkansas, and friends are arranging for that to happen.