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Fort Hood Survivors Still Struggle to Recover

By [Elayne Clift](#)

It's been nearly seven years since the November day in 2009 when Maj. Nidal Hasan, a major and a psychiatrist in the Army, walked into a room at Fort Hood, near Killeen, Texas, and fatally shot 13 people, then injured more than 30 others -- all unarmed soldiers but for one civilian. The shooting produced more casualties than any other on an American military base and was the deadliest domestic military attack in U.S. history.

Why, then, is it still classified as "workplace violence" rather than a terrorist attack?

That question is being raised by Kathy Platoni, a retired Colonel in the U.S. Army and a survivor of the Fort Hood Massacre, as well as by noted psychologist and veterans' advocate Paula J. Caplan, Ph.D., founder and director of The Welcome Johnny and Jane Home Project.

"Given that 'terrorist' is understandably such a scare word, what explains the classification of a terrorist's killings of and injuries to so many in the Fort Hood Massacre as simple 'workplace violence'?" That classification certainly lowers the profile of the Massacre and what has followed, including the neglect of those who were injured or emotionally traumatized directly or by losing loved ones," Caplan says.

In a recent letter to veterans' advocates Dr. Platoni, who like Dr. Caplan has a doctorate in psychology, says "the maltreatment of the victims of the Fort Hood Massacre continues to be a national disgrace. We have been betrayed and left to our own devices to heal, despite the promises of the Department of the Army, and the current administration, to assure that all the victims of this enormous tragedy have been restored to health and that all requisite benefits are awarded. It's been seven years and we are still fighting to obtain our due."

An article by Dr. Platoni in *Time Magazine* published in April pointed out that "The Fort Hood Massacre was unequivocally and indisputably an act of terrorism [but] the Army prosecuted the shooter on murder charges, not terrorism ones. It considered it to be the act of a disgruntled employee even though the shooter had messaged for years with a member of al-Qaeda before the attack."

Platoni explained that neglecting to call the massacre terrorism meant that "it took almost six years for the U.S. to award Purple Heart medals to the victims and the families of the fallen. They were only awarded these medals last April after Congress broadened the requirements for recipients to include attack where 'the individual or entity was in communication with the foreign terrorist organization before the attack.'"

Further, according to Dr. Platoni, at that time the Secretary of the Army had agreed to grant special compensations to the wounded in action and the families of those killed in action. But to date many of those endowments have not been provided in full. "These special compensations will never be paid retroactively to the date of the Fort Hood Massacre, but only to the date of the Purple Heart ceremony," she says.

Perhaps even more shockingly, some of the people wounded at Fort Hood have been paying for medical treatment out of their own pockets as they try to recover physically and emotionally from the terrorist attack.

"How much longer it will take for full benefits and entitlements to be delivered remains an unknown," Platoni says. "It's egregious neglect."

In March of this year a memorial was dedicated to the memory of those lost at Fort Hood in Killean, Texas. But as Dr. Caplan says, "the sequence of events began with bizarre and disturbing attempts to minimize what happened and the neglect of those whose lives were tragically altered that day."

I've written before about the military's neglect of those who serve in the U.S. military, whether they are physically or emotionally wounded combat veterans, long-suffering wives who lovingly care for them, or women vets whose sexual assault has been disbelieved, pathologized or covered up. It's a disgraceful tradition that has a long history. For example, where is the recognition of the women who ferried planes or broke codes or nursed soldiers in Bataan and Coregidor during World War II but never received full military honors because they weren't in direct combat?

It's a tradition I would like never to have to write about again. But it seems the military is far from resolving the often disgraceful treatment that our military personnel get, or the care they don't get despite how much they deserve it. That's why advocates like Dr. Platoni and Dr. Caplan continue to cast light on great gaps in a system that likes nothing better than monuments, medals, and the sound of self-congratulation in lieu of any serious attempt to address its shameful systemic deficits.

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