Chapter Exercises for **Chapter 15: Veterans, Their Families, and Military Social Work**

1. You are asked to configure a 4-hour learning module for your social work program to teach students how to help clients who are veterans or armed services members, or their families. Sketch out your ideas for such a learning module. You may wish to view James Gandolfini’s documentary film *Alive Day Memories: Home From Iraq,* which inspired Dr. Bender at Yeshiva to develop a course on social work practice with the military and to oversee a four-course certificate program related to the military and a field placement that serves the military. You may find more information about military curricula at Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C.; Boston College; and SUNY Empire State College.

2. Read and reflect on the following excerpt from *War Is a Force That Gives Us Meaning*

by Chris Hedges (2002), a *New York Times* correspondent and Harvard Divinity

School graduate. Then discuss your reflections on the culture and attraction of war.

War forms its own culture. The rush of battle is a potent and often lethal addiction, for war is a drug, one I ingested for many years. It is peddled by mythmakers—historians, war correspondents, filmmakers, novelists, and the state—all of whom endow it with qualities it often does possess: excitement, exoticism, power, chances to rise above our small stations in life, and a bizarre and fantastic universe that has a grotesque and dark beauty. It dominates culture, distorts memory, corrupts language, and infects everything around it, even humor, which becomes preoccupied with the grim perversities of smut and death. Fundamental questions about the meaning, or meaninglessness, of our place on the planet are laid bare when we watch those around us sink to the lowest depths. War exposes the capacity for evil that lurks not far below the surface within all of us. And this is why for many, war is so hard to discuss once it is over.

The enduring attraction of war is this: Even with its destruction and carnage it can give us what we long for in life. It can give us purpose, meaning, a reason for living. Only when we are in the midst of conflict does the shallowness and vapidness of much of our lives become apparent. Trivia dominates our conversations and increasingly our airwaves. And war is an enticing elixir. It gives us resolve, a cause. It allows us to be noble. And those who have the least meaning in their lives, the impoverished refugees in Gaza, the disenfranchised North African immigrants in France, even the legions of young who live in the splendid indolence and safety of the industrialized world, are all susceptible to war’s appeal. (p. 3)

3. Read and reflect on this excerpt from Allvord and Nowlin’s (2008) *When Baseball Went to War*. Then discuss how people are forever changed by serving in the military and going to war.

Arguably one of the first victims in a war is a person’s humanity, the memory of the person he was before the nightmare of war, before the sacrifice began and the long and tired feeling of war and regret set in as young boys became men much too early and much too fast. This was true in World War II and is still true today. . . .

In the Korean War, in Vietnam, in Desert Storm, and even today in Iraq, soldiers would burn off a little energy when they could and play baseball to regain a sense of the person they once were and hoped to become again. . . .

Veterans of America’s current conflicts such as Desert Storm and Iraq also serve and play baseball with passion in their spare time. Navy pilot Lt. Commander Terry Allvord saw the importance of baseball as an essential element to morale, discipline, and hope. The U.S. Military All-Stars are servicemen and women from all branches who give up their leave time to play baseball, paying the cost out of their own pockets. World War II, where the players were flown from event to event by the government, the U.S. Military All Stars choose not to accept government money; they want the government to spend all funds for those serving in the War on Terror.

In 1990, then–Aviation Candidate Allvord had the honor of escorting President George H.W. Bush in Pensacola, Florida, and the conversation quickly turned to baseball. It was a subject for which both naval aviators held a deep passion. Bush mentioned how in his day, “Military baseball helped them pass the time, feel a sense of home, and gave them hope.” Then the president asked how the current Navy team was doing.

“We don’t have a (baseball) team, Mr. President,” Allvord answered. The president was disappointed. “Someone should start a team,” answered the former Yale baseball captain. Allvord agreed, and the U.S. Military All-Stars were born. In nearly two decades, those original teams grew to more than 35 single-service teams worldwide. Allvord selected players from those teams and the best players from worldwide tryouts to create the first and only combined armed forces team, U.S. Military All-Stars. Players from the U.S. Military All-Stars were among those who pulled Saddam Hussein from the depths of a spider hole in Iraq. Allvord notes, “There is something unique, something special, when an evil dictator is pulled out of his hole by a liberator, but the fact it was also one of our players makes it even better.” These men are more than willing to give up their cherished free time to represent their country on and off the field. Former Dodgers farm hand and U.S. Military All-Star second baseman Ray Judy USN has a simple answer about playing baseball in the armed forces: “We love baseball, but we love our country more.” (Allvord & Anton, 2008, pp. 239–244)