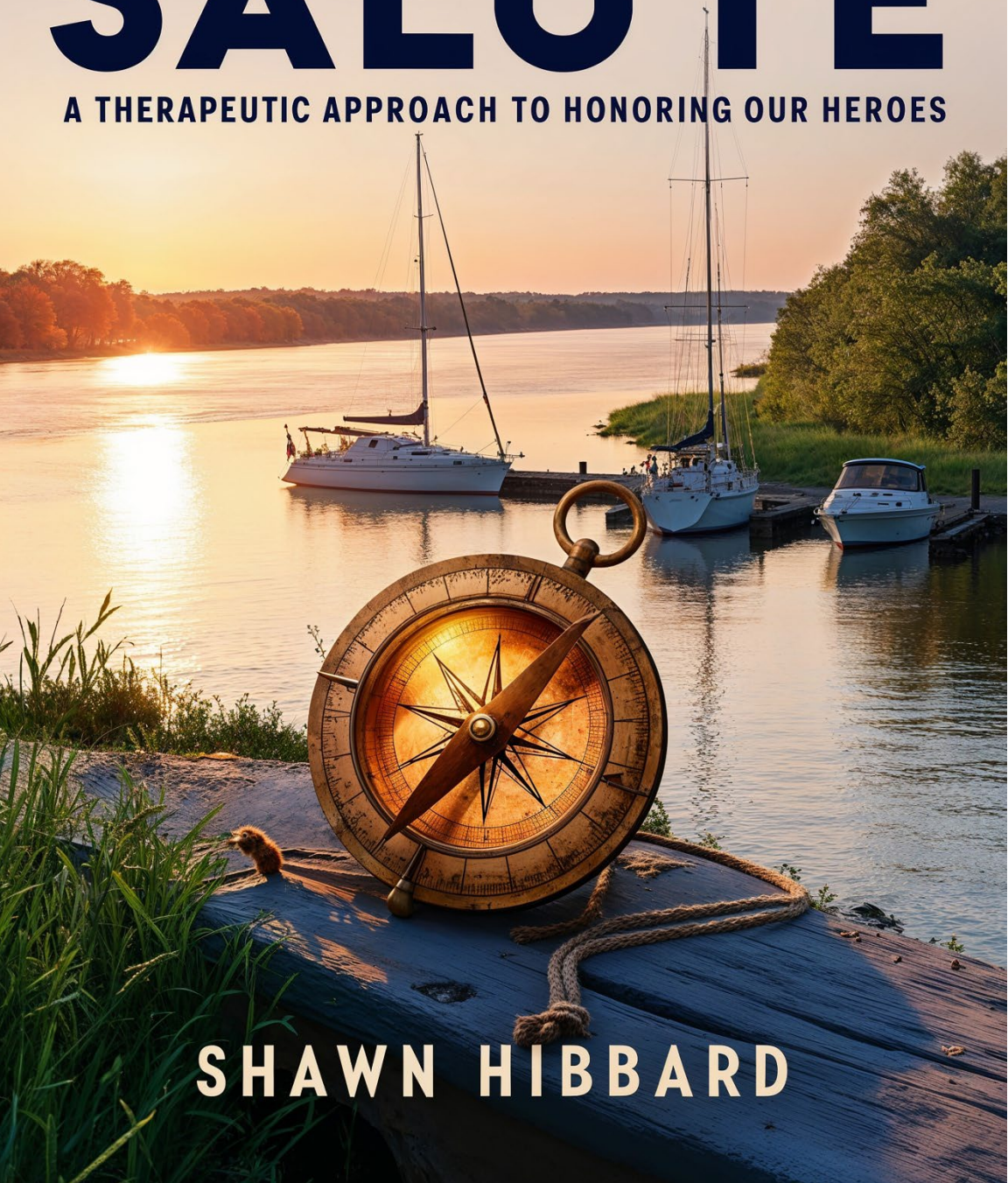
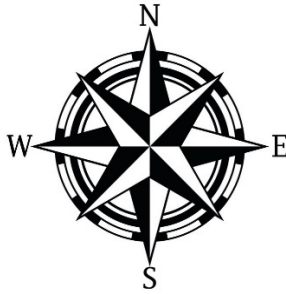


NAUTICAL SALUTE

A THERAPEUTIC APPROACH TO HONORING OUR HEROES



SHAWN HIBBARD



Nautical Salute

A Therapeutic Approach
To Honoring Our Heroes

By

Shawn Hibbard

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PDF Version

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Why Nautical Salute?

Navigating civilian life after service can feel like being adrift at sea with no clear course. *Nautical Salute* offers a compass to help these heroes find their way back to peace, connection, and purpose.

Introduction

The journey home from military service is often far more challenging than the journey into it. For many veterans, the battles do not end when they leave the field; they continue in the mind and spirit.

While the uniforms are stored away, and the medals are displayed on shelves, the invisible wounds of war - PTSD, depression, anxiety, and the profound sense of isolation - can linger for years.

Navigating civilian life after service can feel like being adrift at sea with no clear course. *Nautical Salute* offers a compass to help these heroes find their way back to peace, connection, and purpose.

At the heart of *Nautical Salute* is **Shawn Hibbard**, a combat Army veteran who intimately understands these struggles. After serving in Afghanistan and experiencing the difficulties of reintegration firsthand, Shawn found solace and healing in an unexpected place: the water. His vision for *Nautical Salute* is born from a deep desire to help fellow veterans reconnect with themselves, with each other, and with the natural world.

Through therapeutic boat excursions, Shawn and his team provide veterans with an opportunity to step away from their daily challenges and immerse themselves in an environment that promotes healing, camaraderie, and reflection.

This book, *Nautical Salute: A Therapeutic Approach to Honoring Our Heroes*, is a guide to understanding the power of water-based therapy and how it can offer veterans a new way forward. It explores the science, stories, and strategies behind *Nautical Salute* and demonstrates how the simple yet profound act of being on the water can heal deep emotional wounds.

Whether you are a veteran, a family member, a mental health professional, or someone who supports the veteran community, this book will illuminate the path to healing through the transformative experience of nautical therapy.

The Challenges Veterans Face

For many veterans, the transition from military life to civilian life is fraught with challenges. The sense of purpose, camaraderie, and structure that defined their service is suddenly gone. In its place can come feelings of isolation, confusion, and loss.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) affects up to 20% of veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation are all too common, and many veterans suffer in silence.

Reintegration into civilian society is further complicated by the gap in understanding between veterans and non-veterans. Military culture is unique, and the experiences of service members are often difficult to articulate to those who have never served.

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This disconnect can lead to a profound sense of loneliness, even when surrounded by loved ones. Veterans may find themselves adrift, longing for the structure, mission, and camaraderie they once knew.

The Vision of Nautical Salute

Shawn Hibbard's personal journey of healing through water inspired the creation of *Nautical Salute*. As a combat Army veteran, Shawn knows firsthand the weight of trauma and the struggle to find peace. After returning from service, he experienced the debilitating effects of PTSD and the overwhelming sense of isolation that often accompanies it.

Traditional therapy methods were helpful, but something was missing. It was on the water - surrounded by the rhythmic waves, the expansive sky, and the soothing sounds of nature - that Shawn found a sense of calm and clarity that had eluded him for so long.

Recognizing the transformative power of these experiences, Shawn set out to create a program that would bring this healing to other veterans. *Nautical Salute* was born from a desire to honor, heal, and reconnect those who have served.

Through guided boat excursions, veterans are given the opportunity to leave behind the pressures of daily life and immerse themselves in a setting that promotes relaxation, reflection, and connection. These trips are more than just boat rides; they are therapeutic experiences that offer veterans a chance to heal, bond, and rediscover a sense of purpose.

Why Water Heals

The therapeutic power of water is not just anecdotal; it is backed by science. **Dr. Wallace J. Nichols**, a marine biologist, introduced the concept of *Blue Mind*, which describes the calming and meditative state that water induces in the human brain.

According to Nichols, being near, in, on, or under water reduces cortisol levels (the stress hormone), increases serotonin and dopamine (feel-good neurotransmitters), and promotes a sense of well-being. Water engages our senses in a way that grounds us in the present moment, offering a respite from intrusive thoughts and anxiety.

The sensory experience of water - the gentle motion of the waves, the rhythmic sound of the tide, the vastness of the open sea - has a profound effect on the nervous system. For veterans who are often in a state of hypervigilance, water provides a natural antidote. It invites them to relax, breathe, and find stillness. The boat becomes a sanctuary, a place where the mind can rest and the spirit can heal.

A Community on the Water

One of the most powerful aspects of *Nautical Salute* is the sense of community it fosters. Veterans often miss the camaraderie of military life - the bonds formed through shared experiences and mutual support. On the water, these bonds are rekindled.

Boat excursions bring veterans together in a way that feels familiar and safe. They work as a team, share stories, and support each other through the journey. The boat

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becomes a microcosm of the military unit, where each member plays a role and contributes to the success of the mission.

This camaraderie is essential in combating the isolation that many veterans face. Knowing they are not alone - that others understand their struggles - can be incredibly healing.

The shared experience of being on the water creates a foundation for connection, trust, and mutual support. Veterans who participate in *Nautical Salute* often form lasting friendships and support networks that extend beyond the excursions.

A Call to Action

Nautical Salute is more than just a therapeutic program; it is a movement to honor and support our heroes. By harnessing the healing power of water, we can offer veterans a path to recovery, hope, and renewed purpose.

This book is a call to action for veterans, families, mental health professionals, and community members to come together and support this mission. We have the opportunity to make a difference in the lives of those who have served, to offer them the peace, connection, and healing they deserve.

As you read this book, you will discover the stories, strategies, and science behind *Nautical Salute*. You will learn how water-based therapy can transform lives and how you can be part of this journey. Whether you are a veteran seeking healing, a family member offering

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support, or a community member looking to give back, *Nautical Salute* offers a way forward.

Together, we can honor our heroes, heal invisible wounds, and create a future where no veteran feels isolated or forgotten. The journey begins on the water, where hope, healing, and transformation await.

CH 1

The Silent Struggles of Veterans

When military service ends, the battles do not always stop. For many veterans, the return to civilian life brings a new kind of struggle, one that is largely invisible to the outside world. The armor they wore to protect their bodies is gone, but the armor they've built around their hearts and minds remains firmly in place.

PTSD, depression, anxiety, and isolation are battles fought in silence, often misunderstood or overlooked by those who haven't walked the same path.

Understanding these silent struggles is essential to creating effective solutions for healing. To honor our heroes means acknowledging the emotional and psychological toll of service and recognizing that their battles continue long after they've left the front lines.

The Weight of PTSD

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is one of the most well-known and pervasive issues affecting veterans. PTSD is not a weakness; it is a natural human response to unnatural circumstances. Exposure to the horrors of war, witnessing loss, and surviving life-threatening situations can leave lasting emotional scars.

These experiences create a heightened state of alertness, commonly known as hypervigilance, which doesn't just disappear once a veteran returns home.

Veterans with PTSD may experience flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive memories, and intense emotional reactions to triggers that remind them of their traumatic experiences. Everyday noises like fireworks, a sudden car backfire, or even crowded spaces can transport them back to the battlefield.

This constant state of alertness can be exhausting and lead to withdrawal from social situations, leaving veterans isolated and misunderstood.

The weight of PTSD is compounded by the stigma surrounding mental health. Many veterans struggle to admit they need help. The military instills a sense of resilience, strength, and self-reliance, which can make asking for support feel like failure.

But PTSD is not a sign of weakness; it is a sign that someone has been through something incredibly difficult. Understanding this reality is the first step in supporting veterans through their silent battles.

Depression and Loneliness

While PTSD often grabs headlines, depression is another silent struggle that impacts a significant number of veterans. The transition to civilian life can strip away the sense of purpose, mission, and identity that military service provides.

For years, service members are defined by their roles, ranks, and responsibilities. They wake up each day knowing they are part of something larger than

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themselves. When that structure disappears, it can leave a void that is difficult to fill.

Depression is more than just sadness; it is a pervasive sense of hopelessness, fatigue, and disinterest in life. Veterans suffering from depression may struggle to find motivation, feel disconnected from their loved ones, and experience a numbness that makes joy and fulfillment feel out of reach.

The isolation caused by depression can lead to a downward spiral, where veterans withdraw further from the world, exacerbating their sense of loneliness.

Loneliness is not merely a lack of social interaction; it is the absence of meaningful connection. Many veterans feel that civilians cannot relate to their experiences, creating a barrier between them and society.

They may feel like strangers in their own communities, unable to bridge the gap between the military world they knew and the civilian world they now inhabit. The loneliness becomes a prison, reinforcing their sense of isolation and disconnection.

Anxiety and Hypervigilance

Anxiety is another common struggle for veterans. In the military, vigilance is a survival skill. Constant awareness of one's surroundings and potential threats can mean the difference between life and death.

This heightened state of awareness does not simply turn off when service ends. Many veterans continue to scan for

danger, feel uneasy in crowded places, and experience a sense of dread they cannot easily explain.

Hypervigilance can manifest in everyday situations. A veteran may choose to sit with their back to a wall in a restaurant, constantly survey exits in a room, or feel their heart race when they hear loud noises.

These behaviors are not irrational; they are remnants of the survival mechanisms that kept them alive during service. However, in civilian life, this constant state of alertness can lead to exhaustion, irritability, and difficulty relaxing.

Anxiety can also lead to avoidance behaviors. Veterans may avoid social gatherings, public spaces, or situations that feel unpredictable. This avoidance can further isolate them, making it harder to reintegrate and rebuild a sense of normalcy.

The relentless anxiety and hypervigilance can make the world feel like an unsafe place, even when there is no immediate threat.

The Emotional Toll of Separation

One of the most profound struggles veterans face is the emotional toll of separation. In the military, service members are part of a tightly bonded unit. They rely on each other for survival, share experiences few can understand, and develop a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood that is unparalleled. This camaraderie creates a deep sense of belonging and connection.

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When veterans leave the military, they are often separated from this support network. The bonds that sustained them are suddenly gone, and they may feel adrift in a world that does not understand the intensity of these relationships.

Civilian friendships, while meaningful, often lack the shared experiences and deep trust that military relationships offer. This sense of separation can lead to feelings of abandonment, loss, and grief.

Veterans may also feel separated from their own families. Deployments, training, and the demands of service often keep them away from home for long periods.

Reintegrating into family life can be challenging, especially when loved ones do not fully understand the experiences and changes that service members have undergone. This disconnect can create tension, misunderstandings, and further feelings of isolation.

Innovative Solutions for Veteran Mental Health

Given the complexity and depth of these silent struggles, traditional approaches to mental health care are not always sufficient. Therapy, medication, and counseling are valuable tools, but many veterans need something more - something that addresses their need for connection, purpose, and a sense of adventure.

This is where innovative approaches like *Nautical Salute* come in. By combining the therapeutic power of water with the camaraderie of shared experiences, *Nautical Salute* offers a holistic approach to healing. Veterans are

not just treated as patients; they are honored as heroes. They are given a space where they can reconnect with nature, each other, and themselves. The water becomes a bridge that helps them move from isolation to connection, from anxiety to calm, and from despair to hope.

Nautical Salute recognizes that healing is not a linear process. It is a journey that requires patience, support, and a willingness to explore new paths. By addressing the silent struggles of veterans with compassion, innovation, and respect, we can help them navigate their way back to a life filled with meaning, purpose, and joy.

This is just the beginning of the journey. By understanding the struggles veterans face, we lay the foundation for the healing and transformation that awaits on the water.

CH 2

The Healing Power of Water

Water has an ancient, almost primal connection to the human spirit. It is an essential element of life, a source of nourishment, and a force of nature that has inspired awe and wonder throughout human history.

For veterans grappling with PTSD, anxiety, depression, and isolation, water offers a powerful form of therapy that can promote healing in ways that traditional approaches may not always reach. The science behind the calming effect of water, as well as the personal experiences of those who have benefited from it, highlights its potential to transform the lives of our nation's heroes.

In this chapter, we explore how water-based therapy can alleviate stress, improve mental well-being, and foster a sense of peace and purpose. From the soothing sensory experience to the profound concept of *blue mind*, water has the power to heal both body and soul.

The Science Behind Blue Mind

Dr. Wallace J. Nichols, a renowned marine biologist and author, introduced the concept of *blue mind* to describe the mildly meditative state we experience when we are near, in, on, or under water.

In his groundbreaking book, *Blue Mind*, Nichols explores how water can reduce stress, increase happiness, and promote overall well-being. The term "blue mind" contrasts with "red mind," a state of anxiety, stress, and

over-stimulation that many veterans experience in their daily lives.

According to Nichols, the brain responds positively to water by releasing feel-good chemicals like dopamine, serotonin, and oxytocin. These neurochemicals help reduce cortisol levels, which are associated with stress and anxiety.

When a veteran engages in a water-based activity, such as a boat excursion, the rhythmic motion of the water, the expansive horizon, and the sensory experience combine to create a calming effect on the brain. The blue mind state helps veterans feel grounded, relaxed, and connected, counteracting the hyper-vigilance and anxiety associated with PTSD.

Scientific research supports the therapeutic benefits of water. Studies have shown that being near water lowers heart rate and blood pressure, reduces cortisol levels, and improves sleep quality.

The gentle sound of lapping waves or a flowing river triggers the parasympathetic nervous system, which helps the body enter a state of rest and recovery. For veterans who have lived in a constant state of fight-or-flight, water provides a reprieve - a chance to breathe, relax, and let go.

Water as a Sensory Experience

The healing power of water extends beyond its scientific effects on the brain. Water offers a rich sensory experience that engages sight, sound, touch, and even smell. These sensory inputs work together to create a

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therapeutic environment that promotes mindfulness, relaxation, and emotional release.

- **Sight:** The vastness of an open body of water - the ocean, a lake, or a river - provides a sense of perspective and freedom. The gentle movement of the water, the reflection of sunlight on its surface, and the endless horizon evoke a feeling of expansiveness. This visual stimulus can help veterans escape the confines of their own minds and feel part of something larger than themselves.
- **Sound:** The sound of water is inherently soothing. The rhythmic lapping of waves, the gentle flow of a stream, or the distant roar of the ocean can create a calming auditory backdrop. These sounds have been used in relaxation therapies for centuries, helping to drown out intrusive thoughts and create a sense of inner peace.
- **Touch:** The sensation of water on the skin, whether it's the spray of seawater, the coolness of a lake, or the steady motion of a boat beneath one's feet, can be grounding and comforting. For veterans who may feel disconnected from their bodies due to trauma, water offers a tactile experience that reconnects them to the present moment.
- **Smell:** The crisp scent of saltwater, the freshness of a lake breeze, or the earthy aroma of a riverbank can trigger memories of peace, freedom, and adventure. Smell is closely tied to memory and emotion, and the scents of water can evoke feelings of safety, nostalgia, and relaxation.

Engaging all these senses in a single experience allows veterans to practice mindfulness - a technique that focuses on being fully present in the moment. Mindfulness can reduce anxiety, improve focus, and help veterans process difficult emotions.

On a boat excursion, veterans are encouraged to pay attention to the sights, sounds, and sensations of the water, allowing them to momentarily set aside their worries and immerse themselves in the therapeutic environment.

Reducing Stress and Anxiety

Water's ability to reduce stress and anxiety is one of its most profound therapeutic benefits. For veterans who struggle with hyper-vigilance, racing thoughts, and a constant sense of danger, water offers a sanctuary where they can let their guard down.

The movement of a boat on the water creates a gentle, rocking sensation that mimics the soothing motion of being held or cradled. This rhythmic motion can calm the nervous system, reduce muscle tension, and lower heart rate. As the body relaxes, the mind follows, creating a sense of peace and safety.

In addition to the physical sensation, the openness of the water can alleviate the feeling of being trapped. Many veterans with PTSD struggle with confined spaces or environments where escape routes are unclear. On the water, there are no walls or barriers - just open space and fresh air. This openness can reduce the sense of claustrophobia and allow veterans to breathe more freely.

Water as a Symbol of Renewal

Water has long been associated with renewal, healing, and transformation. In many cultures, water symbolizes cleansing and rebirth. For veterans, water-based therapy can represent a fresh start - a chance to leave behind the burdens of the past and embrace a new chapter of life.

The act of being on the water, away from the familiar stresses of everyday life, allows veterans to step outside their routines and see things from a new perspective. The gentle waves can symbolize the ebb and flow of life's challenges, reminding veterans that even in difficult times, there is the possibility of peace and renewal.

Boat excursions provide a physical and symbolic journey. As veterans venture out onto the water, they leave behind the shore, the weight of their struggles, and the confines of their minds. The experience of floating, moving, and exploring can inspire a sense of freedom and hope. Returning to shore after a therapeutic excursion can feel like coming back with a lighter heart and a clearer mind.

Success Stories in Water-Based Therapy

Across the country, water-based therapy programs have demonstrated remarkable success in helping veterans cope with PTSD, anxiety, and depression. Programs like *Nautical Salute* tap into the healing power of water to create transformative experiences for those who have served.

Veterans who participate in these programs often report a sense of peace, clarity, and connection they haven't felt in

years. The combination of water, nature, and camaraderie creates a holistic therapeutic experience that addresses mind, body, and spirit. For some veterans, a single boat trip can spark a renewed sense of purpose and hope.

One veteran described his first boat excursion as “the first time I felt calm in years.” Another shared how the rhythmic movement of the boat helped him release years of pent-up tension. These stories are testaments to the power of water to heal, soothe, and restore.

Water is more than a physical element; it is a source of healing, connection, and renewal. For veterans facing the silent struggles of PTSD, anxiety, and isolation, water offers a path to peace and transformation.

By harnessing the power of water through *Nautical Salute*, we can help our heroes find the calm they deserve, the freedom they fought for, and the hope they need to move forward.

CH 3

Nautical Therapy: An Emerging Field

Nautical therapy, a specialized form of water-based therapy, is a relatively new yet rapidly growing approach to improving mental health and well-being. By combining the healing elements of water, nature, and movement with the structure and camaraderie of a therapeutic activity, nautical therapy offers a unique and effective way to support veterans struggling with PTSD, depression, anxiety, and isolation.

The transformative potential of being on the water - immersed in natural beauty, engaged in purposeful action, and surrounded by a supportive community - has given rise to programs like *Nautical Salute* that honor and heal those who have served.

In this chapter, we explore the development, principles, and effectiveness of nautical therapy. Through case studies, historical insights, and an examination of what makes boat excursions uniquely therapeutic, we gain a deeper understanding of why this approach holds such promise for veterans.

The Evolution of Nautical Therapy

The concept of using water for healing purposes is not new. For centuries, civilizations around the world have recognized the restorative power of water. Ancient Greeks and Romans built elaborate bathhouses, believing that immersion in water could cleanse both the body and the mind. Japanese culture has long embraced *onsen* (hot

spring baths) as a means of relaxation and healing. Even in modern healthcare, hydrotherapy is used to treat physical ailments and promote rehabilitation.

Nautical therapy builds on these long-standing traditions by integrating water-based experiences with modern psychological practices. Instead of focusing solely on physical recovery, nautical therapy addresses the emotional and psychological well-being of participants. By taking therapy onto the water, it blends elements of adventure, mindfulness, and community into a cohesive healing experience.

The field began to gain recognition in the late 20th century when mental health professionals and veterans' organizations started experimenting with non-traditional therapies. Programs like sailing therapy, kayaking retreats, and group fishing excursions demonstrated promising results for individuals suffering from trauma and stress. These early initiatives laid the foundation for the structured and intentional approach now known as nautical therapy.

Why Nautical Therapy Works

Nautical therapy is distinguished by its ability to simultaneously address multiple facets of mental health. Unlike traditional talk therapy, which may occur in an office or clinical setting, nautical therapy takes participants out onto the open water, where the environment itself becomes a therapeutic tool.

Adventure and Exploration

One of the key components of nautical therapy is the sense of adventure it fosters. Veterans who participate in boat excursions are invited to embark on a journey that offers discovery, challenge, and novelty.

The experience of navigating open water, exploring new places, and engaging with the natural world can ignite feelings of excitement, curiosity, and possibility. For veterans who may feel stuck in the monotony of daily life or trapped in their own thoughts, this sense of adventure can be both liberating and empowering.

The Rhythm of Movement

The steady, rhythmic motion of a boat on the water has a profound calming effect on the nervous system. The gentle rocking creates a sensation similar to being cradled, which can evoke feelings of safety and comfort.

This motion helps synchronize breathing, relax tense muscles, and reduce hyper-vigilance - a common symptom of PTSD. The repetitive nature of sailing, rowing, or navigating also helps veterans enter a meditative state, where intrusive thoughts and anxieties begin to dissipate.

Connection to Nature

Nautical therapy places participants in direct contact with nature, a powerful antidote to the stressors of modern life. The vastness of the open sea, the feel of the wind on the face, and the sound of waves crashing against the hull

create a multisensory experience that promotes relaxation and mindfulness.

Nature's inherent beauty and tranquility offer a stark contrast to the chaos of combat, providing a peaceful refuge where veterans can reconnect with themselves and the world around them.

Purposeful Activity

Boat excursions are not passive experiences. Whether veterans are helping to steer the vessel, navigate using charts, or assist with tasks on deck, they are engaged in purposeful activity. This sense of contribution and responsibility can restore a sense of competence, self-worth, and agency. For many veterans, the opportunity to perform meaningful tasks as part of a team echoes the sense of purpose they experienced during their military service.

What Makes Boat Excursions Unique

While there are many types of outdoor and adventure therapies available, boat excursions offer a combination of factors that are uniquely suited to veterans' needs.

1. **Physical and Emotional Distance:** Being on the water creates a literal and symbolic distance from the stresses of daily life. Veterans leave the shore behind, allowing them to gain new perspectives and step outside their routines.

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2. **Controlled Environment:** While the open water may seem vast and unpredictable, boat excursions offer a controlled setting where veterans can feel safe and supported. Skilled captains and therapeutic facilitators ensure that the experience is structured and secure.
3. **Teamwork and Camaraderie:** The collaborative nature of boating mirrors the teamwork veterans experienced in the military. Whether raising a sail, steering the boat, or navigating, participants rely on each other, fostering trust and camaraderie.
4. **Dynamic, Multi-Sensory Experience:** The combination of movement, sound, sight, and touch engages the whole person, promoting holistic healing that addresses mind, body, and spirit.

Nautical therapy represents an innovative and promising field of mental health support for veterans. By embracing the healing power of water, adventure, and connection, programs like *Nautical Salute* provide a pathway to recovery, resilience, and renewal.

The open water invites veterans to embark on a journey of healing, where each wave, breeze, and horizon holds the potential for transformation.

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CH 4

The Role of Nature in Healing

The connection between nature and healing is as ancient as human history itself. Across cultures and civilizations, natural environments have always been recognized as places of refuge, restoration, and transformation.

For veterans struggling with PTSD, anxiety, depression, and feelings of isolation, reconnecting with nature through nautical therapy can be a profoundly therapeutic experience. The natural world offers a calming and restorative environment that helps to reduce stress, regulate emotions, and foster a sense of peace and resilience.

In this chapter, we'll explore how natural environments promote emotional and psychological healing, how water-based therapy immerses veterans in these restorative settings, and why nature plays such a critical role in improving mental well-being.

Why Nature Heals

In recent years, scientific research has confirmed what many have intuitively known: spending time in nature is good for our mental health. The Japanese practice of *shinrin-yoku* (forest bathing) has become widely recognized for its ability to lower blood pressure, reduce cortisol levels, and improve mood.

Similarly, the emerging field of *ecotherapy* focuses on the mental health benefits of time spent in natural environments.

For veterans, nature offers a respite from the high-stress, high-alert states they experienced during military service. The gentle, non-threatening presence of the natural world helps soothe an overactive nervous system and create space for reflection and healing.

This effect is especially powerful for those dealing with PTSD, where the body's fight-or-flight response remains on high alert long after the trauma has passed.

Reduced Symptoms of PTSD

Natural environments can help veterans manage the intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, and hyper-vigilance associated with PTSD. When surrounded by the sights, sounds, and smells of nature, the mind has fewer triggers and distractions.

The repetitive, gentle rhythms of nature - the rustling of leaves, the lapping of waves, the calls of seabirds - create a soothing backdrop that helps quiet an anxious mind.

Emotional Regulation

Nature has a way of grounding us in the present moment. Veterans who may struggle with overwhelming emotions or emotional numbness often find that time spent in natural environments helps them process their feelings. The tranquility of the natural world encourages

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introspection, allowing veterans to reconnect with their emotions in a safe and supportive setting.

Cognitive Restoration

Mental fatigue is a common experience for those dealing with trauma. The constant effort to manage symptoms, stay vigilant, and cope with stress can be exhausting.

Natural environments offer cognitive restoration by allowing the brain to relax and reset. In the peaceful setting of a boat excursion, veterans can let go of their mental burdens and allow their minds to recharge.

The Unique Benefits of Water-Based Nature Therapy

Nautical therapy combines the healing power of nature with the therapeutic benefits of being on the water. Unlike other forms of nature therapy, boat excursions place veterans in a dynamic, immersive environment where water plays a central role in the healing process.

The Calming Effect of Water

Water has a unique ability to calm the mind and body. The concept of *blue mind* - coined by marine biologist Dr. Wallace J. Nichols - refers to the meditative state induced by being near, on, or in water.

This state of mind is characterized by feelings of relaxation, clarity, and peace. For veterans who may be constantly on edge, the gentle motion of the water, the sound of waves, and the vastness of the open sea provide

a soothing environment where they can let go of their tension.

Immersion in a Tranquil Setting

On a boat excursion, veterans are surrounded by water on all sides. This immersion in a tranquil setting helps create a sense of separation from daily stressors. The horizon stretches out in every direction, offering a visual reminder of the vastness and beauty of the world.

This expansive environment can foster a sense of perspective and help veterans feel connected to something greater than themselves.

Connection to Marine Life

Boat excursions often provide opportunities to encounter marine life, such as dolphins, sea turtles, fish, and seabirds. These encounters can be joyful and awe-inspiring, helping veterans reconnect with a sense of wonder and curiosity.

Observing the natural behaviors of animals in their habitat can also promote mindfulness and present-moment awareness.

Fresh Air and Open Spaces

Many veterans who struggle with PTSD experience difficulty in crowded, confined, or noisy spaces. The open environment of a boat on the water provides a stark contrast to these triggers. The fresh air, open sky, and

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expansive sea create a sense of freedom and spaciousness that can be deeply calming.

Breathing Space

Breathing in fresh, salt-tinged air can have physical and psychological benefits. The act of taking deep, intentional breaths helps reduce anxiety and promote relaxation.

On a boat, away from pollution and urban noise, veterans can fully inhale the restorative air of the sea. This simple act can help calm the mind and reduce the symptoms of hyper-vigilance.

Freedom from Urban Stressors

The stresses of daily life - traffic, noise, crowds, and technology - can be overwhelming for veterans who are already managing mental health challenges. Boat excursions offer a temporary escape from these stressors.

The peacefulness of the water, the absence of intrusive noise, and the gentle rhythms of the boat create an environment where veterans can fully relax and be present.

Nature as a Metaphor for Healing

Nature provides powerful metaphors for the healing journey. Veterans who feel broken, lost, or disconnected often find comfort in the natural world's cycles of renewal, growth, and resilience.

The Sea as a Symbol of Renewal

The sea, with its constant ebb and flow, symbolizes renewal and transformation. The waves that rise and fall, the tides that come and go, and the endless horizon all reflect the natural process of change. Veterans who feel trapped in their trauma may find hope in the sea's reminder that life is in constant motion and that healing is always possible.

Weathering Storms

Just as boats must navigate storms and rough waters, veterans learn to weather the emotional storms of their trauma. The experience of being on the water - sometimes calm, sometimes turbulent - mirrors the ups and downs of the healing process. Knowing that a storm will pass, that calmer waters are ahead, can provide a sense of resilience and hope.

A Safe Space for Reflection

Boat excursions create a safe space where veterans can reflect on their experiences, emotions, and hopes for the future. The natural setting encourages introspection without pressure or judgment. Whether gazing at the horizon, feeling the wind on their face, or listening to the rhythm of the waves, veterans are given a quiet space to process their thoughts and emotions.

Guided Reflection

Nautical therapy programs often incorporate guided reflection exercises to help veterans make the most of

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their time on the water. These exercises may include mindfulness practices, breathing exercises, or journaling prompts. The natural setting enhances these activities, helping veterans feel more open and receptive to the process of healing.

Restorative Environments

Nature, and particularly water, holds profound healing potential for veterans dealing with PTSD, depression, and anxiety. Nautical therapy harnesses this power by immersing veterans in restorative environments where they can experience calm, connection, and renewal.

The gentle rhythms of the water, the beauty of the open sea, and the freedom of being outdoors create a therapeutic experience that is both holistic and transformative.

By embracing the healing role of nature, *Nautical Salute* offers veterans more than just a boat trip - it provides a pathway to peace, resilience, and a renewed sense of purpose.

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CH 5

Building Connection & Camaraderie

When veterans leave military service, one of the most difficult adjustments can be the loss of camaraderie and the sense of connection to a tight-knit community. The bonds forged in the military are deep, often rooted in shared experiences of intense pressure, danger, and teamwork.

When these connections are suddenly removed, veterans can experience a profound sense of isolation and disorientation. Reintegrating into civilian life can feel lonely and alienating.

Nautical Salute offers a way to rebuild these essential bonds through therapeutic boat excursions. On the water, veterans can find connection, teamwork, and a shared purpose that mirrors the camaraderie of their military service.

This chapter explores why social connection is so critical for mental well-being, how boat excursions foster this connection, and how the sense of community built on the water can lead to meaningful healing.

The Importance of Connection for Veterans

Social connection is vital for human well-being. Numerous studies have shown that meaningful relationships reduce stress, improve mental health, and enhance resilience. For veterans, this need for connection is even more

pronounced. The military operates as a close, supportive community where individuals rely on each other for survival, success, and emotional support. When veterans leave this environment, they often feel adrift, unable to find similar connections in the civilian world.

Isolation and Its Consequences

Isolation can exacerbate the symptoms of PTSD, depression, and anxiety. Veterans who feel disconnected from others may withdraw further, leading to a harmful cycle of loneliness and deteriorating mental health.

Isolation also increases the risk of substance abuse, suicidal thoughts, and physical health problems. Rebuilding social connections is a crucial step in breaking this cycle and fostering healing.

Recreating the Bond of Service

Nautical Salute recognizes the need to recreate the bond of military service in a new, supportive context. Boat excursions provide an environment where veterans can reconnect with others who understand their experiences, challenges, and emotions.

The shared purpose of navigating the water, collaborating on tasks, and enjoying the adventure fosters a sense of community and teamwork that is both familiar and healing.

How Boat Excursions Foster Connection

Boat excursions naturally encourage interaction, collaboration, and shared experiences. Unlike traditional therapy settings, which can sometimes feel clinical or intimidating, the open and relaxed environment of a boat trip makes it easier for veterans to engage with one another. Here's how these excursions foster connection and camaraderie:

Shared Experiences

The act of being on a boat is inherently collaborative. Whether it's helping with navigation, adjusting the sails, or simply sharing the experience of being on the water, veterans are united by a common goal. These shared experiences create a foundation for connection. The simple act of working together to keep the boat moving fosters a sense of unity and purpose.

Adventure and Challenge

Boat excursions provide a sense of adventure and challenge that can be reminiscent of military life. The unpredictability of the water, the need to adapt to changing conditions, and the satisfaction of overcoming challenges together all contribute to a feeling of shared accomplishment. This sense of adventure can reignite feelings of competence, confidence, and trust in others.

The Power of Conversation

Out on the water, away from the distractions and noise of everyday life, conversation flows more naturally. Veterans

who may struggle to open up in formal settings often find it easier to share their thoughts, feelings, and stories during a boat trip. The relaxed atmosphere and the rhythmic movement of the water create a safe space for meaningful dialogue.

The Parallels Between Military Camaraderie and Nautical Experiences

The bonds formed during nautical excursions share many similarities with the camaraderie veterans experienced in the military. These parallels help veterans feel a sense of familiarity and belonging, making it easier for them to connect and engage.

Trust and Teamwork

In the military, trust and teamwork are essential for survival and success. On a boat, these same principles apply. Veterans must rely on each other to ensure a safe and enjoyable excursion.

This reliance fosters trust and reinforces the value of working together toward a common goal. Veterans quickly learn that they can depend on their fellow participants, just as they did during their service.

Shared Mission

In both military operations and nautical excursions, there is a shared mission. Whether it's navigating to a specific location, participating in a group exercise, or simply enjoying the journey, veterans are united by a common purpose.

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This sense of mission helps restore a feeling of direction and unity, which can be deeply healing.

Bonding Through Challenges

Overcoming challenges together creates strong bonds. In the military, facing danger and adversity as a unit forges deep connections. On the water, veterans encounter challenges such as rough waves, unexpected weather, or navigation difficulties. Successfully managing these challenges together builds confidence and reinforces a sense of camaraderie.

Visions of What Can Be with *Nautical Salute*

When we look forward, what we see are veterans who participated successfully in *Nautical Salute* excursions. We see them sharing stories of how the experience helped them reconnect with others and rebuild a sense of community. These visions of future testimonies are what we are working towards, providing experiences that foster healing and connection.

Let's imagine what can be...

Chris's Story

Chris, a Marine Corps veteran, struggled with severe PTSD and isolation after returning from combat. Traditional therapy left him feeling disconnected and frustrated. He joined a *Nautical Salute* boat excursion, even though he was skeptical. However, once he was out on the water, everything changed.

How awesome would it be if he said “The moment we set out, I felt a sense of peace I hadn’t felt in years,” Chris might recall. “Working with the other veterans on the boat reminded me of the camaraderie I missed. We laughed, share stories, and helped each other through the challenges of the trip. It was like being back with my unit. I realized that I am not alone.”

Chris’s story *is* possible.

Maria’s Story

Maria, an Army veteran, found it difficult to trust others after her service. She isolated herself, believing that no one could understand her experiences. During a *Nautical Salute* excursion, she found herself opening up to other veterans for the first time since service.

She might say, “The boat trip was a turning point for me.” “Being on the water with other veterans, I felt safe and understood. We shared our struggles and supported each other. I haven’t laughed like that in years. The experience reminded me that trust and connection are possible, are important.”

These are two visionary examples of what this program can be to veterans. We intend to make those a reality.

The Ripple Effect of Connection

The connections formed during boat excursions don’t end when the trip is over. Many veterans stay in touch, forming ongoing support networks that provide companionship, encouragement, and understanding.

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These bonds can extend into everyday life, helping veterans feel less isolated and more integrated into their communities.

Building Lasting Relationships

Nautical Salute encourages veterans to maintain the connections they make during excursions. Group reunions, follow-up events, and social media groups help sustain these relationships. Veterans who once felt alone now have a network of peers who understand and support them.

Family and Community Impact

The positive effects of these connections ripple outward, improving relationships with family members, friends, and the broader community. Veterans who feel connected and supported are more likely to engage in social activities, seek help when needed, and contribute positively to their communities.

What Makes Us Heal

Camaraderie and connection are essential components of healing for veterans. *Nautical Salute* boat excursions provide a powerful way to rebuild these bonds, offering veterans the opportunity to experience teamwork, trust, and shared purpose in a supportive environment.

By fostering these connections, we help veterans break free from isolation, rediscover the joy of community, and find renewed hope for the future.

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CH 6

Honoring Our Heroes Through Nautical Traditions

For centuries, the sea has carried with it a rich tapestry of traditions, rituals, and symbolism. These maritime customs are deeply rooted in respect, honor, and remembrance. Just as military service is filled with ceremony and tradition, nautical experiences offer a powerful platform to recognize the courage, sacrifice, and resilience of veterans.

In *Nautical Salute*, the blending of nautical traditions with therapeutic boat excursions creates an environment where veterans can feel honored, understood, and deeply connected to a larger legacy of service.

This chapter explores the significance of nautical traditions, how these customs can provide healing and recognition, and how personalized ceremonies on the water can offer closure, pride, and a renewed sense of belonging.

The Significance of Nautical Traditions

Maritime culture is rich with symbolism and rituals that reflect discipline, respect, and reverence. For centuries, sailors have developed ceremonies to mark milestones, honor the fallen, and build camaraderie among the crew.

These traditions have endured because they offer structure, meaning, and a sense of continuity. When applied to therapeutic boat excursions, these same

traditions can help veterans feel recognized and honored in a way that deeply resonates with their experiences.

Bridging Military and Maritime Cultures

The military and maritime worlds share many values: loyalty, courage, teamwork, and sacrifice. By incorporating nautical traditions into *Nautical Salute* excursions, veterans are reminded that their service, though concluded, is still honored and valued.

This bridge between two deeply symbolic cultures helps veterans feel a sense of continuity and connection. Whether through flag-raising ceremonies, salutes, or moments of silence, these traditions offer veterans a tangible way to reflect on their service and honor their journey.

Why Rituals Matter

Rituals provide structure and significance to life's transitions. In the military, ceremonies mark enlistments, promotions, deployments, and retirements. These rituals help service members process change, acknowledge accomplishments, and find closure.

When veterans leave the military, they often miss the structure and recognition that these rituals provided. Nautical traditions offer a meaningful way to restore this sense of ceremony, allowing veterans to feel seen, respected, and celebrated.

Types of Nautical Traditions in Therapeutic Excursions

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Nautical Salute incorporates a range of maritime customs to honor veterans and provide a sense of ceremony. These traditions are adapted to suit the therapeutic context of the excursions, offering veterans moments of reflection, recognition, and healing.

Flag-Raising Ceremonies

Raising the American flag on a boat before setting out is a powerful way to begin a therapeutic excursion. This ceremony mirrors the military tradition of morning colors, where the flag is raised with respect and reverence.

Veterans are invited to participate, offering them a moment to reflect on their service and their connection to the nation. The act of saluting the flag together reinforces a sense of unity and shared purpose.

The flag-raising ceremony can also include the reading of the *Pledge of Allegiance*, a moment of silence, or a short prayer. These elements create a solemn and respectful atmosphere that sets the tone for the excursion.

Moments of Silence

Observing a moment of silence on the water provides a space for veterans to honor fallen comrades, reflect on their experiences, and find inner peace. The quiet expanse of the open water offers a serene setting for this reflection. Whether marking the start or end of the excursion, this moment of collective stillness can be deeply healing.

A moment of silence can be personalized to reflect the specific experiences of the veterans on board. For example, veterans can dedicate the silence to a particular friend, unit, or event. This personalization adds depth and meaning to the ritual.

The Sounding of the Bell

In maritime tradition, the sounding of the ship's bell marks important events, such as the changing of the watch or the passing of a fellow sailor. On *Nautical Salute* excursions, the bell can be used to honor veterans' service or remember those who have passed. Each toll of the bell can signify a name, a memory, or a wish for healing.

For many veterans, the sounding of the bell is a poignant reminder of the military's traditions of respect and remembrance. This simple yet powerful act offers a way to acknowledge both the losses and the triumphs of their journey.

Sea Salutes

A sea salute, where veterans stand together on deck and render a salute to the horizon or the flag, is a way to honor the service and sacrifices of all who have served. This ritual mirrors military salutes and taps into the sense of discipline and respect that veterans are familiar with.

A sea salute can be conducted at the end of the excursion, offering closure and a sense of completion. The act of saluting together reinforces the bonds of camaraderie and respect among the veterans on board.

Personalized Ceremonies for Individual Healing

Every veteran's journey is unique, and personalized ceremonies can honor each individual's experiences and contributions. *Nautical Salute* encourages creating customized rituals that reflect the specific needs, memories, and milestones of each veteran.

Crafting Unique Rituals

Personalized ceremonies might include:

- **Dedication Ceremonies:** Veterans can dedicate a part of the journey to a fallen comrade, sharing memories and stories as a way to honor their legacy.
- **Achievement Recognition:** Celebrating milestones in a veteran's healing journey, such as overcoming PTSD symptoms or reconnecting with family, can offer a sense of accomplishment and pride.
- **Memory Releases:** Symbolic acts, such as releasing a wreath into the water or writing messages to be carried by the waves, provide a way to let go of burdens or grief.

The Role of Storytelling

Storytelling is a powerful element of personalized ceremonies. Veterans are encouraged to share their stories, whether through spoken word, written reflections, or symbolic acts.

These stories honor their journey, validate their experiences, and help them feel seen and heard. Sharing stories on the water, surrounded by others who understand, fosters a sense of validation and connection.

The Healing Power of Recognition

Recognition is a core aspect of healing. Many veterans feel that their sacrifices and struggles have gone unnoticed or unacknowledged. Nautical traditions offer a way to restore this sense of recognition, validating veterans' experiences and honoring their service.

Providing Closure

For some veterans, participating in these ceremonies offers a sense of closure. The rituals help them process their experiences, say goodbye to painful memories, and embrace the possibility of healing.

Whether it's through a salute, a moment of silence, or a personalized ceremony, these acts provide a structured way to acknowledge the past and move forward.

Restoring Pride and Dignity

Honoring veterans through nautical traditions restores a sense of pride and dignity that may have been lost during the transition to civilian life. These ceremonies remind veterans that their service mattered, that their sacrifices are respected, and that their journey is honored. This validation can be a powerful catalyst for healing and self-acceptance.

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Nautical Salute Traditions

Incorporating nautical traditions into *Nautical Salute* excursions creates a meaningful and healing experience for veterans. These ceremonies provide structure, recognition, and a sense of continuity, helping veterans feel honored and connected.

By blending maritime rituals with therapeutic practices, *Nautical Salute* offers a powerful way to honor our heroes, fostering healing, camaraderie, and renewed purpose.

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CH 7

Therapeutic Elements of Nautical Excursions

Nautical Salute is more than just a recreational experience; it is a carefully designed therapeutic intervention aimed at helping veterans find healing, connection, and relief from the challenges they face.

Each boat excursion is infused with therapeutic elements that leverage the calming power of water, the rhythm of the sea, and guided practices to promote mental and emotional well-being.

This chapter explores the specific techniques and strategies used during these excursions, highlighting how mindfulness, meditation, reflective practices, and collaboration with mental health professionals can enhance the healing experience.

Mindfulness on the Water

Mindfulness - the practice of being fully present in the moment - plays a central role in *Nautical Salute* excursions. The open water provides an ideal environment for cultivating mindfulness. The sights, sounds, and sensations of being on a boat naturally draw attention to the present moment, helping veterans break free from the cycles of anxiety, intrusive thoughts, and past traumas.

Why Mindfulness Matters

Many veterans struggle with hyper-vigilance, a common symptom of PTSD, which keeps their nervous systems in a state of constant alert. Mindfulness helps counteract this by encouraging a state of calm awareness. It allows veterans to notice their surroundings, thoughts, and emotions without judgment, reducing reactivity and promoting relaxation.

Mindfulness Techniques During Excursions

1. **Focused Breathing:** Veterans are guided through breathing exercises that help them center their focus on the inhale and exhale. The gentle rocking of the boat can provide a natural rhythm to synchronize with their breath.
2. **Sensory Awareness:** Veterans are encouraged to use their senses to anchor themselves in the present. They might notice the smell of salt air, the feel of the wind on their skin, the sound of waves lapping against the hull, or the sight of sunlight sparkling on the water.
3. **Body Scans:** A guided body scan encourages veterans to progressively relax different parts of their bodies, releasing tension and promoting physical ease.

These mindfulness techniques are simple yet powerful tools that can be practiced during the excursion and in daily life, offering veterans a lasting method for managing stress.

Meditation Practices for Reflection and Relaxation

Meditation is another key therapeutic element used in *Nautical Salute* excursions. The stillness of the open water provides a tranquil setting where veterans can turn inward, reflect, and find peace.

Meditation practices are adapted to the group's comfort level, ensuring that each veteran can participate in a way that feels safe and supportive.

Types of Meditation Used

1. **Guided Meditation:** A facilitator leads veterans through a visualization or a calming narrative, helping them focus their thoughts and relax their minds. For example, veterans might be guided to imagine a peaceful shoreline, the sun setting over calm waters, or a gentle journey through a serene landscape.
2. **Mantra Meditation:** Veterans repeat a soothing word or phrase silently to themselves. This repetition can help quiet the mind and provide a sense of stability.
3. **Silent Meditation:** After a brief instruction, veterans sit in silence, focusing on their breath, the movement of the water, or a peaceful image. The simplicity of this practice helps create mental clarity and calm.

Benefits of Meditation on the Water

- **Reduced Anxiety:** Meditation calms the nervous system, reducing feelings of anxiety and panic.
- **Emotional Clarity:** The peaceful environment encourages veterans to process their emotions more clearly.
- **Increased Resilience:** Regular meditation can help veterans build emotional resilience, allowing them to cope more effectively with stressors.

By incorporating meditation into nautical excursions, *Nautical Salute* provides veterans with a tool for achieving inner peace, even when faced with external challenges.

Breathing Exercises to Foster Relaxation

Breathing exercises are a cornerstone of therapeutic practices used during excursions. Controlled, mindful breathing helps regulate the nervous system, reduce stress, and promote a sense of calm.

Common Breathing Techniques

1. **4-7-8 Breathing:** Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 7 seconds, and exhale for 8 seconds. This pattern helps calm the mind and body by slowing the breath.

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2. **Box Breathing:** Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, exhale for 4 seconds, and hold again for 4 seconds. This technique helps focus the mind and control stress responses.
3. **Diaphragmatic Breathing:** Also known as belly breathing, this technique encourages veterans to breathe deeply into their diaphragms, expanding their bellies rather than their chests. This type of breathing promotes relaxation and reduces tension.

Incorporating Breathing Exercises into the Experience

Breathing exercises are introduced at key moments during the excursions:

- **Before Departure:** To help veterans feel grounded and calm before setting out on the water.
- **During Moments of Reflection:** To facilitate deep relaxation during guided meditations or moments of silence.
- **Upon Returning:** To help veterans transition from the boat back to the shore with a sense of calm and clarity.

Using the Movement of the Boat for Relaxation

The gentle motion of the boat creates a natural sense of rhythm that can be deeply calming. The sensation of the boat gliding through the water, the gentle swaying, and the rhythmic sound of waves can help veterans relax both physically and mentally.

Synchronizing Breath with Motion

Facilitators encourage veterans to synchronize their breathing with the boat's movement. For example:

- **Inhale as the boat rises with a wave.**
- **Exhale as the boat dips gently.**

This practice helps veterans stay present and connected to their bodies, promoting a sense of harmony and ease.

Harnessing Motion for Grounding

The boat's motion can also serve as a grounding anchor. When veterans feel overwhelmed or disconnected, they can focus on the sensation of the boat's movement to reconnect with the present moment.

Reflective Practices on the Water

Reflection is an essential part of the healing process. *Nautical Salute* integrates reflective practices to help veterans process their thoughts, memories, and emotions in a supportive environment.

Journaling on the Boat

Veterans are encouraged to keep a journal during the excursion. They can write about their thoughts, feelings, or experiences in response to prompts such as:

- **"What does the water represent for you?"**
- **"What memories or emotions are surfacing during this journey?"**

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- **“What would you like to let go of or leave behind on the water?”**

Group Sharing Circles

After periods of quiet reflection, veterans gather in a circle to share their thoughts. This group sharing fosters connection, mutual understanding, and validation. Veterans realize they are not alone in their struggles, strengthening the bonds of camaraderie.

Partnering with Mental Health Professionals

To enhance the therapeutic impact, *Nautical Salute* collaborates with mental health professionals who understand the unique needs of veterans. These professionals provide guidance, support, and expertise, ensuring that each excursion is both safe and effective.

The Role of Mental Health Experts

- **Pre-Excursion Briefings:** Mental health professionals prepare veterans for the experience, setting intentions and addressing any concerns.
- **On-Board Support:** Therapists or counselors are available during the excursion to provide immediate support if needed.
- **Post-Excursion Processing:** After returning to shore, mental health experts facilitate debriefing sessions to help veterans process their experiences and integrate insights into their daily lives.

A Transformative Experience

The therapeutic elements of *Nautical Salute* excursions - mindfulness, meditation, breathing exercises, reflective practices, and professional support - work together to create a transformative experience for veterans.

By leveraging the unique environment of the open water, these strategies offer veterans tools for healing, connection, and inner peace.

Through these carefully designed therapeutic practices, veterans are empowered to find relief from their struggles and embrace a renewed sense of hope and purpose.

CH 8

Engaging Family and Loved Ones

The journey of healing for veterans is rarely a solitary path. The challenges of PTSD, depression, anxiety, and reintegration into civilian life affect not only veterans but also their families and loved ones.

The ripple effects of trauma can strain relationships, create misunderstandings, and sometimes lead to emotional distance. *Nautical Salute* recognizes that true healing often involves reconnecting veterans with those who matter most to them.

By incorporating family members and loved ones into therapeutic boat excursions, the program promotes mutual understanding, rebuilds trust, and fosters deeper emotional connections.

This chapter explores the importance of family involvement, the strategies for creating meaningful shared experiences on the water, and the transformative impact this has on both veterans and their loved ones.

The Ripple Effects of PTSD on Families

PTSD and other mental health challenges don't occur in isolation. When veterans struggle, their families often struggle alongside them. The symptoms of PTSD - hyper-vigilance, irritability, withdrawal, nightmares, and emotional numbness - can lead to:

- **Emotional Distance:** Veterans may withdraw from their partners, children, or parents, creating a sense of isolation within the family unit.
- **Communication Breakdowns:** Misunderstandings and unspoken pain can erode trust and intimacy.
- **Anxiety and Fear:** Family members may worry about triggering a veteran's symptoms, leading to tension and uncertainty.
- **Role Shifts:** Partners or children may take on caregiving roles, which can create stress, resentment, or feelings of helplessness.

For many families, the struggle to support a veteran can feel overwhelming. It's easy to lose sight of the love and connection that existed before the trauma. *Nautical Salute* seeks to heal not just the veteran but the family as a whole.

Why Family Involvement is Crucial for Healing

Family support is a powerful catalyst for healing. When veterans feel understood and supported by their loved ones, their recovery journey becomes more hopeful and manageable.

Likewise, when family members gain insight into a veteran's struggles and witness their progress, they experience their own healing and empowerment. Involving loved ones in therapeutic boat excursions achieves several key goals:

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1. **Rebuilding Trust:** Shared experiences in a calming environment help restore trust and intimacy.
2. **Mutual Understanding:** Family members learn about PTSD, anxiety, and depression from a more compassionate perspective.
3. **Creating New Memories:** Positive, healing experiences on the water help replace painful memories with ones of joy, connection, and peace.
4. **Breaking Isolation:** Veterans often feel less alone when they see their loved ones participating in their healing journey.
5. **Strengthening Resilience:** Families that heal together build resilience, helping them face future challenges with unity and strength.

Designing Inclusive and Supportive Family Excursions

Nautical Salute tailors its excursions to include family members in meaningful ways. These outings are designed to be inclusive, therapeutic, and enjoyable for everyone involved. Each family excursion balances relaxation, adventure, and reflection, creating a safe space for connection and healing.

Preparation and Setting Expectations

Before setting out on the water, *Nautical Salute* facilitators provide a briefing for both veterans and their families. This preparation includes:

- **Explaining the Purpose:** Clarifying that the goal is to reconnect, support each other, and enjoy the therapeutic benefits of the excursion.
- **Setting Boundaries:** Encouraging open communication about comfort levels and personal boundaries.
- **Offering Support Resources:** Providing access to mental health professionals or counselors who can help facilitate the experience if needed.

Creating Shared Rituals and Activities

Family excursions incorporate activities that promote bonding and reflection. These might include:

1. **Guided Meditation Sessions:** Families participate in guided meditations focused on themes like forgiveness, gratitude, and connection.
2. **Group Reflection Circles:** Veterans and family members share thoughts, feelings, or memories in a supportive environment. Prompts like “What does being on the water together mean to you?” help facilitate meaningful conversation.

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3. **Team-Building Exercises:** Simple tasks like navigating the boat, tying knots, or working together to hoist sails create a sense of teamwork and camaraderie.

Moments of Quiet Connection

Sometimes, healing happens in the quiet moments. Family members are encouraged to spend time simply sitting together, feeling the breeze, listening to the waves, and enjoying each other's presence without pressure or expectation. These moments of peace often allow for unspoken connections to be felt and understood.

Rebuilding Bonds and Trust

One of the most powerful aspects of *Nautical Salute* is its ability to help veterans and their families rebuild bonds that may have been strained or broken. The unique setting of a boat excursion provides a neutral, calming environment where:

- **Old Wounds Can Heal:** The tranquility of the water helps diffuse tension and creates space for forgiveness and reconciliation.
- **Open Communication is Fostered:** Away from daily stresses, veterans and their loved ones can talk more openly about their feelings, fears, and hopes.
- **Shared Experiences Create New Foundations:** Working together to navigate the water helps rebuild trust through collaboration and mutual reliance.

Another visionary story of what can be...

A Father and Daughter's Healing Journey

Consider what could be the story of David, a combat veteran, and his teenage daughter, Emily. After David returned home, his PTSD symptoms led to emotional withdrawal, and Emily felt abandoned. They both might struggle to communicate, and their relationship grow distant.

They take a *Nautical Salute* excursion. David and Emily are invited to sit together on the bow of the boat and quietly observe the horizon. The simple act of sharing this peaceful moment, without words, allows them to reconnect.

Later, during a reflection circle, David might speak about his struggles and how much he loved his daughter. Emily, could be moved by his vulnerability and express her longing to be close to her father again. That day might mark a turning point, and their relationship begin to heal.

Although just a vision story, this is what we see taking place through our nautical tours with veterans and their family members.

The Role of Nature in Family Healing

The natural environment amplifies the healing power of family excursions. The open water, fresh air, and absence of daily distractions create an atmosphere conducive to:

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- **Clarity and Insight:** Nature helps people see their challenges and relationships from a new perspective.
- **Emotional Release:** The expansive horizon and rhythmic waves provide a sense of freedom and release, allowing suppressed emotions to surface safely.
- **Peace and Tranquility:** The calming influence of nature helps families relax and connect without the pressure of “fixing” everything at once.

Addressing Challenges and Emotional Responses

Family excursions are not always easy. Emotions can run high, and old wounds may resurface. *Nautical Salute* facilitators are prepared to handle these challenges with compassion and skill. They offer:

- **On-Board Support:** Mental health professionals are available to provide guidance and reassurance.
- **Safe Spaces for Expression:** Veterans and their loved ones are encouraged to express difficult emotions in a non-judgmental environment.
- **Follow-Up Resources:** After the excursion, families receive information about continued support and therapy options.

They Are Not Alone

Engaging family and loved ones in the healing process is a core element of *Nautical Salute*. By inviting families to participate in therapeutic boat excursions, the program

promotes understanding, trust, and emotional reconnection.

Veterans are reminded that they are not alone, and families are given the tools to support their loved ones while healing themselves.

These shared experiences on the water create a ripple effect of healing that extends far beyond the boat, fostering stronger, more resilient relationships for the journey ahead.

CH 9

Collaborating with Vet Orgs & Gov Agencies

Healing veterans from the invisible wounds of war - PTSD, anxiety, depression, and isolation - requires more than individual or small-group efforts. It demands the coordinated support of organizations, agencies, and communities that are committed to veteran welfare.

Collaboration is essential to ensuring that *Nautical Salute* reaches as many veterans as possible and operates effectively. By partnering with established veteran support organizations, government agencies, and local community groups, *Nautical Salute* can harness existing networks, resources, and expertise to extend its therapeutic impact.

This chapter explores the importance of these collaborations, strategies for building strong partnerships, and the ways in which these alliances can amplify the mission of honoring and healing our heroes.

The Importance of Collaborative Efforts

Collaboration is a cornerstone of effective veteran support. No single program, no matter how innovative, can address all the challenges veterans face. By collaborating with veteran organizations and government agencies, *Nautical Salute* can:

1. **Reach More Veterans:** Partnering with established groups increases visibility and accessibility for veterans who need help.
2. **Enhance Credibility:** Aligning with respected organizations builds trust and validates the program's mission.
3. **Access Resources:** Collaborations provide access to funding, logistical support, and professional expertise.
4. **Create a Holistic Support System:** Combining nautical therapy with other veteran services creates a comprehensive approach to healing.
5. **Share Knowledge and Best Practices:** Collaborations foster innovation and continuous improvement through the exchange of ideas and experiences.

Veteran Support Organizations: A Network of Allies

There are numerous veteran support organizations across the country, each offering unique services. Some of the key organizations to consider collaborating with include:

- **Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), American Legion, American Veterans (AMVETS):** Organizations with national network of posts, they are dedicated to serving veterans through advocacy, community engagement, and direct support.

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- **Disabled American Veterans (DAV):** DAV assists veterans with disabilities and provides critical support for transitioning back to civilian life.

By partnering with these organizations, *Nautical Salute* can tap into established networks to identify veterans who would benefit from therapeutic boat excursions.

Building Effective Partnerships

Step 1: Identify Potential Partners

The first step in building collaborations is identifying organizations and agencies that share a similar mission. Potential partners may include:

- **Nonprofits Focused on Mental Health:** Groups that address PTSD, anxiety, and depression in veterans.
- **Community-Based Veteran Services:** Local organizations that provide resources, social connections, and advocacy.
- **Therapeutic Programs:** Initiatives that use alternative therapies, such as art therapy, equine therapy, or wilderness therapy.
- **Government Agencies:** Agencies like the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and state-level veterans' affairs offices.

Step 2: Develop a Value Proposition

When reaching out to potential partners, it's essential to articulate how *Nautical Salute* can complement their work. The value proposition should highlight:

- **Unique Benefits of Nautical Therapy:** Explain how water-based therapy offers a distinctive approach to healing.
- **Shared Goals:** Emphasize the common mission of supporting veterans' mental health and well-being.
- **Mutual Benefits:** Outline how the partnership will benefit both organizations, such as increased outreach, shared resources, or collaborative events.

Step 3: Initiate Contact

Engage potential partners through personalized outreach. Consider the following approaches:

- **Attend Veteran Events:** Conferences, fundraisers, and meetings provide opportunities to network with organizational leaders.
- **Schedule Meetings:** Arrange in-person or virtual meetings to present *Nautical Salute* and discuss collaboration possibilities.
- **Create Informational Materials:** Develop brochures, presentations, and case studies that explain the program's mission and success stories.

Collaborating with Government Agencies

Government agencies play a critical role in veteran support. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), state veterans' departments, and local government offices provide funding, resources, and networks that can enhance *Nautical Salute*. Here's how to engage with these agencies effectively:

Understanding the Role of the VA

The VA offers a wide range of services, including healthcare, mental health support, and rehabilitation. Collaborating with the VA can provide:

- **Referrals:** The VA can refer veterans who may benefit from nautical therapy.
- **Funding Opportunities:** Grants and sponsorships for innovative mental health programs.
- **Professional Support:** Access to VA clinicians and therapists who can enhance the therapeutic elements of boat excursions.

Navigating Bureaucracy

Working with government agencies can be complex, but persistence pays off. Consider these strategies:

- **Understand the System:** Learn about the processes, policies, and requirements for partnering with the VA and other agencies.

- **Identify Key Contacts:** Build relationships with decision-makers, such as program directors or community outreach coordinators.
- **Prepare Detailed Proposals:** Create comprehensive proposals outlining the goals, benefits, and logistics of *Nautical Salute*.

Creating Referral Networks

Referral networks are essential for connecting veterans with *Nautical Salute*. Establishing a robust referral system involves:

- **Partnering with Mental Health Professionals:** Therapists, counselors, and social workers who work with veterans can recommend *Nautical Salute* as a therapeutic option.
- **Collaborating with VA Clinics:** VA mental health clinics and outpatient programs can serve as referral points.
- **Engaging Peer Support Groups:** Veteran peer support groups, such as PTSD support circles, can introduce members to the program.

Maintaining Referral Relationships

To sustain effective referral networks:

- **Communicate Regularly:** Keep partners updated on upcoming excursions, program successes, and new developments.

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- **Provide Feedback:** Share stories and outcomes from referred veterans to demonstrate the impact of the collaboration.
- **Express Gratitude:** Acknowledge and thank referral partners for their support and trust.

Securing Funding and Resources

Funding is crucial for sustaining and expanding *Nautical Salute*. Collaborating with veteran organizations and government agencies can open doors to:

- **Grants:** Federal, state, and local grants for mental health, PTSD treatment, and veteran support.
- **Sponsorships:** Corporate sponsorships and community donations facilitated through collaborative events.
- **In-Kind Support:** Donations of boats, fuel, equipment, and volunteer time.

Writing Successful Grant Proposals

When applying for grants:

- **Clearly Define Objectives:** Explain how *Nautical Salute* addresses specific veteran needs.
- **Provide Evidence:** Include data, testimonials, and case studies to support the program's effectiveness.

- **Outline Sustainability Plans:** Describe how the program will continue to operate and grow beyond initial funding.

Extending the Reach

Collaborating with veteran organizations and government agencies is vital to the success of *Nautical Salute*. These partnerships extend the program's reach, enhance its resources, and create a network of support for veterans.

By working together, we can ensure that every veteran who struggles with PTSD, depression, or isolation has the opportunity to experience healing on the water.

Through collective effort, we can honor, support, and transform the lives of our heroes, one nautical journey at a time.

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Developing a Sustainable Program

Creating a sustainable program is essential for *Nautical Salute* to honor and work towards healing veterans through therapeutic boat excursions for years to come. Sustainability encompasses financial stability, operational efficiency, volunteer engagement, safety protocols, and community support.

This chapter outlines the key steps needed to establish a long-lasting program, including building an operational framework, recruiting volunteers and professionals, engaging in fundraising, and evaluating the program's success.

Establishing the Operational Framework

We are developing a solid operational framework that provides structure, consistency, and safety, ensuring that *Nautical Salute* operates efficiently and effectively. This framework consists of several key components:

Logistics and Planning

- 1. Scheduling Excursions:**

Plan regular and seasonal excursions to accommodate various groups of veterans. Develop a calendar that takes weather, tides, and seasonal factors into account. Coordinate with participants and partners to avoid conflicts and ensure maximum attendance.

2. Boat Availability and Maintenance:

Identify a fleet of boats that are reliable, safe, and suited to therapeutic excursions. Establish maintenance schedules to ensure the vessels remain in top condition. Collaborate with local marinas, boat owners, or rental services to expand boat availability when needed.

3. Launch Sites and Routes:

Identify convenient and accessible launch sites, ensuring they comply with safety regulations and ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) standards. Plan routes that offer scenic, calming, and tranquil experiences, and ensure they are adaptable to changing conditions.

4. Transportation Arrangements:

Coordinate transportation for veterans who may not have access to reliable means of getting to the launch sites. Work with local veteran organizations, transportation services, or volunteers to facilitate pickups and drop-offs.

Safety Protocols

Safety is paramount in any therapeutic program involving water-based activities. Develop comprehensive safety protocols, including:

1. Safety Training for Staff and Volunteers:

Ensure all boat captains, volunteers, and support staff are trained in basic safety procedures, first aid, CPR, and emergency response.

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2. **Pre-Excursion Briefings:**

Conduct safety briefings before each trip, informing participants of safety measures, life jacket use, and emergency procedures.

3. **Emergency Plans:**

Develop and rehearse emergency response plans for potential scenarios such as medical emergencies, sudden weather changes, or mechanical issues.

4. **Medical Support:**

Have first aid kits on board and, when possible, ensure a medical professional or volunteer with medical training is present on excursions.

Documentation and Record-Keeping

Maintain accurate records to ensure smooth operations and compliance with legal and safety requirements. This includes:

1. **Participant Information:**

Collect contact details, medical information (with consent), and emergency contacts for all veterans participating in excursions.

2. **Waivers and Consent Forms:**
Ensure all participants sign liability waivers and consent forms before each trip.
3. **Incident Reports:**
Implement a system for documenting any incidents or accidents that occur during excursions, with follow-up protocols for addressing issues.
4. **Feedback Forms:**
Distribute feedback forms after each excursion to gather insights for program improvement.

Recruiting Volunteers and Professionals

A dedicated and passionate team is the backbone of *Nautical Salute*. Recruiting reliable volunteers and professionals ensures the program can run smoothly and deliver high-quality experiences.

Roles to Fill

1. **Boat Operators:**
Boat operators who are experienced, knowledgeable, and comfortable working with veterans.
2. **Therapists and Counselors:**
Mental health volunteers and professionals who can offer support during and after excursions. Their expertise enhances the therapeutic impact of each trip.

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3. **Support Volunteers:**

Volunteers who assist with logistics, safety, communication, and participant engagement.

4. **Administrators and Coordinators:**

Individuals who manage scheduling, communication, record-keeping, and partner relationships.

Volunteer Training and Support

1. **Orientation Programs:**

Develop orientation programs to familiarize volunteers with *Nautical Salute's* mission, values, and procedures.

2. **Ongoing Training:**

Offer regular training sessions to keep volunteers updated on safety protocols, therapeutic techniques, and best practices for engaging with veterans.

3. **Recognition and Appreciation:**

Show gratitude through volunteer appreciation events, certificates, and public recognition. Happy and valued volunteers are more likely to stay committed to the program.

Fundraising and Community Engagement

Sustaining *Nautical Salute* requires consistent funding to cover expenses such as boat maintenance, fuel, insurance, transportation, and professional support. Here are strategies for successful fundraising and community engagement:

Diverse Fundraising Strategies

1. Grants:

Apply for grants from government agencies, veteran support foundations, and mental health organizations. Tailor each application to highlight the unique therapeutic benefits of nautical therapy.

2. Corporate Sponsorships:

Partner with local businesses, marinas, and corporations that support veterans. Offer sponsorship opportunities for boat trips, equipment, or events.

3. Donations and Crowdfunding:

Create donation drives and crowdfunding campaigns through platforms like GoFundMe or Kickstarter. Share powerful stories of impact to motivate donors.

4. Fundraising/Outreach Events:

Host events such as charity boat rides, fishing tournaments, or veteran appreciation dinners. Engage the community and raise both awareness and funds.

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5. **Merchandising:**

Sell branded merchandise such as t-shirts, hats, and accessories to promote the program and generate revenue.

Community Outreach

Engaging the community fosters a sense of shared responsibility and support for veterans. Strategies include:

1. **Public Speaking Engagements:**

Share the mission of *Nautical Salute* at community centers, schools, and veteran organizations.

2. **Media Campaigns:**

Utilize social media, local news outlets, and podcasts to highlight the program's impact and successes.

3. **Collaborative Events:**

Partner with local organizations to host joint events, raising awareness and building connections.

Evaluating Program Success

Regular evaluation ensures that *Nautical Salute* meets its goals and continually improves. Key steps for evaluation include:

Defining Success Metrics

1. **Quantitative Metrics:**
Track the number of excursions, veterans served, and partnerships formed.
2. **Qualitative Feedback:**
Collect testimonials, surveys, and personal stories to understand the emotional and psychological impact.
3. **Outcome-Based Metrics:**
Measure changes in PTSD symptoms, levels of anxiety, and feelings of isolation through pre- and post-excursion assessments.

Continuous Improvement

1. **Review Feedback:**
Regularly review feedback to identify areas for improvement.
2. **Adapt and Evolve:**
Adjust the program based on participant needs, volunteer input, and emerging best practices in therapy.
3. **Annual Reviews:**
Conduct annual reviews to assess overall progress and set new goals.

The Framework

Developing a sustainable program for *Nautical Salute* ensures that the mission of honoring and healing veterans continues long into the future.

By creating a solid operational framework, recruiting passionate volunteers, securing funding, and continuously evaluating success, *Nautical Salute* can provide transformative experiences on the water for countless veterans.

Through careful planning, dedication, and community support, we can ensure that no veteran feels isolated and that every hero has the opportunity to find healing, camaraderie, and renewed purpose on the open sea.

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Looking to the Horizon

The Future of *Nautical Salute*

As Nautical Salute continues its mission to honor and heal our heroes, the horizon is full of promise and potential. The potential success stories, the transformative power of water-based therapy, and the strength of veteran communities all point toward a future where this program can expand beyond its current reach.

The journey has just begun, and there is a clear vision for how *Nautical Salute* can grow, influence the future of veteran care, and create lasting change for those who have served.

Expanding Across Florida and Beyond

Nautical Salute began as a vision rooted in the waters of Florida, where miles of coastline, tranquil bays, and lakes offer ample opportunity for healing and connection. However, the need for programs like *Nautical Salute* extends far beyond any single state.

Veterans across the country, whether they reside near the Atlantic, the Pacific, the Great Lakes, or the Gulf Coast, can benefit from the restorative power of nautical therapy.

The goal is to establish *Nautical Salute* hubs in key regions across the United States, each staffed with trained

volunteers, mental health professionals, and boat captains committed to the program's mission.

These hubs would serve as centers of healing, offering regular excursions, ceremonies, and therapeutic activities. Expanding geographically ensures that more veterans, regardless of their location, have access to this unique approach to healing.

In addition to nationwide expansion, there is potential for *Nautical Salute* to collaborate with international partners. Military service and its associated challenges are not confined to the United States.

Veterans from allied nations face similar struggles with PTSD, isolation, and reintegration. By forming global partnerships, *Nautical Salute* can contribute to a worldwide movement of healing, solidarity, and mutual support.

Influencing Future Approaches to Veteran Care

Traditional approaches to veteran care often rely on clinical settings and standardized therapies. While these methods are valuable, they don't always address the deeper need for connection, purpose, and holistic healing. *Nautical Salute* offers a model for integrating experiential and nature-based therapies into mainstream veteran care.

By documenting the program's successes and collecting data on its outcomes, *Nautical Salute* can help shape future policies and practices within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), military health systems, and private healthcare providers.

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Imagine a future where veterans are routinely prescribed therapeutic boat excursions, outdoor retreats, and group nature experiences alongside counseling and medication. This integrated approach recognizes the complexity of healing and the importance of addressing the mind, body, and spirit.

To achieve this influence, *Nautical Salute* plans to engage in ongoing research, partnering with universities and mental health organizations to study the efficacy of nautical therapy.

Evidence-based results can help validate the program's approach and encourage broader adoption within veteran support services.

Innovation and Research in Nautical Therapy

As with any therapeutic field, innovation and research are key to sustaining and improving the effectiveness of *Nautical Salute*. The program aims to remain at the forefront of nautical therapy by exploring new techniques, tools, and approaches that enhance the healing experience.

One area of innovation is the integration of advanced mindfulness practices and biofeedback during excursions. Wearable technology can help veterans monitor their stress levels, heart rates, and brain activity while on the water.

These tools provide immediate feedback and help participants recognize the calming effects of the

experience, reinforcing the connection between water-based therapy and mental well-being.

Another avenue for innovation is the development of specialized excursions tailored to different needs. For example, some trips could focus on high-intensity adventure for veterans who thrive on adrenaline, while others could offer serene, meditative experiences for those seeking quiet reflection.

Programs designed specifically for female veterans, LGBTQ+ veterans, and veterans with physical disabilities ensure that *Nautical Salute* remains inclusive and responsive to diverse needs.

Research into the long-term effects of nautical therapy is also crucial. By tracking participants over time, *Nautical Salute* can gain insights into how these experiences contribute to lasting improvements in mental health, relationships, and quality of life.

This data not only supports the program's growth but also contributes to the broader field of mental health research.

Building a Stronger Community

At the heart of *Nautical Salute* is a commitment to community. The program's future success relies on the strength of the veteran network, the dedication of volunteers, and the support of local communities. Expanding this network and fostering a sense of belonging is a top priority.

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Veterans who have benefited from *Nautical Salute* are encouraged to stay involved by becoming mentors, trip leaders, or advocates for the program. Their firsthand experiences provide inspiration and guidance to new participants.

By creating a cycle of support and empowerment, *Nautical Salute* ensures that veterans are not only recipients of care but also active contributors to the healing process.

Community partnerships are also essential. Local businesses, marinas, fishing charters, and yacht clubs can play a vital role by donating time, resources, and expertise. Schools, churches, and civic organizations can help spread awareness and organize events that celebrate and support veterans.

By weaving *Nautical Salute* into the fabric of communities, the program fosters a culture of gratitude, respect, and ongoing support for those who have served.

Encouraging Veterans to Embrace New Journeys

The mission of *Nautical Salute* is not just about providing healing during the excursions - it's about empowering veterans to embrace new journeys in their lives. Each boat trip is a metaphorical voyage, symbolizing the potential for growth, transformation, and exploration.

Veterans who participate in *Nautical Salute* are encouraged to carry the lessons and experiences from the water into their everyday lives. Whether it's pursuing new hobbies, reconnecting with family, starting a new career,

or seeking further therapeutic support, the program serves as a launching point for positive change.

Veterans are reminded that their journey does not end when they step off the boat. The open horizon represents the limitless possibilities for their future. By embracing the spirit of adventure, resilience, and connection, they can chart a course toward a fulfilling and purposeful life.

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Taking Nautical Salute To The Next Level

Nautical Salute is not just a therapeutic program - it is a mission, a movement, and a lifeline. It is a beacon of hope for veterans who have given so much of themselves to serve their country, and now find themselves struggling with invisible wounds.

These wounds - PTSD, depression, anxiety, isolation - do not heal on their own. They require care, understanding, connection, and innovative approaches that address both the mind and the spirit.

This program uses the calming, healing power of water, combined with camaraderie and shared purpose, to honor veterans while giving them the support they desperately need.

Out on the Water

Through therapeutic boat excursions, *Nautical Salute* takes veterans on a transformative journey - physically, emotionally, and spiritually. These trips are more than just outings on the water. They are opportunities for healing, reflection, connection, and rediscovery.

They offer a unique combination of adventure and tranquility, reminding veterans that they are not alone and that their lives still hold meaning and purpose. The open

water, the rhythm of the waves, the shared experience with fellow veterans - each of these elements contributes to breaking down the barriers of isolation and despair.

In this book, we've delved into the silent struggles that many veterans face once they leave military service. For some, returning to civilian life is a seamless transition, but for many others, it is filled with challenges and emotional pain.

The loss of camaraderie, the lack of structured purpose, and the burden of traumatic memories can create a heavy weight that is difficult to lift. This weight can lead to feelings of being lost, disconnected, and hopeless. Veterans may feel like they are drifting without an anchor, their sense of identity and self-worth eroded by the tides of civilian life.

We've explored how water can provide a therapeutic environment that eases these struggles. The concept of *blue mind* - a term coined by Dr. Wallace J. Nichols - explains how being near, in, or on water can calm the brain, reduce stress, and promote mental clarity.

The sights, sounds, and sensations of water can create a meditative state, helping veterans find relief from the noise and chaos of their inner struggles. This science-based approach offers a powerful alternative to traditional therapies, giving veterans a chance to experience healing in a natural, serene setting.

Healing Happens

Nautical Salute is built on the idea that healing happens best when it is shared. The camaraderie of the boat excursions echoes the bonds formed during military service. Veterans who may have felt isolated or misunderstood find connection with others who have walked similar paths.

On the water, there is no need to explain or justify their feelings. There is simply the shared understanding of having served, of having faced challenges, and of wanting to heal. This sense of belonging can be profoundly healing. It reminds veterans that they are part of a community, that their lives matter, and that their struggles are not theirs to bear alone.

In addition to the camaraderie, the nautical traditions and ceremonies that take place on these excursions honor veterans in ways that are deeply meaningful. Flag-raising ceremonies, moments of silence, and personal salutes provide a sense of recognition and respect that many veterans long for.

These rituals are not just symbols - they are affirmations of the sacrifices veterans have made and the value they continue to hold. They provide closure, pride, and a sense of being seen and acknowledged.

Woven Elements

The therapeutic elements woven into these excursions - from mindfulness practices to breathing exercises - offer veterans tools to manage their mental health beyond the

boat trip. The steady motion of the boat promotes relaxation and focus, while guided reflections encourage veterans to process their emotions in a supportive environment.

These techniques, combined with the expertise of mental health professionals who partner with *Nautical Salute*, ensure that each excursion is both healing and empowering.

Family members and loved ones are also an essential part of the healing process. PTSD and mental health challenges do not exist in a vacuum - they ripple through families, affecting relationships, trust, and communication. By involving families in these boat excursions, *Nautical Salute* helps rebuild bonds that may have been strained or broken.

Shared experiences on the water foster understanding, open communication, and reconciliation. They give families a chance to heal together, to support each other, and to create new, positive memories.

As we've outlined in this book, *Nautical Salute* is not just about individual healing. It is about building a network of support through partnerships with veteran organizations, community groups, and government agencies.

Working Together

By working together, we can reach more veterans, provide more resources, and expand the impact of this program. Collaboration is key to ensuring that no veteran is left behind, and that every hero who needs support can find it.

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Creating a sustainable program requires commitment, funding, and community involvement. The operational framework of *Nautical Salute* - from recruiting volunteers and boat captains to ensuring safety and training - is designed to create a reliable, effective, and long-lasting initiative.

Fundraising and public support are essential to keeping the program afloat and allowing it to grow. Every donation, every volunteer hour, and every act of support contributes to changing and saving the lives of veterans.

The stories shared by veterans who have participated in *Nautical Salute* are testaments to the power of this program. These stories are filled with hope, transformation, and renewed purpose. Veterans who once felt lost have found their way back to joy, connection, and meaning.

Their journeys inspire us to continue this work, to reach more veterans, and to offer more opportunities for healing. Their stories remind us that healing is possible, that hope is real, and that no veteran should ever feel forgotten.

Endless Possibilities

As we look to the horizon, we see endless possibilities for *Nautical Salute*. We envision expanding this program beyond Florida, creating a network of nautical therapy hubs across the country.

We imagine a future where water-based therapy is recognized as a vital component of veteran care, and

where every veteran has access to the healing power of water, camaraderie, and nature. Research, innovation, and dedication will drive this vision forward, but we cannot do it alone.

This is where you, the reader, come in. Your support is critical to making this vision a reality. We ask you to consider making *Nautical Salute* one of your primary recipients of charity funds.

By supporting this program, you are investing in a proven, life-changing initiative that combats PTSD, reduces isolation, and saves lives. Your contributions will help us reach more veterans, provide more therapeutic excursions, and ensure that no hero is left to struggle alone.

Imagine the impact you can have. With your help, a veteran who feels hopeless today could rediscover joy tomorrow. A family torn apart by PTSD could begin to heal and reconnect. A life teetering on the edge could find stability, purpose, and peace. This is the power of *Nautical Salute*, and this is the power of your support.

Join us in honoring, healing, and reconnecting with our heroes. Stand with us as we chart a course toward a future where no veteran feels isolated, forgotten, or alone. Together, we can create a ripple effect of hope, healing, and transformation. The water awaits, the journey continues - and we invite you to be part of it.

Visit us online at **NauticalSalute.com** and make an appointment to meet in person or virtually to discuss how you can join us in this vital mission. We are not claiming to

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be doing something new. We are asking for your support as we do something important and right – *Nautical Salute*.

SHAWN HIBBARD

Bio of the Author

Shawn Hibbard – Founder of Nautical Salute

Shawn Hibbard's life is a testament to resilience, courage, and service. From a challenging childhood to a distinguished military career, his journey has shaped his dedication to helping fellow veterans heal and find peace.

Born into a difficult environment, Shawn faced early adversity that few could imagine. At just three years old, he and other family members fled their home due to trauma and instability. This marked the beginning of a tumultuous childhood spent in foster care.

Between the ages of 3 and 18, Shawn lived in **15 different foster homes, 2 group homes, and even a detention center**. Despite these challenges, his determination remained unshaken. He graduated from **Sherando High School in Virginia in 1997**, proving his strength and commitment to his future.

Following high school, Shawn pursued a path of service by enlisting in the **United States Army**. After completing Advanced Infantry Training (AIT), he served in various capacities across the globe, including assignments in **Germany, Fort Irwin (California), and Fort Bragg (North Carolina)**, where he underwent additional specialized training.

His military career is marked by excellence and bravery. In 2003, Shawn attended **Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) School** and completed **Sniper School** that same

year. He deployed to **Afghanistan** two times - from 2004 to 2005 and again in 2009. Then he served a six-month deployment to the **United States Pentagon**.

His valor in combat earned him the prestigious **Bronze Star Medal with Valor** in 2009 for his actions in Afghanistan. In 2012, his dedication and heroism were recognized when he was selected as a **Hero Soldier for the U.S. Army All-American Football Team**.

After **22 years of Honorable service**, Shawn retired from the Army in 2018. Transitioning into civilian life, he works as a government contractor while seeking new ways to give back to the veteran community.

Inspired by his own journey of healing and the challenges many veterans face, Shawn founded **Nautical Salute**, a non-profit organization dedicated to providing restorative and therapeutic experiences for military members.

Nautical Salute's mission is to offer veterans the opportunity to reconnect with themselves and others through maritime adventures and support programs designed to promote mental and emotional well-being.

Through Nautical Salute, Shawn Hibbard continues his lifelong commitment to service, ensuring that those who have given so much for their country receive the healing and support they deserve.