

Human Factors in Combat

The following factors influence both unit effectiveness and the incidence of combat stress disorders:

1. Health.

- a. **Mental Fatigue:** 8 hours of sleep is ideal. Prolonged periods with 3 or 4 hours of sleep per day produces sleep deprivation. Cognitive skills, accuracy and physical ability suffer. Load up on sleep before an event. In emergencies, several 15-20 minute quality sleep periods can ward off sleep deprivation. Four 2-hour periods a day is next best.
- b. **Physical Fatigue. Reduce the weight of the pack.** Travel light, live off the land. Take terrain, temperature and humidity into account.
- c. **Combat Induced Fatigue of the Spirit. Morale.** Caused by high intensity combat or continuous exposure to danger without relief.

4. Personal Hygiene.

5. **Food and Water.** In 1917, a German regiment was put into panicked flight. The men ignored their officers and fled toward the rear. The regimental commander, an officer of wide experience, ordered his field kitchens to intercept the stream of men. As the kitchens fired up their stoves, the colonel stood in the road and calmly regrouped his regiment: "First battalion, assemble this way! Second battalion, here. Third battalion, by the barn." The men, calmed by the sense of normalcy and the promise of food, obeyed and regrouped. Food fights fear.

6. Clothing.

7. Morale.

- a. **Anxiety.** Keep your Marines informed. Accurate information destroys rumors. Marines feel vulnerable if they do not know what is going on. A clear mission, purpose and expectation sharpens an individual's focus, and lets him know why he is risking his life.
- b. **Isolation and Boredom.** Emphasize to your Marines that the unit will provide for them. We are a team. Demonstrate care by attending to **chow, mail** and security.
- c. **Commitment.** Education and intelligence have no correlation to courage. Capacity for loyalty and commitment to others is the trait needed to cope with adversity.
- d. **Age and personal life.** IDF in Lebanon, 1982 found least battle shock in 18-21 year olds. Most in 26-30 year olds. IDF found most psychiatric casualties among people worried about their families, marriages, new fathers, recent deaths in families. Keep families informed. Insure mail flows.
- e. **Bonding.** Small unit integrity is paramount. Group norms shape morale and performance.
- f. **Self-Confidence.** Healthy, confident individuals fight better. Training and fitness contribute greatly to confidence before battle. Discuss fear. Talk about grief. Grieve formally over loss of comrades. Discuss necessity and justification for taking human life to minimize any reluctance and absolve the Marine of the moral responsibility for killing. Praise individuals who perform professionally.
- g. **Human Carnage.**

COMBAT STRESS DISORDER IS

- ◆ An emotional reaction that results in behaviors that are inappropriate and may disrupt the unit
- ◆ Short-term, time-limited
- ◆ The result of multiple stresses that person, at that time, finds overwhelming
- ◆ Possible in anyone, even those in rear areas

COMBAT STRESS DISORDER IS NOT

- ◆ Long-term
- ◆ A major psychiatric disorder
- ◆ Reflective of cowardice, lack of motivation, or a personality disorder
- ◆ Necessarily reflective of leadership
- ◆ Predictive of future psychiatric disorders

SYMPTOMS

- ◆ Appears excessively fatigued, speaks slowly, moves slowly, and indecisively
- ◆ May have the "1000-yard stare"
- ◆ Cooperative, but performance is impaired
- ◆ May feel incompetent, apologetic, even guilty about job performance; may demonstrate survivor guilt
- ◆ Confused about time, recent events, and/or exact location
- ◆ Poor concentration, forgetfulness
- ◆ Insomnia, often with nightmares
- ◆ Hyperalertness, startle response, tremors
- ◆ Emotional withdrawal, social isolation, crying spells, or ever increasing anxiety