

10 TOUGH FACTS ABOUT COMBAT

FACT #1: FEAR IN COMBAT IS COMMON: EVEN HEROES FEEL FEAR

Over 2/3s of Silver Star recipients reported increased fear as battle progressed. Common symptoms of fear are violent shaking or trembling, losing control of bladder, feeling weak, cold sweats, vomiting. No Soldier knows how he or she will perform in combat until the moment arrives.

FACT #2: UNIT MEMBERS WILL BE INJURED AND KILLED

Close to 4000 Service Members have been killed and tens of thousands have been injured since OIF/OEF began. Innocent civilians, including women and children, will also be injured and killed.

FACT #3: THERE WILL BE COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWNS

Soldiers reports that deployment policies are often inconsistently applied and the flow of information is poor or slow. Rumors often fill the void where facts should be.

FACT #4: SOLDIERS FREQUENTLY PERCEIVE FAILURES IN LEADERSHIP

Soldiers report that leaders frequently engage in actions to enhance their career and personal well-being that they fail to exhibit clear thinking and reasonable action when under stress. The better the leadership, the higher the morale and group cohesion. This leads to better overall mental health of the members of the unit.

FACT #5: COMBAT IMPACTS EVERY SOLDIER MENTALLY AND EMOTIONALLY: COMBAT STRESS IS A COMBAT INJURY

All Soldiers are affected by combat. Combat and operational stress symptoms occur when a Soldier becomes overloaded with the stressors of combat and can be physical, mental, and / or behavioral.

FACT #6: COMBAT CAN LEAD TO LASTING MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES: ASKING FOR HELP REQUIRES A DEEPER KIND OF COURAGE

Combat Stress, Acute Stress, and Post-Traumatic Stress are all on the continuum of stress reactions to combat zone experiences. Symptoms include being easily angered or agitated, nightmares, intrusive memories, thoughts, or flashbacks, feeling numb or frozen. In trying to manage these symptoms alone, Service Members will often try to medicate themselves with alcohol or illegal drugs, which, unfortunately, only worsens the overall situation.

FACT #7: SOLDIERS ARE AFRAID TO ADMIT THEY HAVE A MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE: NEEDING HELP IS NOT A CHARACTER FLAW

Based on the Army's most recent Mental Health Assessment study (May 2007), the majority of soldiers who need help will not seek it because of fear of stigma, backlash, loss of respect from leadership or comrades.

FACT #8: DEPLOYMENT PLACES A TREMENDOUS STRAIN ON FAMILIES

Family Readiness Groups are effective in some communities and completely absent in others. Yet every family facing deployment needs support. Marital problems and family concerns are a huge stressor to the Soldier, as well.

FACT # 9: THE COMBAT ENVIRONMENT IS HARSH, DEMANDING, AND CHANGING EVERY DAY

Combat is sudden, intense, and life-threatening. It takes a tremendous toll on the body, mind and spirit. Every human being has basic physical and psychological requirements, such as getting adequate sleep, nutrition, hydration, and decompression time. **These are not luxuries, they are necessities for the Soldier to remain physically and mentally strong.**

FACT #10: COMBAT POSES MORAL, ETHICAL, AND SPIRITUAL CHALLENGES ON EVEN THE HARDIEST SOLDIER

Because of the enormous pressures and emotional strain that war places on every Soldier, impulsive reactions towards others, both living and dead, can lead to conduct that the Soldier later has profound guilt and regret over. Battlefield ethics are not only to prevent escalation of an incident; they are also there to prevent moral, ethical, and spiritual injury to the Soldier. Every Soldier needs to come home with a war story the he or she can live with.

Adapted from US Army's WRAIR Land Combat Study brochure, "10 Tough Facts About Combat, and What Leaders Can Do to Mitigate Risk and Build Resilience,"
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For more information on the Walter Reed Army Institute of Research and the WRAIR Land Combat Study, the POCs are COL Carl Castro (carl.castro@us.army.mil) and COL Charles Hoge