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Killing in Combat: Implications for Military Leaders, Trainers and Scholars

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ABSTRACT

Canadians have been fighting a respected insurgent for almost eight years in Southern Afghanistan. The traditional Conventional and Counter-Insurgency Operations (COIN) tactics and procedures in warfare have been re-affirmed after the loss of generational first-hand knowledge held within the Canadian Forces (CF). For the most part, the skill sets of the Canadian soldier have evolved from the rich history of battlefield experiences. The historical perspective is always at the root of the military training perspective. As such, the skill sets required to fight a complex battle are firmly rooted within the CF as a result of this historical success and now present day experience. What has not been particularly well documented or educated within the CF is the psychology of combat or the impacts of killing. It will become clear by reading this paper that the CF spends a disproportionate amount effort training soldiers on drills and automatic mechanical skills to conduct warfare. The Canadian perspective regarding the psychology of killing is not readily available either. To date, the Canadian Forces has been ineffective in psychologically preparing soldiers to kill. This paper will examine these issues by comparing what has been documented and researched by a largely American audience with that of a Canadian Company Commander perspective in combat. In doing so, the paper will identify the shortfalls in the CF institution and training systems and suggest some areas for further study and improvement.

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Chapter 1 – Personal Study of Combat

INTRODUCTION

From January to July 2007, I experienced both the professional exhilaration and the deep personal rewards of commanding Canadian troops in combat. Since that time I have experienced the personal challenges that have arose from the consequences of my actions. In wrestling with my experiences since my return home I have sought an understanding in the psychological study of warfare and the act of killing to assist me with the more emotional, and personal side of the profession of arms that I have chosen to serve. The current Canadian Forces (CF) Training system, of which I am a product, can reap the benefits of immeasurable successes at all rank levels in both conventional and Counter Insurgent (COIN)[1] Operations. The training system successes however are based on the mechanics and skill sets of waging war and conduct within the battle space. The doctrine and tactics as taught are a good starting point and can stand on their own merit; albeit I would suggest they too need some revision and honest reflection however that will not be discussed in the content of this paper. With my rudimentary academic understanding of this subject I will begin to express what I believe to be missing and what we should improve upon in order to make our profession stronger. More importantly this must be articulated so that we may better serve the officers and soldiers that so passionately serve us in what I would state has been the most humbling experiences of my adult life: that of waging war.

[1] COIN is defined as those military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological and civic actions taken to defeat an insurgent. *Counter-Insurgency Operations*, Vol. B-GL-323-004/FP-003 (Fort Frontenac, Kingston ON: Chief of the Land Staff by the Army Publishing Office, July 2007), 3/24.

Most of what I will put forward here is based on my experiences as a Company Commander in a Mechanized Battle Group while on operations in Afghanistan. This paper is neither an autobiography nor is it a method for me to boast of either nonsensical statistics or my abilities to command in combat; it is quite the contrary. This is meant to show the sincere concern I have for the members of the CF who may be involved in the perpetuation of combat operations in the future. I believe that it is necessary to identify that my experience may very well be common to many Company Commanders that have served in Afghanistan. Although I have had a very brief time in combat, I did conduct sufficient operations that allow me to identify behavioural trends in both myself as well as my soldiers. Although I am also confident in my ability to conduct operations in a theatre of war I must acknowledge what seemed at times to be a high degree of luck during my experience throughout my time in theatre. Based on my experiences it has become apparent that what we do/say does not always represent what happens on the battlefield. I will discuss the psychology of killing with a view to expanding the knowledge base within the academic literature. I also fully understand that the point of view and tone of much of this paper might sound egocentric however I have taken great care in putting aside personal bias in my assessment. Whether or not my findings are viewed as "popular", it is paramount that I articulate this point of view so that those in the future may gain the experience from my personal and professional failures. This paper will show that the CF has been ineffective in psychologically preparing soldiers to kill.

In order to achieve this, I will first discuss my experiences and note that they are unique to a specific time and place. I will discuss what the modern battlefield may look like beyond the pictures and reports provided through popular media, from the soldier's

perspective. This will be qualified so that the complexity of killing can be understood. In doing so, I will show the emotional connection between the soldier and his/her foe. Using this personal perspective, the psychological impact of killing and the research that surrounds this topic will be critiqued in order to determine whether or not we in the CF are implementing the lessons learned from years of study. Second, I will investigate some of the issues facing our soldiers and how they might be able to overcome the challenges of facing the realities of what they do in combat either through an ethical point of view or improved training. Within the second part, I will review the Operational Stress Injury (OSI) research and show how it may also impact combat soldiers. The third part of this paper will suggest the implications for trainers and our leadership. This will encompass how we prepare the soldier and how we ought to improve our system. Most importantly, the responsibilities of the leadership will be targeted in order to instil debate. The fourth and last part of this paper will then identify areas where further research and development is required on the part of our CF and civilian leadership, and the academic community. My intent is to express some provocative views. I hope that this might cause some degree of controversy so that the open debate on this subject is initiated. At the same time, I recognize that my experiences may be unique and that my interpretation of my own experiences may contain a certain bias. It is difficult to be objective when talking about yourself and your comrades-in-arms. That said, my intent with this paper is to encourage an open dialogue on these very important matters so that the soldiers and leaders of future combat operations will be better prepared for what they will face in similar combat missions.

CHRISTENING THE GROUND

This awkward topic is not one that would often be discussed over a drink at a pub or whilst preparing for a summer vacation. In fact, those in the profession that are charged with "unlimited liability" often do not discuss this topic in any great length. What is often discussed by those in uniform is how effective we are in combat or how our doctrine and tactics support our operational and tactical goals. There are few that focus on the "dirty" business of killing and the effects killing has on those that have conducted the act. It was surprising to me when starting my research at how difficult it was to find a military members' staff paper, article or book on the subject. It was equally shocking to see how few academics wrote about this topic as well. This is even more pronounced when I tried to find the Canadian perspective on killing. Militaries have been at war for millennia. During our collective history we have been killing one another, so why would it be so challenging to find literature on the psychology of doing what is expected when the Governments poke their sharp sticks into the fire? This is precisely why I decided to investigate this topic. Thankfully, some people have taken the time to research and write about this very important subject.

Great pioneers in modern military psychology literature such as Grossman[2], Dyer[3], Bourke[4] and MacNair[5], to name a few, have unveiled many taboos and articulated the years of study conducted on the results of killing. Grossman's work on the

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[2] LCol (Ret'd) Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*Little, Brown and Company, November 1996).

[3] Gwynne Dyer, *WAR*, The New Edition ed. (Canada: Random House Canada, 2004).

[4] Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (2/3 hanover Yard, London: Granta Publications, 1999).

[5] Rachel M. MacNair, *Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002).

psychological aspects of killing in combat is required reading in the Canadian Army. His study of the history of killing, during most major modern conflicts, identifies cyclical trends particularly with regards soldiers' general understanding of the effects of killing. In addition, Dyer states that "men will kill under compulsion – men will do almost anything if they know it is expected of them and they are under strong social pressure to comply – but the vast majority of men are not born killers" [6] Dyer's comments lead to the discussion of how we train soldiers to do something that is "unnatural" as part of the military's focus to ensure that they kill when required. Bourke is excellent at identifying that in war; acts of killing are intimate, imbued with language, emotion and desire. She also contends that combat does not dissolve social relationships it merely restructures them and therefore she expresses the way soldiers experience killing. Her frank commentary demonstrates the paradigm that exists in combat, albeit different than normal life, but still possessing the social bonds necessary within a community. Because of this, soldiers face the emotional backlash as a result of how this impacts the community that they are temporarily living within. Also, MacNair leads many scholars regarding the advanced concept of Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress (PITS) and its distinctness from stress disorders. Her work is centred on the active participation of a traumatic event as being separate from other stressors on the battlefield. Of note, none of these authors are Canadian and none are currently serving military professionals. The focus of this paper is not to advocate these works, but, rather reference many aspects and augment their discussion based on my experiences. Also, there is some clarity that is necessary to

ensure that the CF, and more specifically the Canadian Army, is better prepared for combat and post-conflict operations.

Because of the discomfort with writing and studying killing, the few periodicals available become keystone documents. To be sure, Grossman's efforts have been provocative, but he shines the appropriate light on key issues. Part of the reason for our lack of knowledge in this area is that combat, like sex, is laden with a baggage of expectations and myth.[7] This may be true but there must be a way to extract this knowledge in a mature fashion. From my perspective, I will articulate the reactions to killing that I experienced and those of my soldiers to show that, like sex, it is troubling to see how our bodies react. I will also highlight some examples from the Israeli and Russian experiences to augment my discussion. They show that the psychology of killing has common trends and perhaps linked more to how humans react to killing rather than to how cultures approach killing. Further, it is this realization, of how we physiologically respond to killing and combat that I suggest may contribute more significantly to a soldier's emotional state post-conflict.

As stated, my only true combat experiences were those within Afghanistan. This theatre of operations will be used as the backbone for comparison. Further, based on the evolution of that theatre, the environment in which I will compare will be based on a particular timeframe and one geographic location, Zhari District, found in Southern Kandahar Province, for which was my Area of Responsibility in 2007. In addition, the

[7] LCol (Ret'd) Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*Little, Brown and Company, November 1996)., 33.

COIN environment forced my Company to engage in the *Clear-Hold-Build*[8] mantra of classic COIN, but the time of year and rotation of Task Forces caused my company to conduct these three main tasks in a slightly different order and fashion. Immediately upon deployment I was engaged in *Hold-Build* phase based on the hugely successful outcome of the infamous Op MEDUSA[9], a Canadian-led offensive aimed to establish Afghan control within Panjwayi District, an area within Kandahar Province. I was later forced to re-engage in the *Clear* task and therefore many of my observations are based on the understanding and relationships forged with the local Afghanis in advance of my combat operations.

Once engaged in combat operations, the Company conducted a minimum of 24 deliberate operations and substantially more hasty operations that resulted in lethal effects. Although the Company operated primarily within the Zhari District there were instances that we conducted kinetic lethal operations in other Districts as well. Most of my combat experiences were based on dismounted attacks with the use of indirect fires and Close Air Support (CAS), resembling the modus operandi perfected during the Vietnam War. We would infiltrate to our objective areas through covert movement under

[8] Clear-Hold-Build operations are executed in a specific, high-priority area experiencing overt insurgent operations. Its objectives are to (1) create a secure physical and psychological environment, (2) Establish firm governmental control of the populace and area, and (3) Gain the populace's support. *The US ARMY USMC Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, FM 3-24, USMC Warfighting Pub No 3-33, University of Chicago Press, 2007,.

[9] Operation MEDUSA was a Canadian-led offensive by major elements of the International Security Assistance Force and Afghan National Army that began on September 2, 2006 as part of the 2001 war in Afghanistan. The operation involves most of the Canadian Forces' combat troops in Afghanistan, which provided the bulk of the force there, including troops from 1st Battalion, The Royal Canadian Regiment Battle Group under command by, then, LCol Omer Lavoie, MSC, CD, as well various company-sized formations from the US Army (Special Operations Forces, and Alpha Company 2nd Battalion, 4th Infantry Regt, 4th BDE, 10th MTN DIV). Dutch and Danish soldiers were also involved - albeit peripherally, as well as hundreds of Afghan soldiers. The Dutch PzH 2000 howitzer was positioned with the Canadian M777 Howitzers of Echo Battery and made its combat debut with the Dutch Army as fire support. CTV and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Medusa accessed 20 Jan 09

the cover of darkness. As the combat indicators[10] would dictate, we would seize the initiative and we would strike the insurgent at daybreak before he had the opportunity to react to our presence. As a result, most of my soldiers were engaged in combat that was both very close to them as well as being in an area that they lived and operated within for their entire tour. Because of my physical placement on the battle space as well as the non-linear tactics of the enemy, I was in a perfect position to experience the effects of the enemy as well as those ordered by myself. In my view, the kinetic operations with lethal effects that ensued, were both successful (militarily) and unsuccessful (emotionally) due to this fact. For example, during the first few months of operations, I was in direct contact with Shura Leaders and very involved with local community activities specifically linked to a region known as Saih Choy found within Zhari district. I had what I believed at the time, a great rapport and friendship with local Afghans in this region. We were later operating in this same area where as a result of hostilities forced my team to unknowingly kill Shura members' families within their villages. The rapport that we had established with the people, tribal dynamics and community was tremendously effected. What does fighting in a COIN environment really look like? Outside of the sounds of weapon systems and the orders barked out to clear an objective is it any different than a live fire exercise, or does it even make a difference? The short answer is yes, and I will qualify this comment.

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[10] Combat Indicators are criteria that must be met in order to positively identify the actions, numbers, Pattern of Life (POL) and environment that the enemy is operating in so that the proportional and measured use of force can be applied in that given battle. This method of using criteria ensures that the intelligence used to focus the operation is confirmed or denied once on the objective area and therefore collateral damage is minimized and the risk to civilians is mitigated.

ON THE OBJECTIVE

The fog of war[11] is thick on the modern battlefield, so let me describe the landscape on which the modern soldier finds him/herself fighting. The physical terrain is not as challenging to envision since we often see the landscape and people in daily media. It is likely that Canadians have a good mental picture of where our soldiers are operating. It is the other "stuff" within that landscape like demographics or the way in which the local nationals live and breathe that this geography houses, which is the most important part to understand. We often neglect the details in the picture based on our desire to see the larger picture – however the devil is in the details. The following description/account is a typical "image" of what I or my soldiers would face or think whilst in combat within Afghanistan and this clearly demonstrates the expression "fog of war".

I will not soon forget the sounds of women and children crying, grasping for breath as they hyperventilate in fear. The sights of the streams of tears that clean pathways down the cheeks and chins of these dusty people. To these normal and average Afghans in the battle space, we could very well be the enemy, since we are the foreigner and that when we are engaged in combat they might believe that we will hurt anyone that stands in our way; or so it is perceived. In effect, we have become dehumanized in the eyes of these people since we are not "like them". We are walking machines of war, wrapped in many layers of protective equipment where the only skin exposed to them is

[11]The fog of war is a term used to describe the level of ambiguity in situational awareness experienced by participants in military operations. Joint Service Command and Staff College, Advanced Command and Staff Course Notes dated 2001 The term is ascribed to the military analyst Clausewitz, who wrote: "The great uncertainty of all data in war is a peculiar difficulty, because all action must, to a certain extent, be planned in a mere twilight, which in addition not infrequently — like the effect of a fog or moonshine — gives to things exaggerated dimensions and unnatural appearance." Clausewitz, Carl von. *On War*. Book 2, Chapter 2, Paragraph 24

that around our jaws and necks. After all, how could we see in the dark? This then in some sense facilitates the insurgent propaganda. As the soldiers watch for enemy, communicate with their leaders and take aim, the piercing screams of the children resonate with them. These sounds can pierce the noises of explosions or machine gun fire. The panic movements of a Burka that hides a stunningly secretive woman as she whisks her children into a place that harm cannot reach them. I often think that this environment is far worse to observe then the act of combat itself. On the objective, the soldiers consolidate and clear through the dead or injured insurgents that, minutes earlier, were shooting deadly rocket and small arms fire at them. Within this particular example, at the base of a soldier's feet there are two tiny men. In North America they would be viewed as adolescents, struggling to find their way through puberty, college and perhaps a part-time job, but here they lie bleeding at the foot of a giant soldier. The pain strains one of their faces, and he is terrified, yet one can sense an air of conceit. The other young man is dead. Both have earned the respect of this soldier for their courage, but only after life saving first aid is administered to the one, and both are restrained to be brought back to a hospital at the main camp.

In order to further complicate the environment, the human element of passion and emotion are triggered as a result of our five senses. While engaged in close combat the entire human experience is heightened. The engagement of the five senses further complicates the soldier's ability to keep their actions mechanical as there are some aspects that cannot be understood until witnessed. In fact, the military spends a great deal of effort to ensure that the impact of the soldiers' emotions and senses are reduced in combat. Such things like battle drills, Tactic, Techniques and Procedures (TTPs), unit

Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), over-learning particular tasks through repetitive exercises, are all designed to ensure that soldiers will do what is required of them even when the distractions of the battlefield materialize. Some of the distractions engage our senses which further describe the aforementioned landscape often faced in combat and adds to the idea of "fog of war" earlier addressed. There are tensions between the system's efforts to familiarize the soldier to chaotic experiences through SOPs. These SOPs are meant to ensure that the soldier can conduct business without too much interference from his/her surroundings. I want to make sure that this tension is understood in terms of how these senses might pollute the mind of a soldier in combat:

> **Sounds:** Sounds of ricochet and the calibre-specific crack-thump of incoming and outgoing rounds; the whiz of RPG rounds or the crump of Artillery and Mortar fire make the finite movements of man seem insignificant. Screeching children crying for help, the silence of the moment just before the attack – the ringing in your ears that does not easily go away;
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> **Sights:** Flashes of light, dust and dirt kicked up from the beaten zone of machine guns seem to slow down your perception of time and your feeling of relative security. The strobe-light effect on your mind where it takes pictures of such things like hysterical children, parts of corpses in unnatural positions almost to defy gravity, the desperate look in the eyes of a mother, sister or wife as she gazes on some dead insurgent;
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> **Feel:** The feel of overpressure caused by the explosion of a 1000lbs bomb in the immediate proximity of your soldiers and the effects of wind being pulled from you lungs freezes you into a dreamscape. The sting of a sports-like injury running through your joins caused by dehydration, or quickened movement while over burdened with kit. Lastly, the effects of "hors de combat" suffered from an artillery or CAS strike or blast where you cannot stand up without falling uncontrolled to the ground because your inner ear is disturbed by the concussion;
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> **Tastes:** The taste of dirt or vapours caused by the spoils of fighting cause you to salivate in order to rid your mouth of unpleasant flavours.
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> **Smell:** Lastly, the smell of burning flesh and materials leaves the mind to recall instances in your past where you might have enjoyed or were sickened by the scent. The pork or bacon-like smell of a charred man plagues the mind. Moreover, the physiological response from a hungry soldier to unconsciously

> experience hunger pains and stomach "growling" discombobulates the mind from all relative discourse – simply caused by smelling the effects of raining fire down onto an enemy position.

Any one of the senses on their own can be easily countered through the discipline enforced through the professional conduct of the soldier and his/her leadership. With the reflection upon all five senses one can easily see the potential confusion that might impact our soldiers despite the use of SOPs. How can we objectify or demonize the very elements that make us human? I realized that I had failed to prepare my soldiers properly when I watched them react to the self-realization that they had killed a man for the very first time. To compound my mistake, I ordered the same group of soldiers that killed the insurgents to process the dead and conduct searches for items of intelligence interest. By watching the soldiers tremble, some gagging and others giggling due to nervousness, it became clear that this was not the right thing to ask of them and that they were not ready for this type of order. Had I fully understood the emotional connection and intimacy of combat, I would have tried to prepare them better and failing that, I would have never asked the men to search the bodies of enemy they had just killed. This is part of the learning gap that we need to breach. In order to help, we developed an internal SOP to ensure that once the kill has been completed we would push the soldier that pulled the trigger beyond the objective to provide security for another soldier to conduct first aid or process the dead. This removes part of the emotional spectrum, but not all of it, since all soldiers are involved in the kill in one way or another. The engagement of the five senses makes the act of killing more human, more "real" than I had thought or had expected. The Battle drills, SOPs and TTPs help get all parts of the combat team onto the objective

and to successfully win the fight, but they are all less effective once the soldiers meet the human that was the source of the combat itself.

KILLING

"Killing, despite our objections to its admissibility into the way many of us see our society, has long been a part of it and continues at this moment as a major part of the world consciousness"[12] Aggression is clearly a large part of our genetic makeup as we see when one reads the newspapers or even reviews pop culture. Aggression is even a necessary quality, but the normal human being's quota of aggression will not even cause him to kill acquaintances, let alone wage war against strangers from a different country.[13] Grossman would echo this comment but questions the fact that men can so easily be turned into killers. There is the consoling fact that most men are so daunted by the enormity of killing another human being that they avoid it if they possibly can. Basically, armies succeed in tricking the soldier into killing with modern training methods. Research has indicated that a huge subsequent burden of guilt is laid on those soldiers who did what they were asked; it is now widely suspected that the high rate of combat participation in Vietnam was directly responsible for the extremely high rate of "post-traumatic stress disorder' (PTSD)[14] among American veterans of that war.[15] This

[12] Theodore MD Nadelson, "Killing," *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 30 (2002),. 206.

[13]Gwynne Dyer, *WAR*, The New Edition ed. (Canada: Random House Canada, 2004). 103

[14] Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is one of several conditions known as an anxiety disorder. This kind of medical disorder affects approximately 1 in 10 people. They are among the most common of mental health problems. Children and adults can develop PTSD. The disorder can become so severe that that the individual finds it difficult to lead a normal life. When this condition persists for over a month, it is diagnosed as PTSD. PTSD is caused by a psychologically traumatic event involving actual or threatened death or serious injury to oneself or others. Violent personal assault, such as rape or mugging, car or plane accidents, military combat, industrial accidents and natural disasters, such as earthquakes and hurricanes, are stressors which have caused people to suffer from PTSD. In some cases, seeing another person harmed or killed, or learning that a close friend or family member is in serious danger has caused the disorder.

is what the research states but again, in my case, I am not convinced it is entirely accurate. I noticed that once the men were engaged in combat I needed to limit the amount of force used and stress the graduated weapons effects. The level of aggression as mentioned by Dyer seems to suggest that men have a quota of aggression that limits their ability to kill in the first place. Perhaps the military is successful at tricking the mind to overcome this quota for aggression but I have experienced that soldiers on the battlefield, once engaged in combat, will unleash more rage than necessary and that the discipline on the battlefield is an essential part of the fight. This observation is also well demonstrated during the popular movie *Saving Private Ryan (1998)* where the soldiers are shown clearing the trenches at Omaha where it resembles shooting fish in a barrel. The Highway of Death[16] incident in the Persian Gulf War is another example. In fact, as soldiers become more proficient at killing their ability to use larger weapon systems to strike smaller targets becomes apparent and requires the Chain of Command to carefully monitor the fight so as to use the measured and proportionate level of force accepted within our Rules of Engagement (ROE) and Western Culture.

This inhibition against killing can be removed in most people by a little routine psychological conditioning. As I stated, we train soldiers via over-training, dehumanization, mechanical and drill-like reactions to words of command. This is what worries the psychologists. “When you do actually kill someone the experience, my

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Canadian Mental Health Association. http://www.cmha.ca/BINS/content_page.asp?cid=3-94-97,. Accessed 8 Feb 09

[15]LCol (Ret'd) Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*Little, Brown and Company, November 1996). 259-60, 264-66, 281-89

[16] The Highway of Death refers to a road between Kuwait and Basra where Iraqi units that were retreating suffered an US air and ground attack and were subsequently destroyed during the Gulf War 1991. The attack resulted in hundreds of vehicles being destroyed and it is unknown how many Iraqi soldiers and civilians were killed.

experience, was one of revulsion and disgust."[17] It is now recognized, particularly in the Infantry, that the problem of persuading soldiers to kill is a centrally important part of the training process.[18] This conditioning, however, only does half the job. We see from the work of Dyer, Bourke, Grossman and others that it is also necessary to address the psychological reluctance to kill directly. While we teach soldiers to kill, we spend little time preparing them to deal with how they will feel after killing. There are some that already felt numb at the time of the event, and those who had thoroughly dehumanized the victims at that time of the kill. There are even those who felt a sense of exhilaration. In cases where the killing responds to danger, or where it was pre-planned, there can be a sense of relief that the situation is now over.[19] In my personal case, I completely agree with MacNair. I noticed that the there was almost a sigh of relief once the fire fight started since the most obvious stress seem to be present as we conducted our infiltration onto the enemy objectives. Further, the excitement of combat tended to demonstrate the hyper-masculine stereotypes that are prevalent in popular films. Soldiers would encourage one another, be celebratory in their accomplishments and even show signs of dominance while they fired back at the enemy. This would immediately change once they reached the objective area and they viewed the sights of their accomplishments. The soldiers immediately shift their mood to one that can be described as sombre, quiet, distant or even as if they are entranced by some internal spell. Commanders need to anticipate this mood and be able to refocus soldiers for subsequent operations.

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[17] William Manchester quoted in Gwynne Dyer, *WAR*, The New Edition ed. (Canada: Random House Canada, 2004),. 30.

[18] *Ibid,*. 58

[19] Rachel M. MacNair, *Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002).,. 94.

EROTICIZING THE FIGHT

The act of killing has many parts. There is the predetermined aggression levels of the soldier, the skill sets and proficiency with his/her weapon, and the reactions to what is expected of them to do is then followed by the realization of what they have just done. There is also a part of the fight that seems to be at the extreme end of the taboo itself. It is the connection between the emotions with that of the physical responses to killing on the battlefield. The erotic link to killing is what tends to confuse me the most when I considered my experiences in combat. As I had observed my soldiers and listened to them in their private moments that tended to drive them towards the stimuli of combat; there was a terrifying connection between how we were responding and the parallels with eroticism.

For the most part there have been two such subjects about where the male ego has often exercised selective memory, self-deception, and lying. These are sex and combat.[20] Research indicates that the mortal risk heightens sexual arousal; danger survived becomes mortised with the erotic.[21] With palpable danger, increased sensory arousal often promotes a general heightened sexuality. In the midst of high sexual excitement, physical aggression and pain can become charged with the erotic. The soldier is not instructed of these troubling reactions in advance of combat training or operations. This does sound almost outrageous to believe. The fact that some soldiers experience physiological arousal and even erections while killing may be documented in research,

[20] LCol (Ret'd) Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*Little, Brown and Company, November 1996)., 31.

[21] Theodore MD Nadelson, "Killing," *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 30 (2002)., 202.

but most soldiers are not aware of this research, so they don't understand what is happening when they experience such erotic reactions in combat. A common response involves a mix of confusion and concern. Is he a sociopath and he does not even realize it? Without this full explanation or education, the soldier on his own may question his own morality. There is literature that indicates that sexuality is embraced by war and that the mortal danger can be intoxicating, but its human effects must be understood.[22] Indeed, within the popular Spielberg movie *Saving Private Ryan (1998)*, the final battle scene demonstrates hand-to-hand combat between a German and an American Soldier. After a lengthy struggle, the German ultimately bayonets the American with the gentle and controlled movements reminiscent of a sexual act and after which he is fixed in place whilst staring into the eyes of the dying American. This is a great pictorial demonstrating the sexuality and heightened arousal experienced in combat. "For the killer soldier it becomes a consuming lust which swallows up other pleasures. It tends to turn men in on themselves and make them inaccessible to more normal satisfactions."[23] It was also documented that when the Viet Cong chose to fight a set piece battle there was not ordinary excitement but the manic ecstasy of contact with minutes of orgiastic violence.[24] I found the chemical surge through my own body and "rush" associated with killing to mirror those felt in times of intense physical arousal (<u>without</u> the change to my physical state). Immediately, I would compartmentalize these thoughts and feelings but found that it was unconscious. I could not control these feelings and it felt primal. For the first time in my life I felt aggression that was

[22] *Ibid.*, 203.

[23] Gray G: *The Warriors*, New York: Harper and Row, 1970, 57.

unchecked, and a chemical rush that was almost intoxicating. This was simulated by my anger and excitement with killing my enemy. The act of writing this observation down still makes me question myself and no doubt will cast a whole host of thoughts on the reader about who I really am. Further, there were times that I would think about alternate ways that I would kill the enemy so that I did not set patterns in my own methodology. I did this so that not only would he be unsure of where I was, but also when he did find me, he would not know which method I would choose to kill him. This mental game that I played was secretive of course, but I was not prepared to see how savage I could become. I was trained to be aggressive, to be assertive and to be in control in the challenging circumstances that training system could put me into but I was never taught or trained about how my mind and body would react to killing. I see by conducting this research that this type of reaction has been documented and therefore this relative normalcy might have helped me process these personal observations and those of my men. I failed the soldiers for knowing this now and not before I brought them into these circumstances. In a larger, more general sense, the CF failed for not preparing me to train my soldiers regarding the psychology of killing. As a result of the intense emotional connection I felt for the enemy, my men and the reactions that I personally felt in combat, I did suffer whilst in theatre and needed medications to help balance my anger, sleep deprivation as a result of insomnia and physical strains on my body based on continuous combat operations. I commend the medical community for assisting me and my soldiers mitigate the stresses while in theatre, but it was a band-aid solution and it treated the symptoms and not the underlying problem. I know that I could see the systematic breakdown of some of the soldiers as a result of their own personal thoughts. I could not assist them

[24] Caputo R: A Rumor of War. New York: Ballantine books, 1977

because I too was not sure why I would respond as I did or how to manage this new intimate knowledge of myself. It is this intimacy of combat that is not discussed enough and needs to be studied further within both academia and the Army.

The strength of an organization is centred on its leadership. The shared successes and hardships forge that organization in training and battle. I would argue that some mitigation could have been achieved had I known the historical conclusions to this erotic side of killing and perhaps might have been able to counsel my soldiers accordingly so that they too would have a more educated mind going into the fight. In order to fight, they must be confident in their peers, subordinates, leadership and themselves. If they doubt themselves or question the way they feel in combat, you have lost part of the combat effectiveness of the team. This might result in catastrophic effects, and as I stated earlier, I was blessed with good luck and extraordinary subordinates.

KILLING FROM A DISTANCE

At this point I have discussed the emotion and human factors that complicate the battle space. This has led to how killing has been studied and perhaps how the military overcomes mankind's innate inability to kill one another and how the act of killing may be linked to a significant taboo of erotizing the act of killing. Just by reading this paragraph the cynic might determine that the military houses sexual deviants who can re-program its soldiers' minds to do things that they are not born to do. These subjects were purposely placed at the front end of this paper to entice the reader into taking a different point of view. It makes logical sense then to the layman that once a soldier is trained to kill, he/she would have the same response to killing regardless of where there are on the battlefield. Grossman contends that the distance from the shooter and target has

significant influence on the emotional and psychological consequences of killing in combat. He identifies three general bands of measurement; Maximum and Long Range, Mid and Hand-Grenade Range and lastly Close range (from bayonet to hand-to-hand). My experience would indicate similar trends albeit I did not have any soldiers at the close range as defined by Grossman, but were close enough to fire rounds at point-blank into an enemy's chest.

For example, long range is easier to engage where the enemy is not easily determined as being human. There is no human element of interaction and therefore to the soldier the enemy is just a target at the end of the range of the weapon system. Thus it is probably easier for artillerymen, pilots, and sailors who shoot over the horizon. This is not a documented truth since it is difficult to study the psychological consequences of bombing. The psychology literature makes little mention of impacts of bombing on the bombers. There is a short mention by Grossman of fighter pilots having a reaction to killing in terms of downed aircraft. The pilots that would drop napalm noted that they could mentally envision the faces of those that they killed and therefore their post combat reactions were in some instances very similar to ground troops. From a historical perspective, Bourke noted that technology [stand-off] still failed to render the dead completely faceless. Combatants would use their imagination to "see" the impact of their weapons on other men to construct elaborate, precise, and self-conscious fantasies about the effects of their destructive weapons. This occurred more often when the impact of their actions was beyond their immediate vision.[25]

[25] Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (2/3 hanover Yard, London: Granta Publications, 1999)., xviii-xix.

At the mid range, if the soldier does not have to look at his handiwork and if there was no immediacy to engaging the five senses then it should make killing largely free of trauma.[26] This too makes a great deal of common sense. Holmes has suggested that using a hand grenade made the kill less intimate since the soldier did not need to look at his target or hear him die and thus the soldiers in the trench warfare of WWI would default to grenades over rifles.[27] You are never sure if you had made the kill or not. As I explained earlier, I would push the soldiers through the objective once they were engaged and successful at killing the enemy and would have another organization process the dead so that those who had killed did not look at their handiwork. This internal SOP helped mitigate the excessive stress placed on my men and corresponds with research completed by Holmes. If you are not sure if you killed the body in front of you then the TTPs, SOPs and drills will allow the soldier to conduct the processing of the dead as if it was routine with limited secondary effects.

Close range engagements have greater impact.[28] The closer the contact, the more profound its effects are physically and emotionally. In close combat the soldier will be burdened with bloodguilt, and if he elects not to kill, then the bloodguilt of his fallen comrades and the shame of his profession, nation, and cause lie upon him.[29] In Zhari District, the nature of the terrain made it impossible to engage targets from great

[26] LCol (Ret'd) Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*Little, Brown and Company, November 1996).,112. Trauma defined - DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1987) "(1) the person experienced, witnessed or was confronted with an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity or self or others; (2) the person's response involved intense fear, helplessness or horror"

[27] Holmes, R. *Acts of war: the Behavior of men in Battle*. New York: Free Press. 1985.

[28] LCol (Ret'd) Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*Little, Brown and Company, November 1996).,115.

distances, and the relationships built with the local Afghan citizens as discussed earlier, made the emotional dimension more palpable. Although there are some long distance shootings in Afghanistan by UAV operators, artillerymen and pilots, most of the current engagements within Afghanistan occur between the mid and close range and therefore the immediate engagement is not as intimate but the effects and battle space itself tweak the soldier's emotional senses. I will not forget the look on my own Headquarters' face when I told them for the first time to carry the body of a dead insurgent back out of objective when they knew that he was killed by one of us. They handled the body with great care, respect and as tenderly as one might expect of a friend or colleague. There was a mix in reactions as well. Some soldiers were uncomfortable because they had not handled dead bodies before, some had no issues at all whereas most were experienced with dead but still showed a general concern for the lifeless body in their care. This connection with the close fight and the enemy was completely different then other engagements where the soldiers did not know for certain if they had made the kill or not.

This analysis that Grossman has provided is fundamentally important and I would argue should be considered based on how soldiers are deployed and the mitigating strategies of managing the care of our soldiers. If we know how soldiers will respond as well as the stress placed on them based on these three basic engagement bands we as leaders can manage our own battle space and employ the soldiers in the best possible way. As a general rule, combat effectiveness is achieved through rotating your units out of battle, altering the range of employment of your units and monitoring the intensity of their employment so that you can get the most efficient use of all assets. Knowing this,

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[29] *Ibid.*, 89.

in addition to cycling my own platoons out of the operational rotation, I should have also altered their employment while in combat as well. For example, the highest percentage of stress-related symptoms demonstrated in my Company were those within my Headquarters (HQ) because all deliberate operations were conducted at Combined Arms Team level and the HQ crew were not able to rotate out of battle as a result. I managed to mitigate the stresses at platoon level because I was cognizant of the soldier's behaviour but this was due to my experience in continual combat operations, not because of my prior knowledge of the engagement bands in combat. We know that stress reaction is a joint function of the individual's resilience and his/her exposure the combat. Everyone will become a stress casualty if left long enough. We cannot do much about the first (variable levels of resilience) when in combat, but even short breaks have been shown to help stressed soldiers recover some of their resilience.[30] Again, understanding this is critical and thus more academic effort is needed to help clarify how we could rotate soldiers out of battle but also how we could rotate soldiers out of engagement bands in order to mitigate psychological injury.

[30] Telecon discussion with Lcol (Ret'd) Peter Bradley, PhD, Military Psychology and Leadership Department Royal Military College of Canada, 09Mar09

Chapter 2 - Issues Facing Soldiers

Understanding what killing could be like or the challenges with understanding both emotionally and psychologically is critically important to the soldier; being able to kill on order is his/her raison d'être. There are legal and emotional side effects with what killing soldiers do on the battlefield. Murder implies conscious intent, although intent is always difficult to define or establish. Homicide by accident or in the grip of insanity or in self-defence or lack of premeditation of harm are circumstances mitigating the act of the killer.[31] I have witnessed the spectrum of reactions from elation to rage and all emotional demonstrations were shadowed by the nervousness the soldier displayed when handling the dead. Research indicates that in combat our normal rules of conduct do not apply. It is fair to assume then that so too do our mannerisms alter as a result of the over-stimulation of the senses. Soldiers are normal people but the soldier needs to have a unique approach. What he/she needs is a "Special Moral World".[32] They need to kill but not be murders. This has been described by Dyer as the code of the "warrior gentlemen" and shows the requirement to demonstrate flexibility in the way a soldier thinks and acts based on his/her circumstances either in combat or at home. How else could a soldier die or kill when told to by the public?[33]

MAKING KILLING EASY?

As I have stated, there is a human element that is not easily qualified or quantified when studying combat. The legitimate act of killing seems too distant what makes a

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[31] Theodore MD Nadelson, "Killing," *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 30 (2002)., 202.

[32] The Profession of Arms [videorecording]/National Film Board of Canada
Montreal, NFB, 1983, series 3 hosted by Gwynne Dyer videocassette (VHS) (57 min.)

soldier different than a civilian. Despite this, taking another person's life brings with it a responsibility that is linked to morality. This is important to discuss since our moral codes are shaped by our society and need to be better understood by our society. Soldiers need their own moral code to legitimize their behaviour. Soldiers also need to know how to kill and the reactions to killing. My experience has been that given the extensive training and preparation soldiers receive for the battlefield, they have little difficulty with the killing, but post-killing is another story as shown earlier. It is not killing the enemy that is troubling, it is seeing the results of the kill, and knowing that the dead is just like we are but from a different place at a different time. This very real painting of the battle space takes issue with the scholarly consensus that, for such acts to take place (sniping/killing) perpetrators have to somehow dehumanize/demonize or objectify their enemies.[34] Holmes makes a timeless and powerful perception about the psyche of the American soldier when he notes, "in killing the grunts of North Vietnam, the grunts of America had killed a part of themselves."[35]

No matter how the business of war is adorned by parades, uniforms, the literary glorification of the warrior's courage and burdened by administrative logistics, the soldier's real work is killing.[36] Does our training system prepare the mind for this work? Perhaps somewhat and to some extent it is done so with varying degrees of success but this has not been universally applied pan-CF. Soldiers often feel sadness and sometimes

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[33] *Ibid.*

[34] Neta Ben-Ari Bar Eyal., "Israeli Snipers in the Al-Aqsa Intifada: Killing, Humanity and Lived Experiences," *Third World Quaterly* 26, no. 1 (2005), . 133.

[35] {LCol (Ret'd) Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*Little, Brown and Company, November 1996)., 38.

[36] Theodore MD Nadelson, "Killing," *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law* 30 (2002)., 201.

remorse at what they have done. Rage and the internalized strategy of defensive dehumanization of the enemy may work at the intense moment of contact but is subsided in time.[37] What dehumanizing does do however is desensitize the soldier to his/her environment. Our most basic level training is aimed at ensuring the soldiers are indoctrinated in the most explicit fashion with the notion that their purpose is not just to be brave or to fight well; it is to kill people.[38] The infantry takes this indoctrination even further. This is not well understood in our society.

The media's depiction of violence tries to tell us that men can easily throw off the moral inhibitions of a lifetime and kill casually and without remorse in combat. The ridiculous and at times humorous Hollywood films starring Chuck Norris or the troubled classic Sylvester Stallone role of "Johnny Rambo" both depict examples of uninhibited killing. Sadly, the hype of these over-the-top movies tends to shape our society norms. In the more serious commentaries in films such as *Apocalypse Now (1979 Francis Ford Coppola, Vietnam), All Quiet on the Western Front (1930, Lewis Milestone, WWI), Saving Private Ryan (1998, Steven Spielberg, WWII), Schindler's List (1993, Steven Spielberg, WWII)* and *Platoon (1986, Oliver Stone, Vietnam)* tend to approach reality but still perpetuate the larger myth of soldiers being able to casually kill in combat. There is an emotional response to killing as I have alluded to earlier. I agree with Grossman, that with few exceptions, everyone associated with killing in combat feels guilt.[39]

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[37]*Ibid.*, 201.

[38]Gwynne Dyer, *WAR*, The New Edition ed. (Canada: Random House Canada, 2004)., 59.

[39] LCol (Ret'd) Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*Little, Brown and Company, November 1996)., 88.

> "The ability to look another human being in the eye and make an independent decision to kill him and then watch as he dies due to your action combines to form the single most basic, important, primal, and potentially traumatic experience of war. If we understand this, then we understand the magnitude of the horror of killing in combat."[40]

This is where we need to target two main populations. First, the general public inclusive of the academic world and the second is the military community itself. From the military point of view, we need to focus our training to balance both the physical and the mental requirements to conduct our profession. The "battle mind" is as important post-combat as is the weapon and TTPs or Battle drills during combat. If we arm the soldiers with the knowledge of how they may react to complex situations, they can be confident in themselves and therefore act as a combat multiplier in the longer term. Further, the leadership will be able to manage risk, prolong operations and allocate training time to assist the soldier. Also, this will allow the leaders to generate more complete soldiers and thus potentially have few psychological casualties as a result of their orders. Within the public domain, debunking the media's portrayal of combat will help educate the public in general. This will then lead to the scholarly debate and research necessary to determine how the military may increase our psychological combat effectiveness and also lead to ways in which we can mitigate the effects of the stresses discussed earlier. Also, both the public and military communities need to share information. Too often are the units closed to the psychological studies of the academic world and therefore the value of raw data and first-person experiences are not accessible for analysis.

[40] LCol (Ret'd) Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*Little, Brown and Company, November 1996),. 31.

There are some ways that soldiers make killing easier despite the aforementioned challenges. Soldiers need to rationalize what they do and the outcomes of their actions. Particularly when an enemy is effective and achieves a degree of proficiency, there is a shared respect. This thought processes places the minimum possible burden on the conscience of the killer. The soldier is able to further rationalize his kill by honouring his fallen foes, thereby gaining stature and peace by virtue of the nobility of those he has slain.[41] In contrast, within the context of Ambushes or within Guerrilla Warfare, the enemy presents no immediate threat to the killer, but is killed anyway, without opportunity to surrender. Mixing civilians with terrorists further blurs our comprehension and is in complete contrast to the nobility kill.[42] This is the modern warfare paradigm. It would seem that in today's COIN environment, the more complex the scenario and elusive the enemy becomes the more he becomes the hunted. Here, the soldier's code seems to bring great honour to the difficult insurgent and when he is killed it is both an act of public protection as well as a conclusion to the "cat and mouse" game that both the soldier and insurgent play. This simple explanation almost brings with it the notion of good "sportsman like behaviour" where the victor wins his/her match with grace and respect. This is how I observed the soldiers' responses and how they tend to make killing easier.

[41] LCol (Ret'd) Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*Little, Brown and Company, November 1996)., 198.

[42] LCol (Ret'd) Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*Little, Brown and Company, November 1996)., 199.

MILITARY ETHICS AND MORALITY

The ways leaders train soldiers, employ soldiers in combat, the methods soldiers use to legitimize their actions in combat are all linked but are rooted in the ethical and moral framework soldiers bring to the battlefield. Just about everyone in the modern world knows that killing is wrong. All nations have laws that prohibit killing however not all killing is wrong. As a boy, I was taught very early on that, "thou shall not kill". God gives general or specific directions for killing, and the state puts criminals to death according to "rational justice." Within our own society, a soldier who kills in combat, is seen as "but a sword in hand" of the government and therefore is not responsible for the killing, provided the killing is consistent with legal rules of engagement, and therefore does not violate the universally accepted commandments of "thou shall not kill".[43] This sounds reasonable enough but one could argue that you cannot override a lifetime of social conditioning with persuasive arguments. In the profession of arms we condition soldiers to kill. We do this in three ways; (a) provide soldiers with a justification for killing, (b) by repetitive training on "targets" and "engagements" to ensure that the act is mechanical and is processed as a business transaction, and (c) by helping soldiers dehumanize the enemy. We justify killing through our ethical and moral framework we as an institution adhere to. Military training is replete with battle drills at all levels to ensure that the reaction to enemy fire and response to orders are automatic and instinctive. So, if it is just professional business then why should we be concerned? We should be concerned because there is a requirement for the soldiers to truly understand their own moral framework and how it overlays their professional obligations and perhaps preparedness. This is vitally important because soldiers need to ensure that their

actions are substantiated in their own minds. The moral and ethical "baggage" is the post operational reality and therefore in order to conduct the kill in subsequent operations, they need to have realized what it is they have done.

Military ethics can be viewed as the art of observing those ethical obligations that are appropriate to the soldier's role within society.[44] The discourse associated with an ethical framework will fundamentally change the point of view. As such, I will place Kantianism "lenses" over the understanding of killing since I think it best supports the ethical framework needed to kill in combat, specifically within the Afghan theatre of operations.

Further, the ROEs, serve as a legal tender or "check list" for when and how the soldier should apply deadly force but do not take into considerations a soldier's ethical framework. Drawing on Kant, we can see that our motives are in our control and that we are held morally accountable for what we do. Kant's principle of ends demands that humans ought not to be used, but be regarded as having the highest intrinsic value. Also, an act has specific moral worth only if it is done with a right intention or motive. This moral law outlines the right and wrong thing to do and that a difference exists between the two. This argument extends, in Kantian terms, if there is something that one morally ought to do, and they are able to do it, that person ought to do it no matter what. This is important whether or not this soldier wants to, or whether or not it fulfils the desires and goals or is approved by that society.

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[43] St Augustine: the City of God. New York: Image-Doubleday, 1958,. 55-57.
[44] Richard A. Gabriel, *The Warrior's Way: A Treatise on Military Ethics* (Winnipeg: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2007)., 16.

Kant did believe there was a right and wrong thing to do, whether or not we knew or agreed about it. This was the moral law.[45] He did not believe that morality had a function of producing good consequences.[46] According to Kant, because we intend or try to do what is thought to be right, we ought not to be blamed for things having turned out badly. We generally ought not to be blamed or praised for what is not in our control.[47] Therefore with this logic, the individual soldiers cannot be blamed or praised for what occurs, from a purely ethical philosophical perspective. What Kant does state is that motives are in our control. We are responsible for our motive to do good or bad, and thus we are held morally accountable.[48]

Although based on our moral values, norms are evolutionary and reflect the historic perspective of our cultures.[49] Simplistically defined, morality is culture-based and therefore morals are arbitrary and time-based. By using the moral standards of a society it helps identify the ethical framework used by that nation or people.

> The moral standing of a particular state depends upon the reality of the common life it protects and the extent to which the sacrifices required by that protection are willingly accepted and thought worthwhile. If no common life exists, or if the state doesn't defend the common life that does exist, its own defense may have no moral justification.[50]

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[45] Barbara MacKinnon, ""Chapter 5 - Kant's Moral Theory."" In *In Ethics: Theory and Contemporary Issues*, ed. Barbara MacKinnon (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1998)., 53.

[46] Ibid., 53.

[47] Barbara MacKinnon, ""Chapter 5 - Kant's Moral Theory."" In *In Ethics: Theory and Contemporary Issues*, ed. Barbara MacKinnon (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1998)., 52.

[48] Ibid., 52.

[49] Ibid., 28.

[50] Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*, 2nd ed.Basic Books, 1977)., 54.

There is still moral debate associated with the killing an enemy. The act of killing in this case is directed against a threat to someone presumably doing the morally right thing and would fall into the realist school of moral philosophy.[51]

On balance, the Kantian perspective might take issue with killing individuals because of the literal comparison to intrinsic value of all people. Kant also outlines the idea of categorical imperatives taking on two forms; whatever one can or will accept to do and that we should treat all persons as having intrinsic value and not instrumental value.[52] His concept of moral obligation expresses that it is unconditional and it applies to all persons. It is problematic to consider that killing would be willed for all in these circumstances and therefore the literal comparison to Kant's spirit of impartiality would make all killings morally questionable. Therefore using Kantianism clearly supports the moral and ethical approach to killing for the production of good consequences. Kantiasm is an appropriate ethical model for soldiers when rationalizing the requirement to kill. The CF does not place this ethical/moral debate as part of our training (despite it being placed in our OPME course Leadership and Ethics) and therefore I suggest it needs to be added so that the academic and personal comprehension of the fall-out of a killer soldier's actions can be understood.

Our military training attempts to make killing during war psychologically easier. The training is aimed at making the reactions to stressful situations automatic or instinctive so that the soldier is responding to a frightening/dangerous stimulus through the use of violence. By doing this, we identify a reaction of violence as being equitable

[51] Machon, Major Matthew J., *Targeted Killing as an Element of U.S. Foreign Policy in the War on Terror* (Ft Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies,[2005-2006])., 3.

[52] MacKinnon, *"Chapter 5 - Kant's Moral Theory."*

or rational for the threat itself. Therefore this method provides a soldier with the immediate tools in dealing with the threat. These immediate tools are superficial and are simply a reaction to some distinct action or counter-action. Bandura indicates that this can lead to greater psychological problems post-combat. Soldiers then are unable to fully understand the moral implications of their acts in combat due to the speed in which they are forced to act. As a result, they are forced to deal with their actions post-conflict. Moral disengagement is a concept from social psychology that describes how individuals can convince themselves that ethical standards do not apply in a particular context by separating their moral reactions from inhumane conduct.[53] As a minimum we need to at least discuss this as part of our military culture and greater community.

The fact that soldiers need to justify their society's "abnormal" behavior in order to achieve a higher societal need can be understood in the context of social cognitive theory and the psychological concept of moral disengagement.[54] The social cognitive theory attempts to explain how individuals who are engaged in abnormal behavior justify their activities.[55] According to this theory, people tend to refrain from behaving in ways that violate their moral standards. The challenge with a soldier is that he/she possesses both the moral standards of society writ large as well as those unique to his/her profession. Self-censure can be disengaged or weakened by stripping the victim of

[53] Bandura, A. "Mechanisms of moral disengagement." *Origins of Terrorism; Psychologies, Ideologies, Theologies, Sates of Mind.*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 1990

[54] Bandura, A., Barbaranelli, C., Caprara, G., & Pastorelli, C. "Mechanisms of moral disengagement in the exercise of moral agency". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*,1996.

[55] Ibid.

human attributes.[56] Dehumanization results in the victim being viewed as sub-human, and not as a person with feelings.[57] It is clear that we train the soldiers to respond to a threat through the use of a violent means. We have them believe that the threat comes from someone that is not like them and therefore are somehow less a person than the soldier. This dehumanization of the enemy makes the soldier feel better about killing the threat. We also give them a different moral code to live by while they are in that institution. Arguably, it would be ideal if the soldier was trained, employed and retained in that isolated system called the military. Because soldiers live and functions outside of the military context for most of their lives, the differences between these two worlds may lead to a clue as to why many soldiers experience challenges with their actions. Also, as noted earlier, once the soldier sees the impact of his/her actions on the battlefield this type of conditioning does not always make killing easier.

Blaming the victim or circumstances is another effective method that decreases a soldier's own criticism. In moral disengagement by attribution of blame, perpetrators view themselves as victims who were provoked.[58] This is easily understood in a firefight but there are more complex situations where this does not apply. However, the actions of the soldier are seen as defensive in nature and therefore the victim or enemy is blamed for bringing the act upon him/herself.

In general, the moral standards that we adopt early in our lives and are then refined within the CF training establishment help to serve as guides for conduct. Within

[56] Bandura, A. "Selective activation and disengagement of moral control". *Journal of Social Issues*, 1990. 27-46.

[57] *Ibid*,. 28.

the CF the moral standards are held to the highest levels, specifically within leadership positions. The aim is to prevent these leaders from behaving in ways that violate professional moral standards. This concept then has the "self" regulate one's conduct and therefore the service member remains in line with these internal standards.

OPERATIONAL STRESS INJURIES (OSI)

Nowhere in this discussion have I indicated that the troops are not proficient at killing. I am extremely impressed with their skill to engage in combat and indeed kill an enemy. The kill should be mechanical, and is not new to our modern society. In studying the psychology of killing I find that we are not preparing the mind for combat to a similar level to our physical abilities. Just like the body, it needs to be strong, robust and able to carry the soldier through situations that are not thought possible. In my opinion, it is the preventative medicine portion of our mental heath care that we do not consider. The result is that a number of our combat soldiers come down with what is currently known as operational stress injuries (OSI). An OSI is any persistent psychological difficulty resulting from operational duties performed while serving in the Canadian military. The term is used to describe a broad range of problems which include diagnosed medical conditions such as anxiety disorders, depression and post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as well as other conditions that may be less severe, but still interfere with daily functioning.[59] If soldiers are so proficient at killing then why do we have OSI? Why treat the effects of OSI if you can mitigate the number of symptoms or even the number of people that face the post-combat trauma? These questions also have

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[58] Bandura, A. "Selective activation and disengagement of moral control". *Journal of Social Issues*, 1990. *40.*

[59] Veteran Affairs Canada, Mental Health. http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/clients/sub.cfm?source=mhealth/definition,. Accessed 08Feb09.

not been given enough attention as of yet and needs further academic and medical assessment.

Our history as a military is rife with injuries as a result of waging war. Mostly, the injuries are glorified and even emphasized through literature, art and film. These physical injuries, for the most part, are a direct relation of the application of force and its effects on both the target and neighbouring area. Society shows pity to these soldiers and the injured soldier is showcased as an icon symbolizing the most endearing quality of man; self sacrifice. What is not discussed or even known in the general public or military is that there are more psychological injuries that are hidden behind the crutch or wheel chair of every physically injured soldier. LCol Stephane Grenier (a CF Officer) stated that:

> "During Combat, soldiers can be physically injured. This kind of injury is considered honourable; however others like me can be injured psychologically. The difference is, this type of injury we sustained is not visible. Because of this, these psychological injuries are viewed as less honourable."[60]

In fact, as reported by Richard Gabriel, in every war in which American soldiers have fought in this century, the chances of becoming a psychiatric casualty were greater than the chances of begin killed by enemy fire. This psychiatric injury can be determined as being debilitated for some period of time as a consequence of the stresses of military life.[61] If we look at the 111 deaths of Canadian soldiers in Afghanistan since the

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[60] *Combat Stress Injury: Theory, Research, and Management* Edited by Charles R. Figley and William P. Nash,. Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, New York,. 2007. Article written by LCol Stephane Grenier (CF Offr) *The Operational Stress Injury Social Support Program: A Peer Support Program in Collaboration Between The Canadian Forces and Veterans Affairs Canada (261-293),*. 256.

[61] LCol (Ret'd) Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*Little, Brown and Company, November 1996)., 43.

commencement of operations[62], what would the percentage of psychological injuries be? These injuries are linked to the combat stress that the soldier experiences.

The official statistics regarding the number of OSIs experienced as a result of the Afghanistan Campaign are not yet promulgated. The only quantifiable data comes from our Surgeon General stating that the CF detailed screening follow-up procedures suggest that about 27% of people coming back from Afghanistan have some difficulties.[63] What we can do however is identify the potential numbers by using the statistical trends in this field that come from the study of PTSD. Studies indicate that peacekeepers demonstrate a rate of PTSD that can vary from 2.5 to 20%.[64] Considering that Canada has had a rough force structure of approximately 2500 soldiers in Afghanistan since January 2002, the calculation would see a minimum of 5000 soldiers annually subjected to potential stressors. In total we could argue that we have had a minimum of 37000 soldiers (noting that many of these numbers are repeated in the count due to numerous rotations into theatre) that have contributed to COIN operations. I use the peacekeeping statistics loosely since in our current operational environment, combat operations are not the main effort and significant emphasis is placed on our rebuilding and support to governance. Therefore, without the benefit of a consolidated, national figure, one might deduce that we could have between 925 (2.5%) and 7400 (20%) psychological injuries as result of Afghanistan alone. Considering the attention that the fallen soldiers have received and

[62] This number is effective the date of submission of this paper

[63] McFadyen, Mary. "A long Road to Recovery: Battling Operational Stress Injuries", *Special Report to the Minister of National Defence*. Ombudsman, National Defence of Canadian Forces, December 2008.

[64]Grenier, Lt.Col Stephane,, Heber, Alexandra MD, Richards, Don MD, and Darte, Kathy MN, *"The Canadian Forces Operational Stress Injury Program*", http://mailer.fsu.edu/~cfigley/documents/TheCanadianForcesOperationalStressInjuryProgram.pdf., article accessed 23 Feb 09,. 7.

the amount of public debate based on our losses, it would seem that the probability of psychological injury will take a back seat to the other portions of health care of the soldiers in the near term.

What is Combat Stress? Simply defined, it is a result of internal and external stressors that a soldier experiences while in a combat or combat related mission. They do not come from the enemy action alone. Many stressors are generated from the soldiers own unit leaders, and mission demands. Combat stressors are weapons whose targets are the hearts and minds of individuals opposing warriors. Stress-inducing factors such as chaos, uncertainty, surprise, hopelessness, physical hardship, isolation, and sleep deprivation are studied by military leaders.[65] In Operations other than war (OOTW), stress may result from ROE, the proximity of the combatants to one another. If stress continues for an extended period, an individual's adaptive resources become overwhelmed.[66]

This problem is not uniquely Canadian. The Russian Military for example has experienced a higher percentage of troops with combat stress disorders in Chechnya than in Afghanistan. Based on the Russian experience the same research implied that combat in cities produces more combat stress symptoms than some other types of conflict, and consequently, is a category of combat that should be closely monitored.[67] There is debate within the military community that operating in COIN environment produces similar

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[65] *Combat Stress Injury: Theory, Research, and Management* Edited by Charles R. Figley and William P. Nash,. Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, New York,. 2007. 13.

[66] Combat Stress in Chechnya "the Equal Opportunity Disorder" – Thomas, O'Hara, Army Medical Department Journal.

[67] Norvikov VS. "Psycho-physiological Support of Combat Activities of Military Personnel". *Mil Med J.* 1996; No. 4,. 37-38.

difficulties as does an urban setting. There is no published data to support this assumption therefore is something that should be examined further. Regardless, Russian research has revealed that some 32% of their soldiers operating in Chechnya experienced extreme stress while preparing for combat. As expected, the peak of psycho-physiological stress occurred during times of real danger, as first emotions, then exhaustion, and finally, personality disorders emerged. After their removal from combat, troops demonstrated depression or loss of interest to the extent of self-preservation symptoms decreased while their psychotic disorders increased. This offered a trend toward the formation of sociopathic/psychopathic inclinations, including increased impulsiveness and unreasonable focusing on minor problems.[68] Using other nation's experiences makes complete sense. The observations from Chechnya could help with our understanding of OSI and combat related injuries. Since there is little published Canadian literature on this subject, and little to no training direction, it proves that we have yet to see this as important as perhaps it ought to be.

In recent years, PTSD seems to have become the new "buzz word" however, in fact PTSD has been around for several decades, since the Vietnam conflict. The fact that it is a relatively new term in the Canadian Army may say something about the level of professional awareness within the Army. In addition, OSI has a more broad use, specifically within the military context. It is important to understand these concepts and how they happen. One of the primary (and obvious) factors leading to combat stress is a soldier's fear of dying. This can be curbed somewhat by proper preparatory training, good unit morale, proper leadership, and high state of an Army's equipment quality and

[68] Norvikov VS. "Psycho-physiological Support of Combat Activities of Military Personnel". *Mil Med J*. 1996; No. 4,. 37-38.

readiness. It is also dependent on the proximity of medical assets and personnel to properly diagnose and treat battle stress. The absence of these factors allows tension to increase without any precautionary pressure releases. Soldiers can simply be overwhelmed by feelings of helplessness and rage. As casualties mount and if performance does not meet expectations, a unit will experience more combat stress casualties. In Chechnya for example, the Russian soldiers used in the initial assaults were poorly trained, lacked unit cohesion (some soldiers did not know the last name of others in the same tank), and confronted guerrillas fighting for the survival of their nation (while many Russian conscripts had no idea why they were fighting!). This demonstrates the importance of education as well as the requirement of the leader to train his/her team in all disciplines prior to engaging in combat[69]

Using the COIN environment and the war in Afghanistan as an example one could argue that MacNair's discussion of PITS is what we commonly refer to as PTSD. According to MacNair, PITS is a form of PTSD of which its symptoms can be caused not by traditionally expected roles, such as being a victim or rescuer in trauma, but by being an active participant in causing trauma. Sufferers of PITS may be in the roles of soldiers, executioners, or police officers, where it is socially acceptable or even expected for them to cause trauma, including death. Compared to the more widely understood PTSD, there appears to be greater severity and different symptom patterns for those affected by PITS. Obvious differences to be explored for those who kill include questions of context, guilt, meaning, content of dreams, and sociological questions, leading to special implications

[69] Noy S. "Combat Stress Reactions." In: R. Gal, D. Mangelsdorff, ed. *Military Psychology*. John Wiley and Sons,. 511.

for therapy, research into the causality of PTSD, and violence prevention efforts.[70] For this reason, it is my opinion that PITS needs to be included in our discussion of OSIs.

The simple participation in atrocities (defined as terrorizing, wounding, or killing civilians, or prisoners and mutilating bodies) contributed to PTSD and other psychological disorders.[71] The interesting part of MacNair's work with combat veterans determines that one can suffer from PITS through passive victimization (having something happen to you) or through active measures where the individual causes the trauma. It is not uncommon to have delayed reactions. This observation touches on something that troubles many social scientists in the military community. Most of the academic and medical studies have not considered the role of killing in battle when considering trauma or stress to soldiers. As I conducted my research I found that military leaders generally resist having researchers come into their units to conduct research that may raise discomfiting findings. As such, most studies focus on the danger or the trauma of seeing friends hurt or killed.[72] This type of research allows easier access to the subjects and therefore tends to dominate the field of study. I mentioned at the beginning of this paper that I was frustrated that there is little concerted effort being placed on the academic research on killing and that there were few Canadian studies published in this field as well. Even the observations written on OSI are done so by military members that are viewed to be defeated by the process or recognition and in all fairness are viewed as being "weak" by the rank and file. It is odd to learn as a member of the profession of

[70] Rachel M. MacNair, *Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002)

[71] Ibid,..20.

[72] *Ibid*,. 9.

arms that the job requirements were not studied as closely or before the conditions of the job itself. In my experience leaders in the Canadian Army have been resistant to research that interferes with what they determine to be more pressing unit activities. It is clear that this would be the first obvious place to consider the role of active participation in traumatic circumstances – specifically when debating PITS. According to a 1978 study by Hern and Corrigan, "It appears that the more direct the physical and visual involvement (i.e. nurse or doctor), the more stress experienced."[73] It has been documented that "one of the most abiding sources of trauma, for example, is having to handle bodies and body parts."[74] Our North American experience is not different than most other countries. Clearly from my own personal experiences, handling of the dead did mark a monumental moment in my military career for which I was not fully prepared. It is not that I was not able to conduct my duties, quite the contrary, this specific act showed me how little attention I gave to the topic and eventuality of something that is at the core of what I do for a living. This is why I place so much emphasis on this aspect within this paper.

The most recent Ombudsman's report identifies a need for a more robust system focused on identify, preventing and treating OSI than existed in 2002.[75] This report strengthens my observations and argument as a whole. The report acknowledges the dedication of the Chain of Command to the problem insofar as identifying the

[73] Rachel M. MacNair, *Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002),. 75.

[74] Nat Journal Mag, Defense – Intimate killing

[75] McFadyen, Mary. "A long Road to Recovery: Battling Operational Stress Injuries", *Special Report to the Minister of National Defence*. Ombudsman, National Defence of Canadian Forces, December 2008. 4.

Commander of Canadian Expeditionary Force Command's intent, however as I mentioned at the outset of this paper, what is said is not necessarily what is happening on the ground. It is also important to note that this report was published after my experience in that theatre and therefore may show a distinct shift in philosophy within the military as a whole. As such, it is truly a benchmark resource and shows the maturity that may be occurring within the CF.

The information that precedes this indicates that much of the resident knowledge on this subject has been generated by years of research that has unfortunately come from warfare of previous generations. The trends indicate that our attention and comprehension of the OSI is cyclical and that following any major campaign the psychological health of the combatants becomes a priority. This does not represent an institution or culture that is dedicated to learning. The CF places a great deal of attention on the lessons learned from operations however these lessons are mostly focussed on processes or tactics. Learning organizations capitalize on the faults of previous events and therefore increase their institutional knowledge as a result. This is where the CF has failed as a culture, and perhaps where I failed as a leader since the information and concepts were available if one digs deep enough, however I focussed my attention on the proficiency to act in war. I did contemplate how I might manage the psychological battle space, the mental health of my men and the skills necessary prior to going into battle, but my professional training had provided me with little beyond the most rudimentary grounding in these topics. I just more focussed on the training demands placed on me by my chain of command. I believe this is a common fault.

AVOIDANCE BEHAVIOUR

Most people like to discuss their profession and tell stories that differentiate themselves from others. What you do for a living in part helps define who you are. The ability to share your personal information assists many people with sharing problems, concerns or mitigating stress that may be felt as a result of what they do for a living. Soldiers are no different. The problems that fall out from killing are generally avoided because weakness is a concept that is contrary to what a soldier is believed to stand for in our society as a whole. There are many psychological consequences to killing that go unnoticed because of a soldier's inability to communicate how he/she feels. Anxiety, panic, depression, substance abuse – can also be included in the psychological consequences of killing, along with such things as increased paranoia or a sense of disintegration, or dissociation or amnesia at the time of the trauma itself.[76] This said, it might not be what the soldier says but what the soldier does that shows that he/she has been exposed to trauma.

Part of the problem with stress injuries is gaining the knowledge to diagnosis the issue. Most soldiers are not comfortable with discussing that they may have a problem and the public cannot appreciate how a soldier might have these problems given the ignorance brought on by film and myth about what soldiers are actually like. Unlike the physical sciences where medical doctors can diagnose patients based on the physical injury, much is unknown about the brain and damages that can occur. For example, studies on Israeli soldiers have shown that they have explicitly avoided the idea that

[76] Rachel M. MacNair, *Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002).,. 7.

soldiers have done anything for which to feel guilt (Solomon, 1993). The belief is that all PTSD symptoms must relate to what the enemy did, not what the soldier did.[77] Citizens and political leaders prefer to think that any long-lasting repercussions are the fault of the enemy.

There are countless historical stories of soldiers returning from war where it has been commonly been the case that discussing horrors they have seen or participated in, are discouraged by their friends and families. Further, veterans do not encourage this sharing of feeling/emotion either.[78] It is critical to understand that in order to treat these injuries the proper tools are needed. Unlike a compound fracture, the soldier's injuries in this case cannot be seen, and the soldier must show the injury to the doctor so that treatment can be implemented. If the soldier refuses and the injury is kept quiet, the injury worsens just like any other trauma to the body. Also, until our culture does not see war as portrayed in pop-culture then our society and most importantly, our veterans, will continue to think that these injuries are peculiar. If so, the soldier suffering from this injury does not discuss it freely and perpetuates the absence in our normal discourse.

I have spent a great deal of time discussing only a few topics within this chapter. It is important to understand what faces a soldier in combat as well as the challenges with understanding both the emotional and perhaps psychological side of killing. If society is willing to send its soldiers into harm's way and expects them to do harm to bad people, then they must understand the ways in which we manipulate our moral and ethical framework. There is little wonder why there are some that experience difficulties readjusting to the societal norms when they are no longer in combat. Also, the staggering

[77] *Ibid.,* 162.

potential numbers of OSI sufferers and the obvious lack of understanding within the military to mitigate problems is another important point to take away from this discussion. The problems with stress related injuries are clearly not just a Western cultural phenomena. The results of this reoccurring data and observations show that most modern nations that subject their soldiers to killing without proper training suffer at a rate commensurate with other nations. Therefore the trends are human trends; psychological injury is a human bi-product of killing when soldiers are not trained to deal with the psychological aspects of killing. What comes out of this observation is the requirement to train the soldier before he/she must kill and that the conditioning in battle starts with conditioning before they arrive on the objective.

[78] *Ibid.*, 163.

Chapter 3 - Implications for Trainers and Combat Leaders

GENERAL

It was important for me to articulate the components of killing and the human experience that is associated with all things related to combat, as I have learned to understand them to be. My understanding identifies three problem areas. The first is that military training emphasizes procedures and technology and underestimates the human dimension in combat. The second is that a significant portion of the military training I have been a part of was instructed by officers who had not seen combat. Lastly, because of these previous two mentioned observations, there were many surprises on the battlefield for both my soldiers and I. As such, it has become clear to me that despite my efforts to be the best officer I could be, there was much about the human dimension in operations that I did not understand. For example, I did not fully comprehend the second and third level effects of the direction I issued to the men in combat (or the abilities of my sub-unit to my boss don't understand this). I could conduct the tasks of physical leading and planning in combat both in a conventional and asymmetric warfare perspective, but I did not master the conditioning and education needed to comprehend what would occur once I completed my tasks as assigned by my Commanding Officer. What I should have done, and would argue that the CF has failed to truly face is the psychological conditioning for the effects of killing on the soldier and how prolonged combat will impact the sustainment of a unit in the field. Because I was not prepared in this area, I could not provide my boss the necessary feedback he needed to control his battle space. I did not comprehend the psychological implications of my actions and the potential for injury that I subjected the soldiers to.

Also, there was a requirement to match the physical abilities of the soldier with that of his/her psychological strengths and that too was not considered as much as I ought to. I personally spent a great deal of time conditioning my warriors to be physically strong and mentally prepared for the complexities of the enemy and demographics described in earlier sections of this paper. In this regard I was an excellent trainer, especially considering that like so many within the CF today, warfare was something very new. Not only had I not fully prepared the mind of the soldier on the psychology of killing (it might be impossible to do this well) I did not prepare then for the impact this would have on their bodies themselves. I have earlier stated that there were clear connections between what the soldiers experienced and the way that emotion shaped their physiological responses. These reactions are documented and have been for quite some time. I did however have a good appreciation for the impact of physical exhaustion on the mind. This observation is furthered through F.C. Bartlett (psychologist) who has placed emphasis on the psychological impact of physical exhaustion in combat. "In war, there is perhaps no general condition which is more likely to produce a large crop of nervous and mental disorders than a state of prolonged and great fatigue"[79] Does our current method of training prepare the soldiers minds for killing? Not just the act, but the impact and implications with action?

In a very simplistic manner I have indicated that we in the Army condition our minds to conduct the instinctive kill based on battle drills, dehumanization of the enemy into a target and the like. The repetitive training we conduct, although often deemed boring or rigid by the troops, serves a real purpose. The tactical environment during our

[79] LCol (Ret'd) Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*Little, Brown and Company, November 1996)., 69.

training exercises may not pose any real intellectual challenge to most of the experienced soldiers, the exposure to repetitive environments through practice battles is critical to our training regime. In fact, we rehearse the "choreography" of violence in the most realistic conditions.[80] We do this so that we are comfortable or confident under period of stress. We simulate conditions in battle so that the SOPs, TTPs and drills at individual soldier level are confirmed and also so that all the mechanics of the entire team can be refined. The repetitive nature of this process ensures that as many parts of battle as possible are scripted, automatic. In this sense, the training environment is intended to make the battlefield a scripted exercise. Most aspects of war can be practiced, but how people respond to stress although can be rehearsed, cannot always be prepared for. What we neglect in our training is focused on the natural side of a soldier's reactions.

We need to teach the soldiers about natural reactions and changes that will occur due to their experiences. We need to do this since the climate in war changes men in various ways. Experiences in the Second World War highlight where a soldier's mind goes and what it becomes during the experience itself.

> "In such a climate men may hold fast in memory to their civilian existence of yesterday and stubbornly resist, the encroachments of the violent and the irrational. But the soldier who has yielded himself to the fortunes of war, has sought to kill and to escape being killed is no longer what he was. He becomes a fighter, whether he wills it or not."[81]

That said, we need to prepare the soldier not with the skills to pull a trigger or drop a bomb, we need to arm him with the tools to deal with the responsibility to take life. Why is this so important? The majority of analysts studying this topic have come to the

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[80] The Profession of Arms [videorecording]/National Film Board of Canada
Montreal, NFB, 1983, series 3 hosted by Gwynne Dyer videocassette (VHS) (57 min.)

[81] Gray, J. Glenn. *The Warriors, Reflections on Men in Battle,*. 27

conclusion that the course and outcome of modern war will largely depend on the psychological condition of soldiers, their ability to endure an ever increasing (psychological) load, overcome fear in battle, and preserve their will to win.[82]

TRAINING PHILOSOPHY

Specifically for the combat arms and to some extent all soldiers on the battlefield, the leadership needs to refine the philosophy of training our soldiers for combat. We need to train the "homo sapiens" (civilian) to become a basic soldier. Next, that soldier needs to be trained to be a professional with specific expertise in his trade. Lastly, we need to take the professional soldier and make him/her realize that he/she needs to become a "Homo furens"[83]. This is surely part of what it means to be a soldier and what it has always meant. What this very controversial term implies is a shift in our training philosophy and warrior code. We must not just be satisfied with the battle task standards, drills of applying force and the TTPs of both friendly and foes. We need to develop the mind of the soldiers to be able to conduct their craft with the precision that they so proudly fire their weapons. The "battle mind" should be our next training domain.

PREPARING THE LEADER AND SOLDIERS FOR BATTLE

Leadership is a topic that provokes great discussion and debate. I will not discuss the various styles or principles of leadership in this paper. What I will discuss are the requirements and implications leaders need to understand in combat, and specifically while killing. Dyer has deduced that the leader in battle will in essence be required at

[82] Combat Stress in Chechnya "the Equal Opportunity Disorder" – Thomas, O'Hara, Army Medical Department Journal, as identified by Igor Panarin

[83]Gray, J. Glenn. *The Warriors, Reflections on Men in Battle*,.27. Gray would state that h*omo furens* is "subspecies" of Homo sapiens where he becomes a fighting man. It is described as what it must be like to be a soldier. Here a soldier has surrender himself to war where he has killed, sought to kill or been

times to have to actually "destroy" his/her own soldiers to accomplish the mission. Further, the leader needs to determine how many soldiers he/she needs to use yet still get the job done.[84] Although technology may change, the role of the soldier stays essentially the same. The key to military success is the art of persuasion and ensuring that soldiers overlook their fear of dying. The impact on leaders is very humbling. Leaders understand that they can do everything right but still fail since the battle space has too many variables. This has an effect on the leader and needs to be understood. This is where the knowledge of combat stressors and PITS is fundamental for the combat leader. These two concepts are not studied enough by our combat leaders. If you are an active participant in causing a trauma, then you are more susceptible to psychological trauma and PITS. Of course in combat you do what "has" to be done at the time. Other challenges come out of the post-action. The system usually works when the team stays together.[85] Therefore the leadership displayed, the combat leadership, from training, operations and repatriation needs to keep the team together. This is not a new lesson. The US Army learned this while fighting in Vietnam,[86] yet today we continue to mobilize ad hoc units for missions.

Oddly enough, Military surgeons have described characteristic stress reactions since at least the 18th century. The specific reactions experienced by warriors have changed somewhat, from generation to generation and war to war, but not a lot has

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effected by the battle space. This causes him to transform into Homo Furens.

[84] *The Profession of Arms* [videorecording]/National Film Board of Canada,. Montreal, NFB, 1983, series 3 hosted by Gwynne Dyer videocassette (VHS) (57 min.)

[85] *The Profession of Arms* [videorecording]/National Film Board of Canada,. Montreal, NFB, 1983, series 3 hosted by Gwynne Dyer videocassette (VHS) (57 min.)

[86] *Ibid.*

changed over time. Many of the major adverse operational stress reactions are much the same now as they were in the American Civil War.[87] One of the key lessons of the war in Chechnya for the study of military operations other than war (OOTW) is that psychological climate in small-scale operations may be more complicated and stressful than large scale operations such as Desert Storm.[88] This is perhaps what is challenging our system with our current fight in Afghanistan. What troubled me in my research is that we have a wealth of historical precedence, yet we as leaders seem to relearn these lessons in a cyclical fashion – always post conflict. One new evolution is our lethality in combat. "Only in this century our physical and logistical capability to sustain combat has completely outstripped our psychological capacity to endure it."[89] If this is the case then we as leaders are neglecting the very "soul" of the war machine – the psychological core of the soldier.

Military leaders then are the owners of combat and operational stress and its management. There are two reasons for this. The first reason is our responsibility for soldiers' morale, confidence, and the development of their will to fight. The second is that we bear full, personal responsibility for deciding when and how to spend the resources of war placed at our disposal by the nation. There are times when these resources must be pushed beyond their breaking points.[90] Leaders must understand that

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[87] *Combat Stress Injury: Theory, Research, and Management* Edited by Charles R. Figley and William P. Nash,. Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, New York,. 2007. 33.

[88] Combat Stress in Chechnya "the Equal Opportunity Disorder" – Thomas, O'Hara, Army Medical Department Journal

[89] LCol (Ret'd) Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*Little, Brown and Company, November 1996)., 45.

[90] *Combat Stress Injury: Theory, Research, and Management* Edited by Charles R. Figley and William P. Nash,. Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, New York,. 2007. 17.

the first reason is paramount in the "prevention" of disabling stress reactions and therefore hinges on the personal relationship between leaders and their troops.[91] Research suggests that there may be an ability to prevent or even assist with healing stress wounds through leadership alone.

The warrior culture and pseudo-masculinity of the military is important to gain confidence but is damaging when assisting with emotions. The maturity of the military to see psychological injuries at par with those physical ones is not yet at a level of what is needed to help prevent harm. War is largely perceived by warriors as a test of their personal strength, courage, and competence, so admitting to combat stress "symptoms" may be akin to actually admitting failure.[92] The command climate within the military needs to be tailored to allow an openness and respect for the potential injury sustained by the soldier.

In addition, the diagnostic labels can also harm individual warriors and the military units in which they serve. Psychiatric labels of all kinds carry a heavy burden of stigma, particularly among war fighters. How can you trust a soldier or officer that cannot remain calm, focused, or in control regardless of adversity? It might be argued that soldiers today would rather be diagnosed with a physical ailment/disease than with depression, anxiety or any other form of OSI.[93] The actual labeling of an OSI will complicate the leader's job because it is very difficult to deal effectively with a health

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[91] *Ibid*,. 17.

[92] *Combat Stress Injury: Theory, Research, and Management* Edited by Charles R. Figley and William P. Nash,. Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, New York,. 2007,. 17.

[93] *Ibid*,. 34.

issue morphs into a discipline problem or vice versa?[94] These comments are expressed as a key concern within our most recent Ombudsman report focused on OSIs.

The study and more importantly the understanding of psychological effects of killing is paramount for the leadership and the soldiers themselves. For example, some of the symptoms that fall under combat related psychological injuries are irritability or outburst of anger. Hendin and Hass (1984) identified that those that had killed were especially characterized by violent outbursts.[95] These traits are usually found in our most aggressive but still disciplined soldiers. They are also traits found in the most ill-disciplined soldiers. This is important to note for the Chain of Command since the post-operational care is the responsibility of the leadership and therefore knowing this linkage can help with the integration process both at work and at home. Experience with PITS veterans indicates that they are very in touch with their anger. The ability to understand that these simple emotions may lead to something larger is what we ought to be considering. The CF is getting much better but I would argue the leadership is still not at a level of proficiency needed to mitigate many of the circumstances.

Also, the impact combat stress has on the development of combat exhaustion and the combat efficiency of the average soldier is not widely understood either. Grossman published the work of (Swank and Marchand (1946) which identifies the cumulative effects of protracted combat. I received a briefing from Grossman as part of our Battle Group leadership training that augmented his writings. Of course he was a motivating speaker and a charismatic leader but I did not focus clearly on this Swank/Marchand

[94] *Ibid.* 35.

[95] Rachel M. MacNair, *Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002).,. 4.

work that he published. I naturally listened attentively to the tone and excitement of his voice while I was dazzled by his key notes and ability to "rally the troops" to a common cause. What I should have been doing was studying the cumulative effects of combat and noted the trends that sadly history has proven. Within the Swank and Marchand study, my company was statistically parallel to the data collected from the Second World War and I had no idea until I started my research for this paper.

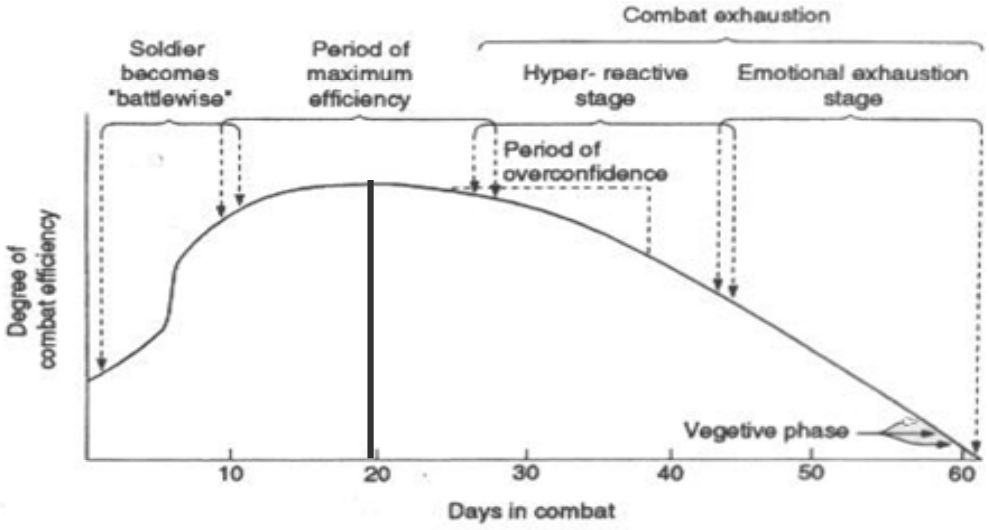

FIGURE 1 Effects of continuous combat.
http://www.killology.com/images/Tbl1p148%202.JPG

Within this graph, research has highlighted that units reach their maximum efficiency in combat within the 20-day mark. Further, the same research notes that combat exhaustion occurs post 30 days with the emotional exhaustion commencing at about the 45-day point. Using my own experiences, my personal reactions were in keeping with this statistical data. Specifically, my Combined Arms Team was extremely efficient at the

15-20 day portion of the curve, and I noticed that insomnia and anxiety emerged at about the 30-day window[96].

Certainly my experiences in combat have shaped my thoughts today but the quantifiable data could have helped me notify my chain of command or my soldiers on trends that are historically proven. At times, knowing we are "normal" helps us deal with the things about us that we may think are abnormal. What I suggest here is that we should pay attention to the lessons learned of the past and that the military has yet to adopt the culture where academic learning in this field assists us with our development.

How we employ of forces in concert with the effects of proximity of conflict receives little debate in our profession of arms. The length of time that soldiers are engaged at close range and how long they ought to remain in place is rarely calculated. Studies have been conducted on Relief in Place operations were the timeliness and duration soldiers are rotated out of the line units effect their ability to prolong combat with sustaining fewer psychological injuries.[97] Leaders need to debate this and come up with methods to allow maximum use of minimal resources whilst ensuring mission success. This could come in terms of the rotation of soldiers out of various engagement bands (i.e., close or long range) in accordance with that which is discussed at Chapter 1.

Leading soldiers in combat starts with the training of the team. What leaders need to know is first how to train the soldier so that he/she is able to kill with not only the weapons they carry into battle but with the body/mind that moves them to the enemy

[96] The cumulative effects of combat over all deliberate and hasty operations are used in my own personal comparision. For example, if a deliberate operation would take place over a 48hr period, the Combined Arms Team would be fighting a battle for a period of 4-8hrs (enemy dependent). Using these individual fights, I can draw similar conclusion to the Swank and Marchand study.

[97] US Department of the Army. *Leaders' Manual for Combat Stress Control.* Washington, DC: DA; September 1994. Field Manual 22-51: 5-7.

objective. I would argue that the balance in this preparation must focus on the mind of the soldier so that he/she may wield that weapon in such a way that their body will not break and that they can complete the act with the emotional confidence of what they have been ordered to do. Once in combat, the leader needs to be able to balance the employment of his/her soldiers and officers so that they are exposed to the minimum amount of trauma whilst balancing the amount of combat they are expected to wage. In addition, the leader needs to comprehend the impact the location on the battlefield has on the soldier when forced to kill. Lastly, the leader must provide the command climate post-combat to allow the proper care to be given for a full recovery of any combat stress or OSI the soldier is experiencing.

Chapter 4 – The Way Ahead

HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE AND RELEVANCE

One of the most refreshing pieces of literature that I have reviewed in conducting this research was that of the Ombudsman report referenced earlier. The recommendations identify many of the lessons that I have experienced and most notably match many of the trends that I have discussed within this paper. Words however will not solve the problem and soldiers respect deeds much more. Of note, the acknowledgement of preventative mitigation and education is what I think is most important. I do not believe that the actions during a conflict will ever be truly understood since they are situational dependent. I also believe that with more experience we will be able to deal with post-injury treatment and support in a much better fashion, and I am encouraged by what I have already witnessed to date. Therefore the most important aspect for soldiers, leaders and academics, at this point is the stuff that we can control now.

We also have the North American (mostly American) historical and other nation's experience to pull information from. As demonstrated by the Chechnya experience, these recent wars reinvigorated Russia's military medical service to look for new ways to prevent or limit psychological trauma in servicemen, and to find new methods to rehabilitate those affected.[98] This prevention is based on "hard knocks" and is deemed necessary to a respected military. The analysis indicates that the primary lessons learned by the medical service in Chechnya were to pay special attention to psycho-preventative measures to reduce combat stress, preclude or reduce psychological injuries, and thereby

[98] Combat Stress in Chechnya "the Equal Opportunity Disorder" – Thomas, O'Hara, Army Medical Department Journal

preserve or raise the combat capability of the force.[99] This is precisely what I deduced by my own research and experience. Further, using the Russian model, the future would see at a minimum, that 20% of the participants would return home with some type of post war psychological syndrome.[100] I would argue that our experiences in Afghanistan could generate similar statistics post-conflict.

The American experience in war has generated most of the research available and shows similar results. Minor discrepancies in statistical data are not important. The level of maturity and attention provided to the medical condition of the soldiers should be our main effort outside of winning our wars. As leaders we are responsible to train them to do our bidding. We are also charged with the responsibility to manage our "human" resources on the battle space with the technical and tactical expertise sufficiently to complete our mission objectives whilst expending fewest possible resources. Leaders are then required to regenerate our soldiers following operations, so that we can again lead them into whatever tasks our Government orders us to conduct. The post-conflict care is key to the successful recycling of these resources back into the fight. As such we have integrated post-conflict training specifically focused on the mind of the soldier. Col(US) Castro and Walter Reed's work on a program called "Battlemind"[101] is aimed at soldiers deploying to and returning from the war zone. Although it was developed for the US soldier it is easily adopted for a Canadian based on our shared basic cultures. This program is being introduced to the CF and is part of every returning unit's decompression training enroute home from Afghanistan but it is not used for pre-deployment training as

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[99] Chizh IM. "The First Priorities of Medical Service." *Mil Med J* 1997; No. 7,. 11.

[100] Razduev V. "'Save Scorched Souls.'" *Orienteer*. 1996; No. 7,. 43-45.

of yet. This program is a good beginning since it is focused on assisting with a soldier's transition back to duty after a significant incident or from a combat environment. It shows the shift in importance the soldier's mental state is to the chain of command. This is an important growth in the CF. Since we receive very little psychology training pre-conflict, initiatives like post-conflict reintegration training can be viewed as trivial when it is the first time the soldiers have been subjected to these concepts.

Education is another important factor to our training philosophy and way ahead. There is research that suggests that relatively uneducated soldiers were more likely to report higher levels of anxiety than educated ones.[102] This same observation came from the Lebanon and Israeli war. Another reason why education is so important is that the technical skill sets of the soldier such as firing his/her weapon or decision making are impaired as a result of stress in combat and therefore it is important for them to understand that they may perform differently as well.[103] As a result of this linkage, there are recommendations that the US places the psychology of combat as a module in their leadership continuation training process.[104] I would suggest that given the small size of our training institutions and the number of combat veterans we already have within the CF, the integration of a psychology course and the buy-in from the chain of command would be relatively simplistic and supported.

As a result of my readings and reflection on my own experiences, I have found recurring themes and areas that need more research. I do not protest to be an expert and

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[101] Castro, Colonel Carl A., Reed, Walter., "Battlemind Psychological Debriefing", Department of Military Psychiatry, Walter Reed Army Institute of Research (WRAIR), 20 Feb 07.
[102] Helmus, Todd C., Glenn Russell W., *Steeling the Mind: Combat Stress Reactions and Their Implications for Urban Warfare*,.25.

[103] *Ibid*,. 97.

sincerely hope that many of the following questions/ and ideas raised have already been answered. What it does show is that much of this analysis was done so through my self-study and interest in making my soldiers stronger should I be given the opportunity to command again. These do not come from my professional education but from my personal study and as such, needs attention by the chain of command.

QUESTIONS AND CONCEPTS FOR FURTHER STUDY

1. The Chain of command must ensure the CF is better prepared for Combat (to include pre-combat/training) and post-conflict insofar as the psychology of killing and combat. Is this happening now?

2. What are the effects of dehumanizing/demonizing in a COIN environment? Should we use this method of training in this environment or not? Does it matter?

3. How does dehumanizing the enemy help in COIN, or is it counter productive given the relationships forged in the conduct of non-lethal operations? Does this replace ethics/moral training? How do Commanders see both concepts or is it something that soldiers just does, perhaps to provide personal justification for their actions?

4. Intimacy of combat – we need to begin to openly encourage soldiers to discuss these issues so that all can benefit from their experiences. There is a requirement to engage in mature and educated discussion as a Chain of Command

5. Question to academic/military - does COIN equate to "Combat" as is studied? Much of the existing post-WW writings refer to combat statistics, if COIN does not equate to combat then are these figures valuable to assess the way we ought to approach killing and combat? If not, then do we have a database that is substantial enough to generate our own conclusions? What parallels are there to the two?

6. The rotation of soldiers within the three main engagement bands (Close, Mid, Long Range) whilst in combat needs both Academic and Military debate. In addition to rotation out of battle, the Chain of Command must manage his/her resources on the battlefield and therefore what ought we to do? Is there a linkage to the research that could assist with this?

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[104] *Ibid*,. 124.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that the CF has not done enough to prepare the soldiers psychologically for killing. By using my personal experiences, I tried to articulate the complexities of the modern battlefield, not from a tactical perspective, but from the human experience and the challenges facing soldiers in combat. I also demonstrated that there is a distinct emotional connection between the soldier and his/her foe. Using this personal perspective there can only be the psychological impact of killing. Although the Ombudsman's report has marked many great improvements and suggestions for the way ahead, it shows that the CF is not yet taken OSI or the psychology of killing to heart since we have been engaged in Afghanistan since 2001 yet the most recent report has shown no real action taken to date.

Further, through the emphasis placed on the ethical and moral perspectives, I have shown that soldiers need to understand the implications of their actions. To simplify the process I have recommended that ethical training be an important part of preparing soldiers to kill in a COIN theatre. Regardless of which ethical or moral framework adopted, the CF needs to ensure that this part of our training and understanding is inherent to every soldier deploying on operations so that they can mitigate the stresses or confusions caused by their actions.

While expanding on the OSI debate, I have shown how we can forecast potential numbers of casualties based on historical and other nation's experiences as well as the statistical estimation of psychological casualties as a result of Afghanistan. Also, I have highlighted the key role that the leadership plays in assisting with both mitigation and treating the OSI itself. All of these topics were examined to ensure that the implications

for trainers and our leadership could be uncovered. Clearly we are not doing enough to prepare the soldier and there is much to do to improve our system. Using myself as an example, I have recognized the gaps in my professional training and preparation for combat and I hope that future combat leaders are better prepared. It is clear that this topic is not highly published by Canadian authors. "On Killing is the only major source to detail at length the subject of killing as ordinarily required in combat, not just atrocity, as a source of PTSD".[105] As such, I have identified areas that need further refinement and research based on the finite limitations of this paper as well as the knowledge base that exists at this particular time. This is a challenge that I give to the Canadian academic and military community to continue to address. I do believe that this topic as a whole is being seen in a much more mature way which is a step in the right direction.

This paper is the product of my personal reflection and study, which I felt compelled to do in order to understand my own experiences in Afghanistan. I hope that the ideas and observations that I have put forward act as a catalyst for future meaningful and open debate on this subject. I fully understand that not all of my observations may not be popular or accepted by all however the thoughts in this paper reflect my experiences and I wish to place them in the public domain for others to consider and perhaps debate. By bringing these ideas into the open and learning from them, I believe that we will be better able to prepare future soldiers and leaders for combat. The goal of this paper has been to ensure that those soldiers committed to training for, conducting, or redeploying from combat operations have additional tools to assist them with the challenges that they will face. Their leadership is responsible to ensure that they get it.

[105] Rachel M. MacNair, *Perpetration-Induced Traumatic Stress* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002)., 14.

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