



A Brief Military Culture Overview

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The Differences between Military and Civilian Cultures

ASPECTS OF MILITARY CULTURE AND LIFE

Uniformity

Teamwork

Anonymity

Camaraderie

Depersonalization

Stoicism

Expendability

Loneliness

Hard Work

Trust

Boredom

Orderliness

MILITARY CULTURE vs. CIVILIAN CULTURE

Military: Collective

Part of a tight knit, cohesive group/unit achievement

The unit's goals are always placed ahead of one's personal goals

Emotionally invested in the group/unit

Civilian: Individualistic

Emphasis is on individual

Self-Reliance by western standards

- In the civilian sector, people's jobs are what they do. In the military one's job is a profound characterization of identity among their peers/unit/etc.
- For both military members and their families, military life provides a great sense of community as well as distinctly structured expectations, rules and, guidelines.

MILITARY CULTURE vs. CIVILIAN CULTURE (Cont.)

- As a civilian, a person's boss has authority over that person while they are at work, but in the military, a service member's boss (commander) has authority over almost all aspects of their life even when the service member has a "day off." Commanders in the military are responsible for their subordinates' conduct on and off duty. For example, a service member's commander may be notified if the service member gets drunk, bounces a check, has a fight with their spouse, if their children are going hungry, or if they get in trouble with the law.
- A common saying or mindset in the military is "never assume. If you don't know, then ask." Particularly in a combat situation, if a service member assumes something and they are wrong, someone very well could be killed. For example, if the service member assumes that they know where all of their troops are on the battlefield during a firefight but never asks to confirm their troop's actual location, they take a great chance of committing fratricide or engaging their own troops with friendly fire.

Important Note- Some veterans and military personnel feel that the only people who will understand them are other veterans/military, especially those who have experienced combat during their military service. However, this certainly does not mean that all veterans/military feel this way, nor does it mean that veterans/military cannot be helped by people who have not served in the military.

ADDRESSING A SERVICE MEMBER

- Army = Soldier
- Navy = Sailor
- Marine Corps = Marine
- Air Force = Airman
- Coast Guard = Coast Guardsman/Guardian

(Hickman, n.d.)

OFFICERS vs. NCO

Commissioned Officers (O-1 through O-10, 14%): plan, lead, organize, requires at least a bachelors degree

Warrant Officers (W-1 through W-5, 2%): highly specialized experts in specific fields (I.E. maintenance, aviation, logistics)

Enlisted (E-1 through E-9, 84%): execute assigned tasks given to them by superiors, perform specific duties and job functions

Non Commissioned Officers (NCOs): implement, lead, train/teach (also enlisted, E-4 and above)

(Hsu, 2010), (Abb, Goodale, & Moyer, n.d)

Military Values System

MILITARY VALUES

Each branch of the United States military has its own set of core values that the members of that branch are expected to live by. From the first day that a new recruit enters into military service these values are introduced and then taught and enforced on a daily basis. Though each branch's core values vary slightly, their purposes are the same; to establish a standard of expectations, conduct, and governance over the service member's life.

The military values philosophy is one of many factors that set members of the United States military apart from their civilian counterparts. These values define how the service members live their lives, make decisions both on and off the battlefield, as well as overcome daily challenges and adversity. Their purpose is to promote strong character and increase the morale and welfare of the force.

MILITARY VALUES (Cont.)

Army

Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage (LDRSHIP)

Navy and Marine Corps

Honor, Courage, and Commitment

Air Force

Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All We Do

Coast Guard

Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty

In addition to the values established by each branch of the military, service members tend to follow and/or live by a few principles or ways of thought (some written, some unwritten):

- **Unit Cohesion**- Much regard and respect for comrades and leadership. Always a desire to contribute to the success of the mission and unit
- **Concern for Reputation**- Fear of disappointing and/or breaking the trust of superiors as well as comrades. Always a desire to contribute to the success of the mission
- **Never Leave a Man Behind**- That goes for on the battlefield and at the local bar
- **Stoicism**- Controlling emotions; the inability to do this could be a sign of weakness

(Rodriguez, 2012), (Halvorson, 2010)

Components

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN ACTIVE DUTY, NATIONAL GUARD AND RESERVE

Active Duty: Full-time service members in the military who are stationed all around the world. Service members and their family live on or nearby a military base and may be deployed or asked to move at any time.

National Guard: The National Guard is federally funded but is organized and controlled by the state. It contains part-time members who can be deployed overseas if needed, but are usually used for domestic matters. They are called in to help during natural disasters and emergencies. It is important to note: civilian providers should ask these individuals about their experiences providing support for domestic crises, such as natural disasters.

Reserve: Each branch of the military has a Reserve, which contains part-time members who usually serve one weekend a month and two weeks a year. The Reserve has trained units and qualified people to be available for Active Duty if needed. The main job of the Reserves is to fill in gaps when Active Duty is deployed overseas.

(Halvorson, 2010), (National Center for PTSD, 2012)

Stress in the Military

POTENTIAL SOURCES OF STRESS

- **Deploying**- Leaving family, loved ones, children, friends, girlfriend or boyfriend, etc.
- **Ultimate Change**- Climate, diet, living arrangements, losing personal freedoms, etc.

The Unknown- Particularly for veterans of the Vietnam War and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, identifying who the actual enemy is on the battlefield can be extremely difficult and sometimes impossible. Due to the nature of these wars, less conventional when compared to previous conflicts, (World Wars I and II for example) it is difficult to separate enemy combatants from the civilian population. In Iraq and Afghanistan, enemy forces or enemy threats can essentially consist of anyone in the general population. Though most often including military aged males, women, children, and the elderly can and do pose mortal threat.

(Hickman, n.d.)

STRESSORS RELATED TO COMBAT EXPOSURE

- Being attacked or ambushed
- Receiving incoming rocket, artillery and/or mortar fire
- Being shot at or receiving small arms fire
- Shooting or directing fire at the enemy
- Seeing dead or seriously injured personnel (including women and children)
- Knowing someone seriously injured or killed
- Close calls, was shot or hit but protective gear saved them
- Clearing/searching homes and buildings
- Arresting/detaining suspected enemy
- Engaging the enemy while still following the Rules of Engagement (ROE)

Important Note- Troops often use slang as a way to cope with some of the stressors listed above. The derogatory terms are used to dehumanize the enemy in order to make killing them less traumatic in the moment. Troops will use phrases such as Wasted, Zapped, Rocked, Greased, Took him out, Capped, Iced, Popped, Waxed, Blasted, Double Tapped, Opened Up on Them (usually in reference to a fully automatic machine gun), etc. This type of desensitizing humor is used frequently among those exposed to death and killing for long periods. Addressing out-of-context use of these terms and others is sometimes necessary. Such interventions must include careful consideration for their intended purpose, and avoid shame.

POTENTIAL NONCOMBAT STRESSORS IN A COMBAT ZONE

There are other stressors in a combat zone than just combat itself.

- **Physical Taxation-** Daily duties outside of direct combat such as long hours conducting vehicle and equipment maintenance, equipment accountability, nearly impossible to meet time sensitive deadlines, etc. These tasks become day-in day-out efforts that are often extremely tedious and frustrating. Also, they are often expected to be accomplished in units that lack the necessary man power.
- **Boredom-** Filling time between direct combat operations, patrols, non-direct combat duties and tasks, etc. Each day can feel just like the last, and the next day will be very much of the same.
- **Lack of Control-** While deployed to a theater of combat, service members have far less control over their lives then they do when they are stateside. They are almost always restricted to their forward operating bases (FOBs) unless they are conducting combat operations or patrols. This extremely limits their choices of food, entertainment, privacy, recreation, etc.
- **Sense of Accomplishment-** In a theatre of combat, operation and work tempos are greatly increased compared to those on base in the U.S. As a result, the efforts and accomplishments of individual service members may go unnoticed by both peers and superiors.

POTENTIAL NONCOMBAT STRESSORS IN A COMBAT ZONE (Cont.)

- **Home-** While deployed service members often worry about the state of affairs back home. During the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, military personnel generally have direct/instant access to their families via email, telephone, social media, etc. This “instant access” can have both positive and negative effects on the service member.

Positive- Support from family, friends, etc.

Negative- Problems occurring at home now become immediate problems to the service member in addition to the ones he/she may already be facing while deployed.

- **Living Conditions-** Cramped, overcrowded, dirty, poor air quality, uncomfortable sleeping arrangements, no personal privacy, noisy, smelly, etc.
- **Working Conditions-** Often less than ideal environment, limited safety and access to properly functioning equipment, or proper equipment in general.
- **Environment-** During a deployment, climate, altitude, weather patterns, precipitation, etc may vary widely from home.

(Halvorson, 2010), (Hickman, n.d.)

POST DEPLOYMENT STRESS

- **Fantasy vs. Reality-** Both the service member and their family members have fantasized expectations about how things will be when the deployment is over. There are readjustments in many aspects of life for both service members and their families. Throughout the deployment, the family of the service member has had to make do without them. For the service member, they have become accustomed to life without their family. Not only have to readjust to life with their family but they must also adjust to life without their “surrogate family” (members of their unit).
- **Reverse Separation Anxiety-** When service members come home they may need to adjust to not carrying their weapon and/or being with their unit 24/7.
- **Reassignments-** Upon returning from a deployment overseas, many members of military units are reassigned to other units or bases, thus leaving behind those with whom they deployed.

(Hickman, n.d.)

CHALLENGES WHEN TRANSITIONING FROM COMBAT TO HOME

Combat

- Cohesion with buddies
- Accountability and control
- Targeted aggression
- Tactical awareness
- Lethally armed
- Emotional control
- Non-defensive driving
- Discipline and obeying orders

Home

- Withdrawal from others
- Lack of control
- Inappropriate aggression
- Hypervigilance
- “Locked and loaded” at home
- Detached and uncaring
- Aggressive driving
- Giving orders leads to conflict (no clear “chain of command”)

(Hsu, 2010)

WHY SERVICE MEMBERS MAY NOT SEEK HELP

- The belief that any psychological issues within themselves or others is a sign of weakness.
- Fear that expressing an emotional reaction may be confronted with, "suck it up" or "get over it".
- Fear that emotional reactions and/or seeking help will negatively impact their careers.
- Fear that their commander having will have complete access to mental health records.
- A command climate that discourages getting help.

(Army Behavioral Health, 2013)

PTSD: POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Post-Traumatic Stress is a strong emotional reaction to traumatic events. We all experience post-traumatic stress during our lives but are usually able to reduce the reactions once the danger is gone. When someone is not able to reduce their own reactions to the past event(s), that person may be at risk for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Diagnostic Criteria:

- Re-Experiencing: Intrusive thoughts of trauma, nightmares, flashbacks, physical/psychological distress/reactivity to similar events
- Avoidance/Numbing: Avoiding thoughts, feelings, conversations, people, places, activities that remind of trauma
- Hyper-arousal: difficulty sleeping, irritability, difficulty concentrating, hypervigilance, startle response

Consequences of PTSD:

- Higher risk of other psychiatric disorders, including depression and substance abuse
- Functional impairment
- Risk for poor health

PTSD: POST-TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER

Stress Responses:

- Resistance: Being immune
- Recovery: A period of dysfunction, then a gradual return to wellness
- Resilience: “bouncing back”
- Chronic Dysfunction: Initial stress reaction, which persists

Some Treatment Options:

- Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy: Prolonged Exposure (PE) and Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT)
- Pharmacological: Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs)

(Watson, 2009)

TBI: TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY

A Traumatic Brain Injury, TBI, is defined by the Department of Defense as a traumatically induced structural injury and/or physiological disruption of brain function as a result of an external force. A TBI may cause impaired cognitive abilities, physical function, and behavioral or emotional function. According to a report by the Congressional Research Service, there have been 253,330 TBI cases in the military between 2000 and 2012.

Diagnostic Criteria:

- Loss of or decreased level of consciousness
- Loss of memory
- Change in mental state: Confusion, disorientation, etc.
- Neurological deficiencies: weakness, loss of balance, sensory loss, etc.
- Intracranial lesion

TBI: TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY (Cont.)

Leading Military Causes of TBI:

- Blasts
- Fragments
- Bullets
- Motor vehicle crashes
- Falls

Symptoms:

- Headaches, dizziness, sensitivity or lights/noises
- Hearing problems/ringing ears
- Change in sleep patterns/tiredness
- Loss of balance and strength
- Slowness in thinking, speaking, reading
- Difficulty organizing tasks and making decisions
- Inappropriate reactions
- Depression/anxiety
- Avoidance of people or activities

TBI: TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY (Cont.)

Some Treatment Options:

- Rehabilitation: Psychiatric care, physical therapy, occupational therapy, vocational counseling, etc.
- Surgery: removing blood clots, repairing skull fractures
- Pharmacological: Diuretics, Anti-seizure drugs

(Act One, n.d.), (Defense Centers of Excellence, 2010), (Fischer, 2013), (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2012)

Talking to Military Personnel and Veterans

THE DOs AND DON'Ts

DO:

- Thank veterans for their service
- Keep the politics out
- Be mindful and curious of what branch of service member was in
- Be curious of their lives outside of the military
- Let veterans tell you their story when they are ready and respect their process

DON'T:

- Ask when you first meet a veteran, “Did your friends die?” or “Did you see people die?” or “Did you kill anyone?” or “How was it over there?”
- Don't assume every service member was in combat
- Make assumptions about someone's military career. Remember that the service member is the expert in his/her own military career.

POSSIBLE QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Has anyone else in your family been in the military?
- Tell me about your military experience.
- When and where do you / did you serve?
- What unit were you in?
- What do you / did you do while in the service?
- How has military service affected you?

In reference to any of the above, "Can you tell me more about that?"

- Did you see combat, enemy fire, or casualties?
- Were you or a buddy wounded, injured or hospitalized?
- Did you ever become ill while you were in the service?
- Were you a prisoner of war?

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