

- "Debrief" the unit after a hard action to:
 - Have everyone tell what they saw and did.
 - Reconstruct and agree on what really happened.
 - Resolve any misunderstandings and mistrust.
 - Let feelings be expressed and accepted as normal.
 - Focus positively on lessons learned.
- Get soldier with home front problems to talk them out; watch reactions after mail call & give emotional support.

LEADER ACTIONS FOR "MORE SERIOUS" BATTLE FATIGUE SIGNS

- If soldier's behavior endangers the mission, self or others, do whatever you must to control him or her.
- If soldier is upset, calmly try to talk him or her into cooperating; if unsuccessful, use superior numbers.
- If concerned about soldier's reliability:
 - Unload soldier's weapon.
 - Take weapon only if seriously concerned.
 - Physically restrain soldier only when necessary for safety or transportation.
- Reassure everyone that the signs are probably just battle fatigue and will get better quickly.

NOTE: Even seemingly very serious battle fatigue signs can improve in minutes if handled correctly on the spot.

- If "more serious" signs continue:
 - Get soldier to a safer place.
 - Don't leave alone; keep him with someone he knows.
 - Tell your senior NCO or officer.
 - Have soldier examined by medic, especially if there could be a physical cause for the symptoms.
- If your leader and medic decide the soldier doesn't need to be sent away for rest or medical exam (or can't be):
 - Treat same as for normal, common signs (if possible).
 - Be sure to warm soldier up if weather is cold (or cool and wet), or cool soldier off if overheated.
 - Make sure soldier eats, drinks, sleeps (4 to 12+ hr).
 - Encourage him to talk in team debrief; give support.
 - Assign to group tasks which he or she can do well.
 - Reassign to full duty and responsibility when able.
 - Have leader or medic check again if doesn't improve.

IF YOUR LEADER OR MEDIC DECIDE TO SEND THE SOLDIER FOR REST IN A SUPPORTING UNIT OR TO BE CHECKED BY A PHYSICIAN:

- Tell soldier you are counting on him or her to get rested and come back quickly.
- Encourage teammates to express trust and confidence.

LEADER ACTIONS FOR A MODERATELY BATTLE FATIGUED SOLDIER SENT TO YOUR UNIT FOR REST (AS A TEMPORARY ADDITION)

- Integrate into your unit as a newcomer:
 - Evaluate, give orientation, introduce to everyone.
 - Assign buddies (pick good listeners).
 - Get necessary gear, or share what the team has.
- Treat same as for common Battle Fatigue in your team:
 - Reassurance, food, sleep; have soldier clean self up.
 - Expect normal discipline and rank distinctions.
 - Send to sick call with other soldiers, if needed.
 - Assign to work details and include in recreation.
 - Get soldier to talk about his or her experiences.
- Maintain expectation of return to own unit (if possible).
- If soldier doesn't improve, or shows more serious signs, tell senior officer or NCO & send for medical evaluation.

LEADER ACTIONS TO ENSURE SUCCESSFUL RETURN TO DUTY

- Visit the soldier in the rest area, if you can.
- Welcome the soldier back and put him or her to work:
 - Assign increasingly responsible duties.
 - Talk openly about what happened before.
 - Convey confidence in the soldier and your unit.

OTHER LEADER ACTIONS TO PREVENT BATTLE FATIGUE CASUALTIES

- Integrate new replacements quickly; assign buddies; get to know each personally (and make sure team does, too).
- Assure physical fitness (strength, endurance & agility).
- Lead tough, combat—realistic training; impart unit pride.
- Your "Leader Actions for Battle Fatigue" reduce losses!

BATTLE FATIGUE

'MORE SERIOUS' SIGNS;

LEADER ACTIONS



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CONTROLLING BATTLE FATIGUE IS BASIC GOOD LEADERSHIP

To accomplish your team's mission in combat, in either low or high intensity conflict, you must help your soldiers to withstand the extreme stresses of war. Tough, realistic training will help a lot, but in war, real enemies will be trying to kill you or stress you until you break. Winning may require your team to push continuously, under terrible conditions, to limits far beyond those you've ever reached before. At other times you may face only tension, waiting, loneliness and boredom.

Whether your unit has a combat, combat support or combat service support mission, your soldiers (and you) may still have battle fatigue. This can happen even when not under direct attack. Physical and mental signs of normal, common battle fatigue and how to live with them are outlined in GTA 21-3-4 (Battle Fatigue; What To Do for self & buddy). You, as leader, need to teach that. You also need to know the "more serious" signs and leader actions outlined here.

WHY YOU SHOULD CALL IT "BATTLE FATIGUE"

- A natural result of heavy mental/emotional work, facing danger in tough conditions. Like physical fatigue:
 - It depends on level of fitness, experience, training.
 - It can come on quickly or slowly, depending on pace.
 - It gets better with rest and replenishment.
- Sleep loss, discomfort, physical wear and fatigue are often also involved, but don't have to be.
- We need to use a simple, common sense name for this natural, common condition, to remind us that it is not a medical or psychiatric illness.
- We can use the name "Stress Fatigue" for the same signs in situations with high stress but no actual combat.

NORMAL, COMMON SIGNS OF BATTLE FATIGUE (Review)

* Physical Signs

- Tension head and back ache, trembling, fumbling, jumpy.
- Pain in old, healed wounds before combat.
- Pounding heart; may breathe too rapidly.
- Upset stomach (may vomit); diarrhea; frequent urination.
- Emptying bowels and bladder at instant of danger.
- Fatigue, weariness; distant, haunted ("1,000 yard") stare.

* Mental & Emotional Signs

- Anxiety, worrying; irritability, swearing, complaining.
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, communicating.
- Awakened by bad dreams; grieving; feeling guilty.
- Anger at own team; losing confidence in self and unit.

- * Many soldiers have these signs, yet still fight well and perform all essential duties.

"MORE SERIOUS" BATTLE FATIGUE SIGNS

- Warning signs which deserve special action, but do NOT necessarily mean a "casualty" who must be evacuated.
- Even the normal, common signs become "more serious" if:
 - They still disrupt the mission after you take action.
 - They don't improve somewhat after good rest.
 - The soldier is acting very differently from the way he or she usually does.

MORE SERIOUS PHYSICAL SIGNS

- Can't keep still; constantly moving around.
- Flinching or ducking at most sudden sounds and movement.
- Shaking (of arms or whole body); cowering in terror.
- Part of body won't work right, with no physical reason:
 - Can't use hand, or arm, or legs.
 - Can't see (or hear, or feel), partially or at all.
- Freezing under fire, or prolonged, total immobility.
- Physical exhaustion; slowed down, just stands or sits.
- Vacant stare, "spaced out"; staggers, sways when stands.

"MORE SERIOUS" MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL SIGNS

- Rapid talking; constantly making suggestions.
- Arguing, starting fights; deliberately reckless action.
- Inattention to self-care, hygiene; indifference to danger.
- Memory loss:
 - For orders; for military skills; for a bad event;
 - For time, place, what's going on; or for everything.
- Severe stuttering, mumbling, can't speak at all.
- Afraid to fall asleep for fear of terror dreams, danger; unable to stay asleep even in a safe area.
- Seeing or hearing things which aren't really there.
- Rapid emotional shifts; crying spells; wishing was dead.
- Social withdrawal; silent or sulking; prolonged sadness.
- Apathetic; no interest in food or anything else.
- "Hysterical" outburst, frantic or strange behavior.
- Panic running under fire.

LEADER ACTIONS FOR COMMON (& MORE SERIOUS) BATTLE FATIGUE

- Set the example of calmness while feeling normal fear.
- Know your job well; keep team focused on the mission; get everyone to think and talk about succeeding.
- Assign an easy task to a soldier showing battle fatigue.
- Remind tense soldiers to use quick relaxing techniques.
- Remind everyone that battle fatigue is normal:
 - Others have it, too (even you).
 - Encourage friendly joking about it.
- Stay in touch with every team member (roll call); keep them talking; stay in contact with leader & other teams.
- Keep everyone informed:
 - Explain the situation and objectives.
 - Don't hide unpleasant possibilities, but put them in the perspective of how the team will handle them.
 - Tell what supports are expected, but prepare team for the unexpected.
 - Explain reversals and delays in support positively.
 - Control rumors; get true facts from your leaders.
- Rotate soldiers' jobs, when you can, to share hardship and danger fairly; this may require prior cross-training.
- Assure best possible buddy/lifesaver/medic aid and rapid evacuation of your wounded (and respect for your dead).
- When tactical mission and safety permit, have team:
 - Drink from canteens; prepare hot or cool drinks.
 - Pass around snacks; prepare food and share it.
 - Dry off, cool down or warm up (if needed).
 - Clean up (wash, shave, change; clean weapons).
 - Use rapid relaxation techniques to "unwind".
 - Stay away from alcohol overuse or drug use.
 - Keep busy (maintenance, recreation) if not resting.
- Never waste a chance for sleep (all in turn including you)
 - By SOP: safe from accidents, vehicles, enemy attack.
 - 4+ hours if at all possible (6 to 10+ hours ideally).
 - Even 15-30 minute catnaps help, but the soldier may be temporarily groggy on awakening.