

The Reality of Combat!



The Psychological Conditioning, Reaction, Consequences and Sacrifices of Real Combat By US Marine Danny Lane

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Have you ever wondered what it would be like to be in combat? In this article I wish to convey my own personal feelings and experiences of the mental transformations before, during and after real combat situations. I'll suggest a psychological attitude that every warrior should develop if you are going to physically survive during and psychologically survive after the combat missions are over. The physical techniques are secondary to the mindset of the combatant.

What you consider in this article as right or wrong, correct or incorrect, can only be determined by yourself. You can translate this reference of my work any way you want.

I credit these mental philosophies in helping me function in a high stress situation with a positive frame of mind, achieve a positive outcome and cope with my own personal setbacks and failures.

Yes America, we are sacrificing young men and women's lives for the freedom of our future generations.

It is not widely understood that the lives of all combat veterans are changed forever once they have entered the combat zone and "walked through the valley of death," even if they survive it.

Sadly, what is not understood by the general public and the veteran's family are the survivors of war continue to suffer the rest of their life. The physical wounds are secondary to the mental scars.

Ask any combat veteran and they will tell you the toughest battles they have ever fought were the ones within after they came home. The war within their own minds and having to deal with the atrocities of war can and often do last a lifetime. Mine has.

To understand what I am talking about, it is first necessary to understand the "**Rules of War**" and the "**Psychological Transformations**" the human mind must go through and understand in order to carry out the necessary missions and objectives they are given in combat.

Death: Death is a fact of life, and although it may seem to run counter to moral standards, death inflicted with intent is also a fact of life. At times a man is forced to kill or be killed, in order to defend his family, country, or society in the case of military soldiers and law enforcement officers.

Killing: Killing, as you know is considered wrong by every natural and cultural instinct possessed by man. To deliberately take the life of another human being requires extreme conditioning on the psychological level as well as the conditioning achieved through concentrated physical training. All life is precious, but there are times when a man must wreak destruction on other men.

If you ever encounter this type of situation, you will know as I did when, where, and the time and place that justifies the slaying of another human being. Sometimes, the choice is not ours to make.

Conflict is essential to the development of man and society. It leads either to the construction or destruction of a man or an entire group. If you do not understand the need for conflict, then you should not be in a position of authority over others. If there is no conflict internal or external there can be no growth. The resolution of your affairs forces personal development. However, conflict does not always mean physical combat. You must see the need for battle if you wish to develop your own cause on any level, but ***you should not fight a battle if you cannot foresee winning the war.***

Mindset! How do we train to create the mind set needed to possibly take another person's life? And, how do we create a mindset that, if necessary, to suffer the loss of one's own life?

First, proper physical and mental training is essential since it arms you with the tools and knowledge needed to carry out and survive a combat situation. That combative mind set can be developed through well disciplined, rigorous training and by gaining confidence in these abilities and skills. The combatant then has to subconsciously program themselves through meditation and visualization to react without hesitation. The last and most important test of course, is the real combat experience itself.

In many ways, the battle has a life of it's own. You cannot know if you will be successful. You can only prepare for battle and it must be done with all of your heart and with all of your consciousness. In that manner you will have the edge. Being unprepared will bring about defeat unless you are truly exceptional, and there are very few who fit that description.

It is foolish to fight a battle that you cannot win, and you cannot win unless you have properly prepared and planned to win.

Fate, which is based on your true desire, will determine the outcome of the conflict according to the extent of your own belief, fate and destiny.

Speaking of fate and destiny, since childhood I had dreams and premonitions of going to war, fighting for my country, and coming home a hero. I used to watch Audie Murphy and John Wayne World War II movies. I had a real German helmet from World War II and wore it as I played (especially during BB Gun Fights).

My fantasies met reality in 1968 when I enlisted in the Marine Corps and volunteered for Vietnam. In the Marine Corps boot camp at Parris Island, SC, I grew from a boy to a man overnight. We were trapped in that hell hole Island being physically and mentally tortured beyond belief not knowing the worst was yet to come in "Nam" only a few months later.

At night, while we laid in our beds with the lights out, our drill instructors lectured us on the reality of war. They said *"Look around ladies, many of you men are going to be dead in a few months. That's what Marines do. They die for their country"*. Gunny Plummer said even if we trained hard and made all the right decisions, fate may still take its course and we may still die.

Those were some shocking words but they were right. I didn't know much about "fate" then but I do now. I, however, trained extremely hard so I could battle death and cheat destiny if it was in my cards. You see, I planned on making it back from that war alive.

The fact is, no matter how much we prepare physically for combat if we aren't conditioned spiritually, psychologically, emotionally and mentally we may self-destruct from fear of dying or guilt with living.

Was I prepared to kill or die after only 6 months of Marine Corps training and mental conditioning? I thought so. But, I didn't know for sure because I had never done either. I hoped so. I had dreamed about it since was a kid. But I had self-doubts just like everyone else. No one knows for sure how we're going to react until the time comes. But, I would soon find out.

Rules of Combat:

1. The morality of the combat is essential to the outcome of the combat. You must know exactly what it is you wish to accomplish and why. And, you must believe it is justified.
2. The atmosphere and the attitude of the combatant are most important!
3. Are you capable of standing alone when necessary and making decisions that can determine the outcome?
4. If you are a leader, do you have influence with those you lead?
5. Will you do whatever necessary to accomplish your goals, irrespective of the feelings or lives of others who may otherwise wish you harm?

In Vietnam, my unit fought in battles constantly for our very lives. We unfortunately killed men, women and yes, even children without having the choice to let them live. Such is the reality of war. In war, life is wasted without hesitation. The question of right and wrong is never asked or answered by the combatants. A soldier's duty is to kill and survive to kill again. War is one of the places that these techniques are morally proper, but not the sole place.

I made it back from "Nam" cheating death hundreds of times. I lived in the jungle on operations more than 300 days of the 400 days I was there. There was a hundred other ways to die in that hell hole besides being killed by Charlie. It wasn't my fate to die there like 59,000 others. I was however wounded several times and seen hundreds of our own men go down beside me, along with thousands of the enemy.

My destiny was to continue, like in my dreams, to come home to a hero's welcome. But, I would find out I was wrong! There were no marching bands, parades, nor a large crowd welcoming us home when I walked off the air craft carrier, USS Iwo Jima, in San Diego. In fact, I had been to war and killed for my country, but I was not old enough to even buy a beer in California. Somehow, that just didn't seem right, but what the hell, I bought a fake ID with two AK-47's I got in battle from the NVA. But, it was great being back in the USA and not in a body bag. Little did I know the hardest battles of the war were yet to come...in my mind.

The Consequences of Combat : Traumatic experiences shake the foundations of our beliefs, and shatter our assumptions of trust. Because they are so far outside what we would expect, these events provoke reactions that feel strange and crazy. Perhaps the most helpful thing I can say here is that even though these reactions are unusual and disturbing, they are typical and normal for a combat veteran. These are normal responses to abnormal events.

I didn't know realize that the traumatic experiences I suffered in combat in Vietnam, as well as twenty five more years as a cop, bodyguard and security expert had changed who I really was. My whole personality had changed from when I was as a kid, but I didn't see it. Everyone around me did though. I was suffering from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and didn't officially know it for 15 years after my return from combat. The Veteran's Administration didn't acknowledge the problem with returning veterans until 1983. It has been reported that as many as 60,000 combat veterans from Vietnam have committed suicide. The American Legion reports that 22 veterans die from suicide everyday. VA studies reveal more than 11 percent of Vietnam Veterans still suffer from PTSD forty years after their return. I am one of those veterans.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is the most common diagnostic category used to describe symptoms arising from emotionally traumatic experiences. I have experienced them for the past 46 years.

First, you will often feel edgy, irritable, easily startled, and constantly on guard: the Vietnam veteran or cop always sits with his back to a wall, sleeps poorly, is agitated and finds it difficult to concentrate. These symptoms are described as hyper alertness or hyper arousal.

Second set of symptoms is called intrusion. This is where you involuntarily re-experience the traumatic event in the form of memories, nightmares, and flashbacks during which you feel or even act as

though the event were recurring. In my situation I suffered numerous traumatic combat experiences and all of them came back to haunt me over the years.

When you are not suffering these involuntary reminders, we experience emotional constriction or numbing, a need to avoid feelings, thoughts, and situations reminiscent of the trauma, a loss of normal emotional responses, or both. Most of our feelings seem unreal and the ordinary business of life no longer matters. We feel cut off from the concerns of others and unable to trust them. It seems that the future holds nothing. At the same time we feel anger at those responsible for the traumatic experience, and ashamed of our own helplessness.

Sometimes, we feel guilty about what we did or failed to do. We become demoralized and isolated because of anger, guilt, shame, avoidance, and emotional numbing.

Seclusion is the most compelling symptom I suffered. I secluded myself from others that wanted or could help me. I RAN away anytime there was a conflict. I became afraid of myself. I didn't and couldn't show love, feel love or want love even from my children. I knew I loved them but couldn't feel the emotions of what any parent should have. My biggest regret and downfall in life is not being able to be a better loving father.

Adrenaline Rush! The adrenaline rush you get when you're in combat firing automatic weapons, rockets, throwing grenades and fighting hand to hand with the enemy is something that has to be experienced to explain it. The constant challenge of risk taking, overcoming death and defeating fear is embedded inside your brain. It never leaves when the battle stops. I seemed to strive on it and needed it to seem normal. I found myself putting myself in those situations just to experience the rush of the adrenaline again and the challenges of surviving and overcoming them. After my return from Vietnam I became a police officer and a martial arts fighter so that satisfied my adrenaline rush for the most part. It however wasn't near the rush as a fire fight in combat.

Addictions! The need for speed so to speak and the adrenaline rush was satisfied initially by me with working out in martial arts and kickboxing sometimes 4-6 hours a day. I needed to sweat and work out the demons that lurked inside my brain. I couldn't sleep unless I was totally exhausted. The action on the streets as a cop and competition in the ring in martial arts and kickboxing helped satisfy my need for about fifteen years but later in life came the other demons. I didn't do drugs (prescription) for obvious reasons because of my duty as a police officer, but I did drink excessively. I needed that to take the edge off each day and night so I could relax and maybe sleep 2-4 hours at most.

When I slowed down physically I began to gamble. That's right, I got my fix betting on football, basketball and baseball. Anything that bounced I bet on it. The excitement and the unknown was more what I needed instead of making money. I knew it was wrong but I viewed it as a victimless sin at that time. Once I accumulated some wealth I started doing day trading on the New York Stock Market. The rush of watching the ticker tape go by on the computer wondering if you were going to make or lose thousands of dollars a day was my fuel for excitement.

I also got into rock climbing and rappelling, riding my Harley at high speeds and other destruction and dangerous behavior. Was it the **(PTSD)** or just my personality you may ask? I know NOW it was the **(PTSD)** as I needed the need to satisfy and recreate the rush, the excitement and the conflict I needed.

Suicide: Several times over the years after the flash backs and facing the atrocities I saw and committed I felt the urge to check myself out of this world. I wanted to end the struggle by biting the bullet. Sitting in the dark, looking down the barrel of a 357 Magnum, drinking a last rum and Coke was the plan most times. But I realized that would be the chicken way out. I just wanted to rest and be at peace with myself again. I knew my legacy in life would be diminished should I exit that way, so I carried on and dealt with the pain.

Overcoming: The only way to overcome this mental struggle is understanding and love by those around you. Prescription Drugs, Street Drugs and Alcohol are NOT the answer. I spent more than 40 years going to treatments at the Veteran Hospital and came home with a prescription of drugs each time. Their answer to treating combat veterans were to medicate us. Finding a loving woman like my wife, Gina that listens, prays and understands what I went through was a miracle. Up to now, I remained silent and never discussed the atrocities of war with anyone. Asking forgiveness from God is also a must. It is NOT your fault you did what you did. You had a duty to serve and protect your country. You must let it go, or it

will destroy you and everyone around you. It almost did me. Put it in God's hands! He can handle anything! Pray daily and ask for strength to overcome.

Meditation and exercise are also crucial. You need to stay busy! You can beat it, I have for the most part. I am at the place NOW I can think of the atrocities and events and talk about them without reliving them. I am forgiven and I am set free of the guilt. It takes time and effort but it can and does work. Writing out your experiences and facing them are also great therapy as it has been for me. My book "Some Gave it All" coming out in 2017 will chronicle my war and police experiences and Dancing with the Devil all these years. I hope it can help veterans and survivors of PTSD overcome the devil and live a more normal life.

In conclusion, at the risk of sounding like a vigilante, I believe all men have a responsibility to the concept of justice, to protect our family, country, the weak and those vanquished by wrong.

Great men, men of courage and strength, are those who would risk their own safety to come to the aid of a victim. But, whether they are soldiers, police officers, or simply men of truth, they must be able to meet force with skill, power and "The Combative Mind Set" to Survive.

The next time you see a combat veteran or police officer look at them differently. When you say "thank you for your service" maybe you now really know what that means.

Thank God there are people in your world that are willing to sacrifice their lives for your freedom. You must understand that they are changed forever. They never come home the same person that left. I didn't!

"Some Gave Some & Some Gave it All"

There is a tremendous "*Price to Pay for Freedom*".

God Bless the brave men and women fighting to keep our country free.

God Bless America, Danny Lane
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