

# The Reality of Combat!

The Psychological Conditioning, Reaction and Consequences of Real Combat



By Danny Lane

Highly Decorated United States Marine Vietnam Veteran, Martial Arts Master 47 years, VIP Bodyguard and Retired Police Officer.

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 society with a positive frame of mind and cope with my setbacks, failures, facing destiny and conflicts.

Yes America, we are again at War and again 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 that have entered the combat zone and have "walked through the valley of death" whether they live or die.

Sadly, what is not understood by the general public and in most cases the veterans family and friends are that the survivors of War continue to be wounded for years and years to come if not their entire lifetime.

Ask any combat veteran and they will tell you that the toughest battles they ever fought were the ones within themselves, within their own minds and dealings with the atrocities of War after they come home.

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, and at others, a man must choose to kill in defense of family, country, or in the name of justice.

**Killing:** Killing, as you know is considered wrong by every natural and cultured 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 take hold of the sword and wreak destruction on other men.

You will know as I did when, where, 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 control and in the position you presume yourself to be in charge of.

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.

Being prepared for any eventuality by understanding the controls required to develop your own particular agenda are essential. 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.

How do we train to create the mind set needed to possibly take another person's life if necessary or worst yet possibly suffer their own death?

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 gaining confidence in your 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.

The reality of life and the attitudes of the fates also play an important role. You cannot know if you will be successful or not. 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 stupid to fight a battle that you cannot win, and you cannot win unless you have properly planned for it.

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 a premonition 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 all the time. I had a real German helmet from World War II and wore it all the time playing (especially during BB Gun Fights).

My fantasies meet 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.

I recall at night while we lay in our beds with the lights out our drill instructors lectured us on the reality of war. They said **"look around, many of you men are going to be dead in a few months, "God made Marines to die" and other choice words to shake us into the reality that some of us in that barracks at that very moment would be DEAD in a few months.**

My drill Instructor Staff Sergeant 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 and fate if it was in my cards. You see, I planned on making it back from that war alive. The Gunny told me when I graduated from Paris Island Boot Camp as I got on the bus to go to Camp Lejeune, NC Gunny told me "Lane, you will make it".

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. I didn't know for sure because I had never done neither. 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.

**Before engaging in Combat you must understand the Rules:**

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 is it 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 a leader, do you have control over those who wish to be in charge of you?
5. Will you do whatever is necessary to accomplish your goals, irrespective of the feelings or lives of others who may otherwise wish you harm?



In Vietnam, we fought for our very lives and killed men, women and yes even children we never knew without having the choice to let them live. Such is the reality of war, where 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, (or is it) but not the sole place.

I made it back from "Nam" after cheating death hundreds of times. It wasn't my fate to die there like 59,000 others. I was wounded two times and saw hundreds of our own men go down along with thousands of the enemy. My destiny was to continue, like in my dreams, to come home to a hero's welcome. But soon I would find out I was wrong! There was no marching bands, parades nor large crowd welcoming me 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 sold my two AK-47's I got in some battles and bought a fake id. But it was great to be back in the USA and not in a body bag. Little did I know the hardest battles of the war were yet to come.

**The Consequences of Combat** can and often do last a life time. Mine has. 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. By and large, these are normal responses to abnormal events. I didn't know until recent years that the traumatic experiences I suffered in combat in Vietnam and twenty years as a cop and bodyguard had changed who I really was. My whole personality had changed from when I was as a child and I didn't see it. Everyone around me did though. I was suffering from Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and didn't know it for 20 years. Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is the most common diagnostic category used to describe symptoms arising from emotionally traumatic experiences. I have experienced them all at one time or the other the past 45 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.

The 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. 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, ashamed of our own helplessness and guilty about what we thought or did or failed to do.

We become demoralized and isolated because of anger, guilt, shame, avoidance, and emotional numbing. Lasting changes in brain chemistry may be associated with this cycle of reliving and withdrawal. In fact we can and often do become walking time bombs ready to explode at any moment.

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, 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, whether a complete stranger standing on the corner begging for food, your friend or a family member, try to look at them differently and thank God there are people like them in your world that are willing to sacrifice their lives for your freedom. You must understand that they are changed forever and never come home the same. God Bless the brave men and women fighting in the Middle East and God Bless America.

God Bless America,  
Danny Lane  
USMC Vietnam Veteran