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## “Combat Stress”



# Lessons from Yusufiyah: Table of Contents

For all members of the Army Profession

<http://cape.army.mil>

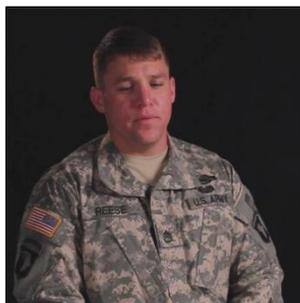
## “Combat Stress”

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## 1. Checklist

- Recruit additional strong/respected leaders from your unit to be facilitators with your unit. (Recruit as many as the situation mandates)
- Watch the video and read the transcript prior to your facilitation.
- Review the additional resources.
- Review the “How to run your workshop” guidelines prior to facilitating.
- Think about a personal experience that relates to the scenario.
- Resource Prep:
  - Make copies of the video transcripts and facilitation questions as needed for each of your facilitators.
  - If you plan on showing video clips, test to make sure they work on the system in your designated training area.
  - Make sure you have a whiteboard with dry-erase markers.

## 2. Who's Who



Joshua Reese was an Infantry NCO and Purple Heart recipient. He has served multiple deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan.

### 3. “Combat Stress” Video Transcript: Joshua Reese discusses the effects of combat stress.



*Joshua Reese is an Infantry NCO and Purple Heart recipient. He has served multiple deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan and has seen heavy combat.*

“I’ve conducted combat operations with the same company; I just finished my third tour with Bravo Company. Back in 2005-2006, we were really stretched then, out on a limb, and a lot of times by ourselves. It was really hard to get to us. Instead of pulling the Soldiers back and giving them someone professional to vent to—to explain things to, to have a senior leader there to be like, ‘Hey, this is why I made that decision,’ or something to that effect—they had a reporter.

There was not a lot of cool-down time so that leaders could sit back and really try to explain things in greater detail. It did create a lot of stress, a lot of unknown. I’ve seen over 20 people killed in this company. I’ve seen a lot, hundreds of casualties. I will admit I’ve thought of things whenever I was seeing some of my Soldiers die. Just being out there having to recover body parts, there will be thoughts

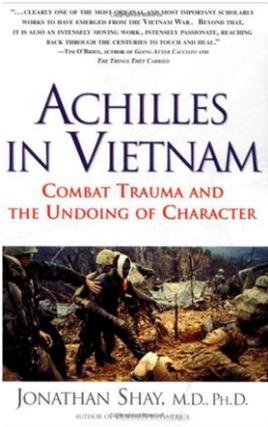
running through your head that are not you. It’s not you; it’s just a reaction to your surroundings. It’s a thought.

There’s a lot of senior leaders in the 101st airborne division that know first-hand the effects of combat stress. It’s a fine line to walk whenever people start dying and the stress really starts mounting up. Just the combat fatigue more than anything takes its toll. Like now, I know we have behavioral health specialists that are with the brigade and are embedded in the brigade. They really do help. Specifically in our last deployment, they helped a lot.

I know there were times when I just had to stop, pull my platoon aside and the company commander was more than willing to give me a few hours here or there—just pause operations for 24 hours—let me pull my guys in. I know Captain Stone—our behavioral health adviser—she was there, a phone call away; she was there. She really helped to explain to the guys what and why they are feeling certain things. I, myself and my lieutenant were able to sit the guys down and explain to them in more detail the bigger picture.”

## 4. Additional Resources

The following resources are available:

	<p><b><u>U.S. Identifies Army Sergeant in Killing of 16 in Afghanistan</u></b>          By: James Dao          Article: <a href="http://nyti.ms/Kb4blv">http://nyti.ms/Kb4blv</a>          “When it all comes out, it will be a combination of stress, alcohol and domestic issues — he just snapped,” said the official, who had been briefed on the investigation and spoke on the condition of anonymity because the sergeant had not yet been charged.</p>
	<p><b><u>US soldier kills Afghan civilians in Kandahar.</u></b>  <a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-17332398">http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-17332398</a></p>
	<p><b><u>P.T.S.D. Can Yield Positive, Yet Sometimes Deadly, Results</u></b>          By: Jim Rendon          Article: <a href="http://nyti.ms/JqT5pS">http://nyti.ms/JqT5pS</a></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• He was later diagnosed with P.T.S.D. Bales’ experience — the stresses, the multiple tours, the injuries — is not very different from that of so many men and women in uniform.</li> </ul>
	<p><b><u>Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character</u></b>          By: Jonathan Shay</p> <p>Jonathan Shay brings a different perspective to bear on Homer and shows us that the wrath of Achilles is, unfortunately, all too familiar to contemporary existence. A clinical psychiatrist in the Department of Psychiatry at Tufts Medical School who works at the VA clinic in Boston, Shay reveals through <i>Achilles in Vietnam</i> the grim truth that this most famous of fictions presents an accurate picture of combat trauma as experienced by some soldiers in Vietnam, and probably in every war. "Homer's starting point...is <i>menis</i>, indignant wrath. I believe it is also the first and possibly the primary trauma that converted subsequent terror, horror, grief, and guilt into lifelong disability for Vietnam veterans."</p>

**4. Additional Resources (continued)**



**Army Times: “Identifying Soldiers engaged in risky or self-destructive behavior”**

Visit the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs “Make the Connection” website at <http://maketheconnection.net/>. The website confronts conditions such as depression, PTSD, drug and alcohol problems, traumatic brain injury, anxiety disorders and more. Additionally, watch <http://www.youtube.com/user/VeteransMTC?v=mlfbrzjbeoo> for topical set-up. Resources revolve around questions like, “What is the importance of programs helping Soldiers deal with combat stress?” “What resources are available for Soldiers/Veterans experiencing combat stress?”



**Military Mental Health:**

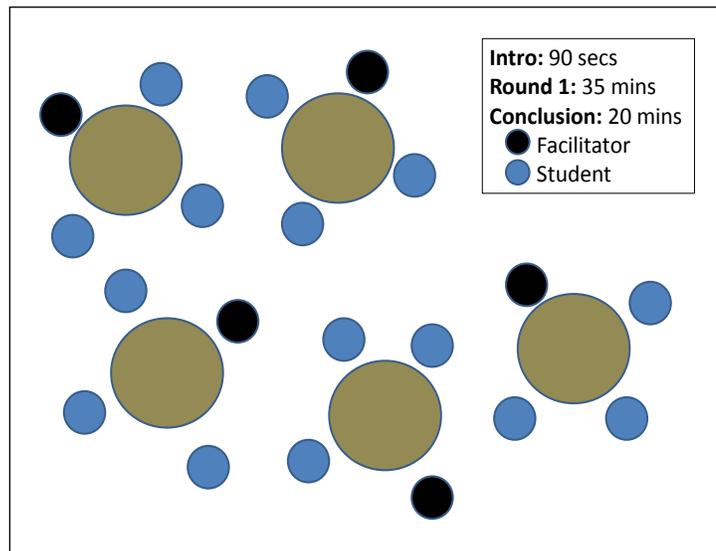
Visit <http://militarymentalhealth.org/welcome.aspx>, an effort by the U.S. department of defense. What type of resource is this? What other types of resources are available to Soldiers?

## 5. How to run your workshop

The basic concept provided below is a way to facilitate this module. Modify as necessary to fit the needs and demographics of the group. We find that having a variety of ranks/leadership positions in each group increases perspective and maximizes takeaway.

**PREP:** Have a whiteboard and markers available. Bring copies of the video transcripts. Have a Facilitator Guide available for each facilitator. Get there early and set up the room in huddles large enough to support a variety of leadership at each table. Put chairs around one table (keep people close), rather than pulling several tables together.

**BASIC CONCEPT:** Meet for 55 minutes to discuss the module. The group breaks down into huddles large enough to support a variety of leadership at each table. For example, you want to have SLs, PSGs, PLs and CDRs in the same huddle so you can maximize the overall effectiveness and increase the number of vantage points. Have one facilitator at each table to guide (NOT LEAD) the discussion. The workshop begins with facilitators asking the participants what their response was to the module. The facilitators' main role is to be a catalyst for conversation



and learning about the topic at hand. This module includes two rounds of discussion, and ends with personal stories and vignettes that relate to the module.

### KEYS TO SUCCESS:

- Let participants do most of the talking.
- The facilitators' key role is to ask questions that spark thought and conversation.
- Ensure you engage each level of leadership and everyone within your group. Do not let any one person dominate the conversation.
- Have questions prepped for each round to drive the conversation. (See "Detailed Plan" on page 6)
- You are a catalyst for conversation. Make sure that you continue to ask questions that make your group dig deeper.

## 6. Detailed plan for your workshop

### INTRODUCTION (90 seconds)

*Introduce the Workshop in a way that communicates the purpose of the event.*

*“Today we’re going to look at the Army Profession and discuss the effects of combat stress.”*

### ROUND 1 - (35 minutes): Discuss the effects of Combat Stress

[Watch “Dealing with Combat Stress”]

1. Reese says, “There was *not* a lot of cool-down time so the leaders could sit back and really try to explain things.” A) What impact does it have on Soldiers when leaders can’t (or don’t) do this? B) What can happen when leaders *do* take the time to do this?
2. Reese says, “Just being out there having to recover body parts, there will be thoughts running through your head that are not you.” A) What do you think Reese means by this? B) In what ways can you relate?
3. Reese also says of, “thoughts running through your head that are not of you,” “It’s just a reaction to your surroundings. It’s a thought.” At what point do thoughts become actions?
4. Consider what you know about combat stress. A) What is combat stress? B) What are the symptoms? C) What are some of the different terms the Army has used over the years to talk about combat stress?
5. Reese says combat fatigue, “takes its toll.” What does he mean by this?
6. As needed, Reese would pull aside his platoon and explain to them the bigger picture. A) What leadership attributes was he demonstrating? B) What are some of the reasons leaders do NOT do this? C) How is Reese building trust between himself and his Soldiers?
7. How does, “understanding the big picture,” help Soldiers deal with the stresses of combat?
8. Reese says he brought in a health adviser to explain to his Soldiers why they might be feeling a certain way. A) Why did Reese want his Soldiers to process their feelings in the middle of combat operations? B) What could be of the effects (good and bad) of processing those feelings during combat operations?

## 6. Detailed plan for your workshop (continued)

9. In what ways do you think Reese's experiences have shaped how he leads?
10. A) What level of empathy does Reese have toward his Soldiers? B) What evidence from his interview do you have to base that on?
11. In what ways is Reese a steward of the Army Profession?
12. What impact do you think that Reese's approach to leadership has on the *esprit de corps* of his unit?
13. In what ways can leaders like Reese positively affect the Army's trust relationship with the American people?

### **ROUND 2-Conclusion (20 minutes): Personal Vignettes and takeaways.**

*Facilitator asks students to share any personal vignettes and takeaways from the module.*

**It is important for the group to relate to this story on a personal level. Conclude the module emphasizing the effects of combat stress. Leaders should walk away with a better understanding of the effect that combat stress has on an individual and on the unit.**

**Upon concluding, the following questions are useful for determining learning and promoting reflection:**

<b>Learning</b>	Q - What did you learn from listening to the reactions and reflections of other leaders?  Q - What are the future implications of this decision and or experience?
<b>Reflection</b>	Q - How do you feel/what do you think about what you learned?  Q - What will you do with your new information?  Q – How can you integrate new learning into your Command team philosophy, command structure and climate?