

CHAPTER 8

STRESS AND STRESSORS ASSOCIATED WITH OFFENSIVE/DEFENSIVE OPERATIONS

8-1. Introduction

The effects of stress and stressors associated with offensive and defensive operations are immense. Leaders must understand how high levels of stress can affect the performance of their personnel in offensive and defensive operations.

8-2. Offensive Operations

a. *Fundamentals.* (See FM 100-5 for details.)

(1) The offensive is the decisive form of war—the commander’s ultimate means of imposing his will upon the enemy. Even in the defense, seizing the initiative requires offensive operations. Combat service support units, by the nature of their missions, will usually be in tactical defense even while the units they support are on the attack. However, the likelihood of rear battle requires that all leaders fully understand the principles, tactics, and psychological advantages of going on the offense.

(2) Commanders, while shielding their own troops from stress, should attempt to promote terror and disintegration in the opposing force. Aggressive patrolling, raids, and sudden, violent actions (which catch the enemy by surprise and do not permit him to recover) should be common tools to magnify the enemy’s battlefield stress. Stress-creating actions can hasten the destruction of his combat capability. Some examples of stress-creating actions are attacks on his command structure; the use of artillery, air-delivered weapons, smoke; deception; psychological warfare; and the use of special operations forces. Such stress-creating actions can hasten

the destruction of the enemy’s capability for combat.

b. *Purposes.* While offensive operations may have as their objective the destruction or neutralization of an enemy force, inflicting physical damage is frequently incidental to offensive success. Large gains are achieved by destroying the coherence of the defense, fragmenting and isolating enemy units in the zone of the attack, and driving deep to secure operationally decisive objectives. These have the result of “stressing out” the enemy defenders.

c. *Characteristics.* The most successful offensive operations are characterized by surprise, concentration, speed, flexibility, and audacity.

d. *Phases.* The four general phases of offensive operations are preparation, attack, exploitation, and pursuit.

e. *Forms of Maneuver.* Just as similar phases are common to all offensive operations, similar forms of maneuver are common to all attacks. These forms of maneuver include envelopment, turning movement, infiltration, penetration, and frontal attack.

f. *Conducting Offensive Operations.* Offensive operations are characterized by aggressive initiative on the part of subordinate commanders, by rapid shifts in the main effort to take advantage of opportunities, by momentum, and by the deepest, most rapid destruction of enemy defenses possible.

g. *Offensive Framework.* A simple, complete concept of operation is the basis of all tactical offensive actions.

8-3. Battle Fatigue and Battle Fatigue Casualties in the Offense

a. The preparation for an attack is a time of high stress and anxiety, both for novice soldiers and for veterans. Physical stress complaints (musculoskeletal, cardiorespiratory, gastrointestinal) are common at sick call. If morale is low and troops are pessimistic about the attack, battle fatigue casualties and misconduct stress behaviors may be high.

b. There may be much stress and physical fatigue in the attack, exploitation, and pursuit phases; but relatively few battle fatigue casualties occur as long as soldiers are able to continue moving and advancing. Battle fatigue casualties increase if the advance bogs down, is pinned down, or loses momentum, especially when indirect fire is received. Being bombed or shelled in the starting line is notoriously disruptive, as is being hit by friendly fire (a risk inherent in a fluid fast-moving battle). Diversionary attacks or security operations may lack the strong psychological motivation of the main attack and require additional positive explanation by leaders to minimize adverse combat stress behaviors.

c. Units in reserve have the difficult task of maintaining fighting spirit and readiness. While not yet fighting, they are at risk but must try to stay rested. The junior troops usually get some sleep if they are not too apprehensive. The leaders often do not get enough sleep because of the never-ending planning and briefing cycle. It is most important that leaders do plan for and get enough sleep themselves and maintain good hydration and nutrition.

d. Combat support and CSS troops (especially supply, transport, maintenance, and medical) may be tasked for prolonged SUSOPS, with increased risk from enemy forces which were bypassed. They tend to have more battle

fatigue casualties per WIA than the combat arms when they do take casualties. Seeing (and especially having to touch) the maimed bodies left behind by the attack may produce battle fatigue (and/or future PTSD) in inadequately prepared troops even if they are not themselves under fire.

e. Every effort should be made to provide rest in the combat and field trains for exhausted soldiers. Restoration treatment for battle fatigue casualties should be at medical treatment facilities as close behind the attack as possible. This should generally be possible in the division support area and brigade support area.

f. Misconduct stress behaviors which constitute criminal acts such as looting, killing EPW, rape, and other atrocities against noncombatants and "liberation" of alcohol and drugs are always a risk when victorious troops advance into enemy territory. Leaders must lead by example and retain control, discipline, and a sense of pride to preclude such behavior.

8-4. Defensive Operations

a. *Fundamentals.* (See FM 100-5 for details.) Defensive operations retain ground, gain time, deny the enemy access to an area, damage or defeat attacking forces, and save one's own units.

b. *Purposes.* The immediate purpose of any defense is to defeat the attack.

c. *Characteristics.* In any defensive plan, preparation, disruption, concentration, and flexibility are fundamental.

d. *Defensive Patterns.* While defensive operations may take many forms, traditional usage divides defensive arrangements into two broad categories: mobile and area defenses.

e. Defensive Framework. A simple, complete concept of operations is the basis of all defenses. Defenses are organized into five complementary elements:

- Security force operations.
- Defensive operations.
- Reserve operations.
- Deep operations.
- Rear operations.

NOTE

Each of these five defensive elements entails different stress for the defending troops and may evoke different combat stress behaviors.

f. Retrograde Operations. A retrograde operation is a movement to the rear or away from the enemy. Retrograde operations are executed to gain time, preserve forces, avoid combat under undesirable conditions, or draw the enemy into an unfavorable position.

8-5. Stress, Battle Fatigue, and Battle Fatigue Casualties in the Defense

a. Stressful Uncertainties. Defensive operations involve more stressful uncertainty about enemy intentions and capabilities than being on the offensive. The defensive posture itself implies that the enemy has the greater strength. Rumors and appraisals of the situation are more likely to be pessimistic and may overmagnify the true threat.

b. Mobile Defenders. Mobile defense incurs more physical fatigue, but soldiers are less likely to become battle fatigue casualties. Even in such obviously high-risk situations, such as a covering force in contact with an overwhelmingly strong attacking enemy, a positive unit identity and cohesion can provide remarkable protection against fear. Problems with battle fatigue and misconduct stress behaviors are more likely to occur later in the survivors who make it back to a safe location—these may cause difficulties for reconstitution of the units.

c. Static Defenders. The stressors in static defense vary with the degree of comfort and security provided by the fortifications. If very strong, the fortifications may increase confidence to the point of complacency and degraded vigilance; if less strong and subjected to intense or prolonged bombardment, static defense incurs high battle fatigue casualty rates. Discomfort, especially cold, wet conditions with inability to move around, increases both cold injury and battle fatigue casualties.

d. Hidden Stress Casualties (in Retrograde Operations). There are relatively few diagnosed battle fatigue casualties in retrograde operations. There may be many undiagnosed battle fatigue soldiers. Some of these soldiers may be ineffective; others may be a loss to their unit as a result of becoming a PW, MIA, WIA, or KIA. Misconduct stress behaviors, such as alcohol abuse, desertion, or criminal acts (looting, rape, atrocities, and the murder of leaders), may occur if the retrograde operation becomes disorganized. The danger of retreat is that it may degenerate into mass panic or rout with every man (or small team) trying to save himself at the expense of the others. Such panic, spread by fleeing soldiers and fanned by rumor, is contagious. Unless checked quickly, it leads to the catastrophic failure of entire armies and the nation, as befell France under the German blitzkrieg of 1940.