



stressors in the current conflicts have been identified as roadside bombs, IEDs, suicide bombers, the handling of human remains, killing an enemy, seeing fellow soldiers and friends dead or injured, and the helplessness of not being able to stop violent situations. Because of the nature of these current conflicts, a high proportion of deployed soldiers are likely to experience one or more stressors. Even though many recent military operations have been characterized as peacekeeping missions or stability operations, many of these efforts may share the same risks and stressors inherent in combat, exposure to hostile forces, injured civilians, mass graves, and land mines, for example.”

Talking to a member of the OTC, he doesn't seem so concerned. I ask him about the possibility of killing an enemy, or watching a soldier that has become like a member of your family die in a suicide bomb attack. He is admirably pragmatic: “Most of us don't get worried, after you train for three years going to war feels like the natural progression for what you have to do. Before you go on tour you need to do 4 months solid pre-deployment training anyway, so you feel prepared.” He appears focused, intelligent and disciplined, the ideal characteristics that members of the British army seek. “I enjoy leading men,” he says assuredly, “Some people can sit behind a desk and do a job like that, but that doesn't interest me at all and, conveniently, I happen to agree with Britain's foreign policy.” It seems improbable that such as stable person could take Paul's route. But could he?

Philip Zimbardo thinks he can. The Stanford University psychologist conducted the renowned Stanford Prison Experiment, and he was shocked by the results. The experiment began in the summer of 1971 as an undergraduate class project on the psychology of incarceration. Zimbardo created a mock prison in the basement of the psychology department building, and volunteers were randomly



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assigned to roles as either prisoners or prison guards. In no time, the undergraduates turned into sadists, they began torturing the prisoners and even simulated sodomy on one another. After six days, Zimbardo was forced to close the experiment. To him it explained why good people turned evil, why there are “no bad apples, just bad barrels,” - a term he has called “The Lucifer Effect.”

In 2004, horrific images were broadcast from Abu Ghraib prison of naked prisoners forced to make a human pyramid, forced to masturbate in front of each other, led around on a lead, each one as sickening as the next. Zimbardo only made one connection. He still maintained there were no bad apples, but the military had created the conditions that fostered the transformation of ordinary Joe soldier into depraved torturer.

I asked Dr Jane Clabour, who specialises in emotional behaviour at

Top: a series of images of the horrific torture perpetrated by American soldiers at Abu Ghraib, Above: Philip Zimbardo

the psychology department at York University, whether such a shift in behaviour is possible. “Ordinary people can be persuaded by a situation to do such extraordinary things”, she explains. “There is also research looking at the violence in Africa, whereby the enemy were dehumanised, which makes it is easier for people to accept atrocities being done to them.”

The psychological effects of combat or ‘Killology’ as Lt.Col. Dave Grossman puts it, falls into this camp. Grossman, an army sergeant turned psychologist bases his neologism on one simple premise: “People don't like to kill. Turning people into soldiers therefore requires extensive desensitisation and conditioning similar to Pavlov's dogs. In this framework ‘kill’ is replaced with ‘engage’ and ‘positive reinforcement is given in the form of immediate feedback when the target drops if it is hit.”

I ask Paul what types of techniques were used during his training. “We got shown footage in training of torture. In another exercise a whole troop got captured, about 60 of us. We got put in a stretch position in a classroom, and we had to watch videos of soldiers getting shot in the backs of the legs.” He hesitates for a moment, “They do deprive you of sleep - but for us that's just normal, because you have to learn. If you're sent to a warzone you can't expect to get proper sleep. So it might seem bad from the outside, that it's really nasty, but that's it.”

And for Grossman that's exactly it. Soldiers are a groomed product, and when this product malfunctions someone has to be there to pick up the pieces. Coping mechanisms are individual to each soldier's personal experience before and during their service, in spite of the training they get. “I was also in the cadets for about three to four years which was a good experience, of a rough idea of what to expect,” reminisces Stephen. “But to be honest, nothing can prepare you.”

Stephen's honesty exposes the weakness of the military's apparent

impenetrable training, although the army must function as one body it isn't made up on one mind. “People's initial personality characteristics will play a role in how they react to wartime experiences, both during the conflict and after”, explains Clabour.

“If society prepares a soldier to overcome his resistance to killing and places him in an environment in which he will kill”, says Grossman, “then that society has an obligation to deal forthrightly, intelligently, and morally with the psychological event and its repercussions upon the soldier and society.”

And how is Britain dealing with that responsibility? Gordon Brown has committed to a withdrawal of 4000 troops from Iraq by July. But we are already being judged; around 6% of veterans are still left homeless, many with cases of alcoholism, depression or disabilities. The MOD stress that they have fifteen military departments of mental health across the UK, so they believe they're on top of it. The Secretary of Defence, Kevin Jones also thinks he's on top of it. Apparently the NHS can handle the issue off its own back: “The health care for all veterans has been the responsibility of the NHS since 1953.” He continued: “Former service personnel with mental health problems, including post traumatic stress disorder will benefit from the Government's decision to extend priority treatment to all veterans whose condition is considered by their GP to be due to service.”

With a war that doesn't seem to have an end game, it isn't enough to wait for the next generation of veterans to book an appointment with their GP. It's about updating the military's knowledge and capacity in the field of combat stress, ensuring soldiers are adequately equipped and possessing a transparent defence policy from torture to racism. “There should be no place in a civilised world where one country invades another using arms and destruction,” says Stephen finally and rather unexpectedly. Maybe it is the case of bad barrels, not apples. **M**