

INTRODUCTION TO COMBAT FATIGUE

THIS FILM IS TO BE SHOWN TO MEDICAL PERSONNEL ONLY. IT IS NOT TO BE SHOWN TO PATIENTS.

UNITED STATES NAVY TRAINING FILM
RESTRICTED
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INTRODUCTION TO COMBAT FATIGUE

THIS FILM WAS DESIGNED TO BE SHOWN TO PATIENTS SUFFERING FROM COMBAT FATIGUE. IT ALSO CARRIES A MESSAGE OF VALUE TO MEDICAL OFFICERS AND HOSPITAL CORPSMEN.

You're about to see a motion picture, which is going to help you to understand more clearly some of the physical and emotional symptoms that have been bothering you, and which are responsible for you being here as patients in this hospital. To explain the causes of your symptoms to you, we're going to show you, among other things, some combat scenes. Scenes just like those some of you have been in. Now, they may upset you but just remember that no one ever had an operation or an illness or had a broken leg fixed without experiencing a little pain. It's the same way with feelings. When we dislodge sore feelings, we have to pry them loose like a bad tooth, and that hurts. Expect it to hurt a little. And strangely enough, you will find it doesn't hurt half as much as you anticipate. So now let's get started. The natural place to start is with fear. Everybody is afraid some of the time. An everybody going into battle is always afraid, at least if they're normal like us. And that's a good thing, for fear has its uses. It makes us alert, sends the blood through our veins, gives us strength and sharpness.

Let's take a simple example.

Here is a cat, behaving in a perfectly normal manner, eating its supper. But what happens when her natural enemy, the dog, walks by? She immediately gets into condition red. And condition red means that an attack is imminent. So she's on her guard. Yet being on guard looks like fear. And that's the clue. Being on guard IS fear. Fear is the body's way of getting into condition red. She is, as you were at your battle stations and in your foxholes, all set to go. That's nature's logical answer to danger: fear. Fear keys you up, sets your heart pounding, gives you that tingling feeling in your legs, and up and down your spine. It makes your mouth dry and causes the all-gone feeling in the pit of your stomach. You get restless, you're on your mark, set to go.

"Come on, get the lead out."

But you know all about this. Let's go back to our cat. She can teach us a lot. When the dog, her enemy, goes, fear goes with him and everything comes back to normal. Once again, she's a peaceful tabby enjoying her supper, quite as if nothing had happened.

Once our danger has passed, you and I react in the same way: go back to our normal occupations. *With one difference: we remember. And sometimes, this remembering business is so real, it won't let us relax. It keeps us on our guard, even though there's nothing happening to make us afraid.*

For instance, here's a hospital ward, probably pretty much like the one you're in. And you know how the men next to you, how you yourself act when you're asleep. These fellows, like you, are behaving as if the enemy were right down the corridor or outside the window. They're remembering, always remembering.

This is patient Corporal Ben Edwards, United States Marine Corps. If we find out Edward's trouble, it will help us to understand what's happening to these other men. And what's more to the point, it will help us find out what the trouble is with you. As you can see, Edwards is having a rough time of it, and you don't have a rough time like this without there being a cause for it. To discover that cause, we'll have to see what he's dreaming about.

"Keep five paces. Keep five paces. Keep five paces. Keep five paces. Keep five paces. Keep five paces."

Well, that's why Edwards is tired each morning. Possibly it's the same sort of thing that makes you feel all wrung out these mornings too. You can see that he's remembering some battle he was in or at least parts of it, and that his remembering has no relationship to where he is, in a safe hospital far away from the enemy. So now let's go back to the beginning and see how this came about.

*"Round de meadows am a ringing
De darkeys' mournful song,
While de mockingbird am singing
Happy as de day is long"*

"So I said to her, 'For cripes' sake, you've had everything I got and now you want a cup of coffee.'

- Gee, what a lousy babe.
- Wonder how much longer before we get there.
- We're seven days out.
- Seven days is a hell of a long time.
- I know."

*"Dere old massa am a-sleeping
Sleeping in de cold, cold ground
Down in de cornfield
Hear dat mournful sound"*

"Jeez, do you have to go all the time?

- Well, ain't there some law about wetting a uniform? Government property or something?
- Wouldn't be the war, would it? Nothing like that?
- No, nothing like that.
- Well, it won't be long anyway. Maybe tomorrow. Then you can let fly whenever you want to. You'll know what a battle's all about.
- Think it will be tomorrow?
- I hope so... Feels kinda keyed up being a sailor.
- Sure does.
- We must be a thousand miles north of Tulagi.
- Yeah, or west.
- Jeez, for a buddy, you sure can contradict a guy.

- Well, that's what a buddy's for.
- Yeah!
- Oh. Is that what you're going to do with the Japs?
- Yeah! And this and this!
- Oh! Wait a minute!
- Kids, that's all. Wait till they get there.
- Yeah, seven days. It will be soon now."

Well, that's where it began. You can see that Corporal Edwards is excited. Maybe the chap with the dry pipe is right: maybe he is behaving like a kid. But that's because he and his buddy, Hal, are tense, and all the other men with them, each in his own way. They're beginning to be afraid, dreading what will happen in battle, wondering whether they will master their fear or whether it will defeat them. And the answer to that: they don't find out until the seven days have become eight, or nine, or two weeks, and they are wherever it is the enemy is.

- "Careful of those GI pants.
- It's like get or get got, all right."

That's it. They're like the cat. They're seeing their enemy, and they're scared. But they're not yellow. All those symptoms he had were to get him ready for this, to make him a good fighting man. He's using his fear, just as you did at first, to make him keen, aware of every danger about him, so that he can meet it. Sure, he's afraid, and so is every other man. But see how his fear helps him, see it snap that rifle into firing position, see it carry him forward, pursuing the enemy, see it give him almost second sight. Edwards is a good corporal. He's really fighting because his fear has been useful to him.

- "Take it easy.
- Where are they?
- Knock it off. They're on the run.
- Dig in here. Make this your position and hold it.
- Alright, Sir.
- Over here, men.
- How is it out there?
- It's pretty quiet.
- OK, Bryan, you and Stone go on ahead for security. Alright, fellows, shovel it deep. Chubby, over there on that scrub for you, there's a good spot. Lorensen, over there by that tree. Hal, you and I will dig here.
- Right."

"I'll carry that: you can follow me."

- "Still, I like apple pie better.
- Oh, I don't know. For my money, I'll take that blonde in Frisco.
- You mean the one with hair on her legs?
- Yeah, blonde hair.

- I said I liked apple pie better.
- The bastards don't know where we are. Come on, let's get going."

You see? The immediate danger has been removed. At least it's not so bad as it was. And so they joke, and are again not afraid. Their fear was useful to them in the battle. Now they don't need it, and so it disappears. If it weren't to disappear now, then the men would not be well.

But like the cat, they have lost their symptoms. Their dog is off in the jungle, and their fear has gone with him. Their fear has served its purpose, making them angry, putting them in condition red.

It's been a beneficial tool in the time of crisis. It appeared when it was needed.

But don't forget, however, Corporal Edwards remembers everything that has happened. Now he knows what fear is like. From this time on, his knowledge is always with him. Let's see where it leads him.

"If we could only be sure the sons of bitches weren't out there.

- My old mother told me there'd be days like this.
- Yeah? Why didn't you shoot her?
- Alright, fellows, knock it off. Making too much noise.
- Sure.
- It would make things a hell of a lot easier if you could sing."

"Somebody ought to teach them marksmanship.

- Yeah, their chests must look mighty bare.
- Wonder what they're doing with all that tin they got in Singapore.
- I don't know why you guys are always scrubbing clothes. With all those shots, it really makes a hell of a good washing machine."

"Christ, my feet got asleep, cooped up like this.

- Yeah.
- Where are they?
- I don't think they're there. It's a week now since we heard them.
- No, it isn't. Eight days and five hours.
- Okay.
- Jesus, who would have thought it had been like this? Four weeks in this goddamned hole. Four weeks of lying on your belly and feeding the mosquitoes.
- Yeah. It's getting so I'm forgetting everything else, including what a man lives for.
- Even Sarah Ann?
- Including Sarah Ann. And that's some crock.
- Oh! Son of a bitch! There isn't a goddamn Jap out there. So why in hell don't we do something about it? Why don't we get a move on? Why don't we take over? See, not a goddamn...
- Come on, let's, let's get him out of here."

"Now, to cook food, all you have to do is put it in the sun.

- Yeah, if the sun don't get it, the maggots will.
- In either case, brother, you'll eat it.
- And like it.

- K rations, X rations.
- Every day. Every damn day. When are they gonna let us eat in peace?"

"American, son o' bitch! American, son o' bitch! American, son o' bitch! American, son o' bitch!"

We've only shown you part of all that happened, just little incidents through the weeks. But I guess you can see where Edwards is going and why. He's been kept always on the alert. Those fear responses haven't had much chance to relax because the enemy, the danger, is always present. It's just as if the dog never went away from the cat, left the cat always like this. Naturally, you can't freeze forever in a position like this. Something's bound to give. But usually such events as you have seen are not enough to cause combat fatigue.

Some climax has to happen. And with Edwards, this is what it was. Oh, and by the way, this is the last of our really noisy scenes, so please bear with us.

"You already know what we're going to do. Anybody have any questions before we go?

- No, no, Sir.
- Alright, when we leave here, you men with a machine gun, go back and join your outfit. We're going to clean out the Japs between here and the river. Our patrol will be the right assault platoon, and we'll move out of here and cover towards the assembly area.
- When we move out, keep at least five paces. There might be some snipers. You all have your rations and ammunition.
- Yes, Sir.
- Alright, sergeant, you move out immediately down this trail. I'll meet you at the fork. Alright, let's go.
- Okay, men, let's go.
- Five paces. Keep five paces. Keep five paces. Keep five paces.
- Spread out.
- It... It could have been me."

Well, that's it. Now we know what Corporal Edwards dreams about every night in the hospital. But why? Because he'd had as much as he could take. He'd been too full of fear, too long. Not that he's a coward: you've seen that he isn't. But there's a point in every man, in every man, beyond which he cannot go. That point with Edwards was reached when his buddy was killed. It could have been something else. It just happened with Edwards, that's what it was.

From now on, you'll see that Edwards no longer behaves like himself. Everything he does or says is a symptom of illness. As his friends put it, it's got him. But if we interpret these symptoms, we'll see that what looks like mysterious or strange behavior isn't so illogical after all, but has meaning and purpose. It's just that Edwards won't accept fear, won't admit that he's reached his breaking point.

"Hand me that gizmo there. This goddamn thing won't work, never did work and never will work.

- Don't try to rush it. Sure it'll work.
- I said it wouldn't, didn't I? I don't think the gear we've got in this gook place is any good anyway. You'd think they'd send us the best.
- What's in your pants, red ants, or did you get hit?
- Well, we're the ones who are fighting this war. You think they'd give us something to fight it with?"

“They sent for the army to come to Tulagi but General MacArthur said no. And this is the reason: it isn't the season, besides there ain't no U.S.O...

- Christ's sake.”

“What the hell is the matter?

- Over there behind that tree, there was a Jap, Sir. I saw him, so I shot him.”

“The fact remains, Edwards, that you fired. You knew the orders, you knew it meant the brig if you shot at random.

- Yes, Sir.

- Why did you do it?

- There was a Jap there, Sir. A twig snapped and I saw something move. I saw him very clearly. It was a Jap.

- Did you kill him?

- Behind the tree, something moved. I saw him and I shot him.

- Did anybody find the body?

- I shot him.

- I see. Not feeling very well, are you, Corporal?

- No, Sir.

- How is your appetite?

- Oh, it's lousy. What I do eat won't stick. It's the slum we get here.

- Are you sure of that?

- Well, I vomit, don't I?

- Yes, I guess you do.”

CLAIMS AND SEEMS SINCERE TO HAVE SHOT A JAP WHILE ON NIGHT WATCH. HIS OFFICER, 2ND LT. REXFORD L. CUTTON STATES NO JAP PRESENT. SLIGHT TREMOR, OBVIOUS HOSTILITY, FIXATION. DIAGNOSIS: COMBAT FATIGUE.

Well, there's the story. Perhaps you recognize the symptoms: nerves and jumpiness, hostility, insomnia, vomiting. Probably he'd tell you he had headaches if you asked him, or diarrhea. He's lost his sense of proportion too. He knows deep inside himself that there was no Jap behind those leaves, but he won't admit it, not even to himself.

Now, how does all this come about? *Well, you remember our cat, and that the cat had all these physical symptoms of fear? And you remember that Edwards had those same symptoms? The blood rushed from his stomach, his heart pounded, his hands were sweaty. And that didn't happen once, but many times over and over again. And the load kept getting bigger and bigger, always increasing until it was just too big a load to carry.*

And since he remembered all the times, he got so he had the symptoms even when there was no cause. That's why he couldn't hold his food any longer. His stomach was physically constricted with his fear. And so he vomited. You know that men going into battle often vomit or soil their pants. Well, men who

carry their fear with them after the battle go on doing the same things because their bodies are always in condition red.

And that's why Edwards is here in the hospital, because he can't forget. He always acts as if there were an enemy present. On a peaceful street, he behaves as if there were a Jap ready to jump from behind any parked car. If somebody drops something near him, he thinks a mortar's got his number, or that he's being dive-bombed.

Maybe instead of getting it out, you've got it inside, and it hangs in your chest like a lump of lead. Or maybe you've thought about it so much that it makes your head swim and you're dizzy. Or maybe you're like the patient I saw the other day who took it out on his pals and his wife, and acted as if they were the Japs and the Jerries, and was edgy and irritable.

That's fear, if you call it by its right name, and don't blame your stomach or your eyes or your bowels for acting the way nature intended them to act when you're scared.

Yes, it sounds simple, but the cure is far from easy. *That's why your doctor sees you so often. That's why you have to do physical work, go to discussion groups, play games, learn about the happenings of the world.*

You're getting well because you're learning what fear is and how to handle it. And when you get your problem worked out, you'll find you don't fight against fear; you just get it lined up so that it works to your best interest when you're face-to-face with the enemy.

As soon as you've learned that the bullets shot at you yesterday or last month or last year can't hurt you today, you've learned the first big lesson. Then and only then, you get into condition red at the right time and in the right place. You accept fear as part of living, something to be taken as a help, not as a handicap.

You and Edwards and the other boys, one fine day, will be as fit as a new silver dollar. And you'll be shoving off well, not only better, but better than ever because you've learned something that can only be learned the hard way: that fear is a fighting man's friend, if he learns how to run it and not be run by it.

THE END

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