

Emotions Under Fire

By
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Combat is one of the most emotional experiences a combatant can have. More Americans fought in World War II than in any other conflict in the 20th Century.

How many American men fought in actual combat during that period is not known; it was estimated fewer than one million of our sixteen million saw any significant action.

For we who did fight, the experience would deeply affect our minds and would follow us into the post-war world.

The kinds of emotions we felt varied from one man to another. Fear is the most universal in close combat. "I could feel my body trembling with fear; my mouth felt like it was full of cotton and my eyes went out of focus. Every movement was in slow motion. I also found being caught in the Japanese artillery barrage is the most unbearable of combat experiences. During prolonged shelling, I had the urge to jump up and scream – STOP IT, MY GOD, STOP IT!

In order to perform in combat effectively, I had to learn to control my fear. I had to learn to live with fear and to go ahead in spite of it.

As a combatant, you had to control other emotions -- like taking another human life. I had no qualms about that, not about the Japanese I came in contact with.

We had the feeling of guilt because we survived the battles while friends did not. Men who fight together in combat develop strong bonds and watching comrades die deeply affected all of them.

Nearly every combatant can recall an instance in which someone broke down under fire, but reflection on the battlefield – even for a split second - can result in death, either for the combatant or one of his comrades.

Combat forced me to wrestle with emotions and search for ways to cope with the madness of war. In order to perform my duties, I had to learn to numb my emotions. "I made a pledge to myself," "I WILL NOT CRACK UP!" To retain your sanity, you must harden yourself.

Up to recently, combatants were reluctant to discuss the war with anyone but fellow combat veterans. But since the History and PBS channels have asked us to come forth and tell of our experiences before it is too late to share them, I decided to do so in the past issues of the *Jefferson's Ferry Tales*. By doing so, it has helped me to get rid of some ghosts.

Thank you for understanding.