



STRESSORS OF  
MILITARY LIFE

AS ILLUSTRATED  
IN PAINTINGS

# STRESSORS OF MILITARY LIFE AS ILLUSTRATED IN PAINTINGS

## INTRODUCTION

The paintings of military life that follow illustrate stressors unique to military life. Some of the paintings have been commissioned by artists and some were painted by ordinary soldiers. The majority of the paintings illustrate the stressors of combat, which understandably, are among the greatest stressors experienced during active duty. The paintings represent different historical times, different wars, settings and geography. They focus on the stressors that military people experience across these categories and illustrate that there is a universal nature to the stressors experienced.

Soldiers and their families have been described as “a part of but apart from” much of the nation. They live separated in military communities or within our cities’ neighborhoods. Their children attend the local schools of their cities and towns or schools within the military community. Their families have the constant fear of the death of their loved ones at times of war.

The military community is set apart from the rest of the nation by stressors unique to being in the military. The military community is set apart from the rest of the nation by its missions and its deployment in remote and foreign areas and the stressors associated with deployment and missions. Moreover, the uniformed portion of this community operates under special regulations and laws and courts which bring specific stressors. Additionally, each phase of a military career and many types of military duty and operational environments are fraught with stressors particular to those duties and environments.

The risk of psychiatric illness and disrupted performance as a consequence of experiencing these stressors is a major source of manpower loss during both peace and war. Furthermore, failure to perform may result in the loss of many lives causing enormous stress to families and our nation.

War is a terrible thing – for those who fight, those who are left behind and those who suffer the effects in their families, communities and nations. No one goes through such experiences unchanged. For many it will be a life event that forms a view of the future and structures their lives for years to come. For some, the effects can be psychiatric illness and family conflict that require intervention. Care is needed to address the needs of those who deploy and those who return and their families. Those who may need specific psychiatric care must be identified early – particularly those who are injured, prisoners of war or those who deployed with family distress before they left.

Across all the services stressors experienced include those related to training, living in peace time, deployment, operational environments, combat, and finally reunion. Stressors affect soldiers, their families and their communities. Basic training brings stressors and fears to young soldiers testing their new identities as well as fears about their futures. Peacetime stressors center on concerns about being able to fight in the future. Deployment and combat stressors carry fears about feeling too disabled to go on and fears of experiencing combat stress: nausea, tremulousness, rapid heart rate, diaphoresis, sleep

disruption, headache, backache, weakness, exhaustion, constricted affect, ambivalence about being in combat and loss of a sense of humor.

Moreover, there are stressors related to fear and guilt associated with evacuation syndrome: hysterical paralysis, overwhelming anxiety, dissociation, physical illness, and hyperventilation. Additionally, there are symptom issues related to the evacuation of injured. Fears about injury, becoming a prisoner of war, dying and exposure to the dead and grotesque are foremost stressors at times of combat, as well as stressors related to the death of a friend or buddy. Furthermore, combat fears include those of experiencing disrupted adaptation and performance as well as fears related to living and working in a group and as a service person.

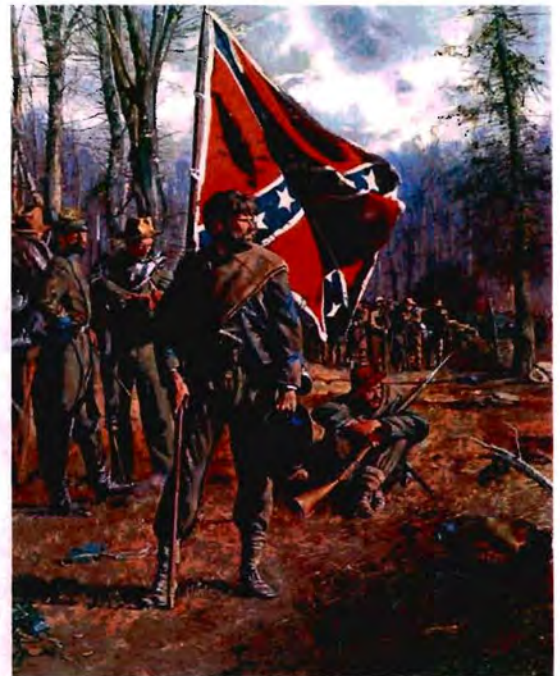
There are also stressors related to separation from spouses and children as well as feelings of being lonely and lost. Boredom in quiet times of combat brings its own stress in long waiting times – periods of silence punctuated with fear. Families left behind experience stressors related to separation and isolation as well as increased responsibilities as caregiver, disciplinarian, teacher, nurse and household manager. Children experience stress related to the loss of a father or mother and expectations of their possible death.

Reunion carries with it special stressors related to coping with injury and possible psychiatric care being needed. Additionally, there are stressors related to coping with role changes that occurred in the family during the soldier's absence. For children, there is often the stress related to father or mother "not being recognized" on return.

The symbolic and metaphoric elements of the paintings presented here help overcome the often overwhelming anxiety and feelings of helplessness that can be experienced at times of stress. What is most amazing about stressors of military life is how well most people do even after experiencing terrible traumatic events. Aided by families, neighbors and relatives, friends and sensitive commanders, the resiliency of military families and military members is remarkable. Medical care, health surveillance and community support are critical to supplementing this resiliency.

**WAR HAS BEEN A PART OF OUR LIFE FOR CENTURIES**

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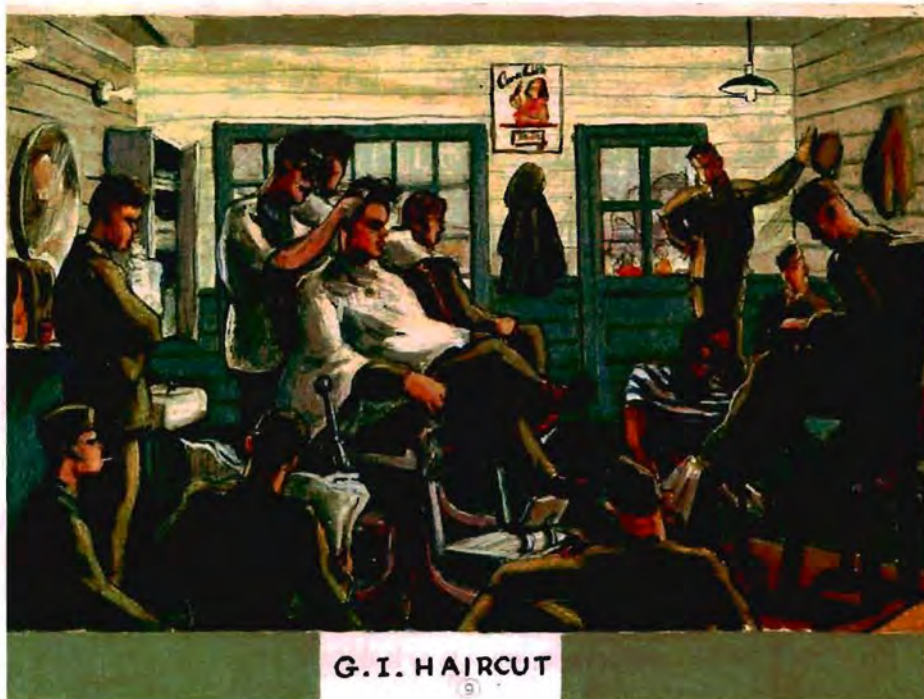


## BASIC TRAINING

Entering the service brings both the excitement of entering a new life as well as stressors and fears about being able to live and work in a group and as a service person. There are doubts, trepidation and uncertainty about being able to perform, to follow rules and conform, to meet the expectations of being a soldier and of being able to face and handle danger.

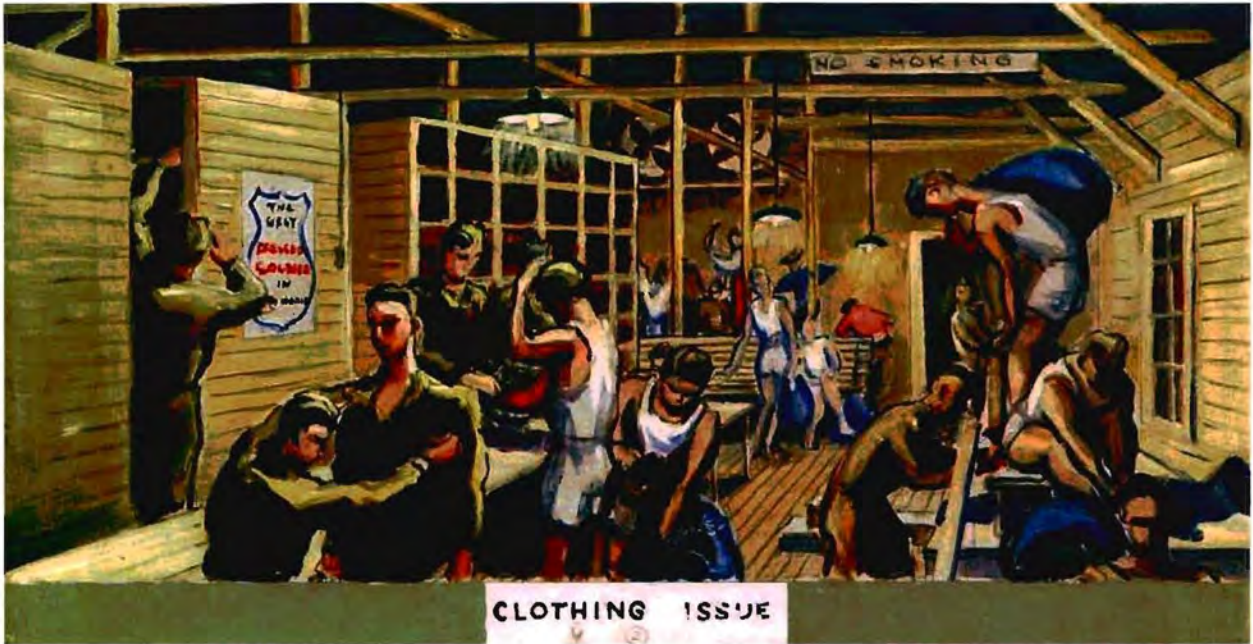


New recruits de-boarding from a bus, full of hope and excitement



New recruits getting their hair cut.

## BASIC TRAINING



New recruits being fitted for the uniforms they will wear.



Recruits on a work detail.

## BASIC TRAINING



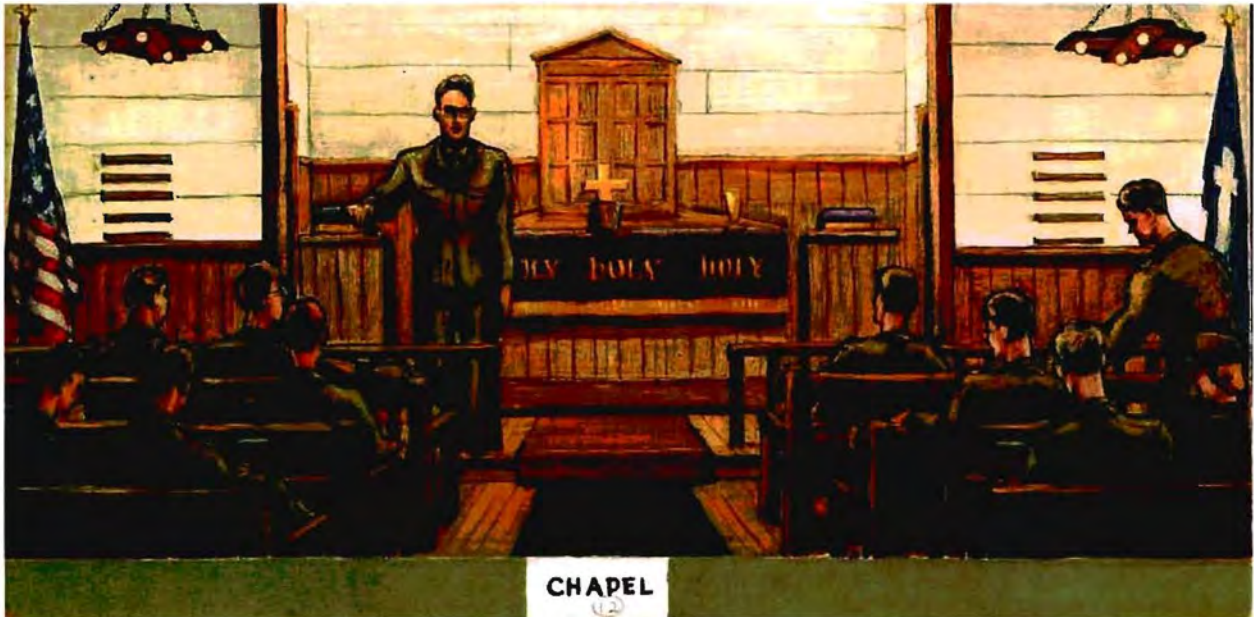
Recruits eating



Recruits relaxing and socializing



## BASIC TRAINING



The chapel, an important place of solace where stressors of military life can be unburdened



Recruits boarding trucks to move out to the field. They are filled with questions about being able to succeed.

## DEPLOYMENT



**Men and women of the military departing for active duty assignments. Their facial expressions reveal emotions ranging from concern, to worries about the future, to confidence that they will succeed.**

## MOMENTS ALONE



Two female soldiers lost in quiet moments of introspection before combat. Moments like these can allow feelings of doubt about being able to perform their duties to emerge, but such moments can also provide a period of calmness needed to summon their inner strength.

## DEPLOYMENT



**A soldier is ready to deploy. He is carrying all of his gear which weighs heavily upon him. The expression on his face is grave. It belies a sense of trepidation and doubt filled with questions about whether or not he will be able to face the danger and meet the tests of what lies ahead in combat. Despite his doubts and fears he is resolute in his determination to move forward. His left hand showing his wedding ring strongly grips his satchel.**

## COMBAT



The troops have landed on the field, ready to do battle. A single soldier stands quietly, weapon pointed downward. There is a sense of unrest, the calm before the storm. The soldier is painted almost completely in silhouette as are the two soldiers in the distance and the helicopter from which they have emerged. The darkness of these forms contrasted against the muddy yellows and oranges of the field lend an atmosphere of portent fraught with feelings of unrest and disquietude as the figures move out to fight.

## COMBAT



**Two soldiers are alone and charging towards the enemy. They are running forward quickly over unknown and unfamiliar terrain. The importance of having buddies in battle is emphasized in this painting as well as the doubts and fears about whether each will be up to the task at hand, of doing battle while supporting one another. Moreover, fears of being injured or captured are often paramount in the thoughts of soldiers as they rush to fight.**

## BUDDIES



The importance of relying on buddies for help is illustrated in this painting of two soldiers being assisted by a third as they try to climb up an embankment. Relying on a buddy is comforting but also stressful regarding whether or not a buddy can be depended upon.

## COMBAT



**Huddled in a foxhole somewhere in a cold winter three soldiers wait for the enemy to appear. Two soldiers are trying to sleep while the third stands watch. His expression is one of tremulousness and fear about facing unknown perils and hazards. Perhaps he contemplates fears of injury and dying as he waits. Or, perhaps he thinking of his spouse and children while feeling lonely and lost.**



## LONELINESS



Silence is punctuated by fear. The scene is a bleak snow covered terrain devoid of trees or any form of vegetation. There are what appear to be telephone poles, but with no wires, no communication. A sense of foreboding is seen in the two dark figures of the soldiers. They appear more as symbols than as individual figures. We are unable to discern any details from their forms, yet we know they are soldiers. They are walking solemnly towards their snow covered barracks somewhere in an isolated area. While the figures are together they appear alone and apart from one another. Each lost in his own thoughts at this time of quiet in combat. A pervasive sense of loneliness dominates the painting except for the brilliant blue of the sky which lends the painting a sense of warmth.

## LONELINESS



The colors convey a sense of desolation and loneliness. There are grays and browns contrasted against the white of the snow. A single figure is slightly bent forward as he moves through the wintry scene lost in his thoughts during this moment of quiet. A wistful sense of longing is communicated by the figure in his solitude.

## FIGHTING BOREDOM



Sailors aboard their ship coping with boredom in a confined space. Two play cards, another writes a letter home, a third stands watching.

## FIGHTING BOREDOM



Striving to create moments of normalcy during combat, two soldiers pass the time playing chess while they endure periods of waiting. Games help to stave off the stress from boredom often felt during lulls in battle. Additionally, performing mundane tasks can do the same, as the soldier here washing his clothes.



## MISSING LOVED ONES



Wondering about loved ones back home is a significant stressor faced by soldiers in combat. There are worries about relationship issues with ones spouse and children as well as worries about whether the spouse back home can perform all the necessary roles of being a disciplinarian, teacher and nurse for the children. Additionally, there is the worry about the increased responsibility for the spouse back home regarding being a household and financial manager. Letters from home bring hope and sustenance but they also revive all of these stresses. As we look at this soldier sitting alone reading his mail from home we can only wonder what worries he may be contemplating.

## OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS



Operational environments bring their own specific stressors. Individuals living in an austere steel box that is kept in constant readiness on or under the sea are exposed to isolation and, at times, enforced physical closeness to their comrades. They also face the full force of extensive climatic conditions, extremes of noise, heat, and humidity; seasickness; and an increased likelihood of physical disease. Lulls in the work demands may present an equally difficult low-demand stress associated with feelings of boredom.

## PRISONER OF WAR



Fear of becoming a prisoner of war is a constant and significant stressor for soldiers in combat. It is well known that prisoners of war show increased rates of psychiatric disturbance. The grim faces and the dark colors in this painting convey powerful feelings of fear.

## COMBAT



Exposure to the dead and grotesque are foremost stressors at a time of combat. The first painting depicts a soldier helping his buddy who in fact may be mortally wounded. The second painting shows civilians who have died as a result of combat.



## COMBAT



The battle has ended, but not the war. Three soldiers are resting, exhausted from fighting. One sits in a folding chair leaning with his head down. He is a young man, perhaps thinking of his loved ones at home and wondering how they are. Another soldier with face masked while resting momentarily is imagining himself feeding his infant son back home. He is longing to be back with his family in happier, sunnier times. The yellow background communicates a sense of longing for better days. A third soldier wearily rests his head on his hand. The American flag is next to him offering solace and comfort to any doubts and fears he feels about being a soldier in combat.

## STANDING GUARD



**A marine bravely stands guard allowing a relief organization to deliver food to refugees. Despite this potentially dangerous assignment his determination and bravery are communicated by both his stance and facial expression.**

## SECURITY PATROLS



Marines are running security patrols after combat operations have ended. This task is fraught with anxiety, tension and worries about being shot.

## COMBAT



Fears of injury realized. Two young soldiers are seen with head and eye wounds. They appear to be contemplating new fears of life after combat. There are worries about their futures and their ability to find meaningful work. There are worries about reuniting with their families and whether or not their families will be able to accept the changes in them. The soldier wearing a helmet with a cigarette dangling from his lips peers out at us from his bandaged face. The expression in his eye is one of sadness and terror. His figure is painted against a black background making him appear in a grim situation. The other soldier's eye can barely be seen because of the shadow on his face. Nonetheless, a sense of being fear-stricken is communicated in his expression. He too is painted against a stark black background. The bright area of red at the bottom of the painting lends a jarring feeling to the painting. The red band, the blue shirt and the white of the bandage suggest that the American flag is now in a bleak setting.

## GOING HOME



Wounded sailors returning home on their ship filled with worries about what the future will bring.

## REUNION



**This painting depicts a soldier coming home and reuniting with family members. The time of reunion renews stress related to past relationship issues with family members and raises questions about the effect the period of separation may have on these relationships.**

# REUNION



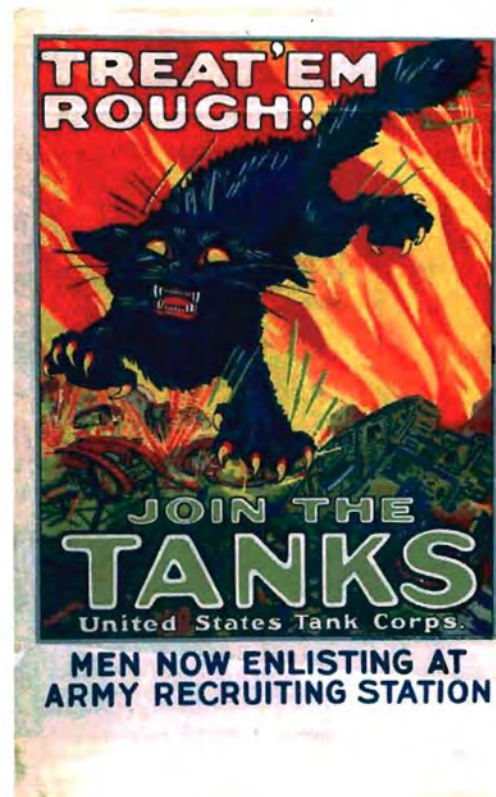
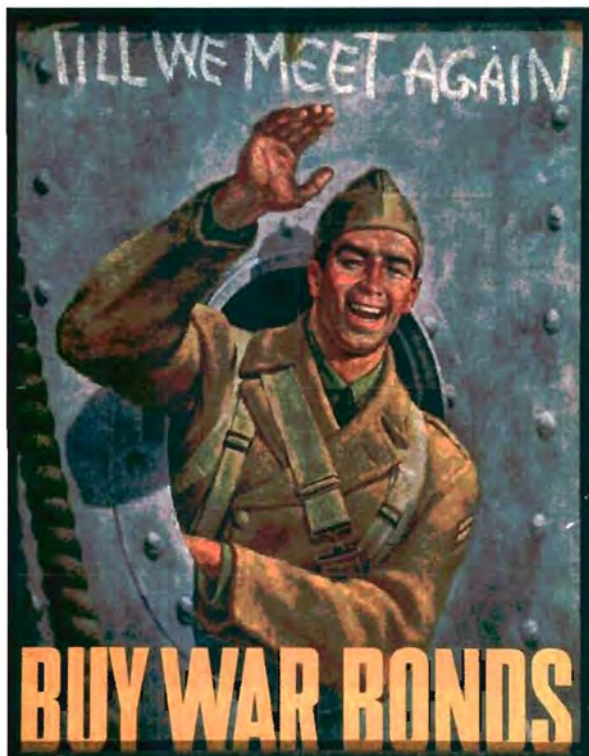
Remembrance of Dotted Street  
from Golden 1914  
Telling # 11 Joe De Táo-02 (MACAU) ARTIST

THE STRONG VISUAL IMPACT OF POSTER ART HAS BEEN AN EFFECTIVE AND POWERFUL MEANS OF COMMUNICATING MESSAGES TO THE PUBLIC





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## CONCLUSION

The paintings and posters presented here are strong graphic images portraying numerous stressors of military life. These images, through their use of design, composition, color and content illustrate stressors facing active duty soldiers in statements more powerful than words. The paintings and posters are especially poignant because they have been created by men and women who have been there. This poignancy enables the viewer to have a better understanding of the stressors of military life.



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