

Target: Iraq

G11

The men of the Third Division are young, athletic and eager. Judging from history, their enthusiasm will last right up to the moment someone shoots back. If the shooting is intense, most will bravely do their duty, but more than a few will curl up into the fetal position or wet themselves. If they see as much combat as their grandfathers in World War II, they will, over time, become jaded, ground down and unwilling. A 1943 survey asked frontline troops how they felt about "getting back into actual battle." Less than 1 percent wanted to do it any time soon. Among Silver Star winners, the second highest award for valor (the highest, the Congressional Medal of Honor, is often posthumous), almost none did.

Combat veterans often don't like to talk about their time under fire. They do not wish to boast, but they also do not wish to relive their feelings of disgust and shame. They know that the most common oaths uttered are not "Charge!" or "On, Wisconsin!" or "I have not yet begun to fight!" or any of those rallying cries of legend. When young men die on the battlefield, writes author and World War II combat vet Paul Fussell, the cry heard most often is "Mother!"

As the U.S. military girds for war, shipping tons of arms and ammunition, thousands of tanks and planes and artillery pieces to jumping-off points around Iraq, commanders must prepare themselves and their men for the hardest part of war: overcoming fear. No amount of men and matériel will conquer Iraq if the men doing the fighting cannot conquer the gremlins in their own minds. They have reason to be afraid. Most presidents, post-Vietnam, have been deeply reluctant to see any soldier come home in a body bag. Determined to show U.S. resolve, faced with a foe armed with WMD, President Bush seems more willing to run the risk of casualties. President Clinton pulled troops out of Somalia in 1993 right after the bloody fight depicted in "Black Hawk Down." Bush is eager to show the world that he is no Clinton.

Leading men into battle requires more than clichés and a strong jaw. In an earlier age, commanders killed shirkers and used alcohol to stiffen spines. As military historian John Keegan has noted, at Agincourt in the 15th century, at Waterloo in the 19th century, at the Somme in the 20th, many



Sergeant Figley (left) says he's not worried about facing battle. History says he should be.

soldiers went into battle "less than sober, if not fighting drunk." Modern American generals must rely on less crude tools. (Alcohol is forbidden on warships and at forward bases of the U.S. military, though soldiers seem to be able to get their hands on liquor, sometimes in mail deliveries from home.) Denial and stoicism, the traditional warrior virtues, may work for some gung-ho types—Marines, fighter pilots, paratroopers, the

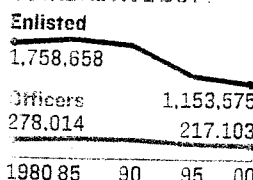
Navy SEALs and Green Berets—but the modern grunt misses his MTV. And even a valorous medal winner can come home a post-traumatic-stress-disorder wife beater.

How best to face fear? The therapy culture has seeped into the armed services: men are now encouraged to talk about their deepest anxieties, and "critical incidence stress teams" of psychiatrists and counselors are rushed to the scene within hours

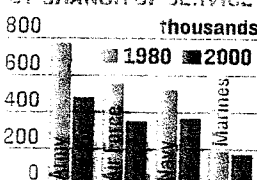
To the Ramparts

Washington may launch the war, but it's up to the troops to win it. The fighting force:

TOTAL ACTIVE DUTY



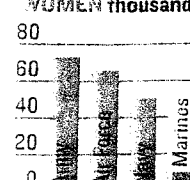
BY BRANCH OF SERVICE



BATTLE DEATHS

| | Deaths | % of total |
|--------------|---------|------------|
| World War II | 291,557 | 1.8 |
| Korean War | 33,741 | 0.6 |
| Vietnam | 47,414 | 0.5 |
| Gulf war | 147 | 0.02 |

WOMEN thousands



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division that saw heavy fighting in World War II, a quarter of the soldiers admitted they had been so scared that they vomited. Almost a quarter lost control of their bowels. Ten percent urinated in their pants. (Dry mouth and gagging are common symptoms of fear, a problem for officers who try to shout orders under fire and, instead, squeak.) Some men break right away under fire. Others take longer. A few, maybe 2 percent, are true war lovers, but they are also deemed psychopaths driven mad by the stress of combat. Army psychiatrists in World War II found that *every* man had an absolute limit of psychic endurance, at most about 60 days of continuous combat or an aggregate of 200 to 240 days.

A war against Iraq, if it comes, will be much shorter—probably. Americans have become accustomed to one-sided wars with low American casualties. U.S. forces will again roll over Iraqi opposition—maybe. U.S. soldiers will be better protected than earlier combatants and kill the enemy from greater distances—usually. Then again, the Third Division could find itself fighting house to house in a city swathed in toxic gas. Even Sergeant Figley does not seem so sure he wants to experience urban combat. He and his troopers have been practicing amid a dozen old trailers arranged into a mock “city.” They use live ammo, but for safety reasons they are required to keep the barrels of their M-16s pointed down except when they’re shooting. In a real street fight, they should be aiming up at the rooftops. “It’s just them creating bad habits,” mutters Figley. Plastic silhouettes in the fake city represent the locals: dark green is the enemy, beige is friendly. But silhouettes do not shoot back, and identifying friend or foe is not so easy in a real fight, especially if the troops are peering through gas masks. They can practice for the worst, but there’s always someone who doesn’t get the message. As the men of a Second Brigade unit struggled to pull on their chem-bio suits in a recent drill, one young private helplessly held up his shattered visor. He had used it as a pillow.

“Train the way you fight, fight the way you train” is the mantra of the armed serv-

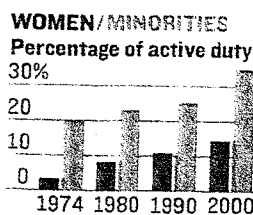
Newsweek Log on for a Live Talk with Howard Fineman on Newsweek.MSNBC.com on Jan. 29 at 11 a.m., ET



of a fight or a fatal training accident. But fear cannot be talked away. It can be contained or compartmentalized, but it cannot be banished. Most commanders know that their best hope is to channel fear, so that men are not paralyzed but rather motivated. It has long been recognized that men fight, not for God or country, but out of fear—fear of being killed and fear of showing fear. The military uses the buddy system knowing

that men do not want to shame themselves by showing cowardice to their buddies.

The great combat historian of World War II, S.L.A. Marshall, wrote that fear affects *all* men, even those in the most highly motivated units. Marshall found that no more than a quarter of the men actually fired their weapons on the battlefield. Religious scruple against killing was one reason. A bigger factor was shock. In one study of a



| RACE AND ETHNICITY | |
|------------------------|-----|
| All active duty | |
| Caucasian | 65% |
| African-American | 20 |
| Hispanic | 8 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 4 |
| Native American | 1 |

| EDUCATION LEVEL | | |
|-------------------|-----|------|
| Officers Enlisted | | |
| Advanced degree | 40% | 0.3% |
| Bachelor's | 50 | 3 |
| No degree | 6 | 94 |
| No H.S. diploma | 0.1 | 2 |

| AGE | |
|-----------------|----|
| All active duty | |
| 41 or older | 8% |
| 36-40 years | 13 |
| 31-35 | 15 |
| 26-30 | 18 |
| 25 or younger | 46 |

| MARITAL STATUS | |
|------------------------|-----|
| All active duty | |
| Single, no children | 41% |
| Married, with children | 39 |
| Married, no children | 14 |
| Single, with children | 6 |