"It was fight or flight...and flight was not an option": An Existential Phenomenological Investigation of Military Service Members' Experience of Hand-to-Hand Combat

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Dedication

In honor of the military service members, past and present, who have fought amidst the most trying circumstances in defense of their society and its cherished values.

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Abstract

Hand-to-hand combat is one of the more psychologically challenging performance environments for those in the military (Grossman, 1995). Even with the technological advances of modern warfare military leaders still believe hand-to-hand combat is an important and relevant challenge for service members (Blanton, 2007; Clark, 2009; Collins, 2007; Wojdakowski, 2007; Wood & Micaelson, 2000). Despite its importance, the hand-to-hand combat experience has, to date, attracted very little research attention. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore military service members' experiences of hand-to-hand combat. To accomplish this objective, phenomenological interviews were conducted with 17 male military service members. Each participant was asked to respond to the following open-ended statement: "Please describe your experience of hand-to-hand combat with an enemy combatant during combat operations." Follow-up questions were asked only to obtain additional details and further clarification of the participant's comments. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were analyzed qualitatively, revealing a total of 584 meaning units. The data were then grouped into sub-themes and major themes that depicted the participants' experiences. A final thematic structure revealed four major, figural dimensions that illustrated these service members' experiences of hand-to-hand combat: *enemy threat, fall to your training, fast,* and *close.* These major figural themes emerged against the contextual background of the major theme: *everyday combat operations*. The results were somewhat consistent with previous literature, mainly information presented in hand-to-hand combat training manuals, but several findings represented extensions of

existing knowledge. The most significant aspects of these service members' experiences were: (a) the perceived novelty of hand-to-hand combat relative to "normal" combat operations, (b) the perception of opponents as instrumental objects, which temporarily suspended the sense of the opponents' humanity, (c) the perceived speed of a hand-to-hand combat event, and (d) a perceived spectrum of intensity (mild to extreme) of encounters with respect to the emotion of fear and the physiological sensations of high arousal. The results suggest several practical training implications for military service personnel, hand-to-hand combat instructors, and performance psychology consultants.

Keywords: hand-to-hand combat, fear, arousal, phenomenology, military

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Chapter 1

Introduction

> "But he [the infantry service member] does not get what he most requires – the simple details of common human experience on the field of battle. As a result, he goes to the supremely testing experience of his lifetime almost a total stranger (Marshall, 1978, p. 37)."

Since its inception in the late nineteenth century the field of sport psychology has contributed a plethora of research on the training and performance of athletes and non-athletes alike (Williams & Straub, 2010). More recently, sport psychology researchers have broadened the scope of their inquiry to include the world of military training (US Army, Army Center for Enhanced Performance, 2010). Some scholars have also recommended greater interaction across the disciplines of military and sport sciences in order to improve the existing understanding of military performance demands (Fiore, Hoffman, & Salas, 2008). Performance Enhancement Specialists working with the United States (US) Army have answered this call, incorporating mental skills training (MST) into the standard training activities for service members and reporting the effects of MST in scholarly journals (DeWiggins, Hite, & Alston, 2010). While such contributions have provided initial insights into the potential effectiveness of MST to equip service members for the mental and emotional demands of warfare, to date, there has been no research examining the demands of service members during actual wartime combat operations from the perspective of the service members themselves.

Among the demands service personnel might face in battle, hand-to-hand combat has generated attention in military literature (Blanton, 2007; Clark, 2009; Collins, 2007; Wojdakowski, 2007; Wood & Micaelson, 2000). In spite of the vast increases in technology used in modern warfare, there remains the possibility of hand-to-hand combat for today's service members. Consistent with Hobbs' (1917) observation during World War I that "events have shown...that modern science has not done away with hand-to-hand fighting" (p. 79), current US military leaders continue to emphasize the importance of hand-to-hand combat training in the preparation of the modern service member. Therefore, hand-to-hand combat would appear to be a logical aspect of warfare to examine from a performance psychology perspective.

Brief Review of Relevant Literature

According to the United States Army training manual, hand-to-hand combat is defined as "...an engagement between two or more persons in an empty-handed struggle or with hand-held weapons such as knives, sticks, or projectile weapons that cannot be fired" (US Army, 2002, p. 1-1). While sharing similarities with combat sports, such as wrestling or boxing, hand-to-hand combat is not a sport (Applegate, 1976; Marriot, 1917; Poliakoff, 1987). Combat sports possess a "...fixed structure or system of competition (Poliakoff, 1987, p. 7)," the outcome of which is measured by a final score. Hand-to-hand combat maintains an intentionally lethal purpose to repel, capture, or defeat other persons deemed by the military to be an enemy (US Army, 1992b), the outcome of which can be life for one and death for the other.

A variety of sources of literature have addressed the demands of military hand-to-hand combat, however scholarly research on this military activity is scarce. Some research has examined the effects of various factors on the hand-to-hand combat training of soldiers. For example, several researchers have investigated the impact of physical capabilities on participant effectiveness in simulated hand-to-hand combat scenarios (Askinazi, 2007; Greenberg & Berger, 1983; Kalina, Chodala, Dadelo, Jagiello, Nastula, & Niedomagala, 2005). A more recent study examined the impact of MST on participant self-efficacy during a hand-to-hand combat training course (Morales-Negron, 2008). Finally, there has been some research exploring US Army soldiers' perceptions of the effectiveness of hand-to-hand combat training in preparation for actual combat (Blanton, 2008). While all of this research offers various insights on hand-to-hand combat training there still exists the need to determine how service members experience hand-to-hand combat mentally and emotionally during actual warfare.

Papers written for military journals have attempted to provide some information about service members' perceptions of hand-to-hand combat. Among the earliest published work was that of military mental health specialists who interviewed soldiers during World War I about their battle experiences (Bird, 1917; Carrington, 1916). While the resulting papers appeared to offer several insights into service members' perspective, questions about the interview methods cast some question as to the accuracy of the findings. Later, Todd (1938) provided some commentary on the psychological demands of hand-to-hand combat in an analysis of weapons used in trench warfare.

More modern attempts to describe the psychological demands of hand-to-hand combat have primarily appeared in training manuals written by former or current military personnel (Applegate, 1976; Duffield & Elliot, 1942; Fairbairn, 1979; Styers, 1952; Thompson & Peligro, 2006; US Marine Corps, 2005; US Army, 1992a; US Army, 2002). The emphasis of these papers, however, is on the technical and tactical instruction necessary for hand-to-hand combat with only an occasional maxim inserted to alert service members as to what they might actually experience. While the previous authors' backgrounds suggest either personal experience in hand-to-hand combat or close association with service members that have encountered hand-to-hand combat, their papers fail to provide insight into the perspectives of participants who have been involved in the actual experience of hand-to-hand combat.

There is some non-military literature dealing with factors relevant to the experience of hand-to-hand combat. Perhaps most significant is Grossman's (1995) book addressing humans' inhibition to killing in warfare. Based on an analysis of anecdotal evidence, Grossman (1995) argues that humans have an inherent resistance to killing other humans and that hand-to-hand combat creates the highest level of psychological resistance due to the close proximity of the participants. When such encounters contain lethal intent the resulting resistance is presumed to generate extreme physiological arousal (Grossman & Siddle, 1999; Molloy & Grossman, 2007). High levels of arousal accompanying hand-to-hand combat have also been identified in military veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Grisby, 1991). Also termed *combat rush*, extreme psychological and physiological reactions to killing have also been shown to

produce positive feelings or even joy, as well as trauma (Bourke, 1999). Taken together, then, this literature suggests that the experience of hand-to-hand combat may produce a wide spectrum of thoughts and emotions.

Recent biographical accounts of military service members' experiences of hand-to-hand combat also provide some insight into the demands associated with such a fight. Examples include Lee's (2006) book containing interviews with World War II veterans and an autobiographical work in which one soldier describes at length his experience of hand-to-hand combat (Bellavia & Bruning, 2007). While such first-person descriptions provide some insights into the possible mental and emotional processes accompanying the hand-to-hand combat experience, the process of reporting fails to conform to conventional procedures used in systematic qualitative research.

Given the intense and personal nature of hand-to-hand combat, it might be argued that the best method for examining such an experience is qualitative interviewing (c.f. Thomas, Nelson & Silverman, 2005). According to Cresswell (2007), qualitative methods afford "...a complex, detailed understanding of the issue" (p. 40). Lomski-Feder (1995) used a qualitative approach in interviewing Israeli war veterans about their experiences of combat. However, the resulting journal article provided only a broad interpretation of the soldiers' life stories framed within the total context of warfare. A potentially more-fruitful qualitative approach for examining the particular experience of hand-to-hand combat is rooted in the framework of existential phenomenology, the chief aim of which is to describe (Polkinghorne, 1989) and understand (Cresswell, 2007) the essence of a person's experience.

Phenomenological research methods have been used by previous scholars to examine a variety of military related experiences, including families' experience of coping with the challenges of separation due to military deployments (Colvin, 2010; Falcone, 2010), the cultural experience of military nurses during the Vietnam War (Scannell-Desch, 2000), the experience of relationships between wounded service members and military nurses (Hagerty, Williams, Bingham, & Richard, 2011), and the experience of military personnel returning from service during wartime military deployments (Shaw & Hector, 2010). While none of these studies examined the specific experience of service members in hand-to-hand combat, it is clear that the technique of phenomenological interviewing produced in-depth descriptions of their participants' experiences.

In an attempt to assess the potential of phenomenological interviewing for examining service members' experience of hand-to-hand combat and refine his interviewing skills, the current researcher conducted a pilot study with nine male U.S. military service members. Each person was asked to respond to the following open-ended statement: "Please describe your experience of hand-to-hand combat with an enemy combatant during combat operations." Feedback obtained from the participants suggested that the research question and method were appropriate for examining service members' experience of hand-to-hand combat. In addition the process revealed several issues to consider when conducting future interviews with military personnel. For example, pilot participants holding a much lower rank than the interviewer (who held the rank of a US

Army major at the time) appeared to be more reticent to provide in-depth responses than those holding a closer rank.

Statement of the Problem

The existing literature provides a very limited perspective of service members' experience of hand-to-hand combat in warfare situations. Performance psychology consultants within the military require greater insights into this experience in order to provide the most effective training and psychological skills for service members required to handle the demands of such an event. Given the promising results of the aforementioned pilot study it appears that a phenomenological interview approach might yield a more nuanced perspective of service members' experience of actual hand-to-hand combat than currently exists.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to obtain in-depth, first-person descriptions of the lived experience of hand-to-hand combat from military service members who had encountered such an experience. The method of phenomenological interviewing was employed to accomplish this purpose.

Assumptions

Two assumptions existed in the present study. First, it was assumed that all participants had actually experienced hand-to-hand combat during a military operation. Secondly, it was assumed that the participants were capable of reflecting on and clearly articulating their experiences and that they were willing to do so.

Limitations

The present study may have also been limited in the following ways. It is possible that the participants were not completely accurate and/or honest when recalling and discussing their experiences of hand-to-hand combat. Moreover, since all experiences were recalled retrospectively, it is possible that some participants may have had difficulty recalling details of the incident.

Delimitations

The present study was delimited in several ways. First, only male military service members were interviewed due to the inability to contact any female service members with experience in hand-to-hand combat. Second, all but one of the participants was a US military service member. Third, each participant self-disclosed that they were highly trained in hand-to-hand combat. Thus, the results may not accurately reflect the experiences of military service members with more limited training. Fourth, only participants having no previous diagnosis of PTSD were included in the study. Finally, since phenomenological research relies on an accurate interpretation of the expressed meaning of participants' experiences, all interviews were conducted in a language familiar to both the participant and researcher (i.e. English).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Overview

Although hand-to-hand combat is essentially unrepresented in the performance psychology literature there exists some published research, information in military training manuals, and suggestions from other scholarly work that appear to have some relevance to such an event. This chapter includes a review of some of this literature that provides a context for a phenomenological investigation of service members' experience of hand-to-hand combat. For the most part, the literature that is reviewed has a performance focus that provides insights into the skill demands a service member might face during hand-to-hand combat. While it might be argued that such an event could produce mental trauma and mental illness, such as PTSD, these topics are beyond the scope of the present study and therefore literature dealing with them is not included here. The current chapter contains a review of the literature dealing with the physical elements and the psychological aspects of hand-to-hand combat. While literature dealing with the two components is presented in separate sections, it is acknowledged that the two aspects are interdependent during the actual event.

Physical Elements of Hand-to-Hand Combat

The literature presented in this section pertains to the following physical elements of hand-to-hand combat and presented in a manner designed by the researcher: Physicality, fighting skill, physiological arousal, open environment, and teamwork.

Physicality. Hand-to-hand combat is a physically demanding and taxing event. Not surprisingly, therefore, the current US Army hand-to-hand combat training manual, *Combatives* (2002), emphasizes that a soldier must be physically fit to fight effectively. In the US Marine Corps hand-to-hand combat training manual from the Korean War era, Styers (1952) similarly wrote about the absolute necessity of top physical conditioning for success in hand-to-hand combat. Prior to 1950, most wars contained considerable and direct physical confrontation between the service members of opposing armies. In a World War I military journal article Hobbs (1917) emphasized the importance of a soldier's physical fitness for hand-to-hand combat using a fixed bayonet, which was a particularly exhausting activity.

The existence of weight classes in many combat sports suggests an advantage exists for those athletes with bigger physical size and strength. Some research results support the notion that physical strength and size are important elements for successful performance during hand-to-hand combat related activities (Greenberg & Berger, 1983). In that study a criterion task of jacketed wrestling was used to replicate the demands a law enforcement officer might experience when restraining an individual. With each participant gripping the other's jacket, two opponents tried to push or pull the other out of a five-foot circle. The participants, who were college students, were also tested on a number of strength-related activities (i.e., bench press, leg press, upright rowing) and their height and weight were measured. The results revealed that physical strength, height, and weight were all significant predictors of performance on the criterion test.

These findings suggest that a service member's size and strength may influence his/her chances of success in hand-to-hand combat.

During trench warfare in World War I hand-to-hand combat would often occur under such physically close and crowded circumstances that the use of the arms could be severely restricted, prompting one Army officer to characterize the event as a "scrum" (MacDonald, 1917). Hobbs (1917) contended that nine out of 10 bayonet engagements ended up in a form of grappling where combatants "...tie themselves up in a knot and roll about on the grass" (p. 84). In keeping with its physicality, hand-to-hand combat is an event that often produces physical injuries for one or both combatants. One World War II veteran described the physicality and injurious violence of one such event in the following way:

> I crashed the Bren [machine gun] into his face. I threw it straight into his face. Before he hit the ground I had my hand on his windpipe and I literally tried to tear it out. It wouldn't come out and we got fighting on the ground. If I could have got his windpipe out I would have twisted that round his neck. I managed to get his bayonet from his rifle and I finished him with that – he was the one that died, not me (Lee, 2006, pp. 217-218).

Staff Sergeant Bellavia's (Bellavia & Bruning, 2007) following autobiographical account also depicts the physically brutal and exhausting nature of hand-to-hand combat.

> I step forward and slam the barrel of my rifle down on his head. He grunts and suddenly swings his AK [rifle] up. Its barrel slams into my jaw and I feel a tooth break. I reel from the blow, but before I can do anything he

> backhands me with the AK. This time, the wooden handgrip glances off the bridge of my nose. I taste blood...he kicks and bucks. His hands beat against me. I can't get enough pressure on him. He's still strong, still in the fight despite everything I've done. I cannot break his throat. I don't have the strength...I feel my strength ebbing. I don't have much left. He kicks at me, throwing his whole body into it. I've got to end this. But I don't know how.

The final comment in the previous account introduces another aspect of the physical nature of hand-to-hand combat, fighting skill.

Fighting skill. Much of the available literature on hand-to-hand combat accentuates the importance of a service member possessing fighting skills in order to survive and succeed in such an event. Styers' (1952) emphasized the necessity of fighting skills when he stated, "on the battlefield when [the service member's] life is in the balance, he cannot use effective attacks of hand-to-hand fighting if he DOESN'T KNOW WHAT THEY ARE!" (p. 77). During World War I, Hobbs (1917) also believed that a "very slight advantage in skill give[s] the victory" (p. 85).

Some available research suggests support for the notion that superior fighting skills are an advantage in hand-to-hand combat. One study (Kalina et al., 2005) examined the performance of military cadets and bodyguards on two simulated hand-to-hand combat tasks (modified *judo* and *sumo* contests). Participants' performance was also evaluated on several physical fitness tests (i.e. sit-ups, pull-ups, 50 meter dash, etc.). The results revealed that superior physical fitness alone was not a guarantee of victory in

hand-to-hand combat. These findings suggest that fighting skill is another factor that may in some cases negate physical strength advantages during such an event. However, the results should be viewed with caution, at least until they are replicated in actual, rather than simulated, hand-to-hand combat.

Other research suggests hand-to-hand combat can be a difficult endeavor irrespective of one's fighting skill. Askinazi (2007) found that Russian soldiers and military cadets possessing 148 hours of hand-to-hand combat training were only able to defeat their opponent in simulated combat scenarios 55 percent of the time (Askinazi, 2007). Such a low percentage of success does not mean that the development of fighting skills is unnecessary. Rather, it might be argued that 148 hours of training is not near enough. A nearly universal theme of military training manuals is the importance of automating service members' fighting skills (Applegate, 1976; Duffield & Elliot, 1942; Fairbairn, 1979; Styers, 1952; Thompson & Peligro, 2006; US Marine Corps, 2005; US Army, 1992a; US Army, 2002). Achieving such automatic levels requires many hours of practice.

Hand-to-hand combat training manuals insist that fighting skills need to be "intuitive" (US Army, 1992a, p. 184) and at such a level of proficiency that the service member is able to "instinctively react" (US Army, 2002, p. 8-21) to an opponent's attack. A service member with expert fighting skills is more likely to carry out "every movement *instinctively* and *automatically*" (Fairbairn, 1979, p. v). This suggests that fighting skills should be developed to such a level of proficiency that they require little or no thinking to execute them during an actual encounter (Styers, 1952). In their historical analysis of

human performance in warfare before firearms, Molloy & Grossman (2007) argue that highly automated fighting skills help service members perform despite the cognitively debilitating impact of extreme psycho-physiological arousal that accompanies hand-to-hand combat (Molloy & Grossman, 2007). They further contend that a service member's ability to employ simple fighting skills in a near automatic fashion, and even rely on group tactics rather than individual skill during an encounter, can counteract the otherwise debilitating effects of high physiological arousal level that often occurs (Molloy & Grossman, 2007).

Physiological arousal. It should come as no surprise that the lethal threat and interpersonal aggression of warfare at a very close distance between combatants creates an intense, high-level of physiological arousal (Grossman & Siddle, 1999; Molloy & Grossman, 2007). Participants in one study (Grisby, 1991) reported a wide variety of powerful physiological effects during combat in the Vietnam War. They said that very high levels of arousal, fear, and even excitement often accompanied their warfare experiences. Some viewed such arousal, termed *combat rush*, as facilitative to performance because it generated a heightened perception of physical strength as well as a hyper vigilance. Taken together, the available literature suggests that a powerful increase in physiological arousal accompanies the experience of hand-to-hand combat.

Open environment. Hand-to-hand combat does not contain rules for "fair play" or safety as found in most sporting environments. Moreover, the combat environment is usually unpredictable and prone to change rapidly. Such environments, which are termed "open" in the motor skill literature, prevent performers from effectively planning their

"full movement in advance" (Schmidt & Lee, 2011, pg. 23). Because of the open environment surrounding most hand-to-hand combat, training manuals emphasize the importance of maximizing every possible advantage for defeating an opponent (Applegate, 1976, Duffield & Elliot, 1942; Fairbairn, 1979; Marriot, 1917; Styers, 1952; US Army, 1992a). For example, service members are encouraged to surprise an opponent whenever possible – whether to initiate hand-to-hand combat or employ an unexpected tactic of their own (Applegate, 1976; Duffield & Elliot, 1942; Fairbairn, 1979). An instructor and author of one training manual compared hand-to-hand combat to "a mugging: you will mug him or he will mug you...it won't be expected" (Thompson & Peligro, 2006, p. 14). In his autobiography, Nick Rowe (1971) described how he used the element of surprise to escape from his prison guard during the Vietnam War.

> I searched the clumps of reeds for...dead wood [to] serve as a club. I wasn't going to take the chance of wrestling with [my guard] since he had a weight advantage as well as a strength advantage. While he walked ahead of me, unaware of what I was doing, I selected a short limb...and stepped quickly behind [my guard]. The sharp blow caught him at the base of the skull...he sagged and dropped immediately without making a sound. I dropped the club and chopped him twice with the edge of my hand, delivering the blows to the side of the neck below the jawbone. I didn't intend to kill him, but I didn't want him to follow me (p. 432).

The open environment accompanying hand-to-hand combat is further reinforced in one US Army training manual (1992a), which states that, "to survive, the soldier in

combat must be able to deal with any situation that develops. His ability to adapt any nearby object for use as a weapon in a win-or-die situation is limited only by his ingenuity and resourcefulness" (p. 166). The manual also emphasizes that service members "stay mentally alert and be aware of an all-round perimeter of defense" (US Army, 1992a, p. 182). In the following quote, Duffield and Elliot (1942) stress the importance of adaptability in hand-to-hand combat situations, stating, "The great thing about hand-to-hand fighting is to keep your intelligence mobile, to seize every opportunity and to be always prepared to shift your plan of attack with hardly a second notice" (p. 34).

Regardless of what type of war a service member is fighting, the performance environment of hand-to-hand combat requires an ability "to react to the fluidity of combat and adjust to its ever changing situation" (US Marine Corps, 2005, p. 5). Carrington's (1916) interviews with World War I service members led him to believe that bayonet fighting is quick, unpredictable and occurs with little or no conscious thought (Carrington, 1916). This notion was reinforced in a later account (Styers, 1952), which put the demands of bayonet fighting in a time frame of "fractions of seconds, and what you do with eight-tenths of a second may mean the difference between" (p. 6) life and death. Clearly, hand-to-hand combat is an event that can occur in a rapidly changing environment, which is difficult to predict yet requires the rapid execution of fighting skills.

Teamwork. Some training manuals remind service members that hand-to-hand combat is ideally not a one-on-one event, but instead an encounter that a service member

must endure and survive until fellow service members can arrive to assist. As one manual puts it, "the fundamental truth of hand-to-hand fighting is that the winner will be the one whose buddies show up first with a weapon" (US Army, 2002, p. 9-1). During hand-to-hand combat a service member's objective is to "dispose of [an] opponent as quickly as possible and go to the assistance of your comrades" (Fairbairn, 1979, p. 70). These directives suggest that the physical demands of hand-to-hand combat can be managed more effectively if shared by a team of service members rather than met by the individual service member.

The preceding literature provides some insight into the physical elements of hand-to-hand combat. Such an event appears to be highly demanding and even brutal, where strength and skill are important elements for success. Such combat can also occur very rapidly within a changing environment, requiring service members to employ any advantage in their arsenal to achieve success, or at least survive until allied service members are able to come to their assistance. In the following section, literature addressing the psychological aspects of hand-to-hand combat is reviewed.

Psychological Aspects of Hand-to-Hand Combat

The literature presented in this section pertains to the following psychological aspects of hand-to-hand combat including the following: the general mindset, mental calm, fear, inhibition to killing, ruthlessness, instinct, positive emotions, and life and death.

The general mindset. The available literature suggests that a wide variety of emotions and cognitions can accompany the immediate experience of hand-to-hand

combat. While much of it is of limited scholarly basis it provides a varied perspective on what a service member might experience psychologically. Much of the literature divides the experience of hand-to-hand combat along into two categories: one, a highly emotional state with little cognitive awareness and two, a more instrumental and calculated attitude.

In his historical analysis of close range weapons used during trench warfare in World War I, Todd, (1938) stated that a "particular psychological transformation" (p. 140) is necessary to confront the fear of hand-to-hand combat. Although he did not describe exactly what the resulting emotional state should be following such a transformation, other authors have suggested a general heightening of emotional intensity bordering on animal energy. Carrington (1916) contended that World War I soldiers attempting a bayonet assault against an enemy position had to adopt a "beast-brute" (p. 64) attitude. This highly emotional psychological state, similar to that of a wild animal during a hunt, was assumed to be necessary for close, hand-to-hand combat using a bayonet. Carrington (1916) described the mindset in the following way:

> All his [soldier's] higher instincts and feelings are in abeyance. He becomes simply an instinctive animal, bent on preserving his own life, by killing as many of the enemy as possible. At such times the crisis of excitement runs high; the men cry out, they shout, they brandish their arms...one idea, and one only, floods the consciousness and the whole being of the soldier, self-preservation" (p. 64).

Carrington (1916) further emphasized a mindset bent on complete control over the opponent as well as a singular focus.

> The thoughts are centered upon one idea – dominating the enemy. Aspirations, regrets, ideas, all find their place taken by bodily sensations and activities....in whatever he does his acts and thoughts become *one*. The most primitive of all our instincts – the instinct of self-preservation – that which we share equally with everything that lives – comes to the fore, and assumes a vital, a dominating position. All the centuries of intervening civilization are swept away in an instant; and we see before us, not the cultured gentleman of yesterday, but a primitive brute-beast, fighting for his existence and his life in precisely the same way his ancestors fought – with no other, higher ideals in mind!" (p. 68).

Duffield and Elliot (1942) also emphasized the importance of a general mindset for hand-to-hand combat characterized by a highly charged emotional state controlled by anger. They argued that a service member engaged in bayonet fighting should let "...his hate dominate him and hold back nothing. There must be no reluctance, no squeamishness, only absolute confidence, absolute determination to go in hell for leather" (p. 12).

In his recent autobiographical account of the powerful emotions he experienced during one incident of hand-to-hand combat, Staff Sergeant Bellavia (Bellavia & Bruning, 2007) stated, "The two of us sound like caged dogs locked in a death match. We are. My voice isn't human any more...we've become our base, animal selves, with only survival instincts to keep us going...I become a madman" (pp. 262-265).

The belief that the general mindset for hand-to-hand combat should be dominated by charged emotions and almost devoid of higher cognitive processing appears at odds

with the mental requirements necessary for successful performance in open environments, such as a sharp focus and adaptability. In addition, some military literature suggests that hand-to-hand combat requires a measure of calm that serves to temper the high emotional energy accompanying the event. That literature is reviewed next.

Mental calm. Some literature suggests that effective hand-to-hand combat requires a measure of emotional control in order to achieve an optimal level of awareness. One hand-to-hand combat training manual encourages service personnel to maintain concentration without interference from fear or anger (US Army, 1992a). Another manual (Styers, 1952) states that relaxation of both mind and body are necessary prerequisites for close encounters with the enemy and that excessive anxiety can inhibit a service member's effectiveness in bayonet fighting. One World War II military instructor (Applegate, 1979) emphasized that the maintenance of mental balance is a fundamental principle of effective hand-to-hand combat. Hobbs (1917) expressed a similar sentiment during World War I when he argued that remaining mentally aware and cognizant of relevant environmental information was an important skill for service members in hand-to-hand fighting situations. He stated that "...keeping your head, even when you get the worst of it for a tie, even when you are hurt and used up, is what matters most of all in hand-to-hand fighting...(p. 84)." Perhaps the greatest psychological challenge to remaining calm and clearheaded during intense hand-to-hand combat is fear. Put simply, fear impairs the service member's ability to remain focused on the effective execution of fighting skills. Some of the causes and effects of fear during hand-to-hand combat are discussed next.

Fear. Fear is an emotion associated with a sense or feeling of apprehension (Lang, 1970) that emerges from the perception of an immediate and real threat (Gower, 2004). However, in some ways the potential to experience fear is independent of the service member's emotional state during close combat. That is fear can accompany either a heightened emotional state or one of mental calm. Prior to World War II, Todd (1938) believed that fighting at close range with weapons like a trench knife or trench club produced possibly the most fear in service members and required the highest personal courage. Additionally, recently published interviews with veterans of World War II (Lee, 2006), which soldiers experience of fear during hand-to-hand combat, suggest that fear can also produce rapid and violent reactions. One soldier stated, "He (opponent) turned and noticed me at the same time I noticed him. I can see his face now, turning. I stabbed him in the neck with my bayonet, then I was so scared that I shot him about three times to make sure" (Lee, 2006, p. 103). Some military manuals emphasize that fear should not be viewed negatively by service members but rather as a tool to employ against an opponent. During World War II members of the British Home Guard were instructed to inspire more fear in the opponent than the opponent produced in them during hand-to-hand combat (Duffield & Elliot, 1942). In a similar vein, Styers (1952) emphasized the "terrifying mental effect" (p. 131) a service member armed with a bayonet or knife could inspire in an opponent.

To date, there has been some research examining service members' experience of fear in combat. One World War II survey of 1766 veterans of combat revealed that 67% admitted to being concerned about becoming injured in battle compared to only seven

percent who responded that they "never worried about" becoming a casualty (Stouffer, Lumsdaine, Lumsdaine, Williams, Smith, Janis, Star, & Cottrell, 1949, p. 202). In another survey of 4504 World War II Army Air Corps personnel, 33% of officers and 43% of gunners reported experiencing fear "almost every time" or "every time" they flew a combat mission (Shaffer, 1947). However, the results of this study also indicated that fear was a more common phenomenon during service members' first combat mission than during later missions, with 85% of officers and 83% of gunners reporting fear on their initial combat flight (Shaffer, 1947).

The intensity and possible sources of fear have also been examined in previous studies with military service members. Shaffer (1947) found that 58% of officers and 68% of gunners on flight combat missions experienced fear that was greater than anything they ever experienced in their life. The percentages of agreement increased to 84% and 89%, respectively, when respondents were asked if fear in combat was at least as powerful as any other fear they had experienced in their life (Shaffer, 1947). Other research has attempted to determine those aspects of warfare that generate the most fear in service members. For example, one study with Israeli war veterans (Shalit, 1988) revealed that the most frightening aspects of combat were letting comrades down (40.4%), loss of limb/injury (26.6%), and death (20.7%). Taken together, the results of previous studies examining service members' fear in combat suggest that such fear can be a powerful experience and stem from multiple sources. However, this research has for the most part targeted service members' general warfare experience rather than that involving hand-to-hand combat. Arguably, the latter situation represents a more complex

emotional event that combines not only fear for the service member's own life but perhaps an instinctive aversion to killing another human being (Grossman, 1995). The latter possibility is discussed next.

Inhibition to killing. Several scholars have addressed the possibility that humans have an inherent psychological resistance to killing other humans (Berkowitz, 1990; Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1979; Grossman, 1995; Roscoe, 2009; Smith, 2007). Most notable is the work of Grossman (1995) who argues that such an inhibition carries, for some people at least, the same strength as other clinically diagnosed, emotional phobia, rendering the possibility of killing another person for any reason unimaginable. If true, such an inhibition would be expected to impact some service member's performance during any potentially lethal hand-to-hand combat situation. Smith (2007) has also suggested that a natural inhibition to killing can challenge a service member's ability to perform in hand-to-hand combat because, "it is when the slaughter is up close and personal, and the humanity of the victim cannot readily be denied, that our profound aversion to taking a life swings into action, *and must be overcome if the soldier is to perform his lethal duty*" (p. 180).

Several authors (Grossman, 1995; Roscoe, 2007; Smith, 2007) cite the World War II research of Marshall (1978) to support their contention that service members have a natural inhibition to killing. Although the methodology used is that study has been questioned (Bourke, 1999; Engen, 2008; Jones, 2006), the finding that over 80% of soldiers chose not to fire their weapons during direct combat with enemy forces suggests at least mild support for Grossman's hypothesis. Also supportive of the resistance to

killing notion, is Browning's (1998) research with World War II German police who had been instructed to kill civilians in support of the Nazi's Final Solution efforts in Poland. Both the testimony and recorded behaviors of participants suggested an aversion to such killing. Many members of the unit said they did all they could to avoid performing their required duty while others who were unable to avoid it employed enabling mechanisms, such as alcohol intoxication, to circumvent their inhibition.

More recently, Smith (2007) has proposed a neuropsychological explanation for human's resistance to killing other humans. Specifically, he postulates that when humans observe another human, "mirror neurons" are activated, creating empathy for the observed person and inhibiting aggression in the observer. As Smith puts it, "when we observe someone performing an action, our brains automatically respond as though we were performing the action ourselves" (Smith, 2007, p. 136). A resulting increase in empathy, especially when viewing the victim's face, generates compassion and inhibits aggression.

If an inhibition to killing were in fact a part of human nature it would appear important for the military to explore ways of assisting combat service members in overcoming this inhibition. One such strategy is to increase the physical distance between killer and victim, rendering the physical features of the victim less obvious (Grossman, 1995; Roscoe, 2007). While such an intervention might be effective for military personnel operating machines of war designed to attack the enemy from a long distance (e.g., tanks, planes), it would not be as effective for service members involved in hand-to-hand combat against a recognizable human opponent. A more plausible strategy for

diminishing the inhibition to killing in close encounters is to dehumanize the opponent (Grossman, 1995; Roscoe, 2007, Smith, 2007). Dehumanization is a form of psychological distancing that occurs when a person perceives the opponent to be something other than human (Smith, 2007). Jones' (2006) historical review of comments from World War I soldiers and doctors suggests reframing the event and dehumanizing the enemy were the most common strategies service personnel employed for dealing with the lethal realities of hand-to-hand combat. Specifically, service members viewed the encounter as "merely a game and (the opponent) as an unwanted pest" (p. 244). In a similar vein, earlier military training manuals characterized fighting an opponent with a knife during hand-to-hand combat as "ugly business" (Styers, 1952, p. 74) or a "dirty game" (Duffield & Elliot, 1942, p. 34).

Another strategy for overcoming the inhibition to kill is substance abuse (Roscoe, 2007). Warriors and military personnel throughout history have attempted to deal with the inhibition to killing by consuming various narcotics or alcohol prior to battle (Roscoe, 2007). While dulling of the senses in these ways may make the task of killing more tolerable it can also impair performance. As a result, substances that heighten emotions and increase aggressiveness might be more effective from a pure performance standpoint. Without highly charged emotions, some argue it is impossible for a human to kill another human (Eibl-Eibesfeldt, 1979) not to mention meeting the minimum performance requirements of hand-to-hand combat (Carrington, 1916; Duffield & Elliot, 1942).

It is also possible for a person to shift the responsibility for killing to someone or something else, such as a higher authority, either spiritual or secular (Grossman, 1995;

Roscoe, 2007; Smith, 2007). The ability of humans to transfer responsibility for aggressive actions to a higher authority was perhaps best demonstrated in Milgram's (1963) classic study involving research participants who were instructed to administer electric shocks to people in another room whenever those persons provided an incorrect response on a paired-associates memory test. The results revealed that participants were more likely to continue increasing the intensity of the electric shock if an authority figure (i.e., the experimenter) was present than if the authority was not present. Other research (Bandura, Underwood, & Fromson, 1975) suggests that the perception of decreased personal responsibility for aggressive actions can produce an escalation in aggressiveness. Bourke's (1999) historical analysis of killing during warfare also suggests that deference to authority can reduce service members' inhibition toward killing on the battlefield. The moral support of others for the act of killing might also be evidenced in the rewards service members receive for valor in combat, which usually includes killing the enemy (Roscoe, 2007).

A more traditional and purposive strategy for diminishing service members' inhibition to killing is the "systematic, ritualized practices that are apparently designed to transform human psychology on a permanent basis" (Roscoe, 2007, p. 490). Over the course of history the preparation for war has included activities designed to transform participants' perceptions of killing and temporarily suspend any innate resistance they might have to doing so. Grossman (1995) argues that modern military training embodies these conditions by emphasizing the necessity of killing during combat. For example, soldier in training fire weapons at highly realistic targets shaped like a human and are

praised and rewarded for excellent marksmanship. By practicing numerous repetitions of such "simulated" killing actions, service members can become conditioned to doing so in real warfare situations (Grossman, 1995), including hand-to-hand combat (Molloy & Grossman, 2007).

Ruthlessness. Contrary to any inhibition to killing, natural or otherwise, is the instruction contained in several military hand-to-hand combat training manuals for service members to show "...ruthless disregard for the opponent" (Applegate, 1976, p. 7) in order to achieve success in hand-to-hand combat (Fairbairn, 1979, p. v). When fighting with a bayonet the service member is admonished to "attack in a relentless assault until his opponent is disabled or captured" (US Army, 2002, p. 7-7). The mentality of ruthlessness includes an element of relentlessness as well. One World War I training manual cautions service members to "...never allow an opponent to recover from being thrown to the ground" (Marriot, 1917). The need for a mentality of "ruthlessness" and "relentlessness" is illustrated in the following excerpt from another US Army hand-to-hand combat training manual:

> [A] proper mental attitude is of primary importance in the soldier's ability to strike an opponent. In hand-to-hand combat, the soldier must have the attitude that he will defeat the enemy and complete the mission, no matter what. In a fight to the death, the soldier must have the frame of mind to survive above all else; the prospect of losing cannot enter his mind. He must commit himself to hit the opponent continuously with whatever it

> takes to drive him to the ground or end his resistance. A memory aid is, "Thump him and dump him!" (US Army, 1992a, p. 73).

Some training manuals encourage service members to resist any hesitation they might have to use unfair tactics in combat (Styers, 1952). Such resistance is further reinforced as service members are conditioned to treat hand-to-hand combat as a live-or-die event and ignore the humanity of the opponent.

Instinct. In addition to the notion suggesting that humans have a natural inhibition to killing, is another that emphasizes humans "instinct" for survival. Some view this instinct as a natural desire to survive any life-or-death encounter, which is always a possibility during hand-to-hand combat (Styers, 1952). Regardless of whether such a desire is instinctual or not, military training manuals emphasize the importance of reinforcing service members' desire to live rather than to die (Thompson & Pelligro, 2006). In one of the earlier manuals Hobbs (1917) contended that every person has a fighting instinct that can be "awakened" through proper military training. At this point it should be clear that the psychological factors surrounding the hand-to-hand combat experience are both varied and competing, ranging from the inhibition towards killing to the desire to survive a life-or-death struggle.

Positive emotions. Adding further to the psychological complexity of hand-to-hand combat is a wide spectrum of emotions service members can experience, including intense sensations of joy. Grisby's (1991) phenomenological research on American Vietnam War veterans suffering from PTSD revealed that some service members' hand-to-hand combat experiences produced a powerful sense of euphoria, enjoyment, and

thrill, termed combat rush, rather than or in addition to fear and trauma. For example, one participant said he simultaneously experienced the emotions of terror, exhilaration, and invulnerability while completely engrossed in the fight. In a much earlier psychological study of service members during World War I, Bird (1917) discussed physicians' observations of the psychological adaptations of service members during their combat experience. In describing the adaptation of one service member during the killing of an opponent with a bayonet a physician noted:

> The first contact of the soft body of the enemy upon the bayonet and the gush of the hot blood produces a sensation of horror which almost paralyses the victor but this soon passes off as he realizes the more he kills the less chance there is of being killed himself, in fact this horror finally becomes a thrill of pleasure (p. 342).

Bourke (1999) obtained similar descriptions of positive emotions during the act of killing from the personal writings (e.g. letters, journals, etc.) of World War I service members. One described the experience of striking an opponent with his bayonet as "gorgeously satisfying...exultant satisfaction" (p. 19) while another characterized hand-to-hand combat as "immensely exciting" (Bourke, 1999, p. 49).

Life and death.A final psychological element of hand-to-hand combat is service members' awareness of the potentially lethal nature of the encounter. In some cases, hand-to-hand combat is about surviving a life and death struggle in which self-preservation and the death of an enemy combatant are mutual objectives (Duffield & Elliot, 1942; Fairbairn, 1979; Marriot, 1917; Styers, 1952; US Army, 1992a). One World

War II veteran of hand-to-hand combat described his sense of being in a life-and-death contest in the following way:

> As he came towards me I had that feeling it was either me or him. When you get to hand-to-hand fighting you realize either you're going to be killed or he's going to be killed. What do you do? You close in and you hope for the best. (Lee, 2006, p. 217)

Given the options of life or death, Carrington (1916) contended that the only objective of a service member in hand-to-hand combat should be the "...complete destruction of the enemy" (p. 65). It should be noted, however, that more recent military manuals (e.g., US Army, 2002; US Marine Corps, 2005) expand the notion of hand-to-hand combat to include the use of non-lethal force and some sensitivity to the larger demands of the mission (e.g., achieving the support of non-combatant citizens).

Summary

Hand-to-hand combat includes a wide variety of performance demands, both physical and psychological. In this chapter an attempt was made to characterize some of these demands as portrayed in the existing literature. To date, the limited research has provided quantitative estimates of the prevalence of various aspects of service members' hand-to-hand combat experience as well as some anecdotal evidence obtained from a small number of the participants themselves. Much of the latter research has focused on the retrospective accounts of service members who fought in the two world wars of the 20th century. However, the majority of both quantitative and qualitative studies, as well as the existing military literature, have provided a "filtered" perspective of the data, offering

readers little more than a third-person interpretation (i.e., that of the researcher/author) of participants' experience. As a result, relatively little remains known about modern service members' lived experience of hand-to-hand combat during warfare. Therefore, the objective of the present research was to address this deficiency by obtaining the first-person accounts of contemporary service members who have experienced hand-to-hand combat in a battlefield setting. It was anticipated that the study's results could provide useful information for service members, hand-to-hand combat military instructors, and performance psychology consultants working with service personnel.

Chapter 3

Method

A qualitative interview research design was used to investigate military service members' experiences of hand-to-hand combat since an open discussion would enable the participants to speak freely due to the intense, personal nature associated with the topic (c.f. Thomas, Nelson, Silverman, 2005). Existential phenomenological interviews facilitated an in-depth examination of the participants' lived experiences of the area of specific interest. This chapter consists of two sections: the first section provides a brief introduction and explanation of existential phenomenology as a research method; and the second section details the selection of participants and procedures used for data collection and analysis.

Section One – Existential Phenomenology

Existential phenomenology encompasses the philosophies of existentialism and phenomenology (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Soren Kierkegard developed existentialism as a philosophy to examine human existence, especially its challenges, and "how we come to live an authentic life" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 9). Phenomenology provides a rigorous and systematic method of inquiry (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Edmund Husserl (1931) and Martin Heidegger (1962) were instrumental in the development of phenomenology. Husserl sought to divert scientific focus from "theoretical analysis" and attend to the specific essences of experience (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Instead of exploring phenomena from an objective stance, popular in traditional science, existential phenomenology seeks to uncover, through dialogue between the researcher and the

participant, aspects of human experience that a more traditional science approach may not be well equipped to investigate (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). A key aspect of the existential phenomenological approach is its focus on revealing a participant's experience of a phenomenon, rather than describing the participant's behaviors or actions (Nesti, 2004; Polkinghorne, 1989).

Participants express their experience through a spoken shared language, which is a socially agreed upon representation of experienced consciousness (Polkinghorne, 1989). The interviewer must then interpret the participant's language across the interfaces of his/her cultural understandings of language in order to develop a sense of the experience (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). This dialogue permits the researcher to interpret the participant's perception of his/her experience and obtain "descriptions that are precise and stringent in meaning" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 49). Based on Merleau-Ponty's focus on perception, existential phenomenological interviewing appears well suited for providing a direct description of a participant's experience "as it is, without taking account of its psychological origin and the casual explanations" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. vii). Examining a person's experience "as it is" begins at the person's "pre-reflective lived experience of the event and not with some idea of how the thing ought to be experienced or perceived" (Nesti, 2004).

Section Two – Procedures

This study used the existential phenomenological research procedures prescribed by Thomas and Pollio (2002). Referred to as the Tennessee Model of Existential

Phenomenology, the procedures include: *exploring research bias*, *selecting participants*, *data collection*, *data analysis*, and *developing/confirming the thematic structure*.

Exploring Researcher Bias

A key factor in existential phenomenological research is approaching the phenomena in question with minimal influence from the researcher's preconceived ideas (Nesti, 2004; Polkinghorne, 1989); and the phenomena under investigation must be examined as it is (Idhe, 1986). To address the researcher's beliefs about the phenomena in question and make them evident to the researcher a bracketing interview is conducted (Nesti, 2004; Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The bracketing interview assists a researcher in identifying underlying assumptions and beliefs so that the researcher is aware of any preconceived notions during participant interviews and data analysis (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). With greater awareness of their biases about specific topics, a researcher is less likely to influence or direct a participant during an interview. However, completely suspending all preconceived ideas and biases regarding a phenomenon is not possible (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). Thus, bracketing beliefs about the topic is not a single event during research, but a continuous process by the researcher to minimize the influence of bracketed ideas from influencing interviews and data analysis (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

Bracketing interview. To enhance the researcher's awareness of biases and preconceived ideas on the topic of interest he participated in a bracketing interview with an individual with substantial experience and expertise in existential phenomenological interviewing. During the process, the researcher was asked to discuss his beliefs about what a military service member might experience during hand-to-hand combat. The

bracketing interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcribed interview was analyzed by two different groups, each containing individuals who had experience using existential phenomenology research methods.

The following themes emerged from the researcher's interview: a belief that military training and participant fear would be the most common issues raised by participants; a frustration with the current literature addressing military hand-to-hand combat due to a perceived lacking of academic rigor and an overstatement of findings based on anecdotal evidence; a belief that the average person has a limited understanding of a military service member's experience of hand-to-hand combat and as a result people only focus on uncovering the "reality of a fight" and neglect to recognize other equally important aspects of the experience; and finally, an acknowledged hesitation and anxiety about encountering the powerful emotions from participants during interviews as well as those the researcher might experience due to the potentially disturbing subject matter.

While conducting the study's interviews and analyzing the data the researcher frequently referenced a written list of the perceived notions and biases obtained from his bracketing interview (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Bracketing continued throughout the research process as the researcher continually developed a sense of the themes emerging from participant interviews and the subsequent data analysis. The researcher continually refined and remained aware of bracketing during the entire interview and data collection process in order to minimize directing the participants or shaping the data analysis based on preconceived notions and the increasing understanding of the topic. The continuous

process was important for the researcher so that he could remain open to new themes and directions highlighted during the interviews (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

Selecting Participants

Two criteria are required for consideration as a participant in existential phenomenology research (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). First, a participant must have experience with the phenomenon under investigation and second, a participant must have a willingness to discuss their experience and the ability to articulate their perception of the experience (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The phenomenon being investigated was a service member's experience with hand-to-hand combat as defined by the US Army Combatives Manual (2002). To assist in verifying the participant's claim of hand-to-hand combat experience participants were recruited with the assistance of secondary sources (i.e. US military hand-to-hand combat instructors), who knew persons with this experience.

After approval from the University of Tennessee Institutional Review Board the researcher recruited participants through a variety of methods. Referrals were the primary source of recruitment. They were received from military hand-to-hand combat instructors, from selected participants who knew of other service members with experience in hand-to-hand combat (i.e. snowball sampling), and from non-profit military organizations. Initial contact with potential participants was made by telephone whereby the researcher informed the individual of the purpose, procedures, and requirements for inclusion in the study. The researcher then coordinated with the participant for a face-to-face interview at a time and place of the participant's convenience.

In addition to referrals from military hand-to-hand combat instructors, the researcher attempted to contact potential participants from two other sources: First, the researcher reviewed news media reports of service members with experience in hand-to-hand combat and second, the researcher reviewed military valor award citations that mentioned hand-to-hand. The researcher sent email messages to ten potential participants inviting them to participate in the study and received only one reply, but that respondent declined to participate in the study.

The sample size of participants for an existential phenomenological research is determined by data saturation. Data saturation occurs when themes and meanings provided by the participants become redundant and is possible because data collection and data analysis occur simultaneously (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Between interviews fifteen and sixteen there appeared no new information or themes were revealed. The seventieth interview continued to demonstrate that no new information or themes were emerging from participants; the researcher determined that data saturation had been achieved, and no further interviews were conducted. A brief description of the participants in this study is provided in Chapter 4.

Data collection

Pilot interview / study. Before beginning data collection the researcher conducted several pilot interviews with participants. Pilot interviews were conducted in accordance with all procedures used with the participants. These pilot interviews served to verify that the research question was appropriate for exploring the topic; it also served

as an opportunity for the researcher to hone his interviewing skills. Several interviews were transcribed and analyzed in an interpretive group, where the researcher received feedback on his interviewing techniques from three professors experienced in existential phenomenology research on the researcher's interviewing techniques. When the researcher confirmed that the research question and research method were appropriate for the topic in question, other participants were contacted to schedule interviews.

Interviews. Interviews were conducted either face-to-face or over the telephone. The researcher made every effort to conduct face-to-face interviews since it seemed to the researcher that during the pilot study participants were more reluctant to discuss details of their experience when interviewed over the telephone. The researcher did not control the length of the interviews, but instead allowed the participants to talk freely about their experience for as long as they wanted and were able to provide details about their experience (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The interview lengths differed between participants with a range from 18:18 minutes to 73:50 minutes. Before each interview, the researcher explained the full nature of the study, answered any questions from the participants regarding the study, and obtained written consent (See Appendix A). Participants were informed that their responses during the interview, as well as any information gleaned from discussion outside the interview, were confidential. They were also advised of their right to withdraw from participating in the research at any point without prejudice or penalty. They were informed that participation in the study was completely voluntary and they would not receive any payment for their part in the study. The researcher selected a pseudonym for each participant, which was used to enhance

confidentiality during data analysis. Interviews were audio recorded with a digital recorder and all of the interview digital files were stored in a secure location until the files were transcribed. Transcribed interviews were also modified by removing dates, locations, and other information to enhance participant confidentiality, but without impacting the analysis of the interview. Once a file was transcribed the digital file was destroyed.

After a short period of informal discussion between the researcher and the participant the interview commenced. The opening question in existential phenomenology seeks to allow the participant a wide span of responses to describe the experience of the phenomenon in question (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Additionally, phenomenological research does not attempt to direct a participant's response in any particular direction, but rather, it aims to support a participant's ability to describe, in rich detail, their own personal aspects of the experience in relation to the research (Nesti, 2004; Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the interview began by asking the participants to respond to the following open-ended question: "Please describe an incident of hand-to-hand combat with an enemy combatant during combat operations." Participants were asked follow-up questions during the interview only to seek additional clarity of the participants' responses and obtain further refinement of emerging themes (Polkinghorne, 1989). To make certain the participant covered every aspect of their experience that they were willing to discuss, the researcher finished questioning participants by asking if there were any other aspects of their experience they wanted to discuss. Each interview was concluded with the researcher summarizing the

key aspects from the interview and asking the participant for validation of this summary or if the participant had any corrections. Other than gender, rank, branch of military service, military occupational specialty, and the military conflict in which the participant's experience occurred; no other demographics data was recorded for inclusion in the study because the researcher believed additional demographic data (age, race, specific dates or locations, etc.) might compromise participant confidentiality. The researcher then concluded the interview by thanking the participant.

Immediately after the interview, or at the earliest possible convenience, the researcher recorded field notes that were used during data analysis to provide context for the interviews (Appendix B).

Data Analysis

Each interview audio file was transcribed verbatim and the researcher analyzed the transcript text to determine meaning and understanding. A primary goal of phenomenological research is that the transcript text should be understood based on interpretation rather than on theoretical inference by the researcher (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Gadamer's (1975) development of *hermeneutics* to study human existence from text directs a researcher to continually incorporate the contextual aspects into the immediate meaning of the text (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Several steps were implemented in order to incorporate the contextual aspects of the transcript and to enforce a meticulous analysis.

First, the researcher read a transcript several times in order to develop an understanding of the participant's experience as-a-whole (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Then

each participant was given a copy of their transcript and invited to read it to ensure the interview accurately expressed their experience and gave them the opportunity to make changes to the transcript (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). 11 of the 17 participants replied to the researcher's invitation to confirm the accuracy of the text and agreed that the interview accurately encapsulated their experience. Six of the participants did not reply to the researcher's attempts to contact them for follow-up on the accuracy of their transcript. The non-response led the researcher to determine that the participants were satisfied with the transcript's accuracy. It is important to note that several of the participants were active duty service members residing in various locations throughout the United States, which may have challenged the follow up process of obtaining confirmation information. This was especially challenging when service members were conducting training exercises or conducting military operations outside the United States.

Next, the researcher examined the transcript for reoccurring patterns of meaning that stood out in participant's statements. The identified statements and reoccurring patterns comprised the transcript's *meaning units*. A meaning unit is a "part" of the transcript that, when related back to the "whole" of the transcript in a hermeneutic manner, provides insight into a specific aspect of the participant's experience (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Identifying meaning units requires a continuous reflection on how the parts connect and relate to the experience as a whole (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). To assist the researcher in identifying meaning units, the researcher incorporated an interpretive research group.

Interpretive research group. The researcher presented seven transcripts at an existential phenomenology interpretive research group at the University of Tennessee. During the group's interpretive process one group member read aloud the researcher's questions, another group member read aloud the participant's statements, while the remainder of the group followed the dialogue with their copies of the transcript (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). When a group member identified a meaning unit or emerging theme from the transcript text, the group stopped reading to discuss and establish consensus regarding the identified theme. The researcher took notes during the group discussions, identifying those meaning units and themes that reached consensus within the group. Two professors with expertise in existential phenomenology and leading interpretative groups facilitated the discussions; however all group members contributed to the interpretative process by providing their opinions during the discussions, as well as recording notes on their copies of the transcript. The group members represented a variety of academic backgrounds (e.g. psychology, nursing, educational psychology, experimental psychology, sport psychology, forest wildlife & fishery, etc.), which provided a diverse perspective to the interpretive process (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The group discussion, including the debates and questions directed to the researcher, assisted the researcher by challenging prior interpretations and providing a variety of viewpoints to consider regarding the meaning units and emerging themes from the text (Pollio et al, 1997). The researcher continued to independently analyze interview transcripts, while incorporating the input generated by the interpretive group.

The identified meaning units are the foundational elements of the participant's experience; they are grouped together and organized into a thematic structure representing the participant's experience (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The meaning units were first grouped into smaller sub-themes and then the sub-themes were grouped into more general themes that represented the participant's experience (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The researcher was especially attentive to metaphors within the transcripts since they provided key examples where a participant needed to express an aspect of their experience that may not have been easily expressed in ordinary dialogue (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). With a thematic structure developed for each participant the researcher then sought commonalities that connected across all the participants (Pollio, Henley, & Thompson, 1997). The researcher used the hermeneutic circle process to continually relate individual participant thematic structures to a broader sense-of-the-whole for all of the participants (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Specifically, the researcher developed themes describing "...experiential patterns exhibited in diverse situations" (Thomas & Pollio, 2002, p. 37). The final thematic structure (Figure 1) representing the major themes for the servicemembers' experience of hand-to-hand combat was presented to the interpretive group and refined based on their observations, questions, and recommendations.

Confirming the Thematic Structure

The final step of phenomenological research is acquiring the participant's feedback regarding how accurately the thematic structure captured his personal experience of hand-to-hand combat (Dale, 1996; Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The researcher attempted to contact all the participants to obtain their feedback on the final thematic

structure and 13 participants responded. The participant responses reflect strong support for the themes developed by the author. For example, one participant responded, "I believe this, in my opinion, is very much on the button" (Quentin, personal communication, January, 09, 20120) and another stated, "overall themes look dead on" (Lucas, personal communication, January, 10, 2012). One participant (Nate, personal communication, March, 29, 2012) went to a great deal of effort to articulate a response, even providing a one to ten scale of how the five themes reflected his experience. While his overall evaluation of the themes was very supportive, he had particular concern for the *everyday combat operations theme*, which he rated a five, arguing that the *surprise* sub-theme arises from a mentality within US service members that embraces deliberate planning before engaging an enemy combatant, but that military operations in urban areas does not permit such planning before close fighting occurs.

To increase the study's validity, the participant's own language was used wherever possible when explaining the sub-themes and themes of the final thematic structure (Nesti, 2004; Pollio et al., 1997). Incorporating the participant's own words from the transcript text assists in keeping the researcher's interpretation closer to the participant's experience; it also increases validity by attempting to demonstrate the accuracy of the interpretation to readers (Dale, 1996; Polkinghorne, 1989).

Issues of validity and reliability. Reliability is a measure's repeatability or consistency based on successive experimental trials (Thomas et al., 2005). The open-ended, non-directive quality of existential phenomenological interviews expects the participant to vary his response on separate occasions or different interviews; therefore

phenomenology views reliability as thematic consistency across interviews rather than identical responding (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). A sensible continuity in the narrative structure between a study and any future study, rather than seeking identical results between studies, constitutes reliability within existential phenomenology (Pollio et al., 1997). Additionally, phenomenology seeks reliability within a specific study by demonstrating thematic consistency based on the thematic structure of the participants' experiences and text from the interviews supporting the thematic structure (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Text will be included from interview transcripts during data analysis and presentation of results to establish the reliability of the thematic structures that emerge. Additionally, the consensus of the Existential Phenomenology Interpretive Group strengthened the thematic structure's representation of the participants' experience as prescribed by Thomas and Pollio (2002).

Both methodological and experiential criteria are used to establish validity in phenomenological research (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Methodological criteria addresses the appropriateness of the method for the topic and the rigor applied during research (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The extent of illumination and plausibility of the findings determines the experiential criteria for the research (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The methodological and experiential criteria work in a reciprocal relationship so that, illuminating and plausible results will convince a reader of the appropriateness and rigor of a study. In addition, evidence suggesting that the method was appropriate and was conducted rigorously lends to the illumination and plausibility of the results (Pollio et al., 1997). Ultimately, phenomenological validity rests on the researcher's ability to convince

a reader that the thematic structure accurately captures the participants' experiences (Polkinghorne, 1989). Incorporating the participant's feedback is a key procedure for ensuring rigor, improving the accuracy of the thematic structure, and for convincing a reader of the plausibility of the findings (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). The thematic structure will be presented to the participants for their feedback regarding how well the findings captured and expressed their experiences.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine military service members' experiences of hand-to-hand combat. To achieve this aim, in-depth existential phenomenological interviews were conducted with 17 military personnel. The present chapter includes descriptive information about the participants, presentation of the thematic structure that captured participants' experience, and discussion of the major themes and sub-themes comprising the structure. Sample quotes are provided throughout the chapter to illustrate how participants' own words are consistent with the respective themes.

Participants

The final sample of participants consisted of 17 military personnel, (11 actively serving in the military and six no longer actively serving), with experience in hand-to-hand combat during military combat operations. Although all 17 participants were males, no prospective participants were denied based on gender. The military personnel in this study served almost exclusively in military occupational specialties that, at present, are not available to women, which may have contributed to the researcher's inability to find female military service members with experience in hand-to-hand combat. All participants possessed extensive military hand-to-hand combat training and some served as military instructors as well. Many had combative experience outside the military in the traditional martial arts, competitive combat sports (e.g., wrestling, boxing, mixed martial arts, etc.), and, for at least one participant, "recreational brawling."

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic and the importance of maintaining participant confidentiality a demographics table connecting the participant's pseudonym to any demographic information was omitted. Nonetheless, some demographic information can be provided about the participant sample as a whole. Out of the 17 participants, 15 served in the US Army, one served in the US Marine Corps, and one served in the Rhodesian Army. Furthermore, for 16 participants, their military rank during their hand-to-hand combat event(s) was that of a non-commissioned officer (NCO) and one participant was an officer. The military occupational specialties (MOS) included 14 Special Forces, two Infantry, and one Selous Scout. The military conflicts in which participants experienced hand-to-hand combat included: Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Restore Hope, the Vietnam War, and the Rhodesian Bush War.

Thematic Structure

The transcripts were analyzed qualitatively, yielding 584 meaning units that were grouped into sub-themes and major themes. A meaning unit is a word or group of words from the interview transcripts that communicates some aspect of the participant's experience (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). For example, "adrenaline" was a one-word meaning unit used by many of the participants to characterize their experience during hand-to-hand combat. The final thematic structure, consisting of the five major themes that encompassed the participants' experiences of hand-to-hand combat and their interactions, is shown in Figure 1. This visual representation illustrates the single wholeness or gestalt of the participants' described experience.

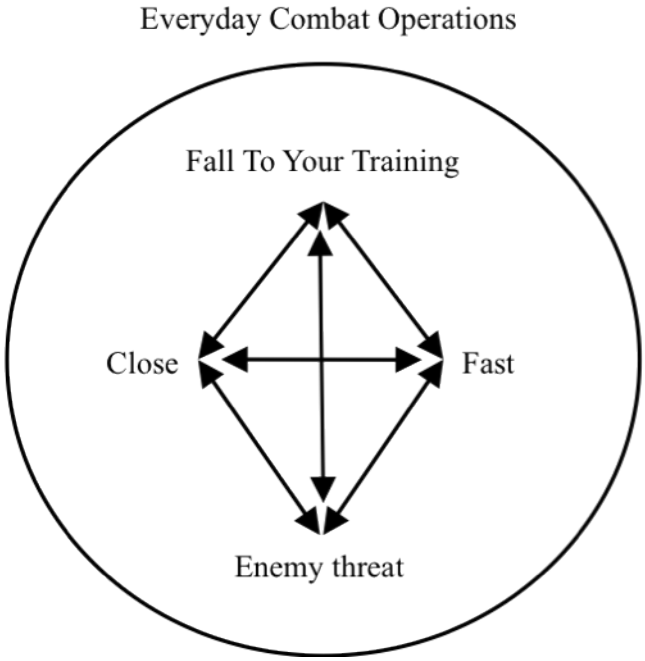

Figure 1. Thematic Structure of Participant's Experiences

Figure 2 is a second representation of the thematic structure that makes use of a familiar military icon to further characterize the interconnectedness among the major figural themes and capture the visceral emotional quality of the participants' experiences.

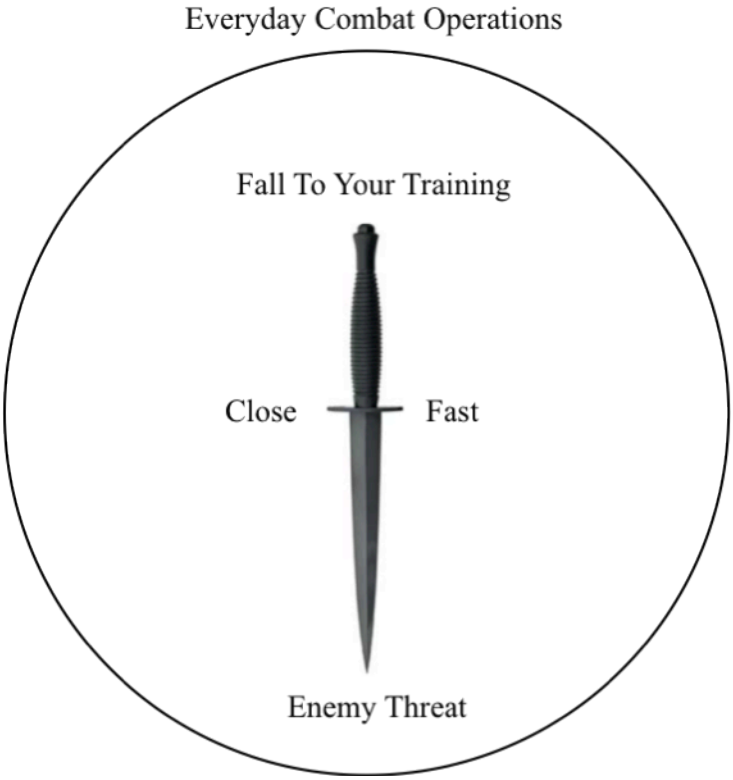

Figure 2. Icon of Thematic Structure

In Figure 2 the knife handle represents the participant's figural *body* as the product of training that emerges in the theme *fall to your training*. The knife blade connects with the various figural aspects of *others* (i.e., enemy combatants) to highlight the physically violent and aggressive interaction between participant and opponent. The relatively short ends of the knife cross guard represent figural portions of the existential themes of *time* and *world* during hand-to-hand combat. The small size of the cross guard ends, relative to the size of the blade and handle, coincide with the short amount of time comprising combat (i.e., *fast*) and the immediate physical proximity to the combatant (i.e., *close*).

The interaction between a person and her/his world, termed *perception* by Merleau-Ponty (1962) is the specific focus of existential phenomenology. Perception, in

this sense, views the lived human experience as a constellation of prominent aspects that stand out as the foreground against some context (background or ground) of a greater, overall experience (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). In existential phenomenology the aspects that stand out in a person's experience are considered *figural*, while the context that supports those aspects is referred to as the *ground* (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). The figure and ground exist together and "co-create each other" (p. 18) within a person's experience (Thomas & Pollio, 2002). Put another way, a figural element always occurs within and is connected to the contextual backdrop of the ground (Thomas & Pollio, 2002).

Four major figural themes characterized the present participants' experience of hand-to-hand combat: *enemy threat, fall to your training, fast,* and *close.* The theme that acted as the ground to contextualize these figural themes was *everyday combat operations*. These themes and their respective supportive sub-themes are presented in Table 1. Although the four figural themes are presented in the following sections as specific aspects of the participants' experiences, it is important to emphasize that they are closely interrelated, reinforcing each other, and should not be considered in isolation. Quotes supporting each theme or sub-theme include the pseudonym of the participant who made the statement during his interview.

Everyday Combat Operations

Everyday combat operations emerged as the ground that contextualized the four major figural themes of these participants' experiences of hand-to-hand combat. For them, hand-to-hand combat represented a departure from the relatively routine nature of military combat operations. All participants described their experience of hand-to-hand

Table 1

Major Themes and Sub-Themes

Major Themes	Sub-Themes
Everyday Combat Operations	Surprise
Enemy Threat	Last resort
	Danger to self
	Risk to mission
	Person disappears
Fall To Your Training	Training takes over
	Targeted aggression
	Adrenaline
	Fear
Fast	Opponent's actions
	My actions
	The event
	Only seconds
Close	

combat by first providing a long and detailed narrative of the situational factors leading up to the encounter with the enemy. In most cases the event or events prior to the actual hand-to-hand combat experience seemed relative normal or routine. Participants also articulated the decision-making that led to hand-to-hand combat and that verified their perception that the person they were about to fight was an enemy. Finally, while the experience of hand-to-hand combat was a departure from everyday combat operations, it appeared to be only temporary; as participants described their actions after the event in a manner suggesting that they returned to the relative normalcy of combat operations.

Surprise. For these service members hand-to-hand combat represented a departure from *everyday combat operations* and the sub-theme *surprise* epitomizes this point. *Surprise* consists of a break in the relative normalcy of *everyday combat operations* and the powerful context within which the figural themes stood out to the participants. The service members also experienced unexpected or novel facets of hand-to-hand combat. For example, when it was initiated by an enemy without forewarning one participant described the experience as an "oh shit!" moment.

In such instances the service member was violently transported from the ground of *everyday combat operations* into the figural themes of hand-to-hand combat. Despite all their previous training in hand-to-hand combat and an understanding that a surprise enemy encounter was a possibility during combat operations, participants experienced an element of surprise when actually attacked by an opponent. Don stated "it caught me off guard. [I] did not expect that" when he was struck by an enemy combatant after opening a door and entering a room. When Ike was attacked without forewarning he described the experience as "suddenness. [It] wasn't planned that way, [it] just happened."

The violent interruption of *everyday combat operations* could also come from illogical actions by the enemy. Some participants believed the opponents' intent was "just very unexpected and surprising" (Paul). Lucas' reaction to this type of surprise took the form of incredulity toward the opponent. During his hand-to-hand combat encounter he found himself wondering, "Why am I in this situation, dealing with you, when you're, you should be doing what I tell you to do. What is your frickin' problem? [T]here's no reason...that you should do anything other than what I say."

Surprise was also manifested in the ways some of the service members' own fighting actions impacted their opponent. When Nate kicked an opponent he said, "it amazed me. The difference that that one act made...it immediately de-escalated [the situation] and we immediately... regained... authority and control of this situation." Marvin felt a sense of novelty bordering on "weird" when he applied a sport-style fighting technique that required some adaptation within the combat environment. Brian's experience of surprise came with a sense of relief in the effectiveness of his fighting skills. He stated, "I felt like, wow! This shit works...but I was glad it worked." *Surprise* served not as a figural aspect of the participants' experiences but as a catalyst for the figural themes contextualized within the ground theme of *everyday combat operations*.

Enemy Threat

The figural theme *enemy threat* emerged as participants confronted another person whose perceived behavior suggested a risk to the service member's welfare. Risks included endangerment to the participant's life or the perception that the behavior might compromise the service member's mission. Once the other person "felt and appeared to be a threat" (Brian) he was considered an enemy. Participants expressed no ambiguity or second-guessing about the risk they faced in hand-to-hand combat. The *enemy threat* posed by the opponent was comprised of several sub-themes: *last resort, danger to self, risk to mission,* and *person disappears*.

Last resort. A combination of the service member's actions, the opponent's threat-inducing behavior, and the demands of the mission sometimes create an unavoidable hand-to-hand combat situation. However, such combat is not necessarily

the favored approach for confronting an opponent, especially during lethal encounters. As Ken stated, “where I got into...situations of hand-to-hand [it] was...a last resort.” Sometimes the situation and lethal threat posed by the enemy make hand-to-hand combat a mandatory act, or as Homer stated, “I did what I had to do.” The inescapability of many hand-to-hand combat encounters can create the belief that killing the opponent is the only option. Quentin felt this way during a number of situations he encountered, stating, “it was a case of...there’s only one way to get out of this situation. And that was kill him.” Carl concurred that hand-to-hand combat can prompt the necessity to kill an opponent stating, “when you’re [in] that kind of close, hand-to-hand situation the only way to save your own life is to kill the enemy.”

In other instances, *last resort* emerged as the best way of avoiding an escalation in unnecessary violence. Oscar resorted to hand-to-hand combat because if he had not he believed, “it just would’ve been a street fight, maybe even resulted in gunplay, had I not been able to get the guy under control quickly and...handcuff him.” Non-lethal encounters can also be deemed unavoidable due to present situational demands. Fred believed hand-to-hand combat was necessary because his opponent was “getting away, I’ve got to do something. I did it.”

These participants never considered avoiding, removing themselves, or fleeing from the situation that required hand-to-hand combat. Alex explained that in such an encounter “something has to be done right away” and although the situation might generate a “fight or flight” choice, “flight is not an option.” George concurred that fleeing

hand-to-hand combat is not an option while distinguishing the choice between fighting to live and being killed by an opponent:

> The guy will fucking kill you. He's not going to stop. He's not going to go away. He's going to continue until you are done. You got two choices: You can die where you are, or you can take a stand and take him with you, minimal. Or you can finish him off and go home at the end of the day.

George's comment not only highlights the unavoidable sensation of hand-to-hand combat but also introduces the sub-theme, *danger to self*.

Danger to self. Participants discussed the threat they felt to their well being due to both the actions of their opponent and the demands of the situation. Not surprisingly, this sub-theme, became very explicit for participants when describing hand-to-hand combat scenarios they perceived as life threatening. Brian clearly articulated the sense of threat created by the actions of an opponent stating:

> I got hit....the guy jumped up on me, and started trying to get his fingers in my eyes...He'd hit me, he'd dominate me, and he was trying to finish me...in my mental model he had the means and intent and ability to kill me...It was a fulcrum or pivotal point.

The powerful sense of threat from an enemy combatant can also be exacerbated in situations perceived as desperate. Ken stated:

> My first time with hand-to-hand combat, we ran out of [ammunition], and we [were] was fighting a hardcore NVA. We [were] getting overpowered.

> They didn't want to kill us. They wanted to capture us. They could have over-run us anytime. They could have shot us. They could have done anything, and took us out immediately. But they wanted to capture us. So we ran out of ammo, we ran out of frags (fragmentation grenades), we ran out of everything. We [were] down to our trenching tools and our knives or bayonets and we fought.

An enemy can also create a sense of threat by their body language. Hand-to-hand combat sometimes has elements that signal the individual's intent and transform them into a perceived threat. While George was watching a person during combat operations the person, "made eye to eye contact with [him]...and [he] could just tell that something was about to go down." Jake experienced the same sense of threat due to eye contact with an opponent:

> He was holding my hands and I could tell by looking at his eyes that he was going to be in for a fight. He was trying to stop me from taking his gun and drawing my gun and I was trying to stop him from doing the same thing. So we were kind of standoff and I remember looking in his eyes and I knew I was in a bad spot.

Risk to mission. This sub-theme characterized how participants believed the actions of their opponent and the demands of the situation created a threat to their military objectives or their military unit. The dominant aspect characterizing the experience of *risk to mission* was the participant's sense that he or his unit was losing control of the situation. Lucas encountered an opponent who threatened

his fellow service members, prompting him to initiate hand-to-hand combat. He said, "I just realized I had to get control of this individual, not knowing who he is or anything about him, other than he's getting ready to come out into my assault force." Participants were concerned that the opposing individual's actions could influence other people in the environment and lead to an unnecessary escalation of violence or pose a risk to the overall mission. Alex's sense of threat came from wondering how the local population in a foreign country would interpret his actions if he was engaged in hand-to-hand combat. He said he was:

> ...worrying, okay, if I engage this guy, is somebody else going try to come in and intervene, or is somebody going [to] engage us from a distance. How are the villagers going [to] react to the situation? Are they going [to] think that we were just bullying a local? Would they try to intervene somehow? Or would they just stand in the distance. Either let us conduct our business or are they going to try to interact somehow, engage us in some shape or form whether they'd be from a distance, or up close.

At times concern about the success of the mission was combined with a clear, personal sense of threat to the participant's well being. Ike described one situation where his actions were necessary in order to protect himself and to avoid creating noise that would compromise the mission. In this instance, the person attacking Ike created two threats. As he explained:

> I walked by this certain place [and] a young Montagnard jumped out of the bushes with a hatchet and swung it at me. Very, it happened very

> quickly and I...purposely...did not want to fire a weapon because that would give away our whole operation. Fortunately he missed. And when he missed with the axe, it came down and I grabbed his arm and the axe and took the axe away."

Person disappears. When hand-to-hand combat takes place, service members tend to perceive the combatant in a different manner. The enemy is no longer viewed as a person, but becomes a "human form" (Lucas) only recognized by physical actions, body parts, weapons, and physical size. Of these attributes, the only aspects significant to the service member are those that might impact his effort to fight the opponent. Lucas described how his perception of the individual he encountered changed as, "he...just became a thing...and I knew how it moved; I knew how it should move, but everything else didn't matter...he just evaporated, as a, as a nose, as eyes - as a moustache, beard."

For some participants the "opponent" became the weapon held by the opponent or the service member would focus on whether the threatening individual was holding a weapon or not. During Brian's combat operations his key concern when looking at a potential opponent was whether the person was armed or not, stating "[I] came to the first room...and a guy came out wrapped up in a blanket...I'm like, shit man, I can't see if you got a gun or not." Marvin also worried about the possibility an opponent was carrying a weapon, stating, "my fear was...his hands...because we're always taught...hands will show...everything. So since I couldn't see what he was doing with his hands, that's what was worrying me the most." Homer described one situation where he focused on the weapon, specifically his opponent's rifle muzzle, stating, "I see the guy's

muzzle...coming around the corner that I was behind and I grabbed his muzzle...I punched him in the face, threw him up against the wall and basically ripped his weapon out of his hands."

Another feature that captured participants' focus during hand-to-hand combat was the opponent's physical size, especially if the opponent was larger than they were. Jake stated, "he was a pretty good size man...every bit of six foot and probably 230...that's big...I mean that's more that I weigh. So he was a pretty big guy." During one of their encounters Lucas said he noticed, "that guy was big...he had me by at least 40 pounds" and George stated that he was "kind of surprised...because [the opponent] was six-feet, three-inches, 300 pounds. Big." Recognition that the opponent was larger than them produced a greater sense of threat for these participants and generated the belief that the opponent would be more challenging in hand-to-hand combat.

In other instances the participants recognized that their opponents were smaller than they were. Marvin talked about feeling much larger than one opponent, stating "I was a lot bigger...probably...twice his size easily." Generally speaking, the smaller the size of the opponent the lower the sense of physical threat these service members felt. Ike characterized one opponent as "very slim...lithe...not strong. [I]t...was very easy....to wrestle with them or pin them down." Paul also emphasized the minimal threat posed by a smaller opponent when he stated,

> I don't feel he represented a threat that needed to be killed, because he probably weighed 110 pounds and - come on - against a Green Beret? I

weighed in at about 210, and I had my gear on, and my rifle and my pistol.

I mean, he didn't have much of a chance.

Another aspect of the sub-theme *person disappears* was the opponent's physical actions during the fight and how the service member responded to them. Brian's focus was drawn to his opponent's threatening actions when "we were wrestling and he started pulling at my kit and all my breaching charges." For Brian, the danger of having his opponent activate the grenades on Brian's body armor became the only focal attribute of his enemy. In the following statement Fred described another such interaction with an opponent. "I drove him into the wall, kicked his leg out from under him and put him in a choke hold. And he went buck wild and he started tearing and grabbing...for everything I had." In some instances, participants perceived opponents as body parts; considering only what the potential impact injuring this body part might have during a larger fighting situation. For example, Nate believed that kicking the leg of an opponent would deter the opponent's allies from further aggression and violence. Therefore, when he initiated hand-to-hand combat his opponent became just a leg. Nate stated that "as [the enemy] came closer to me I came around...kicked him in the sciatic nerve or along the leg. He immediately went down. He thought his leg was broke. It wasn't broke....but he was in pain."

Fall to your training

The label for the figural theme, *fall to your training*, was derived from Ethan's comment that during hand-to-hand combat "you ain't rising to no occasion. You are going to fall to the level of your training." This concept expresses the idea that the

training, physical, and mental capabilities a service member possesses at the moment of hand-to-hand combat is the only thing the service member can use to resolve the situation. The results of hand-to-hand combat are usually a direct reflection of a service member's level of preparation prior to the actual event. *Fall to your training* embraces the mentality and physicality of hand-to-hand combat while also representing the *body* theme emphasized in existential philosophy. This major figural theme consisted of the following sub-themes: *training takes over*, *targeted aggression, fear,* and *adrenaline.*

Training takes over. Participants' training in hand-to-hand combat was discussed at length during their interviews and one aspect in particular emerged as a common component of their in-the-moment experience: their training took over. That is, once these service members were physically engaged in hand-to-hand combat they "really believe that training instinctively took over" (Paul). A service member's fighting skills emerge with little or no reflection or analysis – they simply kick in automatically to meet the demands of the situation. As Homer stated, his actions were "more of a reaction than having to sit there and think about what was going on." Participants also commented that when they responded to an opponent during an encounter "you don't think about it" (Alex). Previous training experience just "comes out" (Lucas). As Oscar stated, "[I] didn't plan it. Just the guy started to move; I had a hold of his arm and his neck. I turned my hip to, into him, and threw him. And it just came reflexively."

Targeted aggression. A distinct change in mentality and perspective often occurs for a service member engaged in hand-to-hand combat. Several of these participants explained that a particular mentality, captured in the sub-theme *targeted aggression*, was

necessary for success in hand-to-hand combat, especially when there is lethal intent toward the opponent. Such instances required a conscious and voluntary change to a mental state that included a deliberate understanding of the necessity to harm the other person. Four participants explicitly described this shift as, "flip the switch" (Brian), "switch" (George and Lucas), or "switch on" (Fred).

Hand-to-hand combat sometimes requires an intent to control the opponent and when necessary employ "ruthlessness" (Ken) in implementing lethal force. Once the fighting mentality is "switched on," a service member is "going to use the force necessary to accomplish what I need to do" (Brian). However, the appropriate level of aggression is something service members also must sense based on the perceived demands of the situation and the opponent. Alex described the continuum of aggression as a "primal switch" that was controlled with a "leash." In hand-to-hand combat, service members "let out" the "leash" just enough to achieve the aggression necessary for successful performance.

Lethal encounters obviously necessitate the most powerful and intense levels of aggression. An opponent must not only be controlled but also "dominated" (Alex). In such situations an aggressive mentality must be maintained until the opponent is controlled, defeated, and the hand-to-hand combat encounter is completed. George understood this when he stated, "you have to be willing to continue, even though you hurt the guy, he may be a rock, you got to continue, continue, continue until the guy is...no longer a threat to you." Ethan perhaps best summarized the importance of dominating an opponent because of the potentially lethal consequences when he stated:

> One of us is going to live and one of us is going to die. Guess what? You're the fucker dying. Never is there a more critical moment to be domineering...Yep, you can call me a domineering prick if you want to, but I'm going home and you're going in a box.

The participants in this study sometimes used animal metaphors to describe the aggressive mentality necessary for success in hand-to-hand combat. For example, Alex described the "primal switch" as akin to a "tiger or a lion that gets a taste of blood." Ken stated, "I exploded on them with that emotional content, that...wolverine, the meanest, nastiest fighting animal on the face of the earth, and I hit him with that." Ethan and George also used animal metaphors to reinforce the "domineering" mentality necessary in lethal hand-to-hand combat. Ethan characterized it as "unleashing the hounds" and George stated, "You got two choices, you can be a fish and die where you are. Or, you can fight back, become a predator and do what you got to do."

These service members also realized that while "flipping the switch" may be necessary for extreme hand-to-hand combat challenges, it is unhealthy to maintain the "switched on" mentality once the demands of the situation have been met. As Ken stated, "ruthlessness is necessary to survive in combat. But it must be balanced with a strong spirituality." Lucas elaborated on this notion believing that being switched on "is not anything that anybody needs to see" outside of combat.

Fear. Service members also experience negative, apprehensive feelings when encountering a risk to life, risk to the mission, or a separation from fellow service members. Put simply, the experience of hand-to-hand combat can be an extremely fearful

event. These participants seemed to experience the greatest fear when attacked by an opponent without prior warning. With no time to cognitively process the event the service members felt an immediate and powerful sense of fear. Carl stated the fear was "overwhelming where...my thoughts shut down just for a split second...kind of took my breath" and Jake said the initial challenge of hand-to-hand combat could be "terrifying." George stated, "fuck yeah I was scared! I was scared out of my mind," while Ike admitted that his surprise encounter with the enemy "scared the bejesus out of me."

Fear can also come from sources other than the opposing enemy. Sometimes fear stems from the larger environmental factors related to the immediate hand-to-hand combat event. Alex's fear was not due to the physical threat of his opponent but rather in not knowing "what the situation is." More specifically, he feared what impact his hand-to-hand combat fight would have on the local, indigenous people who might be observing it and "how they [were] going to react to the situation." Fear can also be experienced as a sense of isolation created by hand-to-hand combat that separates service members from their comrades. Brian stated, "that's kind of a bad feeling, I didn't care for that. You know [being] alone in a room in the dark is a bad feeling...when there [are] three other guys [enemy combatants], that's kind of a bad feeling."

Adrenaline. One aspect of the physical experience of hand-to-hand combat is the arousal that was labeled by participants as "adrenaline." The "amount" or intensity of "adrenaline" appeared related to the service member's perception of threat. Extreme, lethal encounters produced a "life and death type adrenaline rush, where you really don't have a safety net" (Alex). Marvin described one adrenaline shift in the following way:

> [I] was running a little hotter 'cause this guy was--he had his hands on me, and then, you know, and I was trying to figure out what he was doing with his hands underneath him. So, I definitely, uh, had a, uh, different gear kicked up.

These service members also experienced adrenaline as facilitative. As one put it, adrenaline can give "a heightened sense of awareness" (Alex). Extremely high levels of adrenaline can make "you almost believe that you are... superhuman" (Quentin). Participants sometimes experienced adrenaline as enjoyable. For Fred the sensation was "exhilarating" and even a "feeling of butterflies...a rush." Brian described his experience of adrenaline as both facilitative and enjoyable, stating:

> Its like a football feeling and I'm, I'm hunting. You know, it's like being a linebacker, who's going to be my bitch? Who's going to come through here? Cause I'm going to put my helmet right on the side of yours. That kind of amped up – definitely an excitement, I mean in a very positive way.

Participants sometimes noticed increases in adrenaline to a greater extent after their hand-to-hand combat encounter was over than when it was going on. "It was a massive adrenaline dump...afterwards I was just completely drained. I had nothing left" (George). Ken also mentioned the extreme effects, stating, "I had so much adrenaline pumping that after it was over with I started throwing up. I just started puking because I had so much adrenaline in me."

Fast

Situations requiring hand-to-hand combat rarely offer the service member an abundance of time to assess the matter and decide what to do. Therefore, the ability to make fast, accurate, split second decisions is almost always necessary for success. Not surprisingly, therefore, *fast* emerged as one of the four major figural themes of participants' experiences of hand-to-hand combat. This theme essentially consisted of the service members' descriptions of a very short span of time, sometimes even perceived as instantaneous, that characterized hand-to-hand combat. In describing *fast,* participants would often punctuate their remarks with hand slaps or finger snaps to illustrate the brevity of available time. During a situation where Ken attacked several opponents in hand-to-hand combat, he reflected that he "went through two guys (participant claps his hands together loudly), so quick and so fast." Lucas snapped his fingers to emphasize how quickly he knocked his opponent to the ground, stating, "it was quick.... this guy was on the ground and...done...like that [snaps his fingers]." Quickness was also reinforced by words designed to convey and enhance their description such as "Boom, bop-bop. That quick" (Don). The participants' efforts to emphasize their descriptions with verbal sound effects or actions associated with speed and quickness might suggest the powerful impact of the temporal aspects of their encounters.

The theme of *fast* included four sub-themes: *opponent's actions*, *my actions*, *the event,* and *only seconds*.

Opponent's actions. This sub-theme emerged from what the service members said about the speed of their opponent's movements. Two participants noted that their

opponent “kind of got up really fast” (Alex) and that “his [opponent’s]...action was faster than my reaction” (Jake). In these instances the speed of the opponents’ actions prompted surprise or the perception that the combatant might have a tactical advantage.

My actions. This sub-theme centered on participants’ perceptions of the speed of their own actions. Sometimes they emphasized the speed of their decision-making and other times the speed of their physical strikes. Regarding the latter, one participant recounted, “[I] dropped this dude real quick with a couple of...straight punches” (Fred). Another said he sought to “put him down...as fast as [he] could” (George). Some of the participants also talked about rapid split-second decisions they made. One stated, “I was able to process it that fast (finger snap), and take action” (Paul). Occasionally, a service member would use a metaphor to illustrate the speed of his actions. For example, Ken said, “I went through two guys so quick and so fast that...I exploded on them.”

Ken was only one of two participants to experience a hand-to-hand combat encounter in slow motion. In that incident he initiated a surprise attack against the opponents and remembered feeling very confident about his hand-to-hand combat skills. Ken described the experience as “just like everything was slow motion. All my movements were just precise and slow motion...its like putting your VCR on slow motion...and it got precise.” Paul understood the event transpired very quickly, perhaps faster than he could think, but he also expressed a similar sense of slow motion stating, “I know I didn’t have time to think...it just happened...but when I think about the events, and I see it in my mind’s eye, it seems very slow, almost where I could dissect it and do it in a different way than I did. But I know in reality there was no chance.”

The event. This third sub-theme of *fast* emphasized the rapid nature of the hand-to-hand combat event. For these participants such encounters seemed to transpire quickly. Their comments included "everything happened so quick" (Homer) and "it happened very quickly" (Ike). Some service members perceived the speed of the event as almost too fast, "this was getting way out of control for me, fast" (Lucas) while others seemed to remember little about it because of its brevity; "it seemed like you blinked and it was over" (Don).

Only seconds. Participants also talked about the rapid escalation of the encounter, sometimes describing its duration in terms of seconds or fractions of seconds. One perceived that his opponent was "out in seconds" (Marvin). Another service member said he remembered focusing entirely on an opponent for a brief time, distracting him from the overall tactical scenario of the combat operation. He reflected that:

> I think for a fraction of a second or maybe a second, maybe two seconds, I don't know...who the hell is measuring time at that time, at that point. But for that second all my focus is on this individual. (Nate)

The necessity of hand-to-hand combat requires immediate and decisive action, often in a very brief interval of time. As one of the participants put it, "I had to charge at that moment in time. There was nothing else to do. If I did not charge, I was going be drawing my Jewish heart within a few seconds" (Quentin).

Close

The final major figural theme, *close*, refers to the perceived physical distance between the service member and the opponent during hand-to-hand combat. While close

physical proximity might seem to be an obvious element of hand-to-hand combat, it also emerged as a figural aspect of these participants' experience. Paul described the physical distance between he and his opponent as "very close; he was right on top of me." Brian remembered fighting with his opponent and, "pull[ing] him in close" and Carl stated that the event is even more perilous "when you're that kind of close."

Participants also described the close physical proximity to their opponents in less direct ways. For example, *close* appeared to be deeply intertwined with the figural theme *enemy threat*, because of the emphasis on the physical interaction between participant and combatant. Close proximity also seemed to be related to the intensity of the interaction with the opponent. One service member described the experience as "wrestling" (Brian) while another stated, "it was a case of, he's (opponent) right in my back. I'm in his back." (Quentin). Alex's interaction was so close that the opponent "head-butted [him] right in [his] lip and busted [his] lip." As George put it, "when you go hands on it's a lot of physical contact." Taken together, these comments suggest that the more intense the contact, the "closer" these participants perceived the opponent to be.

Because close proximity to the opponent was related to the figural theme *enemy threat*, participants sometimes tried to increase their physical distance from the enemy in order to achieve an increased sense of security. Nate said he felt better when he increased this distance because his (Nate's) "natural instinct is to create space." However, should hand-to-hand combat become a necessity, either through an enemy initiating the attack or the participant believing it was the best course of action, these service members did not hesitate to close the physical distance with their opponent. On such occasions Brian said

it was imperative to "keep a guy (opponent) in retention once you have a hold of something, never give it up...If you get a limb, keep it, keep it in retention, keep it immobile."

Physical distance between participants and their opponents sometimes appeared to be related to the figural theme, *fast*, as well. In the following description George alluded to this connection.

> A guy who's 300 pounds, who's standing in front of you, maybe with two feet between us, he's going to cover that distance in a quarter of a second and it came straight to blows. There was no grabbing for any kind of weapon system.

Themes Outside the Immediate Experience of Hand-to-Hand Combat

At the beginning of each interview the participant was asked to, "Please describe an incident of hand-to-hand combat with an enemy combatant during combat operations." While this instruction prompted considerable comment about the hand-to-hand combat experience, it also produced descriptions of other aspects of the participants' military life that appeared to be related to the experience in question. As a result two major figural themes were identified that, while technically outside the immediate experience of hand-to-hand combat, appeared to be salient aspects of these service members' lives. These two themes were *confidence in training* and *impact of killing*.

Confidence in training

Participants believed that their prior military training was absolutely essential to surviving their hand-to-hand combat encounters. Quentin stated, "I am convinced in my

mind that, if I did not have that training...I would not have survived." Brian put more simply by stating, "training equals survivability." Carl provided perhaps the most powerful endorsement for effective training when he said, "when all else fails, the training works no matter what feelings you have, what's going on in your mind, what's going on around you, the training will come out."

The major figural theme *confidence in training* was represented by two sub-themes: *realistic* and *repetition*.

Realistic. These service members believed the realistic nature of their training was invaluable to their ability to perform well during actual hand-to-hand combat. During training service members are told to, "train like your life depends on it" (Paul). Participants described ways their training simulated actual hand-to-hand combat situations, such as by wearing all of the equipment they would be wearing during combat operations. One said, "training with the kit on is valuable" (Marvin) while another felt training had prepared him for combat because "we had done it [in] full kit" (Don). George emphasized the importance of training realistically in a more graphic way, stating:

> The first time you get racked by some guy's fist, it should not be in a life and death situation. Cause you don't know how you are going to react. It can be very overwhelming...it's definitely an emotional event for most people when it first happens.

Repetition. This sub-theme dealt with participants' trust in the quantity as well as the quality of their training. They believed that their fighting skills emerged during hand-

to-hand combat because of the large volume of training they experienced prior to entering combat operations. This sub-theme also seemed to be connected to the sub-theme *training takes over*. These participants felt that a key reason why *training takes over* at the moment of actual hand-to-hand combat was the considerable *repetition* they experienced during their military training. For them hand-to-hand combat was "something that we rehearsed over and over and over again" (Lucas) and "did it so many times like it's so repetitive that it's just kind of kicks in and takes over" (Homer). Carl said, "Repetition is key to everything. Muscle memory...the more you drill something of course the better you're going to know it, the better you're going to learn it." Alex expressed appreciation for the importance of extensive practice in the following quote:

> Countless hours of doing, you drill them over and over and over again...it becomes instinctual; it becomes drilled into you, you do it over and over and over again to where it's like you don't think about it, it just happens.

Ethan seemed to agree insisting service members must, "train, train, train, train, train, train."

Impact of killing

These participants also discussed the personal impact of killing another human being during hand-to-hand combat. When such encounters take place in a lethal atmosphere they can be "ugly...distasteful" (Ike) and "nasty work" (Quentin). Understandably, only those participants who had killed an opponent talked about the impact it had on them. In the present study, nine participants described hand-to-hand combat encounters that resulted in lethal consequences for the opponent. Nevertheless, it

might be argued that the possibility of killing an opponent during hand-to-hand combat was a realistic one for all of the participants.

This theme was characterized by a range of emotions, most of which participants said they experienced after the encounter had ended. Some felt especially disturbed after killing the opponent. Quentin described his reaction in the following way:

> Killing a person the first time. You are a little bit, feel a little bit off. But, if you kill the guy in hand-to-hand, I think that 'off' feeling, after you've done it, now I'm not saying this 'off' feeling happens immediately, I don't think that happened - - never happened to me immediately, I must admit. But an hour later, when you are relaxing, and you feel very tired, that is when it hits you mentally that that's what you've just done.

Carl also described the powerful emotion he experienced after his fatal hand-to-hand combat encounter. He stated that:

> ...it was definitely a more intimate type of a situation than stand off shooting, it was really personal. It got, you know, hand to hand, touch, down to a personal level that I, I almost felt bad for having to do it and it, it took more out of me than any other kill that I've ever had to do, um, especially shooting. It drew a lot more emotion and it kind of mentally drained me a little bit, like when the situation was over, you know. And we were out of there, I had to step back, get away from my guys, put the weapon down and kind of, you know, regain my thoughts.

Ken's comments contrasted with those of the previous participants and seemed to be more closely related to the sub-theme *targeted aggression.* He believed that a "rampage" mentality was necessary for hand-to-hand combat but also felt it must be balanced with other emotions. For him, killing another person in combat was sometimes a necessity but he tried to put it in a spiritual perspective in order to deal with the impact of doing so. He explained:

> You got the compassion and humility and the spiritual control over your rampage...you got a strong spiritual being. You are able to control that amount of energy that destroys the human being...and you got [a] creed. You got your Ranger creed, your SF (Special Forces) creed, and you never take a life without a cause.

Some participants discussed various ways that they coped with the *impact of killing*. For most of these killing an opponent in hand-to-hand combat required some amount of mental processing. Some also believed that combat training should include ways to deal with the mental trauma associated with killing. Brian provided the most powerful example when he described his own attempt to do so.

> I have my own techniques for handling that stuff. I wrote the guys letters over the years. I wrote them letters, 'Hey man I'm sorry I killed you, but you obviously had bad intent for me and I'm coming home. I hope if we ever meet again it will be under different circumstances.' [I] burn them [the letters] in the fire and release them. Everybody has to handle that stuff in their own way, but I think it needs to be part of a combatives program.

For a few participants the *impact of killing* appeared to be relatively minor. Don stated that killing an opponent had little affect on him, "As far as how I felt about that guy, hey you know the guy's got to go. It wasn't a big deal." George expressed a similar sentiment when he said:

> Guys have asked me before, how do you feel about actually beating a guy until he passes? It doesn't bother me at all. Because at the beginning it's not personal to me. In that moment it's just a matter of, "I'm going home at the end of the day and you're not." I think basically, you don't take this shit personally. That will save a lot of mental anguish later on. That guy, I don't take what he did to me personally. I don't think he disliked me. Personally he didn't know shit about me, but I was the enemy. To me, he was the enemy. He made a shot at it, I made a shot at it, and I came out on top. I just realize that war is war. It is what it is. There really isn't that much more to it.

Summary

The major figural themes that characterized and communicated meaning of the experiences of hand-to-hand combat for service members in this study were *enemy threat, fall to your training, fast,* and *close*. These figural themes were perceived against the ground of *everyday combat operations.*

Chapter 5

Discussion

Despite technological advances, hand-to-hand combat remains a reality faced by military personnel on the modern battlefield (c.f. Dyer, 2004). Combat operations are tremendously complex with the actual fighting of an enemy comprising only a small component of the overall demands of military personnel. However, when hand-to-hand combat does occur it can be a powerful experience; one that is distinct from the relative normalcy of other combat operations. Thus, examination of such a phenomenon might provide helpful information regarding the demands of human performance under extreme circumstances.

Prior to the present study no research had been conducted examining the performance demands experienced by military personnel during hand-to-hand combat. Some researchers had examined hand-to-hand combat training, including the effects of mental skills training (Morales-Negron, 2008), and the relative importance of physical fitness and fighting skills during such an event (Ashkinazi, 2007; Kalina et al., 2005). In addition, military hand-to-hand combat training manuals (Applegate, 1976; Duffield & Elliot, 1942; Fairbairn, 1979; Styers, 1952; Thompson & Peligro, 2006; US Marine Corps, 2005; US Army, 1992a; US Army, 2002) provide some insights into what a service member might experience in the lethal environment of warfare. None of this literature, however, contains in-depth information pertaining to service members' lived experience of hand-to-hand combat. Therefore, the primary aim of the present investigation was to obtain modern service members' first-person descriptions of hand-

to-hand combat experiences using the rigorous methods of existential phenomenological interviewing and data triangulation. In this chapter the *major findings* of the study are discussed first. Then, the relevance of the present findings with respect to *connections to and extensions of previous research, practical implications,* and *recommendations for future research* is proposed. Finally, several *conclusions* based on the present results are offered.

Major Findings

Five major thematic dimensions characterized the current participants' experience of hand-to-hand combat. Four of these were figural, consisting of *enemy threat, fall to your training, fast,* and *close*. These figural themes were connected to at least one of the four classical grounds encompassing the full span of human experience found in the literature in existential phenomenology (e.g., Thomas & Pollio, 2002), *world, time, body,* and *others.* The figural theme *close* derives from the ground of *world*, which represented the service members' sense of space within the setting of hand-to-hand combat event. The theme *enemy threat* was grounded within *others*, based on the interaction between participants and their opponents during hand-to-hand combat. *Fast*, which represented the service member's temporal experiences rested within the ground of *time*. Finally, *body* served as a ground for the figural theme, *fall to your training*, which emphasized the rigorous training these service members had undergone in preparation for combat. Of the four existential grounds, the one that seems most predominate for these service members was the person's body. Although all four grounds are emphasized in the thematic structure, they are experienced in terms of the effects they have on the body, for example,

fast is experienced in terms of the tempo of the body and *close* in terms of physical distance from the opponent. Taken together, the major figural themes that emerged from the interviews suggested that, for these participants, the experience of hand-to-hand combat represented a complex interaction of "in the moment" physical and psychological demands occurring within a context consisting of all of the major existential phenomenological grounds.

Perhaps the most significant finding of the present study was the suddenness with which the participants encountered their hand-to-hand combat event, propelling them into a powerful and novel experience. The sub-theme *surprise* suggests that the figural themes experienced in hand-to-hand combat represented a significant departure from the relative normalcy of *everyday combat operations*. This aspect of the service members' experience appears similar to Heidegger's (1962) concept of *thrownness,* referring to situations that arise in people's lives that thrust them into circumstances they did not choose. Participants in the present study were often thrust into their hand-to-hand combat by the sudden and specific nature of an event that required an immediate response. The demands of the mission, the particulars of the immediate situation, and the actions of the opponent combined to create the participants' perception that hand-to-hand combat was the best course-of-action for either minimizing violence or, at worst, to surviving a lethal threat. The sub-theme *last resort* suggests that if a better option than hand-to-hand combat had been available participants would have been receptive to it.

Despite its sometimes novel departure from the life of *everyday combat operations*, hand-to-hand combat was considered a necessary risk. Participants did not

blame themselves, their opponent, or the circumstances for their actions, but rather viewed their hand-to-hand combat encounter as an ever-present possibility in the life of a combat service member. Two of the participants (Brian and George) echoed this sentiment stating, "It is what it is." The present service members also viewed their experience of hand-to-hand combat as a learning experience, which reinforced their understanding of their fighting capabilities and increased their confidence in their military training.

Another important aspect of the present results is the manner in which participants depersonalized the interactions with their opponents. Hand-to-hand combat, for these service members, was an event during which they temporarily suspended the opposing person's humanity. Instead of seeing the opponent as a person, participants appeared to focus their entire attention on the physical aspects of the opponent that were relevant to achieving the goal of successful performance. Coupled with this shift in perception regarding the opponent, these service members also appeared to alter their own psychological demeanor to produce a level of aggression necessary for meeting the demands of the event. This "mental switch" was deliberate and appropriate to the level of perceived threat, producing a state of mind and emotions that ranged from the ferocious, if survival was at risk, to whatever was necessary to achieve the opponent's defeat. However, once the hand-to-hand combat encounter was resolved, participants switched "off" the fighting mentality and returned to a mindset appropriate for non-combat operations.

A third significant finding of the present study dealt with the perceived speed of the hand-to-hand combat event, labeled *fast*. For these participants, the rapidity of hand-to-hand combat was often surprising, especially if the service member had no prior warning about a possible attack. Service members' descriptions of the speed of the event ranged from instantaneous to lasting a few seconds or less. Perceived speed also appeared to be related to the participant's own actions, the abilities of the opponent, and the number of decision-making demands.

A fourth important finding of the present study was the powerful combination of physical and psychological features that characterized hand-to-hand combat. Increases in arousal were associated with the perceived demands of the event. Hand-to-hand encounters perceived to be potentially lethal were accompanied by higher levels of physiological activation. Fighting skills were also a dominant feature of participants' experiences but in many cases service members' felt their skills emerged "reflexively" to meet the demands of the encounter. Fear appeared to be the dominant emotion participants experienced, although the intensity varied considerably depending on the service member's perception of threat. At the most extreme levels, fear could temporarily inhibit participants' ability to cognitively process important environmental information. In some cases, fear was associated with other aspects of the situation, such as the risk to fellow service members or the potential impact of a hand-to-hand encounter on the perceptions of bystanders observing the event.

Connections to and Extensions of Previous Research

The current study represented an initial attempt to understand military service members' experiences of hand-to-hand combat through the use of open-ended interviews and bracketing of *a priori* assumptions. Nevertheless, some of the results are consistent with previous literature associated with hand-to-hand combat and others serve to extend the current body of knowledge.

A number of themes that emerged from the interviews support the findings of previous studies or are in line with information found in the military manuals. Consistent with previous literature (Bellavia & Bruning, 2007; Hobbs, 1917; Lee, 2006; Styers, 1952, US Army, 2002) describing hand-to-hand combat as a violent physical event is the major figural theme *close*. Participants characterized the violence they experienced in terms of a variety of physical actions, such as kicking, punching, wrestling, choking, biting, and striking the opponent with a weapon like a rifle or a knife. While hand-to-hand combat was clearly a physical event for all of the service members in this study, the level of the force and resulting violence depended on the perceived threat and demands of the situation. In some instances, participants employed hand-to-hand combat to restrain an opponent because more lethal means (e.g. shooting with a firearm) were not appropriate or necessary.

Another aspect of the physicality of hand-to-hand combat described by the present service members through the major theme, *close*, was the small physical distance between combatants. This aspect of the encounter is consistent with previous literature characterizing hand-to-hand combat as a "scrum" (MacDonald, 1917) or describing the

situation as a battle between two opponents who "tie themselves up in a knot and roll about on the grass" (Hobbs, 1917, p. 84). However, the present findings extend descriptions of the hand-to-hand combat event depicted in some previous literature by revealing how these service members attempted to create distance with the opponent and avoid hand-to-hand combat whenever possible or until situational demands offered no better course of action. If hand-to-hand combat was inevitable, participants attempted to maximize their advantage within the limited physical space and "dominate" their opponent. Finally, for some participants proximity to the opponent appeared to alter their perception of the speed of the encounter, with a closer proximity being associated with a shorter time course.

Virtually all hand-to-hand combat training manuals (Applegate, 1976; Duffield & Elliot, 1942; Fairbairn, 1979; Styers, 1952; Thompson & Peligro, 2006; US Marine Corps, 2005; US Army, 1992a; US Army, 2002) emphasize the importance of automatic fighting skills for successful performance. The results of the present study suggest the participants possessed near-automatic fighting skills, as reflected in the major figural theme *fast* and the sub-theme *training takes over*. Participants also described their fighting skills as emerging "instinctively" to meet the demands of some hand-to-hand combat encounters. Automated movements were clearly an advantage for these service members, especially given the very short time span of many encounters and the limited opportunity for cognitive processing during hand-to-hand combat.

The autonomous nature of fighting skills participants perceived during hand-to-hand combat is consistent with the sense of being on "automatic pilot" (p. 51) reported by

law enforcement officers during deadly force encounters with firearms (Artwhol & Christensen, 1997). This finding is also consistent with research examining perceptual distortions during life-threatening situations. For example, 64% of the participants in one study described their movements as automatic or not within their control when in situations of imminent, extreme danger (Noyes & Kletti, 1976). Some authors (Grossman & Siddle, 1999; Molloy & Grossman, 2007) have argued that automatic skills are necessary for hand-to-hand combat because the extreme increases in arousal accompanying such an event severely limit a person's cognitive abilities. For the present participants, automated fighting skills were instead perceived to be a significant advantage when encountering an opponent at close range within a brief time span.

As suggested by the results of previous research (Grisby, 1991) and emphasized in other literature addressing the issue of close combat (Grossman & Siddle, 1999; Molloy & Grossman, 2007), hand-to-hand encounters for some participants in the present study elicited a powerful level of physiological arousal. Grisby's (1991) concept of combat rush appeared to characterize some service members' descriptions of their experience. A few participants even characterized the high arousal of such combat as enjoyable, which is consistent with several anecdotal comments of military service members found in earlier literature (Bird, 1917; Bourke, 1999). However, it is important to note that the positive feelings expressed by participants in the present study dealt solely with the sensation of increased physiological arousal, which some termed *adrenaline*, and not with other aspects of the experience (such as physically harming or killing an opponent).

Some previous authors (e.g., Molloy & Grossman, 2007) have argued that hand-to-hand combat produces large increases in physiological arousal. However, the remarks of some participants in the present study appeared to refute this position by conveying the notion that changes in arousal were associated with the degree of perceived threat and associated performance demands of each particular situation. In some cases, participants reported no change in their arousal level. However, it is also possible that these service members were adept at managing their arousal level during hand-to-hand combat because of their extensive and specialized training which is a possibility also recognized by Molloy & Grossman (2007).

Previous hand-to-hand combat literature (Applegate, 1976, Duffield & Elliot, 1942; Fairbairn, 1979; Marriot, 1917; Styers, 1952; US Army, 1992a, US Marine Corps, 2005) suggests that success in hand-to-hand combat requires a high level of adaptability to an ever-changing performance environment. The comments of service members in the present study appear to support this view, especially if the opponent initiated the encounter with little or no warning. In such cases, participants seemed to direct their attention to environmental cues, likely for adaptation purposes, and reported a near-automatic emergence of their fighting skills.

Another finding that supported and extended accounts found in previous literature was the major figural theme *fast*. Some military literature (Carrington, 1916; Styers, 1952) has emphasized the importance of very rapid reactions and "split second" decisions during close fighting encounters. Most of the service members in the present study also perceived their hand-to-hand combat experiences to be "quick" or even "instantaneous,"

offering little or no opportunity for response preparation. However, two participants reported a contrary perception, describing their experiences as events that transpired in slow motion. Such reports of perceptual slowing have not been found in previous hand-to-hand combat literature, but have been reported in prior studies with law enforcement officers who encounter situations in which deadly force and firearms are involved (Arthwol & Christensen, 1997; Klinger & Brunson, 2009). The exact mechanisms underlying such altered perceptions during hand-to-hand military combat would appear to warrant further investigation.

The results of the present study substantiate and amplify earlier discussions of the prevalence of fear during warfare (Duffield & Elliot, 1942; Fairbairn, 1979; Styers, 1952). As suggested in hand-to-hand combat training manuals, the current participants reported experiencing fear, particularly when the opponent initiated the encounter or there was an element of surprise. Fear has been characterized as consisting of three components: negative or apprehensive feelings, physiological activation, and avoidance or escape behavior (Lang, 1970). Interviews with the service members in this study revealed the existence of the first two components but not the third one. Rather than demonstrating avoidance or escape behavior when fearful, these participants remained in the situation and attempted to perform their required task. Consistent with earlier research on fear during combat (Shalit, 1988), the service members in the present study attributed their fear to a variety sources. These included a lethal threat imposed by the opponent, the impact that their actions might have on others outside the immediate hand-to-hand combat encounter, and physical separation from their fellow service members.

Adding further depth to the current understanding of fear in combat, the present results suggest that while fear might inhibit cognitive processing, especially during a surprise attack by the enemy, it does not necessarily prevent successful completion of the tasks necessary for performance success.

Previous literature (Applegate, 1979, Bellavia & Bruning, 2007; Carrington, 1916; Duffield & Elliot, 1942; Hobbs, 1917; Styers, 1952; US Army, 1992a) is divided with respect to the necessity for service members to possess the mentality of the "beast brute" or state of mental calm in order to achieve success in hand-to-hand combat. The descriptions of the present participants included examples of both mental states. Service members stressed the critical importance of evoking a sense of ruthlessness during hand-to-hand combat by "switching on", which some characterized by using predatory animal metaphors, in order to elicit a level of aggression for "dominating" an opponent. At the same time, this emotionally charged aggression was channeled in a measured way in order to address the level of threat presented by an opponent as well as maintain the cognitive faculties necessary to adapt to a rapidly changing environment.

Finally, the findings of the present study suggest some support for the notion that humans have a psychological resistance to killing other humans (Grossman, 1995; Roscoe, 2007; Smith, 2007). While the current participants did not appear hesitant to implement lethal actions against an opponent, some indicated that they had feelings of remorse following the event. Participant comments suggest different strategies they may have used to temporarily circumvent any aversion they might have to killing. Some said they attempted to dehumanize the opponent by viewing him only as a "human form."

Others said they focused on the opponent's body parts, size, or the weapon he was carrying in order to determine the best strategy for successfully defeating him in the hand-to-hand contest. These examples of a process focus that temporarily objectified the opponent for the purpose of enhancing performance and possibly diminished the psychological inhibition to killing have not been reported in the previous literature. Whether such strategies are unique to hand-to-hand combat or not remains to be determined. An additional mechanism that appeared to subvert participants' resistance to killing another human, at least during the time course of the event, is the "switch" mechanism that produced a facilitative emotional state for harming others, which was expressed in the sub-theme *targeted aggression*.

Practical Implications

The present results suggest several practical implications for service members, military hand-to-hand combat instructors, and performance psychology consultants working with military personnel. These implications are presented in the following sections.

Service members. The present findings may benefit service members most by simply informing them of things they could encounter in the event of hand-to-hand combat (c.f. Marshall, 1978). The importance of establishing an initial, cognitive understanding of a potentially stressful event is the first step in developing resilience to stress-inducing performance events (Meichenbaum, 1985). The fact that the participants in the present study survived their hand-to-hand combat encounters suggests that their training transferred well to an actual combat encounter. Yet some comments, associated

with the sub-theme *surprise,* suggest that there can be aspects of actual hand-to-hand combat that are novel and unprepared for. No matter how well trained or even experienced with actual combat service members might be, they need to "expect the unexpected" in hand-to-hand combat and be prepared to do whatever is necessary to succeed and survive.

There are several specific aspects of the hand-to-hand combat experience that service members can expect. Perhaps foremost is the fact that hand-to-hand combat is an event that usually occurs very quickly at a very close physical distance to the opponent. Such encounters demand highly automated fighting skills and the ability to adapt to a wide variety of challenges. Service members should also expect to experience fear in hand-to-hand combat as well as increases in physiological arousal that at times can be quite extreme. Military personnel need to be able to manage their aggression by mentally "switching" it "on and off" according to the demands of the situation. Finally, given the fact that the opponent in hand-to-hand combat is going to be another human being, service members may need to at least temporarily be able to alter their perception of the opponent from that of a person to that of a "human form" or "object of focus" in order to succeed in the event and survive. Finally, immediately following the encounter, service members need to attempt to recover a mentality that embraces the humanity and dignity of others and be prepared to cope with the psychological repercussions of having employed close, interpersonal violence, and perhaps lethal harm, against another human being.

Military instructors. In keeping with the concept of transfer, military hand-to-hand combat instructors should attempt to create training environments that expose service members to the rapid speed of actual hand-to-hand combat. While more difficult to simulate, training modifications should include components that induce increases in adrenaline and fear that reinforce service members' confidence in their ability to effectively perform under such conditions in actual hand-to-hand combat encounters on the battlefield. Consistent with the present results as well as the recommendation found in military hand-to-hand combat training manuals, instructors should attempt to develop service members' fighting skills to an automatic level of competence. The achievement of such levels of proficiency may require a commitment to more frequent training sessions. However, the principle of relevance rather than sheer quantity of training should be emphasized. This means instructors should carefully select the skills they want service members to develop and then create practice sessions where trainees learn to produce the desired response to particular stimulus conditions (Schmidt & Wrisberg, 2008). However, given the open environment in which most hand-to-hand combat occurs, practice sessions should eventually include exposure to a wide variety of unpredictable environmental conditions in order to encourage the development of service members' adaptation skills (Schmidt & Wrisberg, 2008). By creating practice experiences that direct trainee's focus to "key environmental cues" and improve their "flexibility of movement production" (Wrisberg, 2007, p. 38), instructors will be preparing service members to meet the demands of actual battlefield confrontations (Wrisberg, 2007).

The major figural theme *fast* suggests that instructors need to consider the speed-accuracy trade-off when designing practice experiences. Fitts' Law (1954) posits an inverse relationship between speed and accuracy of movement production when both components are necessary. Put simply, increases in speed produce decreases in accuracy. Given the speed and accuracy demands of hand-to-hand combat, instructors may need to impress on service members the importance of achieving an optimal speed-accuracy trade-off when developing their fighting skills. That is, for movements with minimal accuracy demands (e.g., striking a large target) speed need not be sacrificed. However, as accuracy becomes more important for success, service members may need to adjust the speed of their movements in order to gain control of the situation rather than bringing it to a swift conclusion.

Another approach to developing trainees' ability to manage the speed of hand-to-hand combat is to design practice activities that expose service members to faster than normal environmental conditions. Such a strategy has been shown to be effective in the training of fighter jet pilots. In one study (Miller, Stanney, Guckenberger, & Guckenberger, 1997), pilots exposed to "above real-time training" in cockpit simulators performed better in actual air combat scenarios than pilots exposed to normal time training. Since limited time appears to be a critical component of hand-to-hand combat, above real-time training simulations may provide a potentially fruitful way for instructors to improve the speed of service members' decision-making in such battlefield encounters.

Given the fast and chaotic nature of hand-to-hand combat described by the present participants, tactical adaptability would appear to be particularly important for service

members during such encounters. The literature in applied motor learning suggests that one key to success in activities pitting the skills of two individuals against one another is the ability to maximize "one's own performance while minimizing that of the opponent" (Wrisberg, 2007, p. 70). Therefore military instructors might consider ways of creating training sessions that enable service members to take control of one-on-one encounters by doing the things they do best while, at the same time, preventing their opponents from doing what the opponent likes to do. This type of training would also require an emphasis on rapid identification of the potential strengths and weaknesses of an opponent in order to determine ways of minimizing his strengths and exploiting his weaknesses during hand-to-hand combat.

Performance psychology consultants. Consultants working with military personnel might employ a variety of techniques to enhance the prospects of success during hand-to-hand combat. The results of the present study suggest that arousal regulation (Weinberg & Gould, 2011; Williams, 2010) could be a valuable skill for service members exposed to such encounters. However, since the speed of hand-to-hand combat requires rapid adjustments, consultants might initially assist service members in developing their arousal control skills in quiet settings but then encourage them to practice incorporating the skills in progressively more complex and rapid environments. In addition, consultants might teach service members how and when to use arousal regulation techniques prior to embarking on potentially dangerous missions in order to achieve a desired level of focus and composure.

The present results also suggest another potentially useful mental skill for service members to learn is imagery (Vealey & Greenleaf, 2010). While the lethality of hand-to-hand combat is virtually impossible to simulate in physical training sessions, the details and emotion of such an event might be approximated in imagery sessions. Such imagery should be as realistic as possible, including multiple sources of sensory information (i.e., sight, sound, feel, smell, etc.). For example, a service member might visualize being attacked by an opponent in a lethal manner and then producing a quick and successful response to the attack. Performance psychology consultants might also teach service members to use imagery for other purposes, such as coping with fear or effectively regulating physiological arousal during hand-to-hand combat.

The present findings as well as earlier military literature (e.g., Shaffer, 1947; Stouffer et al., 1949) suggest that confidence is important for minimizing the impact of fear on performance in combat. Therefore consultants might encourage instructors to not only create training scenarios that are realistic and challenging but also allow service members to experience success. Research in sport psychology clearly shows a positive relationship between success and confidence (see Burton & Weiss, 2008; Zinsser, Bunker, & Williams, 2010). A useful mental skill for promoting confidence is positive self-talk. Participants in the present study mentioned using affirmative phrases to generate a "can do" attitude of success or a positive energy. Encouraging service members to identify and incorporate positive self-talk into their hand-to-hand combat training would appear to be another way performance consultants might increase the confidence of service members (Zinsser, Bunker, & Williams, 2010).

Since an effective focus of attention appeared to be important for the participants in this study, attention control is another skill consultants might assist service members in developing. Consistent with Niefeffer's (1976) recommendation for martial artists, it would seem that consultants should emphasize the advantages of an external attentional focus during hand-to-hand combat. Such a focus would offer at least two advantages. First, it would permit more automatic execution of the necessary movements (and minimize the possibility of paralysis by self-analysis) and second, it would minimize the potentially damaging effects of increased adrenaline and fear by maintaining a focus on the opponent and his actions. Attention control training would also be helpful in developing service members' ability to rapidly shift between a narrow focus (e.g., the opponent's hands or weapon) and a broad focus (e.g., the larger tactical situation) in hand-to-hand combat situations.

The intense fear reported by some participants in the present study suggests the potential of hand-to-hand combat experiences to produce extreme levels of psychological stress. The present results also indicate that some participants had difficulty managing the psychological effects associated with killing their enemy, which usually surfaced following the encounter. Such reports are consistent with MacNair's (2007) research suggesting that killing in combat can psychologically traumatize a military service member and with Noy's (1987) suggestion that hand-to-hand combat, due to the direct interpersonal nature of the event, has a high potential for psychiatric disturbance. Thus it would be helpful for performance consultants working with service members returning from combat to consider the potential risk of psychological damage and be able to

identify the symptoms of chronic and extreme stress. If they are not personally qualified to provide clinical assistance they should know other licensed professionals whom they can refer service members to for help.

Another way of assisting service members in coping with the severe stress from combat is to temporarily remove them from the immediate combat environment and assist them in developing coping skills (Noy, 1987). It has also been suggested that effective leadership as well as a high level of group cohesion within a military unit are factors that can serve to buffer or mediate service members' combat stress. Therefore, consultants might alert military leaders to the typical symptoms of and reactions to combat stress, such as flashbacks (US Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine, 2007), and the normal duration of such symptoms (i.e., 6 to 8 weeks). If more severe symptoms are noticed or the duration of extreme stress prolonged, leaders need to understand the importance of referring service personnel for professional mental health assistance (US Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine, 2007).

Recommendations for Future Research

The results of the present study appear to extend the findings of earlier research and expand the notions of hand-to-hand combat portrayed in previous literature. Nevertheless relatively little remains know about the experience of hand-to-hand combat. Future studies might therefore address this event in other interesting ways. For example, phenomenological interviews might be conducted with military service members that have experienced hand-to-hand combat incidents outside of combat operations, such as during training missions within foreign countries. The present findings suggest that

hand-to-hand combat sometimes occurs during prisoner handling operations. Therefore it would be helpful to learn more about the factors precipitating such encounters and the ways such combat, if necessary, might be conducted in a manner that advances the goal of the mission.

In the present study, only one of the participants was from a country other than the United States. Thus it might be informative to explore the experience of hand-to-hand combat for service members from other countries or cultures. Since the current participants were all males, it would be beneficial to learn more about the combat experiences of female service members or the attitudes and perceptions of those prevented from engaging in such combat.

The present study also suggests that existential phenomenology is a useful method for exploring service members' lived experience of hand-to-hand combat and achieving a deeper understanding of the psychological and performance demands they face on a regular basis. Since very little research exists on service members' experiences in other forms of combat, this method would appear to be ideal for examining some of those experiences. Future studies might focus on the experience of snipers; the experience of those involved in aerial combat, close quarter fighting with firearms, tank warfare, or urban warfare; and the interpersonal experience of advising the host-nation military forces of another country during counter-insurgency operations.

Conclusions

The results of the present study suggest the following conclusions:

1) Hand-to-hand combat is usually a suddenly presented and rapidly transpiring event in battlefield situations.

2) Such combat can produce powerful physiological and psychological responses in service members.

3) Success in hand-to-hand combat often depends on a rapid and accurate interpretation of environmental information and the production of highly automated movements.

4) The hand-to-hand combat experience in battle can provide feedback or reinforcement regarding the extent to which soldiers' training prepared them for the event.

Post-script

This research represents a small window into the nuances of a particularly disturbing form of human behavior. The author's intent was not to promote warfare or assist service members in becoming "better killers." While warfare is a regrettable aspect of human history and our present-day lives, hand-to-hand combat represents a performance arena that military service members sometimes encounter. Nearly all nations have citizens that, either voluntarily or involuntarily, perform duties that potentially bring them face to face with the moral challenges of military service. Research that produces a better understanding of the physical and psychological demands of warfare may lead to more effective training that enhances service members' prospects of fulfilling their duties, protecting fellow service members, surviving on the battlefield, and returning home to their loved ones. Additionally, it is hoped that research of this nature may provide citizens and leaders with a deeper understanding of and appreciation

for the demands and sacrifices of fellow humans who fulfill the role of military service member.

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Appendix

Appendix A – Informed Consent

Hand-to-Hand Combat Study

INTRODUCTION - You are invited to participate in a research study I am conducting as a Sport Psychology independent study at the University of Tennessee. The purpose of this study is to learn more about military personnel's experience of hand-to-hand combat with an enemy combatant during combat operations.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVEMENT IN THE STUDY - Should you decide to participate in this study; you will be asked to participate in an interview at a time and location of your choosing. During the interview you will be asked to describe in as much detail as possible your experiences of competition. I may occasionally ask follow-up questions to gain further clarification or to obtain additional details to previous comments. The interview should last approximately 20-60 minutes depending on the depth of your responses. I will audio record the interview and then transcribe it (i.e., type it out on paper) for further analysis. I will then provide you a copy of the transcript to be sure it accurately portrays what you were trying to say in your interview. You may choose to adjust or delete any part of the interview in order to provide a more accurate description of your experience.

RISKS - You will be asked to select a pseudonym - a fake name - for this study, which I will substitute for your real name whenever you make comments that might identify you. This is done to help preserve the confidentiality of your responses. Further, in an effort to preserve your confidentiality I will only share your interview with members of the research group assisting me in this study and with the professor who is my faculty advisor.

BENEFITS - Potential benefits from participation in this study include to the opportunity for you to: (a) add your perspective to the limited body of research concerning military hand-to-hand combat and (b) perhaps uncover a deeper meaning and understanding of your own experience of hand-to-hand combat.

CONFIDENTIALITY - I will use the results of this research for a research project. The results will be coded in such a way that participants' identity will not be revealed in any manuscript or publication resulting from this study. While individual participants' responses will remain confidential in written reports, aggregate data representing generalizations about all participants' responses will be discussed. All audio recordings and transcripts will be stored in a secure location and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless you specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. Upon completion of the study, all information that matches you with your answers, including audio tapes, will be destroyed.

CONTACT INFORMATION - If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the researcher, Peter Jensen (865) 974-1283. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

PARTICIPATION - Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

STATEMENT OF CONSENT - I have read the above information and have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this study and understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix B – Sample Field Note

Nate (Interview 14)

Speed and violence of action appear necessary for successful hand-to-hand combat, but must be tempered with judgment to decide whether 'kinetic' or 'non-kinetic'. Howard stresses the importance of assessing the environment. He describes an "adrenaline pump" when entering the structure/building – but did not experience a different sense of adrenaline during actual H2H. There was a continual process of assessing the opponent to determine what action was required. Howard is very precise and articulate in his descriptions. He continually "checks in" with me to make sure I understand what he is communicating. For Howard, communicating a sense of authority over the opponent was the objective. Could this be similar to the "dominating" theme coming up in earlier participants? He describes his previous training as "allowed me to see" what was occurring during the situation. There is a recurring importance of being in control of the situation. He says he was "amazed" that one act (the kick to the opponent) could immediately deescalate a situation and put it back into his control and authority. Explicitly discusses that he thinks a specific "mental state" is needed to handle a situation. The "kinetic line" is easy to teach and execute - that mindset is easy. He states that there is less sympathy in a soldier when an action becomes kinetic. He believes that confidence in skills was key for his performance. He mentions anxiety specifically, but what does he tie or connect it to. Natural Instinct?

Appendix C - Confidentiality Statement: Research Group

PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY
THE EXPERIENCE OF HAND-TO-HAND COMBAT BY MILITARY PERSONNEL
'Brian'

As a participating member of the interdisciplinary phenomenology research colloquy under the direction of Drs. Sandra Thomas and Howard Pollio at the University of Tennessee, I agree to guarantee confidentiality to all participants whose transcripts are read aloud in the group meeting. This means that I will not repeat any words, phrases, or other excerpts from the audio taped interviews outside of the meeting room. I will not publicly divulge the nature of any information learned or discussion that has taken place, during the group meeting.

Signatures Date:

Vita

Peter Richard Jensen graduated from G. Ray Bodley High School in Fulton, NY in 1989. He began his collegiate studies at the Virginia Military Institute (VMI) with the class of 1994. After completing his first year at VMI, Peter transferred to the United States Naval Academy where he studied general engineering and competed on the Brigade Boxing Team. Graduating in 1995, he earned a Bachelor of Science degree and was commissioned as a US Navy Officer. After serving five years in the Navy, Peter transferred into the US Army to serve as a Special Forces officer. After completing training, he made combat deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. In 2006, Peter joined the first group of US Army officers to attend the US Military Academy's Eisenhower Leader Development Program that included earning a Master of Arts degree in Organizational and Social Psychology from Columbia University. After graduating from Columbia University, Peter continued his military duties with deployments to the Middle East. In May 2009, he began his studies as a doctoral student at the University of Tennessee and graduated with a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Kinesiology and Sport Studies with a specialization in Sport Psychology and Motor Behavior on May 10, 2012. Upon graduation Peter began his assignment at the US Military Academy in West Point, New York as the deputy director for the Center for Enhanced Performance.