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Machine, Machine! Stories about How Border Breaking Experiences from a Combat Fatigue Course Relates to the Development of Willpower and the Educational Concept of Bildung

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how border-breaking experiences among officer cadets can contribute to the development of character. The object of investigation is the “Combat Fatigue” course and the reported reflections and outputs about this in extremis learning experience. The findings are analyzed using the theoretical concepts of hardiness, willpower, and resilience. These concepts suggest that a warrior’s leadership ethos is related to the mind at the cost of the body, and that team spirit is fostered in harsh conditions. Hallucinations are reported during the training by the cadets as being valuable to their future leadership, because they can represent border-breaking experiences, strengthening their belief of mastery in harsh leadership environments.

KEYWORDS

Bildung; leadership training; willpower; hardiness; combat fatigue course

Cold souls, mules, blind men, drunkards I do not call stouthearted. Stout of heart is he who knows fear, but conquers fear, who sees the abyss but with pride. Whoever sees the abyss, but with an eagle’s eyes, whoever with an eagle’s talons grasps the abyss: He has courage.



Friedrich Nietzsche (2005, p. 251)

Machine! Machine!” Army officer cadets at the Norwegian Military Academy (NMA) shout the words to each other when another physical task is thrown at them during their two-week “Combat Fatigue course” (CFC) [Stridskurs]. This part of their training is a pass/non-pass mandatory test, found at the end of their second year of their three-year officer’s education and is required to qualify as a professional officer in the Norwegian Army. The NMA has two qualification arenas that must be completed in order to obtain a graduation diploma: the “Combat Fatigue” course and the winter mountain march. These two arenas are considered essential to obtaining officer competency. A continuation is possible in both arenas, but a grade will not be issued in the subject of leadership development and a diploma will not be issued before both exercises have been completed and passed (Krigsskolen, 2015).

The combat fatigue course

Before the CFC the cadets have gone through their basic practical, tactical and strategic training, acquired the skillsets to go through the combat fatigue course. The CFC is a signifying event, but it relies on other challenging exercise weeks, especially the “Demands of War” course and the winter mountain march (Magnussen & Boe, 2017). A result from a CFC can also be interpreted as “Rites de passage”, signified by a separation from society and the NMA, coping with the different challenges and integration into the corps of Norwegian army officers, by passing the “test” and returning to society (Genep & Ringen, 1999).

The cadets need at the CFC to keep going, mentally and physically through what we will describe as a three-phased experience. The first phase is about waiting and mental preparation at the school campus, before they “suddenly” becomes stripped of food and sent into “war mode”. This is followed by a physical exhaustion phase where arduous soldiering tasks and ensuring that cadets are not falling asleep (cheating) are being performed under close surveillance of NMA-staff. The final phase is about fighting, leading groups of fellow cadets in various combat action. They are called upon repeatedly, seemingly endless. In

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the CFC 2015 the cadets speculated about when to finish, and reportedly were duped when the finishing line did not materialize when they thought it should end. Cadets knew the frame and the basic content of the CFC in beforehand. The sources are various; but mostly hearsay and anecdotal “combat” stories told in a bar late at night by third years cadets or graduated officers. One thing that the cadets hardly can prepare for is the psychological effects of sleep deprivation.

Sleep deprivation is a vital part of the challenge to the cadets where their realms of “The unforeseen” (Torgersen, 2015) lies. Vaitl et al. (2005) reviewed the impact of sleep deprivation on a variety of cognitive and affective outcomes. They found that common cognitive consequences of sleep deprivation included diminished volitional potential, attentional narrowing, memory disturbances, and general cognitive impairment. The officer’s will, the leader’s willingness to lead, should be the last thing that dies in a simulated war situation, and it signifies strength of character. When “Machine, Machine” is shouted it potentially signifies the belief that mind over matter still as an ideal among Norwegian army officer cadets. This is a kind of dichotomous thinking that can be criticized for ruling out the body, Cartesian dualism (Jespersen, 2007), and the environment, and the cadets’ “being-in-the-world” (Heidegger, 1962). The cadets at the NMA go through a three-year so-called *dannelsesreise* [educational journey], or a *Bildung* process [Bildungsprozess] (Heidegger, 1962).

In adventure education and according to Becker (2007), vital to *Bildung*-processes are encounters with the unfamiliar and new.

The new experience, which signals both dynamism and transformation at the same time, makes the adventurer’s past appear in a different light. It shows that the past is not closed and finished with. It does not determine us [humans] forever. It contains hidden possibilities, which are just waiting to be used or activated (Becker, 2007, p. 83).

Encounters with the new experience can be seen related to the effects of sleep deprivation and not-knowing. It contains hidden possibilities, it is about learning from the unforeseen and it can hardly be formulated as learning outcomes (Magnussen, 2018) on an individual level. The result of such *Bildung*-processes in our context of research can be seen the light of increased hardiness, willpower, and self-reflection.

The challenges facing officers

The Prussian general and military theorist Carl von Clausewitz (1832/1984) wrote that, when one is under

pressure, one tends to give in to physical and intellectual weakness, and only great strength of will leads to the objective. This becomes quite straightforward: “Your will must be harder than anything it comes up against” (McCoy, 2007). Clausewitz (1832/1984) used the terms *character* or *character strength* (Bang et al., 2017) to describe this capability. Leadership is needed in war or warlike environments, because leadership aims the gun so that the team can pull the trigger (Cannon & Cannon, 2003).

A soldier who believes that he or she has the resources to get through a stressful situation and complete a mission successfully will also perceive fewer threats and less stress (Morgan et al., 2002). A critical aspect of army and infantry operations is the extreme physical and emotional stress that is placed upon soldiers involved in combat. Infantry operations are thus characterized by uncertainty, the risk of death or significant injury, and physical and mental fatigue (Holder, 1999).

Effective leadership is exercised in cooperation with and in relation to others, and can be described as the result of the interaction between the leader and the subordinates over time (Forsvarsstaben, 2007). Military leadership can be described as a continuous process that is exercised in relation to others in a specific military context (Boe, 2018). A war is not won alone, and 85% of all military training takes place in small teams, as opposed to 5% that takes place in the civilian world (Mullin & Shriberg, 2005). Ultimately, meaning is shared in communities when different subjects relate to each other and are engaged in joint activities.

Furthermore, the Norwegian Chief of Defense (Forsvarsstaben, 2012, p. 11) states: “[Military leadership] is about doing the uncomfortable and being able to cope with it, overcoming powerlessness, and avoiding emotional breakdown. Military leadership demands robustness in order to think clearly and effectively, and cope with one’s feelings when facing complex and difficult situations” (authors’ translation). Because military training results in a high level of wear and tear on the personnel (Hoedebecke & Wells, 2002), it is imperative to develop a strong will to cope with war and warlike situations.

This article will present what these cadets report from their learning communities as meaning, experiences, and the main outcomes of the CFC held in late spring 2015. We will discuss their reports in the light of theories of resilience, hardiness and willpower.

Resilience and hardiness

Often, a definition of self-efficacy tells what the individual thinks he or she is able to do in relation to a

specific task (Bandura, 1997, p. 22). This is about setting goals and learning how to “reach” them (Latham & Lee, 1986). Another concept relating to self-efficacy is hardiness (Kobasa, 1979). Volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) characterize contemporary military operations (Snider & Matthews, 2012). Preparing officers for these types of situations often referred to as “in extremis leadership” (Kolditz, 2010). The Norwegian Armed Forces Joint Operational Doctrine states: “The opposing rigors can be extreme. Our profession represents the will to succeed and to strive toward results that exceed the expected – the difference between success and failure” (Forsvarsstaben, 2007, p. 160, authors’ translation). This quotation highlights the importance of an officer having a strong will in his or her professional practice.

Putting will over matter, like when the officer cadets shout “machine, machine” to each other, also goes along with the concepts of resilience and hardiness. Resilience can be defined as the tendency to recover quickly from different challenges and stresses, while maintaining focus (US Army, 2012). Resilience, however, is not described as a personality trait, but rather as a normal, stable, or successful developmental trait in potentially dangerous situations. Resistant or hardy individuals can be described as people who have the capacity or ability to make a comeback when things have been difficult or challenging (Coutu, 2002). Hardiness is similar, focusing on a person’s perception of control, challenge, and commitment when facing difficult situations (Kobasa, 1979).

An important factor in developing willpower is thus the ability to create in oneself a high degree of faith in one’s own mastery (Eid, 2006). Believing in one’s own capacities, skills, and abilities has been found to be important for Norwegian military officers within diverse subjects. Examples include increasing the will to kill (Boe & Johannessen, 2015), learning aggression and aggression control (Boe & Ingdahl, 2017), preparing for a parachute jump (Boe & Hagen, 2015), and enhancing leadership communication skills (Holth & Boe, 2017).

The extent to which a person possesses certain characteristics may affect their evaluation of a situation as controllable or uncontrollable, challenging or threatening, and will also be crucial to a person being dedicated to a task or feeling foreign to it (Kobasa et al., 1985). Paired closely with resilience is the concept of *persistence*. Simply stated, persistence is the ability to finish what you start, and persistence is an important character strength for military officers (Boe,

2016). Previous research by the Norwegian Armed Forces has identified 12 of the 24 character strengths that are most important for military leaders (Bang et al., 2017). They are leadership, followed by integrity, persistence, bravery, open-mindedness, fairness, teamwork, self-regulation, love of learning, social intelligence, perspective, and creativity. Persistence, like power, is an important trait in military personnel if they want to succeed with missions or in selection into the military system. In a study of a group of cadets similar to the group used in the present study, the character trait persistence was found to be correlated significantly with the cadets’ performance, both physically and academically (Bang et al., 2017). Military personnel must possess certain characteristics, and willpower is one of them.

Willpower

Willpower has been the subject of research since the 1960s (Mischel & Grusec, 1967). However, only in the past few years has it been possible to document clearly the positive benefits of strong willpower. There is a robust and predictive association between the degree of willpower and a wide range of life consequences (Tangney et al., 2004). The ability to control one’s actions rationally is particularly important, and it is therefore not surprising that willpower is referred to as the most important of all virtues (Baumeister & Tierney, 2011). Willpower is thus clearly connected to the character strengths persistence and self-regulation.

The concepts of willpower, self-control, and self-regulation are often used interchangeably in the literature, whatever the context, but they all refer to the same mental process (ibid; Metcalfe & Mischel, 1999). Other overlapping concepts include performance control, “executive control,” self-discipline, grit, postponement of reward, and ego strength.

Willpower can be defined as the capacity to change your responses to support your long-term goals, so that you live up to your standards (Baumeister et al., 2007). The more willpower you have, the better, unless it leads to rigidity and inflexibility in your thinking and decision-making. Characteristics of military leadership include leadership and the ability to make decisions in difficult and challenging environments. The ability to make good decisions depends on several factors. A particularly important factor in a dangerous situation is the person’s ability to maintain self-control. If a leader scores high on self-control, this increases the chance that the leader will maintain tranquility, promote confidence in his subordinates,

and make good decisions (Forsvarsstaben, 2012; Kolditz, 2010).

Leaders with a high degree of self-control make better decisions in stressful situations than those with low self-control because leaders with high self-control become less ego-depleted. Ego depletion means that one's self-control or one's willpower draws from a limited pool of mental resources. The point is that they can or will be used until there is nothing left. It has been suggested that making decisions is ego depleting, because it requires many of a person's resources. Individuals who have high self-control may therefore have a larger reservoir of willpower, and this translates into less ego depletion than those with less willpower (Samuels et al., 2010).

This paper discusses how new, border-breaking experiences can contribute to the development of willpower, and hardiness and, consequently, can affect Bildung processes. Before we present excerpts from interviews, analysis, and discussion, we will describe this paper's methods.

Methods

This paper uses data from the research project "Practice Makes Mastery?" The data were collected at various NMA practice sites used during the three years of officer training. The project's ontological starting point is how exercises, as a learning landscape (Nielsen & Kvale, 2003), affect officer cadets.

Ethnography

This research uses an ethnographic approach, with a greater emphasis on observation than on participation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1987) of the cadets learning and exercise activities. The data stems from field notes, photos, and semi-structured interviews of eight cadets. The cadet enters the learning structure of individual, team, class, and cohort. One researcher followed the cadets on their practice field, but did not have what Patton (2002, p.340–341) calls an "inner perspective." The researcher took the role of onlooker. In all situations while observing, the researcher retained his civilian "outdoor" clothing, and was easy to spot among all of the green uniforms. The fieldwork followed the pathways of naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), with an emphasis on "natural" settings and open-ended conversations. The second author of this research paper did not participate in the fieldwork, but contributed to the analysis.

The contingent of cadets that were the "object of inquiry" consisted of 51 males and 5 females. Their ages ranged from 20 to around 30 years. Out of this cohort which was followed on all their exercises, a group of 8 cadets, four female and four male were interviewed. Four interviews were conducted with each cadet; during their first week, ultimo first-, second- and third year. The key informants were chosen using such criteria as diversity of years in service, gender, military branch, and age.

Analysis

In addition to surveying the field observations (photos and field notes), answers to the following interview question were also analyzed: "What are your experiences/reflections of the 'Combat Fatigue' course?" The question was posed to four male and four female cadets during the final weeks of their three-year formation at the NMA. Data were transcribed in MS Word for Windows and collected in the analysis program MAXQDA 10. In this program, the interview sets were coded "combat fatigue course", with the three subcodes topics; will, hardiness, and learning community. After the initial coding of the interviews in the broad category of the "Combat Fatigue" course, with the subgroups willpower and hardiness made by one of the two researchers, the second researcher reread and refined the content of the initial coding. Then, the first researcher reread the coded material and made the final excerpts.

Validity and reliability of findings

The translation (Patton, 2002) from Norwegian to English in this paper presented a challenge. It affects aspects such as fact vs. fiction and the validity of texts (Czarniawska, 2004), including the texts' communicative validity of the findings and translations. To retain both intention and meaning, the interview excerpts were kept in their "original" Norwegian form together with the English translation in earlier drafts of the paper. This allowed us to preserve the Norwegian voice. Some Norwegian expressions are enclosed in parentheses and remain in the paper. Photography provides researchers with the opportunity to relive the observed situations with the distance of an onlooker (Patton, 2002). Questions about transfer and generalization of the findings are limited by their "similarity and fittingness" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 124). These limitations may be important when we address issues with implications to military

training, leadership development, and learning in commensurable situations.

Ethical considerations

This research relies on informed consent from adult participants and was conducted according to the rules and regulations provided by the Norwegian Center for Research Data (Project number xx). Information about the scope and ethics of this research was given to the cadets on their second day at the NMA at Tollbugaten 10. Anonymity is secured by keeping interviews and name lists on a separate, password-protected server. One cadet withdrew from participation in the project; no reasons were given or asked for.

Results

The “Combat Fatigue” course is a pass/fail exercise. This makes the cadets intensively aware of the consequences that failure would have on their future in the army. They are motivated to deliberate on the level of effort they will expend on the exercise. One female cadet, we will call her Trine, puts her tactical deliberation on persistence and coping strategy this way:

How long can I risk 100% effort? What are the consequences? It was not a physical thing. It was about the mental game of every day and every hour. I experienced that my chosen strategies worked well.

Interviewer: What were they?

To continue, always get myself up again, always continue. Care for the people around me. And there is another one “if it doesn’t go right, go left”. That kind of helped me out. It was like the *fire the engine* experience that I have experienced earlier.

Interviewer: Continue like a machine metaphor?

Yes, something like that.

Former ideals and soldiering culture provide her with motivation to continue like a machine. She continues by describing her core values, recalling the ethos of her former platoon as two pictures.

It was something from my old company. As a young recruit, I learned to keep on fighting. It is in me, if you get sick, or wounded, you shall continue whatsoever. It is the picture of two other soldiers carrying you. In my other company, it was just “gravel on”, and the people there said “we gravel on” no matter what.

Trine had brought pictures of these ideals in the notebook that she carried through the exercise. She

had also written that she would develop as leader. “Therefore I really wanted to experience leading when I was totally exhausted. I was never to experience that [during the CFC]. A pity, but I realized quite early that it would be difficult to try.” She continues, dwelling on her previous experiences at the NMA:

But I’ve learned so many other things. I thought I would be more affected by sleep deprivation than I was. My old strategies from previous exercises learned years ago worked. The mistakes I made on the exercise “demands of war”, I really had learned from them. It worked.

To have previous experiences in similar situations, a form of habituation (Eid, 2006) helps to reduce the impact of the unforeseen and enhance perceived performance. A positive force is also found in the ethos of a company, providing motivation to move on, no matter what. Like a machine.

Such coping strategies are also mentioned by another male cadet, we will call him Erik, who also mentions pictures in his notebook. He recalls: “I had this drawing in the book where I wrote things down. A motivation drawing.” The cadets had been advised to make a drawing to help them formulate their own leadership ethos and reinforce or alter their motivation when feeling low. Erik expressed his reflections on the “Combat Fatigue” course as they will apply to his future role as a leader in harsh environments:

I also think that I never will allow myself to end up in a similar situation again. In a war-like situation that is. To be so affected by lack of sleep and food and those things. To me, it puts the role of the leader in a different perspective. Especially when you are out on a mission and always will be involved in doing things. It will be so important to be able to step back from the work-tasks and have breaks. It’s about not ending up in ... , yes, a situation where you are strongly affected by sleep deprivation and hunger because of the way the brain works. It works so differently, from when you are rested and relaxed.

Erik reflects on his metacognition experience as a different way of functioning mentally. It scared him. He continues:

It is a kind of scary in a way. I remember that I sat there trying to solve problems, and I could not make my head work at all. Then I could get an uplift thinking: “What on earth was I doing?” All in all, it was a good experience, mostly when I think about the mental part of it.

Forcing cadets to undergo extreme experiences of sleep deprivation has been reported as being unpleasant, but also as giving new experiences, formulating new self-awareness on Erik’s thinking (or lack of it),

and providing him with ambitions to rest in future demanding situations. These kind of experiences are related to the development of willpower.

Willpower

Another female cadet, we will call her Wilma, when asked about her experiences during the course, compares it with the first-year exercise “Demands of War,” during which cadets are “losing the war”, and based on that position, formulate their individual leadership development plan. She reflects:

The “Demands of War” exercise happened in known territories and didn’t last long. It was easier in a way. When I was tired, I didn’t reflect much on it. It all took place so close to Oslo, so I knew all the way where I was, so to navigate was not a problem. In the fatigue of war course, it was very different. It lasted longer and that made it tougher. Uh ... and I noticed how sleep deprivation affected me much more. I did not experience that during the exercise “Demands of War.”

Wilma underlines the importance of unfamiliarity and time as factors that make the struggle harder. She continues:

I fell asleep all the time. I became a little nervous about that, did I sleep too long, was I in a hurry? And I started to hallucinate (laughs), many times it made me think that that I knew where I was going, instead I had fallen asleep, I knew or I thought I knew where I should continue also. In reality I had just made the same path three or four times, seeing new thing on each la: It made a mess of my head, so it was a lot tougher this time. Things were way more difficult during the “Combat Fatigue” course than the “Demands of war” course. The period of “auftragstaktik” and the exhausting phase were challenging. Especially the last one, it was so heavy. However, it is like that, you just have to grind your teeth together and carry on. You do not think much about anything else.

To carry on, in a hostile environment receiving little (at least during the first week) positive reinforcement from the crew of instructors who facilitated the exercise (fieldnotes), can consolidate and strengthen willpower. Nisse, a male cadet, emphasized the importance of willpower this way.

Yes, it is about being a stayer. The ability to continue, no matter what, and not least, to raise expectations of others at same time as you do it to yourself. It is about doing the right things. In that respect, it was a nice tri:

To extract the best in you and try to affect others through your example as a role model is impossible if

the boys are waiting for you. You have to be up there, physically and mentally. Another cadet explains:

I don’t know exactly, maybe everybody has this fear of suddenly being exposed as a different person than the person they have tried to give a picture of. I don’t know. I will not say that I am afraid of being revealed. It is more about the fear of disappointing others. In the company I came from [an elite company], it was a pressure to be strong and fit. It makes out your core as a leader; it is the way you gain respect. I feel it strongly; you see the pressure to be “a machine”, as we call it. But also because I know that to be in good physical condition brings you gains and surplus as a leader. You do not want to be the platoon commander who has to say; “Wait for me boys; I just need to catch my breath, before we continue this attack.” It is this pressure in the infantry where I come from, to and where I am going to continue after the new posting, to keep up a high physical level. It gives you a lot as a leader in this business.

This ability to stay in shape in order to lead provides the officer with a psychological advantage. It reduces their worries and is one less thing to fight. However, this also creates pressure, demanding willpower to continue and keep up with the boys. This can be seen as related to hardiness.

Hardiness

One of the female cadets, we will call her Felicia, was observed on one of the final days of the “Combat Fatigue,” course fighting a male cadet who was 40 kilos heavier than she was. We shared our memories of the incident:

I: The “Combat Fatigue” course. Last time I saw you, there you were nosebleeding and ...

Felicia: What? Nose bleeding as well? I thought I was only wiping blood from other people’s noses.

I: It was in a fight with (anonymised; laughs).

Felicia (laughs): I should have seen it on video.

I: He was a bit careful until you hit him hard, then he became a bit angry.

Felicia: At least I tried. This is something that I have experienced in boxing also. The boys are a bit cautious. It is okay, but while training it is a bit annoying because I need a reference on how painful it can be, it is not nice to have pain, but I think that it is worse to be surprised when I get hit for real. That is so much worse than while boxing. Boxing hurts, I get knocked down, but I survive.

The thought of going into a real fight and not being overwhelmed or knocked down by a blow fires

Felicia in her training. She wants it to be as realistic as the training ground allows. This relates to hardiness, but also to how groups of cadets form teams to help each other in their training of willpower and hardiness.

Team losses

Another cadet reflects in the interview about how the course finally created a team from the learning group dedicated to helping each other perform during the different learning tasks provided by the NMA.

Cadet: And I thought, okay now we are getting to know each other. It was so nice. It has to be this mutual trust that we will work things out. I thought it worked out pretty good. I have experienced that some people have fallen, have felt as outsiders afterwards. I really do not know what to do then. I am just trying to treat them as I normally do, even if somethings has changed.

The CFC is a vital arena for the cadets. Together with the winter mountain march (crossing the Hardangervidda) (Magnussen & Boe, 2017), the “Combat Fatigue” course is a rite of passage to becoming a Norwegian officer from the NMA. This enhances the dilemma of depending on and competing with members of your learning group: This relationship can create a sense of loss in the cadets. The cadet continues:

I have experienced that it hurt when so many of us are quitting [a total of seven out of 50 during the three years at the NMA]. Especially when xx quit, he was in my study group, it makes me think: okay, is it we that have made mistakes? We talked about that in our study group: Shall we talk [about him] this way, and before he left we decided not to talk about him when he not were present, except questions like is he here or shall we make contact. It was about not talking behind his back. That could divide the group and create or make an unfortunate group dynamic.

The relegation of cadets in these situations can cause a sensation of loss and some awkwardness in relating to a team member who leaves. In this group, they decided not to speak about him. In another group who lost one of their members, for one cadet [from an audio recording, second week], it was about a creeping uncertainty. The cadet said, “now we do not know who is the weak link in the group: We had one person who always fell behind. The rest of the group where strong. Now, I do not know who the weak link is. Is it me?” In this case, the evaluation system, together with a harsh structural frame of food and sleep deprivation, creates a hostile environment.

The only support for the cadets comes from the teams. One cadet said [field notes]: “When marching, the last kilometer to the maintenance hall the final day, I felt proud of what we had achieved. We had become a team.”

Discussion

The ethos of a warrior can be seen as being nurtured and trained through different arduous tasks during three years at the NMA. This is in addition to the diminishing role of the body, as enforced by a culture in which it is treated or referred to as a machine. This represents a division of the mind and body, related to stoic ideals (MacIntyre, 1993).

Preparation is important for the cadets, for example, the idea that they need to feel the full force of a blow in order to be prepared. It is hoped that this experience can help the mind continue and the body to rise after being knocked down. Sleep deprivation is reported to produce hallucinations in the cadets (Matthews et al., 2011). The will must still perform and control the hallucinations. The will must be stronger than any obstacle it encounters (McCoy, 2007), even hallucinations.

The team or the group of cadets can, to a certain extent, provide an individual cadet with a friendly sanctuary, provided that he or she is not the one standing out, wearing a yellow shirt. If the team’s weakest link is eliminated by withdrawal or being relegated, you could be next. Nevertheless, a deep-felt sense of team spirit can be the result of conquering extreme challenges.

Participating in and passing the “Combat Fatigue” course represents a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Crossing their mental “village borders,” or known territory, and entering the wilderness beyond can cause unexpected things to happen. The formation of a cadet through the Bildung-processes of meeting challenges can be seen as an adventure or inner journey. Character strengths, willpower, team spirit, and hardiness can be the result of traveling in an individual’s uncharted territories. “Adventures are practical examples of experiences that are normally prevented by everyday life” (Becker, 2008, p. 173).

Educational implications

This research can be relevant to exercise planners and educators. The military ethos of ignoring the body and testing character can cause injuries. The paper also indicates that entering individuals’ uncharted

territory, mentally and physically, was reported as being meaningful strengthening future leaders. Similarly, cadets entering a future “Combat Fatigue” course can benefit from the context described above, framing their individual fragmented experiences within a larger Bildung process. That is, results from the present interviews can help them prepare themselves and interpret their own possibly fragmented experiences.

When planning combat fatigue courses, the effect of completion needs to be addressed. Physical differences might provide the cadets with a variety of competing starting points. This means that ignoring the body in training gives some cadets mental advantages. Hallucinations can be seen as a valuable experience, creating combat readiness through in extremis situations.

Initiation rites, such as combat fatigue courses, can be seen as essential Bildung processes, imposing unpleasant but valuable learning experiences on the individual, and forming and developing their willpower, resilience and hardiness. The stoic ideal lives on and is exerted through the will of military leadership training. The combat fatigue course becomes a key passage into the officer profession.

Learning in the frame of a combat fatigue course can strengthen willpower, hardiness, and resilience. Vital in such processes is an element of adventure connected to the unknown or the unforeseen, powerful and educative factors. Such experiences can in the light of the concept of Bildung, toss away the pedagogical need of “smart goals” (Reeves & Fuller, 2018). The educational concept of unknown and unforeseen is related to “reclaiming a language for education in an age of learning” (Biesta, 2005).

Limitations

This research builds on data from one combat fatigue course within the framework of the NMA. Not all cadets participating in the combat fatigue course were asked to participate in the research. Further research is needed on the element of competition in relation to development of collaboration skills.

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