Beating Combat Stress
101 Techniques for Recovery

John Henden

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I dedicate this book to the hundreds of thousands of servicemen and women from all four armed services who have served in the frontline of various theatres of operations over the last few hundred years. The vast majority, as others will in the future, simply dust themselves off before making the necessary readjustments, at their own pace and in their own time. Some will have needed help from comrades, the chain of command, their regimental association, family welfare workers, or other agencies to complete that adjustment. This handbook is dedicated particularly to those servicemen who have found it tough on their return; or who have experienced symptoms later on. It may be used as a manual for welfare workers who are providing the most effective help possible, and as a self-help guide or “buddy-aid” for all service personnel who have need. Service wives or partners, parents or other relatives may find it helpful too, in discovering the widest range of valuable tools and techniques. Theories about what might be helpful for service personnel with combat operational stress reaction (COSR) can be found in many textbooks and papers. This handbook contains no theories; instead, it is a practical how-to-do guide, packed with field-tested tools and techniques that work in the majority of cases.

If there are three lead messages within this handbook, they are as follows:
Dedication

- to get serving troops back to maximum operational fitness and health as soon as possible
- to promote early intervention, wherever and whenever possible, for all service personnel who have been on tours of duty, anywhere in the world
- to equip both serving personnel and veterans with the widest range of tools and techniques to promote a life lived well.
## Contents

*About the Author*  ix  
*Foreword*  xi  
*Preface – The Book’s Purpose*  xv  
*Acknowledgements*  xix  
*Introduction*  xxiii  
*How to Use This Handbook*  xxvii  

**Section 1: Dealing with “Triggers”**  1  
**Section 2: How to Deal with Flashbacks**  9  
**Section 3: How to Deal with Unwelcome Thoughts**  29  
**Section 4: Dealing with “The Lows”**  59  
**Section 5: Dealing with Sleep Disturbance**  69  
**Section 6: Living Life to the Full (or as Full as Possible)**  87  

**Appendix A: The Evidence Base for Solution-focused Therapy**  115  
**Appendix B: Helpful Questions and Statements from the Worker**  125
Appendix C: What Service Users Have Found to be Helpful in This Work 127

Appendix D: How to Avoid Re-traumatisation and Re-victimisation 129

Appendix E: Blocks to Disclosing 131

Appendix F: The Three Stages: Victim – Survivor – Thriver (Living Life to the Full, or as Full as Possible) 133

Appendix G: Benefits of Doing This Important Work 137

Appendix H: Reassuring Things for Servicemen to Know 139

Appendix I: Two-day Workshops 141

Bibliography 145

Index 149
About the Author

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John Henden is a former soldier, therapist and trainer of
military welfare workers within all four armed services.

John is an acclaimed international author, conference presenter
and solution-focused trainer. He is a regular presenter at
European Brief Therapy Association conferences and was a
founder member of Solutions in Organisations Link-up. Over
the last 10 years, he has worked in over 15 countries.

He has worked in health, welfare and support services for over
30 years, having gained both a deep knowledge and a wide
experience of “what works”, when it comes to helping
individuals get their lives back on track. Throughout his
career in health and welfare, he has never lost sight of the
potential in people to make the necessary changes to live
useful and productive lives, despite any earlier labels they may
have been given.
Foreword

The conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have thrust into view tragic images of fallen servicemen and women returning home in flag-draped coffins, and heightened public awareness of the need to support those who have suffered life-changing injuries. Those with longer memories may recall the Falklands Campaign of 1982: British television screens filled with pictures of severely burned Welsh Guardsmen struggling off the stricken Sir Galahad or 2 PARA burying their dead at Goose Green. But those whose injuries we see are just a small proportion of those who suffer in the course of duty. Far more numerous are those who suffer through the stress of what they have experienced, and their injuries are invisible to all but themselves and their close families and friends. In past generations these wounds would have gone unrecognised and untreated, but not anymore.

John Henden, an ex-serviceman, therapist and trainer in the military welfare field, is at the forefront of the fight to transform those who suffer from the stress of combat back to being the fully effective soldiers and citizens they once were and, he argues with great conviction, have always been. This practical, no-nonsense book will make a tremendous contribution in this vital area. Anyone who picks it up will
realise at once that there is no “psychobabble” here, just soldier-focused common sense.

One of the biggest obstacles to treating those brave individuals who, in previous generations, were likely to have been dismissed as suffering from some sort of “shell shock”, was simply admitting that their reaction was normal. Yes, for them it was unpleasant, worrying and severely depressing, but it is now widely accepted that this is a perfectly normal reaction to situations of great stress. Like any illness it needs to be recognised, accepted and treated. The military’s “macho” culture has often sought to stigmatise those who sought help, but that is increasingly a thing of the past. Few soldiers who have experienced combat can deny they have felt fear, and no one can be certain how they will react the next time. The military community has reached a level of operational competence and professional maturity where it is now fully recognised that all mates in difficulty need help, whether they are bleeding visibly or hurting inside. We understand these things so much better today.

I am sure that this book will make a major contribution to heading off psychiatric injury at an early stage; the practical advice is both simple to understand and wise in substance. Moreover the six sections are divided up in such a way that the subject matter is readily accessible; the reader gains instant benefit from turning the pages. One only wishes others would write and speak in such clear terms. There is nothing to be gained by pretentious language and academic mumbo jumbo; Henden’s communication skills are a lesson in getting a message over with crystal clarity. He introduces readers to the concept of Triggers – random events which can set off unwelcome memories producing debilitating Flashbacks, but
he quickly dissolves these scary moments into something that is normal and can be handled with the application of his reassuring strategies. In the sections that follow, he offers similar techniques to deal with Unwelcome Thoughts, “The Lows”, the desire to live Life to the Full, and Sleep Disturbance. The latter is so common that his practical tips will benefit not just those suffering with combat stress, but anyone struggling with the pressures of our overheated society.

Over and above the book’s principal sections, Henden includes nine appendices which underpin all that has gone before. He lifts the veil on his own Solution Focused Brief Therapy, and goes on to provide important signposts for those working in this life-restoring area for the benefit of others. Throughout, while the military focus is evident, it is not applied in such a way that prevents relevance to other walks of life. This will significantly widen the appeal and the success of this invaluable book.

Henden has consulted widely, thought carefully, and offers compelling advice in an area of life that has become much more open to receive it. In this regard he is a man for our times, and this book is a most welcome product. If used as intended, hope will be restored and many lives transformed.

General Sir Richard Dannatt GCB CBE MC DL

Former Chief of the General Staff

July, 2010