“THERE’S A STEREOTYPE THIS MAKES YOU SOFT. NO, IT BRINGS YOU ON POINT.”

ny word of the military adopting training left-of-centre training practices, from introducing gender-neutral fitness testing to even accepting the reality of PTSD at all, generally prompts a snort of derision from the wider community, inside and out. It's not easy to introduce what would
into the training routines of elite military forces worldwide.

More and more military units have begun incorporating what's known as 'mindfulness training' into their programs, with evidence pointing to the possibility that it not only helps stave off the effects of PTSD after combat, but also helps create soldiers that are cooler, calmer, and more prepared to make tough decisions in the heat of action.

Certain commanders in the US Army have introduced mindfulness training — which includes meditation, breathing exercises, and other focus techniques — to their programs, while mindfulness is also being taught throughout the British Royal Navy, Army and Air Force and the New Zealand Air Force. NATO is even holding a two-day symposium in Berlin to discuss its effectiveness.

"I was asked recently if my soldiers call me General Moonbeam," Maj. Gen. Walter Piatt, who was director of operations for the Army and now commands its 10th Mountain Division, told the New York Times. "There’s a stereotype this makes you soft. No, it brings you on point." He also pointed to a study conducted by the University of Miami, which found Special Forces soldiers displayed improved memory, an enhanced ability to process information, and better decision making in chaotic battle situations after being taught mindfulness techniques.

Commander William MacNulty, a commissioned officer in the United States Public Health Service, told the Times that you could compare the training to conventional physical training, however you're increasing your mental capacity instead. “You might not drop and do push-ups when you’re in a gunfight, but you have increased capacity,” he said.

Mental focus “becomes a transferable skill,” he added.

The practice is also catching on as an effective treatment outside of combat zones, where breathing exercises, meditation and the like are all being found to help with the trauma many soldiers deal with after their service.

Commander Tim Boughton, a long-time British service member who left a decades-long career having seen unimaginable horrors in Iraq, the Falklands, Northern Ireland and Afghanistan, said that mindfulness techniques have made him far more capable of dealing with the trauma that so many unequipped ex-servicemen deal with on a daily basis.
"The amount of brain power it frees by not being trapped in the past or the future is incredible," Mr. Boughton said. "The military is seeing the mass benefits of this."
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