

Norwich University is the oldest private military college in the nation, and it is the birthplace of the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC). Each year, over 100 graduates commission into the American military after completing four years of rigorous training in leadership and tactics. These officers represent the highest level of non-combat training. Deployment of these officers into combat zones frequently occurs within one year of graduation. The present study examines three important facets of military preparedness: vigilance, threat assessment, and resilience. Psychological measures of these abilities include self-report surveys and questionnaires, ERP brain-wave components such as P300 and ERN, and eye-tracking measures such as fixation counts, gaze durations, and pupillary dilation. Stimuli representing unusual or threatening events can be presented tachistoscopically and responses can be measured. A psychological profile can then be generated for each commissioning officer. We have previously collected profiles for civilians, military cadets with varying military training, as well as military veterans with varying degrees of combat exposure. Our ongoing research has found that military training, by itself, can lead to more optimal levels of vigilance and threat assessment, as evidenced by larger P300 peaks and fewer false positive errors in a weapon identification task. In addition, scores on a variety of psychological measures of depression, PTSD, and resilience indicate that military training can increase resilience and offset development of hypervigilance, depression, and PTSD. On the other hand, combat exposure and war trauma can lead to higher levels of hypervigilance, depression, and PTSD. Understanding the interaction between military training and combat exposure in the etiology of depression and PTSD in soldiers is vital to the American military. The present study seeks to examine whether military training for commissioning officers mitigates the negative outcomes of PTSD and depression, while optimizing vigilance, accurate threat assessment, and resilience.