

My Drift

Title: Phobias

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A phobia is a lasting and unreasonable fear caused by the presence or thought of a specific object or situation that usually poses little or no actual danger. Exposure to the object or situation brings about an immediate reaction, causing the person to endure intense anxiety (nervousness) or to avoid the object or situation entirely. The distress associated with the phobia and/or the need to avoid the object or situation can significantly interfere with the person's ability to function. Adults with a specific phobia recognize that the fear is excessive or unreasonable yet are unable to overcome it.

Types of Phobias

There are different types of phobias, based on the object or situation feared, including:

Animal phobias: Examples include the fear of dogs, snakes, insects, or mice. Animal phobias are the most common phobias.

Situational phobias: These involve a fear of specific situations, such as flying, riding in a car or on public transportation, driving, going over bridges or in tunnels, or of being in a closed-in place like an elevator.

Natural environment phobias: Examples include the fear of storms, heights, or water.

Blood-injection-injury phobias: These involve a fear of being injured, of seeing blood or of invasive medical procedures, such as blood tests or injections.

Other phobias: These include a fear of falling down, a fear of loud sounds, and a fear of costumed characters such as clowns.

What Are the Symptoms of a Phobias?

- Excessive or irrational fear of a specific object or situation
- Avoiding the object or situation or enduring it with great distress
- Physical symptoms of anxiety or a panic attack, such as a pounding heart, nausea or diarrhea, sweating, trembling or shaking, numbness or tingling, problems with breathing (shortness of breath), feeling dizzy or lightheaded, feeling like you are choking
- Anticipatory anxiety, which involves becoming nervous ahead of time about being in certain situations or coming into contact with the object of your phobia; for example, a person with a fear of dogs may become anxious about going for a walk because he or she may see a dog along the way.
- Children with a specific phobia may express their anxiety by crying, clinging to a parent, or throwing a tantrum.

How Many People Have at Least One Phobia?

The National Institute of Mental Health estimates that about 10% of Americans have one or more phobias. Let's do the arithmetic. There are about 325 million people living in the United States. Ten percent equals about 32.5 million people with a phobia or multiple phobias.

Phobias usually first appear in adolescence but can occur in people of all ages. They are slightly more common in women than in men. Phobias in children are common and usually disappear over time. Phobias in adults generally start suddenly and are more lasting. Only about 20% of phobias in adults go away on their own without treatment.

What Causes Phobias?

The exact cause of a specific phobia is not known, but most appear to be associated with a traumatic experience or a learned reaction. For example, a person who has a frightening or threatening experience with an animal, such as an attack or being bitten, can develop a phobia. Witnessing a traumatic event in which others experience harm or extreme fear can also cause a phobia, as can receiving information or repeated warnings about potentially dangerous situations or animals.

Fear can be learned from others, as well. A child whose parents react with fear and anxiety to certain objects or situations is likely to also respond to those objects with fear.

How Are Phobias Diagnosed?

If symptoms of a specific phobia are present, the doctor will begin an evaluation by performing a medical and psychiatric history and may perform a brief physical exam. Although there are no lab tests to specifically diagnose phobias, the doctor may use various tests to make sure that a physical illness isn't the cause of the symptoms.

If no physical illness is found, you may be referred to a psychiatrist, psychologist, or other mental health professional who is specially trained to diagnose and treat mental illnesses. Psychiatrists and psychologists use clinical interviews and assessment tools to evaluate a person for a specific phobia.

I can almost guarantee that if you end up seeing a "Shrink", he or she will find several phobias that will keep you coming back until you give up getting rid of the phobias or you ran out of money. During my research on mental illness and/or disorders, I have come to the following conclusion - we are all crazy! So, don't worry too much if you have a phobia or two. I will tell you about mine later in this article.

However, if the diagnosed phobia is causing excessive fear and anxiety to the point where it interferes with your daily routine, including school, work, social activities, and relationships, then you will most likely need and should get treatment.

How Are Phobias Treated?

Treatment for phobia(s) may include one or a combination of:

Cognitive behavioral therapy: Psychotherapy is the cornerstone of treatment for phobias. Treatment usually involves a type of cognitive behavioral therapy, called systematic desensitization or exposure and response prevention (ERP) therapy, in which patients are gradually exposed to what frightens them until their fear begins to fade away.

Medication: For situational phobias that produce intense, temporary anxiety (for example, a fear of flying), short-acting sedative-hypnotics (benzodiazepines) such as Ativan, or Xanax may be prescribed on an occasional, as-needed basis to help reduce anticipatory anxiety. Unless a phobia is accompanied by other conditions such as depression or panic disorder, long-term or daily medicines are generally not used. Occasionally, serotonergic antidepressants such as Paxil, Prozac or Lexapro may have potential value for some patients. More recently, common blood pressure drugs called beta-blockers have been used to treat anxiety related to specific phobias.

Relaxation techniques: You can do this by practicing relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, rhythmic exercise, and yoga. These things may help reduce your anxiety symptoms.

After all this treatment, you will probably still have the phobia(s) but you will be better equipped to live with it.

America's Top Phobias

The current count for the number of different phobias is 530. Yes, 530! I'm not going to list all 530 but I am going to list the top 21 plus a few of the more interesting ones. As you read through these different phobias, try to determine what phobias you have or might have.

Phobia	The Fear of...	Comments
#1 Arachnophobia	Spiders 	This phobia is quite common, affecting as many as 1 in 4 people. While there are an estimated 35,000 different spider species, only around a dozen pose any type of real threat to humans.

Phobia

The Fear of...

Comments

#2 Social phobia

Social or Public Situations



This phobia is an overwhelming fear of: Being judged by others in social situations; Being embarrassed or humiliated -- and showing it by blushing, sweating, or shaking. The most common form of social phobia is a fear of public speaking.

#3 Aerophobia

Flying



The fear of flying affects about 10 million U.S. adults despite the fact that airplane accidents are very rare. Some of the common symptoms associated with this phobia include trembling, rapid heartbeat, and feeling disoriented. The fear of flying sometimes causes some people to avoid flying altogether.

#4 Claustrophobia

Small Spaces



The fear of being enclosed in a small space or room and unable to escape. It can be triggered by many situations or stimuli, including crowded elevators, small windowless rooms or hotel rooms with closed doors and sealed windows and other enclosed spaces.

#5 Acrophobia

Heights



The fear of heights impacts an estimated 23 million American adults. This fear can lead to anxiety attacks and avoidance of high places. People who suffer from this phobia may go to great lengths to avoid high places such as bridges, towers, or tall buildings.

#6 Ophidiophobia

Snakes



This phobia is quite common and often attributed to evolutionary causes, personal experiences, or cultural influences. Some suggest that since snakes are sometimes poisonous, our ancestors who avoided such dangers were more likely to survive and pass down their genes.

Phobia

The Fear of...

Comments

#7 Mysophobia

Germs



The excessive fear of germs and dirt can lead people to engage in extreme cleaning, compulsive hand-washing, and even avoidance of things or situations perceived as dirty. People with this phobia may also avoid physical contact with other people out of fear of contamination.

#8 Brontophobia

Thunder and Lightning



During a thunder or lightning storm, people with this disorder may go to great lengths to take shelter or hide from the weather event such as hiding in bed under the covers or even ducking inside a closet or bathroom.

#9 Carcinophobia

Getting Cancer



Typically affects those who have had the disease or have known people afflicted with it. It's normal to experience some fear of getting cancer but people with this phobia often take their fear to the extreme and when that fear impacts their everyday life it becomes a source for concern. Of all the phobias that exist, the fear of getting cancer can be the most debilitating.

#10 Thanatophobia

Death



Almost everybody fears death to a certain degree, but the extreme and often irrational thought or fear of death leads to this phobia. Severe cases of Thanatophobia often negatively impact the day to day functioning of the individual. Often this person refuses to leave home owing to this fear. The talk or thought of death (or what lies after death) can trigger panic attacks.

#11 Trypanophobia

Needles or Injections



The fear of needles or injections is a condition that can sometimes cause people to avoid medical treatments and doctors. Like many phobias, this fear often goes untreated because people avoid the triggering object and situation. Estimates suggest that as many as 8 percent of people in the U.S. are affected by this type of phobia.

Phobia**The Fear of...****Comments**

#12 Cynophobia

Dogs

This phobia is not just a normal apprehension of unfamiliar canines; it is an excessive fear that can have a serious impact on a person's life. For example, a person with this phobia might feel unable to walk down a certain street because they know that there is a dog living in that neighborhood. This condition can make it difficult to get to work and other places outside of the home.

#13 Monophobia

Being Alone

Many people experience this phobia and show extreme insecurity, anxiety, and depression when left alone. As a result, they try to avoid such situations as much as possible. However, when it happens, they might experience dizziness, nausea, inability to distinguish between reality and unreality, lightheadedness, fear of fainting, and chest pain.

#14 Atychiphobia

Failure

The simple act of trying is the only way we are able to reach personal goals in our lives. When we try new things, there are two possible outcomes: success or failure. Atychiphobia is an irrational fear of failure that will eventually hold back an individual so strongly that they will refuse to do anything that he or she cannot assure their success on.

#15 Aquaphobia

Water

This is an abnormal and persistent fear of water. Sufferers of aquaphobia experience anxiety even though they realize the water in an ocean, lake, creek, or even a bathtub poses no imminent threat.

#16 Hemophobia

Blood

An abnormal and persistent fear of blood. Sufferers of this very common phobia dread the sight of their own blood, the sight of the blood of another person or an animal, and sometimes printed or filmed images of blood or even thoughts of blood. When this happens, they may feel dizzy or even faint.

Phobia

The Fear of...

Comments

#17 Ailurophobia

Cats



The fear of cats which produces an undue anxiety reaction even though sufferers realize their fear is irrational. Sufferers of this phobia may fear not only the scratch or bite of a cat, but also the "evil mystique" of cats as depicted in Halloween folklore and such literary works as Edgar Allen Poe's "The Black Cat."

#18 Xenophobia

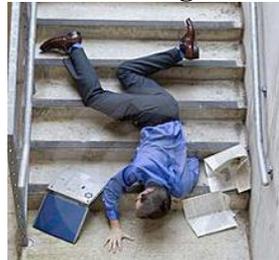
The Unknown



Xenophobia is the irrational sensation of fear experienced about a person or a group of persons as well as situations that are perceived as strange or foreign. It is the fear of anything that is beyond one's comfort zone.

#19 Basiphobia

Falling



One in four Americans aged 65+ falls one or more times each year. Having a fear of falling is a slippery slope. It turns out that being afraid you're going to fall increases the risk that you will take a tumble, even when you've never fallen before.

#20 Nyctophobia

The Dark or Night



Lots of kids are afraid of the dark. It could be the boogeyman in the closet or a monster under the bed that's haunting them. Most children grow out of this fear as they get older. But some kids don't and they're so freaked out by the dark that it interferes with their ability to function at home, work, or socially. Examples would be not wanting to go out alone at night because it's dark.

#21 Katsaridaphobia

Cockroaches



It is a fact that cockroaches will outlive humans as they can withstand 2000 times the radiation levels than us and can also go for days without food. Such facts will not be encouraging to people who suffer from extreme cockroach phobia. The fear of cockroaches can literally turn the sufferer's life into a nightmare.

UNUSUAL PHOBIAS

Phobia	The Fear of...	Comments
Coulrophobia	Clowns	Coulrophobia is a relatively common phobia, and usually present in children. The 'scary clown' has often been used in popular culture, for example in the form of the Joker in Batman comics and film adaptations. Coulrophobia has some celebrity sufferers - namely Daniel Radcliffe and Johnny Depp. Depp said of his clown fear: "it's impossible, thanks to their painted-on smiles, to distinguish if they are happy or if they are about to bite your face off."



The Fear of Numbers



Triskaidekaphobia – The Fear of the Number 13

It is estimated that at least 8 percent of the U.S. population has a fear of the number 13, and even more have a fear of Friday the 13th, known as paraskevidekatriaphobia. This results in financial losses in excess of \$800 million annually, as people avoid marrying, traveling or in the most severe cases, even working. But what's so unlucky about the number 13, and how did this numerical superstition get started?

An early myth surrounding the origin of the fear involved one of the world's oldest legal documents, the Code of Hammurabi, which reportedly omitted a 13th law from its list of legal rules. In reality, the omission was no more than a clerical error made by one of the document's earliest translators who failed to include a line of text.

Mathematicians and scientists, meanwhile, point to preeminence of the number 12, often considered a "perfect" number, in the ancient world. The ancient Sumerians developed numeral system based on the use of 12 that is still used for measuring time today; most calendars have 12 months; a single day is comprised of two 12-hour half days, etc. Following so closely on the heels of a "perfect" number, some argue, the poor 13 was sure to be found lacking and unusual. This fear of the unknown would seem to play into two other popular theories for the number's unlucky connotation, both of which revolve around the appearance of a 13th guest at two ancient events: In the Bible, Judas Iscariot, the 13th guest to arrive at the Last Supper, is the person who betrays Jesus. Meanwhile ancient Norse lore holds that evil and turmoil were first introduced in the world by the appearance of the treacherous and mischievous god Loki at a dinner party in Valhalla. He was the 13th guest, upsetting the balance of the 12 gods already in attendance.

Tetraphobia is the fear of number 4



In many East Asian cultures, including China, Korea, Japan, and Taiwan, the number 4 is considered unlucky. If you step onto an elevator, you probably won't see a button indicating the fourth floor because most hotels, apartment buildings and hospitals skip the number altogether. In Beijing, it's not even possible to get a vehicle license plate that has the number 4 on it. And in Singapore, a luxury carmaker had to change the name of the Alfa Romeo model 144 because citizens were scared to buy it. It's the same reason Nokia phone models don't start with the number 4.

In Chinese culture, the reason behind the superstition surrounding the number 4 lies in the way it sounds. The word for the number 4 sounds much like the word for death. The same is true for many other Asian cultures, which share a number of linguistic similarities. In Japan and Korea, for instance, the word for the 4 and the word for death are exactly the same. Furthermore, in Japan, 49 is an unlucky number because it sounds like the words that mean "pain until death".

The fear of the number 4 is considered more serious in Asian cultures than Westerners' propensity to think the number 13 is unlucky. In fact, it affects the way business is done in these countries. Corporate phone numbers, product serial numbers and office addresses should be cleansed of the number 4 if a business hopes to succeed. It's a fact of life that can be problematic for Western companies entering the Asian market, like Four Seasons hotels or Foursquare, both of which needed a different brand name to make a good impression.

Hexakosioihexekontahexaphobia is the fear of the number 666

The number 666 appears in the Bible, in the Book of Revelation. Revelation 13:17-18, in the King James version, states the "number of the beast" is "six hundred threescore and six" or 666.

The prevalence of the number 666 in pop culture represents another trigger for this fear. Many horror movies use this number as a premise and tend to be supernatural thrillers that play on the association between the number and the Antichrist. Some films use doomsday scenarios, drawing on the number's apocalyptic connotations.

One of the most famous examples of the fear of the number 666 is the renaming of a famous highway in the American Southwest. U.S. Highway 666 was so-named by the American Association of State Highway Officials in 1926 according to official naming guidelines, as it was the sixth spur off U.S. Highway 66 (the infamous Route 66).

Over time, the New Mexico section of Highway 666 proved to be statistically dangerous. Skeptics believe that this was due to the road being improperly designed or maintained for increasing traffic loads. However, many believed that it was actually the road's name that caused accidents and fatalities. Soon Highway 666 became known as the Devil's Highway.

Phobia	The Fear of...	Comments
Globophobia	Balloons   Oprah Winfrey	<p>The world is a strange place: we often accept someone's fear of heights or fear of spiders as 'something normal'. However, when it comes to the fear of balloons phobia, people usually laugh about it. As far as the "silliest or most irrational" fears go; Globophobia is high up in the list. Even Oprah Winfrey shocked her audience by admitting to having experienced the fear of balloons phobia.</p> <p>People suffering from this phobia feel morbid fear at the thought, sight, touch or even smell of balloons. Most individuals, however, are only afraid of the sound made by the popping of balloons. As with any phobia, the symptoms of Globophobia vary depending on the roots of the fear. Some people might be able to withstand balloons while they are deflated. However, the moment one starts to inflate them, the sufferer feels anxious.</p>
Somniphobia	Sleeping  	<p>Somniphobia is to be afraid to sleep. It is often said that along with sex and pooping, sleep is one of the greatest pleasures in life. But what if, suddenly, one day sleep goes from being awesome to a nightmare that you can't wake up from?</p> <p>An Interview with a Guy Who Can't Sleep Because He Is Afraid of Dying. "It is affecting every area of my life. I try to avoid sleeping by all means because I'm afraid of dying—by way of a heart attack or a fatal accident. The next day, I feel totally powerless and hopeless. This heinous physical and psychological fatigue is really taking a toll on me. Any small detail of your daily life is affected, things that a normal person would not be able to understand."</p>
Hylophobia	Trees 	<p>Hylophobia involves an irrational fear of wood, forest, or trees. It is often caused by exposure to films and fairy tales which involve scary woods in childhood. Many sufferers don't grow out of the phobia and any walk in a scenic setting can trigger anxiety. Some hylophobes suffer extreme anxiety when they simply think about a tree or wood.</p>

The following story was written by Peter Gorner and appeared in the Chicago Tribune in 1985. I found it to be very interesting and directly related to my worst fear.

Life of a Tunnel Rat: Fighting Fear in `nam

American officers in Vietnam viewed the short, wiry combat engineers as SWAT teams to be summoned whenever a suspicious hole was found in the ground. To fellow GIs, these ``Tunnel Rats`` were cocky members of a spit-and-polish clique who kept to themselves, ridiculed rank, disdained drugs and self-doubts, and exulted in jobs that no sane man would do.

The Viet Cong guerrillas, however, respected the American tunnel soldiers as deadly hunters, who--armed with only knives, flashlights and pistols. --chased them through stinking ratholes to oblivion.

Today, the VC honor the Tunnel Rats who fought them man-to-man as America`s best soldiers in the 10,000-day Vietnam War. Ironically, it has taken the Communists to tell this nation about them.

``By the time American forces entered Vietnam in force in 1965, the guerrillas had dug into Uncle Ho`s beloved earth, `` says Tom Mangold, a correspondent for the British Broadcasting Co. (BBC) who, with colleague John Pencyate, has unearthed the vicious story of tunnel warfare in Vietnam.

``Time and again the Viet Cong would execute hit-and-run raids and simply melt away, `` Mangold says. ``They vanished because elaborate networks of tunnels and caves connected villages, districts, even provinces. These evolved as the response by a poorly equipped guerrilla army against massive modern war technology.

``The tunnels, thus, had great symbolic significance to the Viet Cong. They became convinced that if they persevered and maintained an active presence, they could win the war``.



Viet Cong Underground Installations

During the French occupation that ended in 1954 with the fall of Dien Bien Phu, Vietnamese peasants--like an army of fleas--had methodically used their hands and tin bowls to carve up their land, often carrying out the concealed dirt in plain view of the enemy. But the true magnitude of the effort remained hidden until 1978, when Mangold and Pencyate became the first BBC

journalists to be granted visas by the newly victorious government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to visit Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon).

As a point of interest, the reporters were shown a massive tunnel complex dug into the protective clay of the district of Cu Chi, just 20 miles north of Saigon. The reporters later conducted detailed interviews with the few tunnel guerrillas who had survived the war. They, in turn, told the journalists about the American Tunnel Rats.

The tunnels, and the unpublicized life-and-death struggles that had occurred therein, shocked Mangold. A former war correspondent, he remembered very well the district within a 70-square-mile natural citadel of jungle and briar.

“Everybody in Saigon knew that Charlie was all over Cu Chi, but no journalist knew about the tunnels”, Mangold says. “The place was a free-fire zone--the most bombed, shelled, gassed, defoliated, and devastated area in the history of warfare. From hotels in Saigon, we’d watch returning planes routinely dump unused bombs and napalm over Cu Chi.”

But, as Mangold and Penycate detail in their remarkable new book, “The Tunnels of Cu Chi”, the complexes withstood all attempts to occupy and hold the area the Communists now honor as the “Land of Fire”.

“American military commanders never really caught on”, Mangold says.

“They consistently underestimated the extent and importance of the tunnels. In 1966, they even built Cu Chi base, a 1,500-acre complex housing 4,500 men, directly over a thriving rat’s nest of VC tunnels. Charlie had a field day then, blowing up planes and equipment from within the perimeter. It later came out that even the base barbers--all 13 of them--were Viet Cong.”

The secret Cu Chi tunnels were “like a thorn stabbing the enemy in the eye”, a VC officer told Mangold. The guerrillas lost 12,000 people there, but still were able to infiltrate Saigon with intelligence agents, party cadres and sabotage teams. The 1968 Tet Offensive was planned and launched underground; the tunnels housed thousands of troops.



A network of small access holes (2 feet wide by 3 feet deep) led to communication tunnels that, via a series of cleverly hidden trap doors, zigzagged up, sideways and down as far as 18 feet. These passageways led to a labyrinth of caverns and caves that snaked through as many as 4 separate levels for 200 miles, stretching all the way to the Cambodian border.

Air, sanitation, water, and cooking facilities were sufficient to maintain a primitive but reasonably safe existence. In the subterranean mazes (few of which were more than 6 feet high), the Viet Cong built sleeping chambers, air-raid shelters, latrines, hospitals, kitchens, stages for political theater, conference centers and print shops. They stored huge caches of rice, precious water buffalo and captured American artillery (they even entombed an American tank).

As bombs hurtled down and tanks rumbled overhead, the guerrillas lived uncomfortably in the dank and darkness sometimes for years. They built booby traps and weapons in complete ordnance factories. They made antipersonnel mines at primitive forges. They repaired ``dud`` American shells and bombs for reuse.

The Viet Cong stashed corpses of their fighters in the tunnels to foil the American penchant for body counts. They hid dead GIs down there, too. Babies were born in the tunnels. In the dim light of small foot or hand generators, combat doctors operated bare-handed, using household drills for brain surgery, wood saws for amputations, sterilizing instruments in pressure cookers. Anesthetics were uncommon, Mangold reports. Honey was the main antiseptic; as it dries it becomes acidic and kills bacteria.

Such were the underground metropolises of the Viet Cong. No wonder that once the guerrillas had executed a raid and retreated in the earth, the odds shifted dramatically against anyone who followed them. The hunters became the hunted.

``The levels of the tunnels were twisted, snakelike, making the line of fire impossibly short``, Mangold reports. ``Entrances were camouflaged and invisible. Explosives often just bounced off the clay walls. Gas was cleverly contained in sealed-off tunnel segments. The tunnels were infested with booby traps. If you somehow survived them, who was waiting for you in the dark?

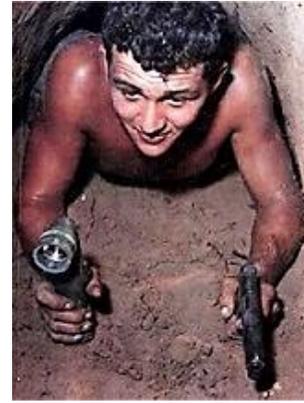
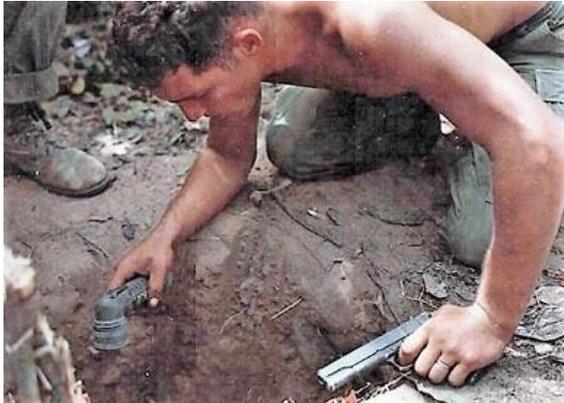
Charlie with an AK-47``.

To penetrate such fortresses on the rare occasions when they would discover them, the Americans needed a special kind of soldier. At first, attack dogs had been sent down the holes. The dogs knew nothing about booby traps, and as a result of the inevitable carnage, their handlers flatly refused to sacrifice any more animals. The canine fiasco led in 1966 to the abrupt creation of an ad hoc human unit.

``The Tunnel Rats were combat engineers``, Mangold says. ``They had to be small and thin, volunteers, and highly skilled at hand-to-hand combat. The job was to kill, capture or entomb Viet Cong with explosives. The favored weapon was a small-caliber revolver. The Americans were forbidden ever to fire off more than three shots in a row. Fire six and the enemy would know you were out of ammunition.

``There never were more than 100 Tunnel Rats at one time, and most were killed in the tunnels. We spent three years scouring the U.S. for them and could find only 12. I suspect there`s another 10 left that we couldn`t find. The attrition rate was appalling.

``These were strange guys to begin with. They`re still tortured by the memories of what they went through. When they came marching home, America, wracked by postwar trauma and recriminations, was not interested in their story. So, they never told anybody. They remain lonely, isolated, very heroic men. But they`re the heroes America never knew it had``.



Lean and as ascetic as the VC they hunted, the Tunnel Rats eschewed anything that would deaden their senses, even cologne or chewing gum. The knife or bayonet, weapons as old as war itself, determined whether they lived or died. Booby traps had to be felt for in pitch darkness. Long dormant instincts were rehoned. Fingertips and ears became what walking sticks are to the blind.

``Massive fear--that was the key``, recalls Jack Flowers recently in a telephone interview. A onetime war resister who became a highly decorated Army officer, Flowers in 1969 served as ``Rat Six``, commander of the crack Tunnel Rat unit of the 1st Infantry Division. He went down 97 holes after Viet Cong, each time in terror.

``You had to control and direct the fear. You made each movement with infinite care. Your senses never were more acute. In the tunnels, your adrenalin was pumping like a river. I swear I could hear my heart beating.

``We`d enter the tunnel one at a time, separated by several feet, so a grenade wouldn`t get us all. You`d feel your way along for booby traps. It got so you could sense them. The same for VC. You could smell another human being in the tunnel. You knew he was waiting for you in the dark. Many times, I tried to talk VC into surrendering. They never would``.

The Tunnel Rats never knew what they`d find.



Bamboo Vipers



Giant Centipedes

``The VC would take a snake--we used to call them `one-step` or `two-step` snakes. They were bamboo vipers and once bitten, you could only take one or two more steps before you died. Charlie would tie the viper in a piece of bamboo with a piece of string. As the Tunnel Rat went through, he'd knock it, and the snake would come out and bite him in the neck or face. You learned to check the ceilings with your flashlight.

``The VC also would set out boxes of scorpions with a trip wire that would open the box. One of the men got stung. He came out screaming and never went back in another tunnel. We also met hornets, centipedes, great moving masses of black spiders, bats. We met rats that carried bubonic plague``.

In the heat and stinking filth, fighting claustrophobia with every breath, the Americans had to squeeze their way along, often for hundreds of yards.

``In a three-level tunnel, hidden trap doors led from one level to the next``, Flowers says. ``First you had to find the trap door. Then squeezing down through it was scary. But going up through a trap door was the toughest thing a man could do. You had no idea what was up there above you``.

A favorite VC trick was to slit a GI's throat, or garrote him, as he came up through a connecting trap door. Or else the guerrillas might spear the GI through the throat, impaling him in the small opening. His buddies couldn't get him down and sometimes became hysterical. As they tried to crawl out of the tunnels, more VC would be waiting.

Once, from an opened trap door, a grenade suddenly dropped in Flowers' lap. Like a flash, he wheeled, scrambled, and crawled far enough away to survive the blast. For years afterward, that grenade, twisting and falling in slow motion, would pervade his dreams.

Flowers declines to estimate how many enemies he killed. His last mission occurred at a freshly dug bunker complex near the Saigon River. The Americans discovered seven holes.

``My men went down six of them. They all were cold--no VC. Everybody had done a turn but me. The last hole had to be hot. Looking down the 10-foot shaft, we could make out the tunnel entrance. We knew the Cong were in there. There was no way I could ask anybody else to go down that hole``.

Flowers was due to leave Vietnam soon. He really didn't have to explore the tunnel. But he insisted. As his men lowered him down the shaft on a sling seat, he remembers, he saw tears in their eyes. His elbows and boots rubbed against the sides of the shaft, dislodging dirt.

He pictured a VC waiting below with his AK-47 set to automatic. He could blast 20 rounds through Flowers in 4 seconds. Flowers knew he had only one chance.

``I had to shoot first. And I had to hit him in the head. All our training boiled down to this: Shoot at close range, shoot in the face``.

When he was about three feet from the bottom, Flowers' men stopped lowering him. He swung sideways, his left arm over his chest, to make himself smaller. He hunched his right shoulder to protect his temple. Then he gave a curt nod. His men dropped him.

Gun blazing, he hit the ground. The first shot drilled through the VC's forehead. The second smashed through his cheek. The third his throat. The fourth, fifth, and sixth, his body. Flowers kept pulling the trigger, clicking, clicking, the empty chambers of his revolver.

When the smoke cleared, his shots were neatly grouped in the wall. There was no VC. Just in Flowers' mind. By firing his six shots, he had broken the Tunnel Rat code. He had broken something else as well.

"I was finished", he says. Quickly relieved of command and sent home, it took him years to heal. He wrote a book as therapy but didn't try to get it published. Painfully, he completed college, married, divorced, remarried, fathered two daughters, and made and lost a lot of money as a stockbroker in Philadelphia.

Now, Mangold and Penycate having found him 16 years later, Flowers suddenly finds himself a commercially authentic hero. He has sold his story to MGM. He hopes to contribute to the film. But his life again is a shambles, he says. He is going through another divorce, has quit his job, and is pinning his hopes on Hollywood.

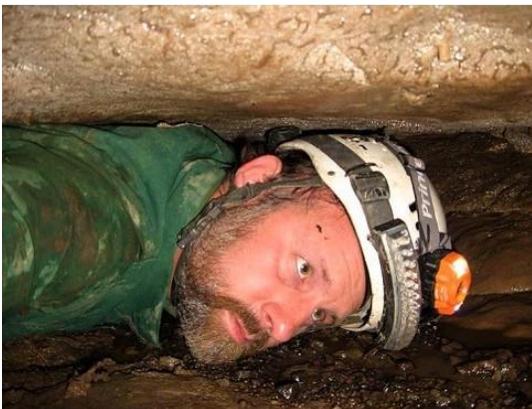
"I'm glad our story is finally being told", he says. "Why did we do it? I wasn't a tough guy. Nobody who knows me would ever suspect I could do what the Tunnel Rats did. I'd never want a son of mine to have to do it.

"But I think that if called upon, men will rise to any occasion. There is something deep inside us all, something we can use if we really have to". That something is primordial and very frightening, he knows.

"We should thank God", he says, "that we're not generally challenged enough in life to have to show that side of ourselves."

---- End ----

I'm a Vietnam era veteran serving in the Navy from October 1961 to February 1966. Just reading about these "tunnel rats" makes me feel uneasy. I'm sure glad I spent most of my Navy career playing basketball in Spain and not crawling around in the tunnels in Vietnam.



Sometimes I think about the worst possible way to die and every time the same thing pops into my mind. Being trapped underground and dying from a slow terrifying suffocation.

Can you think of a worse way to go?

So, now you know. My phobia is called Taphophobia or the fear of being buried alive. I feel uneasy in tunnels, caves, and mines.

I have no idea what caused this phobia.

There are two other phobias closely related to Taphophobia that I probably have. They are:

- **Cleithrophobia** is the fear of being trapped in an enclosed space.
- **Claustrophobia** is the fear of being in a small space with no possible escape.

So, do you have any phobias? What do you fear? What are you afraid of? Maybe you are one of the few who is **“FEARLESS?”**

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