Question: How successfully did soldiers cope with the emotional traumas of World War I, and were their coping mechanisms positive or negative?

Soldiers used a variety of coping mechanisms to deal with the emotional traumas of war during World War I. Soldiers used anything from stimulants, such as cigarettes, to religion as a way of dealing with the traumas they had experienced.¹ For soldiers who couldn’t cope were diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which was known as shellshock. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is a disorder diagnosed by doctors when someone, specifically a soldier, is not able to cope with the traumatic event that occurred². The successfulness³ of the coping mechanism of a soldier depended on how they chose to deal with the emotional traumas they experienced, whether negatively, such as smoking, positively, such as or if they chose to deal with it at all.

For some soldiers, the only way to cope with the war was to smoke. According to DCCPS the number of cigarettes consumed by adults, in America increased when America joined the war in 1918.⁴ Smoking is addicting because cigarettes contain nicotine; nicotine is a stimulant drug⁵ which causes a change in mood, perception or consciousness, the change is what makes it addicting because the person smoking wants to continue to have the change in mood, perception or consciousness.⁶ As a result of the increase in cigarettes being used, it increased the the number of deaths

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³ Successfulness is achieving or having achieved success.
⁴ The division of cancer control and population sciences of The national cancer institute
⁵ A stimulant drug is considered a psychoactive drug, which is a term used for a substance, usually chemical, that affects mood, perception or consciousness.
caused by lung cancer. Smoking, although a negative coping mechanism because it resulted in the increase in lung cancer, was a successful coping mechanism for soldiers because it achieved the goal of the soldiers by changing their mood, and letting them escape the traumas they had experienced.

Religion was a positive way of coping for soldiers because it gave soldiers hope. Many soldiers wrote home asking their families to continue praying that the war would end soon. With every near death event they experienced, believing in an afterlife helped them deal with the idea that they could die at any moment. Many soldiers would repeat “If your name is on the shell you will get it.” This was also something soldiers said to come to terms with the fact that they could die at any moment. Often European troops had close connections with the established churches, which allowed them to create study groups. These study groups were organized so soldiers could share their spiritual speculations. Religion also helped soldiers justify their actions. A sikh soldier wrote home saying that “God alone directs events.” It was a justification that God directed him to have this life, and that god would justify his actions. Religion was a significant part of society before the war, and continued to play a significant role in society during war because it allowed soldiers to connect with other soldiers, and successfully achieved the soldiers goal to justify his actions, and the actions of his fellow soldiers.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder was common in World War I, but was known as shellshock. Shellshock did not have a medical treatment because it was unknown as a medical diagnoses. PTSD was not recognized until the vietnam war, in 1955. Although

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8 Appendix 1 & 2  
10 A sikh is a disciple of God who follows and believe in the Ten Sikh Gurus.  
PTSD was not recognized as a medical diagnoses at the time, shellshock was still common, and soldiers would do many things to help other soldiers suffering shellshock after the war, such as creating social groups dedicated to helping soldiers experiencing shellshock (PTSD). One example of this is the American Legion. The American Legion was founded by Theodore Roosevelt in 1919. The American Legion has grown, and successfully helped 2.4 million soldiers struggling to readjust to daily life. In 1921, with the help of the American Legion, the Veterans Bureau was formed. The Veterans Bureau is a combination of all public veterans programs, including public health service veterans hospitals. Both organizations have been successful in helping veterans find jobs and get the best health benefits. Operation Comfort Warriors Program was created by the American Legion, to provide comfort items to wounded warriors, and the Veterans Bureau has created websites for every state in America, with links to employment applications. Although PTSD is a negative way of coping because it is the result of soldiers unable to readjust to daily life, and unsuccessful because the soldiers were not able to cope with the trauma’s they had experienced, the organizations created for soldiers suffering PTSD have been successful.

The successfulness of a soldier’s coping mechanism depended on how they chose to deal with the emotional trauma of war, negatively or positively. In my opinion, although a negative way of coping, smoking was a successful coping mechanism because successfulness is the achievement of one’s goals, and the goal of a soldier smoking cigarettes was to escape the traumas they had experienced by changing their mood. Religion was also a successful, as well as a positive, coping mechanism because it gave soldiers hope; it helped them come to terms with the fact that they might die, and could help them justify their actions. Those who experienced PTSD had a unsuccessful, and negative way of coping because PTSD was a result of not coping or not being able to cope with the traumas they experienced, and as a result
experienced many negative symptoms\textsuperscript{12}. Therefore depending on if the soldier chose to cope with the emotional traumas of war or if they were, either unable to or refused to cope with the traumas of war, and if they were positive or negative coping mechanisms, resulted in the successfulness or unsuccessfulness of the coping mechanism.

Appendix -
1) \[\text{Image of text from a book page}\]

\begin{quote}
\texttt{<http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/faith-belief-and-superstition>}. \\
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{12} Some symptoms being hallucinations, recalling the traumatic event during sleep, while drunk or on drugs, and even while awake (sober), many daily things could also trigger a reaction, such as loud noises or crowds; anything that could remind them of their traumatic experience.
<http://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/faith-belief-and-superstition>