

A P P E N D I X

*On Why Soldiers Fight**

Many investigations of why men fight have focused on the concepts of morale or esprit de corps and have discussed individual and unit performance in combat in terms of courage, discipline, enthusiasm, and willingness to endure hardship. Such research, however, does not adequately explain the factors involved in the endurance of a modern professional army.

According to Morris Janowitz (1964), "even in the smallest unit there is an 'iron framework' of organization which serves as a basis of social control. The single concept of military morale must give way, therefore, to a theory of organizational behavior in which an array of sociological concepts is employed" (Janowitz and Little, 1965; George, 1967; Moskos, 1980; Kellet, 1982).

The literature on military motivation suggests a number of explanations for human behavior in combat. These approaches treat the primary group and its relationship to the organization in explaining combat behavior. Beginning with Shils and Janowitz in their study of cohesion and disintegration in the Wehrmacht,

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small-group cohesion, interaction within the group, and organization have been increasingly emphasized.

By the term *primary group*, investigators refer to the concept of *Gemeinschaft* (small, intimate, community relationships). More specifically, primary groups have been conceptualized as being

characterized by intimate face-to-face association and cooperation. They are primary in several senses, but chiefly in that they are fundamental in forming the social nature and ideals of the individual. The result of intimate association . . . is a certain fusion of individualities into a common whole, so that one's very self, for many purposes at least, is the common life and purpose of the group. Perhaps the simplest way of describing this wholeness is by saying it is a "we."¹

Research indicates that the soldier is strongly bound to the primary group as long as it is capable of satisfying his major physiological and social needs. Shils and Janowitz reported that as long as the Wehrmacht soldier had the necessary resources and as long as the primary group met his essential personal needs, he was "bound by the expectations and demands of its other members." Molnar (1965) cites similar evidence discussing soldiers bound to some degree by social role and status patterns common to a primary group. Shils and Janowitz state:

It appears that a soldier's ability to resist is a function of the capacity of his immediate primary group [his squad or section] to avoid social disintegration. When the individual's immediate group, and its supporting formations, met his basic organic needs, offered him affection and esteem from both officers and comrades, supplied him with a sense of power and adequately regulated his relations with authority, the element of self-concern in battle, which would lead to disruption of the effective functioning of his primary group was minimized.²

Supporting this basic hypothesis, Shils and Janowitz also note:

For the ordinary German soldier the decisive fact was that he was a member of a squad or section which maintained its structural integrity and which coincided roughly with the social unit which satisfied some of his major primary needs. He was likely to go on fighting, provided he had the necessary

weapons, as long as the group possessed leadership with which he could identify himself, and as long as he gave affection to and received affection from the other members of his squad and platoon. In other words, as long as he felt himself to be a member of his primary group and therefore bound by the expectations and demands of its other members, his soldierly achievement was likely to be good.³

Additional factors also impact upon the cohesiveness of the primary group and its influence on the behavior of the soldier. Many investigators have pointed out that the concept of the primary group takes on an added sharpness under combat conditions. In considering the primary group as a dependent variable, the mere fact that a combat situation entails an increase in solidarity in response to an external threat is a phenomenon that has been verified many times. When a threat and the responsibilities for coping with it are shared, an increase in group solidarity and a reduction of internal group conflict usually occur. Observers of men in combat have called attention "again and again to the fact that the most significant persons for the combat soldier are the men who fight by his side and share with him the ordeal of trying to survive."⁴ S. L. A. Marshall, an observer of men in combat in numerous wars, observes: "I hold it to be one of the simplest truths of war that the thing which enables an infantry soldier to keep going with his weapon is the near presence or the presumed presence of a comrade."⁵

Another variable that seems to increase primary group cohesion in combat is the soldier's calculation of his chances for escape from the threatening situation. If he is bound to the primary group by isolation from surrounding groups, by anxiety-producing doubts about his ability to leave his unit successfully, and by other such ambiguities, he sees his best chance of survival as resting with one or two buddies or with the other members of his primary group (Little, 1964).

Other factors influencing primary group cohesiveness are the past social experiences of the members. Common religion, race, ethnic group, social class, age, geographical region, and history appear to contribute to the communications necessary for intimate interpersonal relationships common to a primary group (Janowitz and Little, 1965; Shils and Janowitz, 1948; Emerson, 1967; Kohn, 1932; George, 1967).

Another influence shaping primary group solidarity is the member's commitment to his sociopolitical system, ideology, secondary group symbols, and causes, such as common awareness and resentment of the nation's colonial history (George, 1976). In this concept of "latent ideology," Moskos attributes some importance to broad sociopolitical values in explaining why men fight (Moskos, 1975). Indoctrination induces commitment to secondary symbols by establishing preconditions for primary group cohesion. Indoctrination themes generally stress the legitimacy of war aims and justify fighting for such aims (George, 1967). While recognizing the impact of secondary groups on the individual soldier, Shils and Janowitz maintain that their influence is slight, compared to that of the primary group. They quote a German soldier in support of their position:

The company [military unit] is the only truly existent community. This community allows neither time nor rest for a personal life. It forces us into its circle, for life is at stake. Obviously compromises must be made and claims be surrendered. . . . Therefore the idea of fighting, living, and dying for the fatherland, for the cultural possessions of the fatherland, is but a relatively distant thought. At least it does not play a great role in the practical motivations of the individual.⁶

The honor and romanticism involved in fighting a war often appeal to the young soldier who experiences the need for asserting manliness or toughness. The coincidence of these personal needs with similar group norms and military codes also serves to reinforce group solidarity (Shils and Janowitz, 1948; Stouffer et al., 1949; Moskos, 1970).

This discussion has emphasized the influence of the primary group in shaping the behavior of the soldier. However, a significant question remains. Will the primary group produce behavior by the soldier that is congruent with the goals of the organization? Many investigators have noted that the primary group cohesiveness that emerges in the small combat unit can militate either for or against the goals of the formal military organization (Etzioni, 1961; Janowitz and Little, 1965; George, 1967). For example, in discussing problems of "Negro" US Army units during World War II, Janowitz and Little point out:

Primary groups can be highly cohesive and yet impede the goals of military organizations. Cohesive primary groups contribute to organizational effectiveness only when the standards of behavior they enforce are articulated with the requirements of formal authority.⁷

Still other investigators have found small group behavior in combat situations that is deviant from the organization's point of view (Shils and Janowitz, 1948; George, 1967; Little, 1964). Shils and Janowitz in their investigation of cohesion and disintegration in the Wehrmacht found that units that surrendered as a group were led by "soft-core," non-Nazi comrades to whom organizational goals were relatively unimportant.⁸

The performance of the group in meeting organizational goals is largely dependent upon the effectiveness of the leader. Research suggests that a capable leader can manipulate primary group members through a wide range of organizational mechanisms, psychological techniques, and indoctrination themes in order to shape primary group norms and attitudes that are compatible with organizational objectives. He can accomplish this task because he has been accepted as the natural leader of the small group. Men who fight modern wars must be convinced that their leaders have their welfare in mind, and leaders must continually demonstrate expertise and set the example in adhering to group norms before men will follow them (Dollard, 1943; Homans, 1946; Marshall, 1947; Shils and Janowitz, 1948; Stouffer, 1949; Little, 1964; George, 1967; Van Creveld, 1982).

Primary group behavior, whether deviant or desirable from the organization's point of view, is the result of norms formed by primary group interaction. The primary group is therefore a major factor in explaining man's behavior (positive or negative) in combat.

A recent and convincing study comparing the "fighting power" or human capabilities of the World War II German and US armies reinforces the major conclusions in the above review of the literature on why soldiers fight. In the study, Martin Van Creveld notes:

. . . [The soldier] fought for the reasons that men have always fought: because he felt himself a member of a

well-integrated, well-led team whose structure, administration, and functioning were perceived to be . . . equitable and just.⁹

In studying the Israeli Defense Forces in all of their wars, including the war in Lebanon, Rueven Gal distinguishes between combat and preparation for combat in discussing why soldiers fight. His research indicates that in actual combat soldiers fight because of the desire to survive and because of the cohesive effects of the small group and its leadership. In preparing for combat, group cohesion and leadership are again very significant along with two other factors: the confidence the individual has in himself as a soldier within the context of his training, weapons, and ability to meet any anticipated situation and the perceived legitimacy of the "war" within the public and unit. However, legitimacy was not requisite. In Lebanon, as long as Israeli troops had confidence in their leaders at the company level and below and as long as cohesion was strong, they continued the advance, even if they disagreed with the immediate objective or questioned the overall legitimacy of the "invasion."¹⁰

Again the conclusion that cohesion, common values, and leadership must be viewed within an overall approach that considers individual, organizational, situational, and social factors in explaining why men fight is strongly reinforced.