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## CHAPTER III

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### *Assessing Cohesion in Small Units*

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**S**SMALL-UNIT COHESION capable of causing soldiers to expose themselves to enemy fire in pursuit of unit objectives must also satisfy certain needs for the soldier. Individual soldiers must identify with their immediate unit leaders, and the unit must satisfy physical, security, and social needs. The cohesive unit becomes, in effect, a social and support organization capable of satisfying the soldier's major needs.

#### *Physical, Security, and Social Needs*

A soldier will not willingly stay in a unit unless physical, security, and social needs are met. Most armies are able to meet them to some degree, but many have difficulty in the confusion and displacement of war. A cohesive unit will provide adequate food, water, medical support, and essential supplies and weapons at all times but will also endure during periods of scarcity when other less cohesive units would disintegrate. For a unit to endure, it must receive logistical support that, in the eyes of unit members, will allow the unit to survive the situation faced by the unit.

Whether the small unit is the dominant primary group for the individual soldier is of the utmost importance. Primary social affiliation within the unit is an extremely significant indicator of cohesion because it means that the small military unit has replaced other influences such as the family as the primary determinant of the soldier's day-to-day behavior. In such a unit, the soldier becomes bound by the expectations and needs of his fellow soldiers. Such relationships completely overshadow other obligations and claims on his loyalties. It is not necessary that the primacy of the unit be formally recognized. The soldier merely recognizes that more immediate considerations and relationships have displaced family, parents, and friends as the prime determinant of his behavior. Despite the intensity of the relationship, it is not usually seen as permanent but as one that is limited to a specific period or to the duration of the conflict.

Such devotion to a cohesive unit does not, of course, occur spontaneously. Besides reliable logistical support, a cohesive unit provides the major source of esteem and recognition for unit members. Because a unit is able to meet this powerful need, the soldier tends to dedicate his time and energy to it, to its activities, and to its goals. Conversely, in units where these needs are not met, the soldier will seek them outside the unit, and often in groups with goals not congruent with those of the army. Leaders need to plan and create these conditions for cohesion systematically.

The cohesive unit also requires an environment that promotes a strong sense of mutual affection among unit members. The greater the degree of challenge, hardship, and danger, the greater the development of mutual affection and attraction among unit members. Such attraction can occur in peace as well as in combat. For a purpose to be perceived as worthwhile by the group, what seems to be necessary is common exposure to hardship, or to difficult training, or to danger. Of course, the role of the leader in establishing the goals and in leading the formation of the unit members' opinion about the significance of those goals is paramount.

Preventing the soldiers' alienation not only from the group but also from the unit's leaders is a responsibility of leadership. The soldier will tend to identify strongly with his unit and its lead-

ers if the leader conducts his relationships with his subordinates in a manner that convinces the soldier that influence is a two-way street and that he, the soldier, is not merely at the end of a long, impersonal chain of command. Instead, the leader must ensure that the soldier does not become alienated and that he obtains a sense of influence over some of the events that occur in his immediate unit. Those events include passes, chow, safety measures, or other unit activities controlled by his immediate leaders.

Events outside the control of immediate unit leaders can also contribute to the soldier's identification with his unit. Cohesion occurs when the unit and its leaders act to protect the soldier from and to regulate relations with higher authorities. An example involves the situation when soldiers perceive orders or allocations from higher headquarters as being unfair or inadequate. The sergeant, platoon leader, or company commander who goes to higher headquarters and wins relief or who merely makes the attempt not only increases his influence among his soldiers but also significantly contributes to their sense of belonging to a group that can deal with an otherwise uncaring environment. What is important in such situations is not whether the leader was able to correct the perceived inequity but that the leader's foremost priority was the unit. Also important is the unit members' perception that, whatever the outcome, they and their leaders will share its effects equally and that the unit is a vehicle through which the individual is taken care of.

Although small-group cohesion can exist independently of unit leaders, unit cohesion that accepts and reinforces army goals and purposes as the unit's own can only occur consistently when soldiers identify closely with their immediate leaders.

In summary, the soldier identifies strongly with his unit when the unit satisfies his major physical, security, and social needs. A cohesive unit

1. provides adequate food, water, medical support, rest, and essential supplies and weapons;
2. is the primary social group for the individual soldier and controls his day-to-day behavior;

3. provides the major source of esteem and recognition;
4. provides a strong sense of mutual affection and attraction among unit members;
5. protects the soldier from and regulates relations with higher authorities;
6. provides the soldier a sense of influence over events in his immediate unit; and
7. causes the soldier to identify strongly with immediate unit leaders at squad, section, platoon, and company levels.

### *A Soldier's Perception of Successfully Escaping the Unit*

The soldier's perception of his chances to avoid service or escape his unit successfully for the civilian world significantly affects unit cohesion. There must be no conflict within the soldier's mind concerning his personal reasons for remaining with his unit. He must perceive no option other than service with his unit. When the soldier thinks beyond his buddies and the group, he must be able to justify to himself, with minimum doubt, why he chooses to endure hardship and danger with his unit when a familiar civilian environment, offering comfort and safety, is nearby. If soldiers perceive that relatively harmless administrative avenues of escape are open, or if soldiers believe the penalties for desertion are relatively light, cohesion in a unit will be weakened. If such courses are clouded with ambiguity, however, and the soldier has significant doubts about his ability to leave his unit successfully, he will conclude that he is committed for the duration and will see his best chances for survival as dependent upon the members of his immediate unit.

To achieve this end, a cohesive unit will ensure that the soldier is aware of all legal, moral, and physical barriers that separate him from the civilian world and bind him to his unit. As a result, the ambiguous and often alien nature of the world beyond the borders of the unit should be emphasized, especially to young soldiers.

Other factors supporting cohesion are linked directly to broad, societal agreement about the citizen's duty to serve in defense of the nation and indirectly to the nation's potential for nationalism. Soldiers must be aware that their society will exact significant penalties for being AWOL and for deserting and will attach significant social sanctions for "bad paper" discharges. The soldier must also perceive that chances for avoiding such punishment are small for those who choose to avoid service. There can be no expectation that sanctions and penalties will be lifted or eased at a later date or that those who avoided service will be valued equally with those who served.

Cohesive units will also benefit from internal army policies that do not grant administrative and medical discharges or transfers easily. Another significant set of policies concerns the provisions made by the society to recognize successful completion of a soldier's tour of service. Tangible and significant rewards such as job preference, assistance with education (such as the GI Bill) or assistance in purchasing property (with VA loans) are examples of a society's recognizing the sacrifices soldiers endure. The greater the emphasis on these rewards, the greater the attraction of military service and the stronger the bonding of a soldier to his unit.

In sum, if unit policy and societal norms cause the soldier to perceive that all courses for leaving his unit are problematical while positive group and societal practices attract him toward his group, then unit cohesion will be strengthened. A cohesive unit

1. will ensure that the soldier is aware of all legal, moral, and physical barriers that separate him from the remainder of society and that tend to keep him within his unit;
2. will not grant discharges and transfers easily;
3. will attach significant social sanctions for "bad paper" discharges;
4. will exact significant penalties for being AWOL and for deserting; and
5. will recognize and reward successful completion of tours of service.

### *Maintenance of Unit Integrity and Stability*

The soldier will identify more closely with his unit, and cohesion will be strengthened, if organizational policies give priority to maintaining unit integrity during off-duty and maintenance hours as well as during training and operations. Personnel policies, to include replacement practices, should also emphasize maintenance of unit integrity.

Creating and maintaining cohesion requires a firm policy of relying on small-unit rotation, rather than on individual replacements, as well as an emphasis on personnel stability within units. From a management perspective, it is often much more efficient to assign individual replacements, based upon skills and the needs of the army. However, treating individual soldiers as “spare parts” in a large and complex personnel machine fails to recognize why men fight in combat. Cohesion, that state binding men together as members of a combat unit capable of enduring the stress of danger and hardship, is dependent upon personnel stability within small units.

The creation of a cohesive unit is best accomplished upon its initial formation, before other norms form that are incongruent with army values. Creating a cohesive unit requires an intensive resocialization process. The determinants of the new recruit’s day-to-day behavior must be replaced by a new set of rules based on his perceptions of what his new fellow soldiers and his leaders expect. This type of resocialization is best created through a rites-of-passage process that totally consumes the soldier’s attention and efforts for an extended period and from which he emerges with a new or adapted set of operating rules for his daily life. These norms must be firmly grounded in the bonds and expectations formed between him, his fellow soldiers, and his immediate leaders. It must be emphasized that the creation of a cohesive unit is equally important in teaching skills to the soldier. Ideally, both occur simultaneously, and the learned skills are seen as essential for meeting the expectations of fellow soldiers. The danger occurs when cost-effectiveness managers review a training program and eliminate portions that promote cohesion but that don’t contribute to learning a skill and are thus seen as areas in which time and money can be saved. It is also essential that units created through this process be maintained as operational units at the platoon and

company level and not be broken up to provide for individual replacements.

The maintenance of unit boundaries and, therefore, of cohesion directly depends upon the frequency with which unit members associate with each other, the perception of a common and worthwhile purpose, and the structure of the group to achieve its purpose and to distinguish the unit from other organizations. Small-unit boundaries must be reinforced by physical surroundings, personnel policies, day-to-day routines, traditions, and ceremonies.

Cohesive units will benefit significantly from barracks and mess halls designed to increase the frequency and duration of unit members' association. Other unit housekeeping facilities and activities should also be designed to promote frequent and extended association. Clubs, athletics, and social events should be organized to promote unit participation. To the same end, unit history, ceremonies, distinctive insignia, and other items representative of unit and national history should be taught to new members and should be periodically reinforced for older members.

Pass and leave policies that are not routine and that ensure that absences from the unit are limited to approved purposes help maintain the high frequency of association necessary for cohesion. In particular, passes should be awarded only to soldiers who have demonstrated solidarity with the group by strict adherence to group norms in their day-to-day behavior. When possible, passes should be given to groups of two or three soldiers from the same unit. In this manner, unit norms are maintained when the soldier is away from the unit.

Cohesive units discourage member soldiers from belonging to autonomous groups with possibly deviant norms. Such discouragement is accomplished by structuring army life to be an all-consuming experience, capable of satisfying all of the soldier's needs during the expected duration of his service.

The soldier must view his immediate unit as the source of the good things in his life as well as the originator and enforcer of strict behavioral norms. Control over pay, promotions, awards, and recognition of all types should be located at platoon and company levels. Although centralized control of these functions at higher levels might be more efficient and equitable, it focuses the

soldier's attention away from his immediate unit and detracts significantly from the ability of unit leaders to use such rewards in building unit cohesion.

Finally, the number of soldiers in a unit under the direct influence of competent noncommissioned and junior officers and the amount of structure between soldiers and leaders significantly affect cohesion. The general rules are that cohesion is inversely proportioned to the size of the group and that the more the relationships are structured, the greater the cohesion.

For an army, the key question is this: how far down in the ranks does the formal organizational structure reach? An army concerned with building cohesive units will ensure that each soldier is firmly associated with a group that is a formal military unit as well as the primary influence in controlling his day-to-day behavior. This process is most effectively accomplished in three-to-five-man groups in which the leader is appointed by the army and is the actual as well as the formal leader of the group.

Such a group will be the basic building block of an army organization and will serve as a disciplined, fire-and-maneuver, combat, or operational unit as well as a buddy group capable of meeting the basic affection and recognition needs of the soldier. Such an organization extends itself into a group of soldiers and, through leadership, brings congruence between group norms and army objectives.

In sum, unit cohesion will be strengthened significantly if army policies and practices emphasize unit integrity during off-duty and maintenance hours as well as during training and operations. Unit stability must be given priority within units as well as throughout the army replacement system. Preserving unit integrity maintains the primary group with which soldiers identify. Within units, personnel policies must emphasize structuring small groups under the positive control of competent and respected noncommissioned and junior officers. Additionally, actions of individual soldiers must be controlled 24 hours a day in order to increase



the frequency of intra-unit association and the ultimate dependence of the soldier upon the unit. An army building cohesive units will

1. structure smallest units not to exceed 10 soldiers with sub-elements numbering 3 to 5 under the positive control of respected and competent leadership;
2. use a unit rotation system rather than individual replacements, emphasizing personnel stability within units;
3. rely on rites-of-passage processes in basic training and initial entry to resocialize soldiers and form initial cohesive units;
4. maintain high frequency of association among unit members by reinforcing unit boundaries through design of barracks, mess halls, and day rooms and provide clubs and athletic facilities designed to promote unit association at off-duty social and athletic events;
5. distinguish boundaries of the unit by creating a "we-they" view through traditions, ceremonies, and distinctive insignia;
6. prohibit soldiers from belonging to autonomous groups with possibly deviant norms;
7. establish pass and leave policies that keep leave short and encourage joint passes with other unit members; and
8. reduce centralized, bureaucratic control over the good things in the soldier's life and give control of these to the immediate leaders of the individual soldier. Pay, promotions, leaves, passes, and awards should be dispersed and in some instances controlled no higher than section or company level.

## *Motivation and Control*

Causes of a soldier's behavior are directly linked to the satisfaction of needs and values, which in turn can often be determined from a soldier's attitude. Controlling behavior through a soldier's needs and values can be effected in several ways. Three approaches are generally recognized—coercive, utilitarian, and normative (i.e., involving personal commitment). Each approaches the individual through needs and values.

Coercive motivation is based on the need of the individual to avoid severe physiological deprivation, hardship, or pain for himself or for someone whom he values. Such an approach is often termed negative motivation, and the individual is alienated from the organization. The limitations of this type of motivation for an army are obvious. Modern warfare has made the control of troops in combat exceedingly difficult. No longer do soldiers enter combat in rigid formations under the watchful eye of noncommissioned officers who are behind them with swords drawn. Modern weapons and tactics have made direct control of troops in combat exceedingly difficult if not impossible. The dispersion, confusion, chance, and danger that characterize modern battlefields have caused a significant historical shift downwards in the locus of control and have increased attempts to rely on other methods of control.

Utilitarian control is essentially based upon a managerial approach to leadership and decisionmaking that relies heavily upon utilitarian motivation in the form of monetary reward or other tangible benefits. This approach assumes that the soldier is an "economic man," who, when paid enough, can be recruited and induced to do the tough jobs such as serve in the combat arms. Utilitarian motivation is the motivation of the marketplace; individual decisions are made primarily for tangible benefit on the basis of a calculative attitude, with the decision to opt out of the army always a real choice if the going gets too tough. In an army where significant incentives are utilitarian, the commitment of a soldier to his unit is not very strong—no job is worth getting killed for.

The only force on the battlefield strong enough to make a soldier advance under fire is his loyalty to a small group and the

group's expectation that he will advance. This behavior is the consequence of strong personal or moral commitment. It represents the internalization of strong group values and norms that causes the soldier to conform to unit expectations even when separated from the unit. The soldier with a strong moral commitment to his unit sees himself in battle or even in day-to-day routine as part of a small, intimate group, represented by a few buddies on his right and left or in the same vehicle, with a sergeant or junior officer who is always near. The normative power of the group causes the strong personal commitment on the part of the soldier that he ought to conform to group expectations, that doing so is the responsible thing to do, and that conformity is expected in spite of the fact that he might personally prefer to be doing something else. Such commitment is often referred to as a calling or, at the small-unit level, as "not letting your buddies down." This is the strongest possible type of motivation for soldiers to endure the danger and hardship of war.

An army that relies on a normative control system, one that brings about a strong personal commitment to a unit and its objectives, will prevail over an army that relies more on coercive or utilitarian control, everything else being equal. An army with a normative control system will

1. emphasize the development of unit norms and values in such a way that unit members are bonded together in their commitment to each other, the unit, and its purposes;
2. refrain from using managerial leadership but emphasize personal and continuing face-to-face contact with all soldiers by leaders;
3. refrain from negotiating businesslike contracts between soldier and organization, or between leader and organization, for the purpose of expressing terms of service or expected performance; and
4. refrain from persuading soldiers and junior leaders to accept difficult jobs or duties

through material reward (such as bonuses for enlisting in combat arms or special benefits for taking first sergeant positions).

### *Surveillance and Conformity*

Once achieved, cohesion is not necessarily permanent. Monitoring the conditions that affect the attitudes and behavior of soldiers requires constant attention. A comprehensive observation and reporting system that effectively penetrates the smallest unit contributes significantly to unit cohesion. Such a system must have legitimacy with the soldiers. It must be perceived as having enforcement of accepted group norms as its only purpose and must be manned and operated primarily by the soldiers themselves.

The goal of this system is to detect, not to punish, the deviant soldier in order to focus group pressures in support of the organizational principle of responsibility to unit norms. The soldier is never allowed to be an individual but is constantly reminded of the expectations that his buddies, his unit, and his leaders have about his actions.

The system for surveillance and for achieving conformity should be emphasized when units become debilitated through combat, hardship, and shortages of qualified leaders. The focus of these efforts must be where the soldiers and the organization meet, at the small-unit level. The reporting system then gives leaders at all levels the capability of monitoring individual and group attitudes, behavior, and adherence to unit norms.

Depending upon the gravity of the deviation from unit norms, conformity is reestablished primarily through two techniques—focusing group pressures and isolation. These techniques are not meant to deal with the outlaw or the criminal but to provide the small-unit leader with powerful tools to maintain cohesion. Isolation from, or restricted access to, all social contact is a powerful conditioner of attitudes. Isolated individuals tend to conform quickly to dominant norms as a condition of being ac-

cepted by the group. Likewise, a unit that has suffered some measure of disintegration through combat loss or hardship can re-establish cohesion quickly through isolation, which turns the group inward on itself, and through emphasizing the basic cohesion-building procedures described previously.

Most often, isolation techniques will not be necessary if group pressures are properly mobilized and brought to focus. Group pressure is a significant tool available to unit leaders. Either through self-criticism or peer pressure, psychological anxieties can be brought to bear on the soldier concerning his status within the unit. If the soldier is psychologically dependent for security and other needs upon his relationship with the group, tremendous pressures can be brought on the soldier by the leader who is able to mobilize and direct such pressures. The relief from anxiety that comes from the individual's reaffirmation of his intent to conform to group expectations is an extremely strong force for cohesion.

A comprehensive surveillance and reporting system penetrates an army down to the smallest unit, detects the deviant soldier, and serves as the basis for mobilizing group pressures in order to preserve cohesion. A cohesive unit will

1. rely on observation reports on deviant soldiers, reports initiated by peers;
2. view deviance as a violation of group trust concerning common expectations about individual attitudes and behavior;
3. reject the view of the reporting system as "informing" because the uncovered soldier is not punished but is brought back into the group; and
4. accept criticism to mobilize group pressure and isolation as legitimate techniques by leaders for focusing group sanctions against deviant soldiers.

### *Commonality of Values*

Certain characteristics found within the secondary group or nation from which soldiers are drawn also affect the ease with which cohesive units are built. These characteristics are generally associated with a nation's potential for nationalism. However, the degree to which these characteristics are evident within the small units of an army affects cohesion.

Major cultural factors enhancing cohesion are common social experiences based on soldiers' sharing a common religion, race, ethnic group, age, social-economic standing, or sex. These factors indicate the extent to which basic cultural values are shared and therefore the extent to which they contribute to or hinder communication among unit members. Almost all cultures make role distinctions between the sexes. The extent to which a culture socializes its members to accept women in certain roles will affect cohesion in a unit if women are assigned in a manner that disregards these roles. Cohesive units drawn from a heterogeneous society

1. are ethnically similar and share other major cultural characteristics or
2. are integrated and socialized to the degree that minorities
  - a. are able to communicate effectively,
  - b. share and adhere to dominant secondary and primary group norms,
  - c. do not form autonomous minority groups with separate norms incongruent with army norms;
3. are assigned by sex or by sex and function.