

# INTRODUCTION

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BY *Charles C. Moskos*

THAT MEN too often find themselves fighting wars is a depressing commentary on both history and contemporary life. That many of these same men endure situations where they can be killed or kill others is a perplexing fact of human behavior. It is not surprising, then, that interpretations of the motivations of men in combat are many and that the library on the subject is voluminous. *Cohesion: The Human Element in Combat* by Wm. Darryl Henderson says something, however, that is both new and important; at the same time it restates verities that are old and yet have to be rediscovered.

Colonel Henderson brings to this book a unique set of credentials. He commanded a rifle company in Vietnam during 1966-67, and suffered a near mortal personal attack by North Koreans on the Demilitarized Zone in 1975. But Colonel Henderson brings more than direct combat experience to this study. He holds a Ph.D. in comparative and international politics and is the author of *Why the Vietcong Fought* (1979), a detailed, provocative, and convincing study of one of the most effective armies of modern times.

*Cohesion: The Human Element in Combat* is even more ambitious because it uses the most difficult of all research methodologies—the comparative approach. It is comparative in several ways. We are presented with information and analyses on four quite different armies, those of the United States, Israel, North Vietnam, and the Soviet Union. The reader is introduced to basic variables relating to the human element in combat, which in turn are applied and compared with each other within each of the four countries. Henderson has defined the following as key variables: the military unit's ability to provide for the soldier's main needs, unit integrity and stability, the soldier's perception of escaping the unit, unit motivation and control, deviance from unit norms, commonality of values, factors promoting small-unit cohesion, and leadership in cohesive units. It is the comparative mode of analysis and the clear specification of variables which give this study of unit cohesion its unique and most valuable quality.

At the outset, it must be noted that *Cohesion: The Human Element in Combat* sets itself apart from the prevailing viewpoints on combat motivations and the dominant tendencies in military manpower policy. By making unit cohesion the focus of the study, Colonel Henderson gives little support to those who see advancing military technology revolutionizing warfare to the extent that the social psychological processes of small groups of men in tactical situations are, at best, secondary considerations. Unlike too many others, Colonel Henderson regards the impending disappearance of the ground combat soldier in modern warfare to be greatly exaggerated.

*Cohesion: The Human Element in Combat* also runs counter to the prevalent notion that military leadership per se, with its implied convictions that "can-doism" can overcome deficiencies in soldiers and organization, is the salient feature of small-unit performance. By pointing to the systemic factors affecting combat performance, Colonel Henderson points to the limits of leadership as an explanatory factor in differential combat outcomes.

This book is also to be contrasted with the school of thought that holds that erroneous strategic formulations were the

principal cause of the American failure in Vietnam. Colonel Henderson provides a corrective to this viewpoint by his reemphasis on the centrality of cohesion in small units and the tactical nature of warfare.

*Cohesion: The Human Element in Combat* must also be placed in the context of theoretical studies of military sociology. Broadly speaking, studies of armed forces and society usually proceed along one or the other of two levels of analyses. On the one hand, the analysis focuses on the societal, cultural, and political context of military systems; on the other, the emphasis is on the internal organization of the military system. Whether or not one views the armed forces as an independent or dependent variable shapes policy conclusions as well. The issue can be posed as to which matters more, the qualities the soldier brings into the military or what happens to the soldier once he is in the military. What distinguishes Colonel Henderson's study is that it gives due attention to both factors—and does so for four different armies. The military is not treated in isolation from the societal context and the values soldiers bring with them; at the same time, the unique and specific qualities of the military organization and, above all, of the combat situation are clearly kept in focus. Colonel Henderson bridges the gap between the level of micro-analysis based on individual behavior and the level of macro-analysis based on variables common to sociology.

Finally, and most important, Henderson sets himself against those who view the military in system analyses and econometric terms. The importance of systems analysts in public counsel is not, of course, a recent innovation, but what is new is the effort to apply system analyses to issues of combat performance. This implies a redefinition of military service away from an institutional format to one more and more resembling that of an occupation.

Such a redefinition of military service is based on a set of core assumptions. First, there is no analytical distinction between military and other systems—in particular, no difference between cost-effectiveness analysis of civilian enterprises and military services. Second, that military compensation should as much as possible be in cash, rather than in kind or deferred, thereby allowing for a more efficient operation of the marketplace. By 1983, a private

first class was earning about \$15,000 a year if he lived (as was becoming more common) off base. And, third, that unit cohesion and goal commitment are essentially unmeasurable, therefore an inappropriate object of analyses. Colonel Henderson's study counters each of these assumptions.

The most subtle point of Colonel Henderson's study is that he has taken the small unit as the object of analysis. We constantly forget that combat behavior (as is true for most human behavior) must be understood in the context of the small group in which individuals operate. While it is much easier to measure individual aptitudes and attributes, the central point is that social psychological, rather than psychologicistic, variables are most salient. This has been a hard lesson to absorb in the military social science community.

I wish I could say that I am sure that the lessons of this book will be absorbed by the world of military consultants and those responsible for manpower policy at the highest levels. Yet, I fear, even though *Cohesion: The Human Element in Combat* offers a sophisticated comparative methodology, the quantifiers of the manpower establishment in the Department of Defense will not be impressed. This is sad for both the country and its soldiers. Because the methods used in this book are holistic, qualitative, and comparative, they will probably be slighted by those seeking so-called "hard data." The pseudo-quantification reflected in the marketplace approach to military manpower will most likely continue to ascend. Yet, in the long run, by attaching a market value to military service, econometricians and the manpower establishment of the Department of Defense have cheapened, rather than enhanced, the value many soldiers and many Americans believed it had.

*Cohesion: The Human Element in Combat* is written at a time when the American Army is seeking to recover an internal balance it lost both in the Vietnam war and in the early years of the all-volunteer force. At the time this book was going to press, the American public was being told that the Army had turned the corner. Certainly there was reason for cautious optimism in light of an upturn in recruit quality, more rigorous training procedures, and Army initiatives to enhance unit cohesion. Yet there was a kind of Pollyannaish glow to the reports on the improved Army.

Long-term and systemic factors contributing to diminished combat effectiveness were still operative. That Colonel Henderson addresses these issues frontally means he goes against the grain. He brings clarity to what are literally life-and-death matters.

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