



VIEWPOINT



*The following represents the personal opinions of the author
and not necessarily the position of the Association of The United State Army or its members.*

May 1993

HOMOSEXUALS AND UNIT COHESION

by

Robert Lee Maginnis

Senator Sam Nunn hosted hearings during the last week of March 1993 concerning the contentious issue of homosexuals in the military. His committee heard from cohesion experts.¹ These experts outlined cohesion's importance for combat readiness.

They indicated the military's business is to fight and win. It accomplishes this task by fielding well-trained and cohesive units. They opined that the introduction of openly serving homosexual soldiers will undermine the development and sustainment of cohesive units.²

This paper will examine the probable impact of openly serving homosexuals for unit cohesion. Before examining the specific detrimental impact, the paper addresses the significance of cohesion for combat units; how cohesion is developed; and how it is sustained.

First, cohesion is critical to combat effectiveness. Military experts from Clausewitz and Napoleon to Schwarzkopf have recognized the importance of cohesion. It causes soldiers to willingly expose themselves consistently to enemy fire and to fight to victory or death.

Cohesion is the invisible power behind the combat unit. French military theorist Ardant du Picq explains the concept: "Four brave men who do not know each other will not dare to attack a lion. Four less brave, but knowing each other well, sure of their reliability and consequently of mutual aid, will attack resolutely."³

Army historian S.L.A. Marshall further illustrated the significance of cohesion. He said, "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."⁴

Individual bravery does not decide the battle, rather unit bravery (or cohesion) does. Cohesion is related to the confidence each man places in his leaders and comrades. It is the unity of effort in a fighting team.

According to British historian Lord Moran, “The secret of the awful power of the German Army (of World War II) is ... in a certain attitude of her manhood.”⁵ During that war the German army, on the average, inflicted three casualties on the allies for every two they incurred.⁶ This success is attributed to small-unit cohesion, mutual trust and confidence in leaders and comrades. It is a critical combat multiplier.

The high level of cohesion in the Israeli Army is a reflection of its society. That society has a common language, religion and strong sense of nationalism. Its army is able to defend itself through the use of highly cohesive units.

Israeli battle experience showed that soldiers who lacked cohesive bonds with leaders and comrades were more vulnerable to battle shock. Cohesive units were better able to endure the shock of combat and maintain effectiveness than noncohesive units.⁷

U.S. ground units in the Vietnam War did not have the same level of cohesion as North Vietnamese units, especially after the Tet offensive in 1968. The U.S. Army lacked vertical bonding—the need for soldiers to believe in their leaders and the purpose of their mission—and the horizontal bonding needed for soldiers to feel comfortable in a unit. This resulted in a total breakdown of cohesion on the unit level.⁸

Although the Argentines outnumbered the British during the Falkland War, and although their weapons and supplies were more than adequate, it became apparent that the Argentines lacked the will to prevail which is characteristic of cohesive, well-led units. This became even more apparent when, during negotiations for surrender, a main Argentine condition was that their officers be allowed to retain their side arms for protection against their own men. Argentine soldiers and officers did not have mutual trust.⁹

The U.S. Army studied the impact of cohesion for units involved in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Units of six brigades were studied. Cohesion was found to be a critical variable affecting soldier handling of stress in combat.

Military history demonstrates time and again that a cohesive unit is more effective in combat than an equal force with less cohesion. There are examples of highly cohesive small forces destroying much larger forces with low cohesion.

Cohesion makes the difference on the battlefield. It saves lives. It is not just something nice to have. It is essential at all levels of the military organization!

Second, cohesive units are made from soldiers willing to subscribe to Army values and standards. The Army resocializes recruits who have generally congruent values, interests, attitudes and fundamental beliefs to accept the values and standards critical to becoming a soldier.

The recruit must hold the Army’s values and demonstrate them in performance of duties.¹⁰ A recruit must also accept standards which dictate the behavior that will or will not be tolerated.¹¹

Acceptance of common, explicit Army values and standards by soldiers reduces conflicts, decreases obstacles to communication, and improves unit competence. Commonly held values and standards among leaders and soldiers also make units less susceptible to disruption by external forces and contribute in large measure to unit cohesion.

Ideally, the military attracts only recruits with the following cohesion-building values: a willingness to sacrifice personal welfare for unit welfare; a desire to become part of a disciplined group; a sense of community obligation; and respect for authority. These elements form the basis for building cohesive units.

If recruits with incongruent values must be accepted, the socialization process will be more difficult and will require constant attention until military values have been internalized, not merely given superficial compliance. When not internalized, conflict results.

Another aspect of resocializing the recruit is the creation of a new identity. The recruit must discard his personal identity in favor of the group (unit) identity. He must willingly focus on the unit's activities and goals and not his own. The neophyte soldier becomes totally dependent on his fellow soldiers for completion of unit missions and for survival. This mutual dependence fosters mutual trust.

Resocializing recruits also includes the removal of the unsuitable. In the Army, a recruit is unsuitable who cannot obey orders — any orders — or who fails to inculcate Army values and standards, or who cannot withstand immense and searing mental and physical pressure. These people will not enjoy the confidence of their peers.

Nonconformity with the cohesion-building unit also includes membership in an informal interest group. Many times informal interest groups have a strong influence upon the soldier's commitment to unit goals, values and standards. Such informal groups were evident during the Vietnam War.

Such groups included "heads" (drug users) who contended with "juicers" (alcohol users); "hawks" with "doves"; "lifers" (career soldiers) with "U.S.s" (draftees); and African-Americans who contended with whites. Membership in one or more of these interest groups often degraded a soldier's loyalty to his unit. Serious problems arose when such groups acted contrary to unit objectives. These groups undermined morale and unit cohesion.

Other significant factors which affect soldier socialization and unit cohesion include wide divergences among soldiers in terms of age, cultural background, religious preference and sexual composition. These factors need to be resolved in favor of the unit. After all, the unit's effectiveness demands complete compliance and subordination of personal preferences.

In summary, soldiers who accept the Army's values and standards and subordinate personal interests to those of the unit become the building blocks that make cohesive units. Over time and through frequent contact, interpersonal relationships develop among soldiers and between them and their leaders. Eventually, these relationships become more important and more intense. These intense, personal relationships are the basic elements of unit cohesion. They explain the maturing trust, discipline, morale and confidence that are key underpinnings of cohesive units.

Third, cohesive units are sustained in peacetime by maintaining a high frequency of association among unit members by reinforcing unit boundaries through design of barracks, mess halls and day rooms. Units also provide other opportunities, such as clubs and athletic facilities, for soldiers to come together socially. Unit leaders encourage bonding and cohesion by creating a healthy “we-they” view through traditions, ceremonies and distinctive insignia.

Leaders support cohesion by actively discouraging soldiers from belonging to autonomous interest groups with possibly deviant norms. Such groups tend to polarize soldiers and therefore undermine cohesion.

Training plays a key role in the development of cohesive units. During peacetime the process of military training is designed as much to inculcate group cohesion and solidarity upon which fighting spirit depends as it is to produce an adequate level of technical or tactical expertise.

Soldiers best bond (and therefore become cohesive units) when their differences are minimized and common expectations and experiences are shared. They develop strong rules of behavior and expectations (group norms) about individual conduct on the basis of face-to-face relationships which become the immediate determinant of the soldier’s behavior.

The bonding of soldier and leader is also critical to the development and sustainment of cohesion. Soldiers bond with leaders they trust, especially leaders who deal effectively with dangerous situations. These leaders ensure this vertical bonding by demonstrating that they care about the soldiers’ personal lives, by evidencing professional competence and a degree of leader predictability, by ensuring effective leader-soldier communication, and by evidencing an ability to effectively train soldiers.¹² These factors relieve the soldier of anxiety, resulting in greater leader influence and control, and encourage the development and sustainment of vertical cohesion.

Another factor that contributes to cohesion is the role played by the supportive military family. Nearly half the Army is married. The importance of the morale and confidence among Army spouses and family members must be considered. The family can directly influence retention and support the cohesion-building process.

The sustainment of soldier bonds and unit cohesion requires careful nurturing. Soldier-to-soldier and soldier-to-leader relationships cannot be neglected. Unnecessary interruptions to these relationships potentially defeat unit cohesion. The introduction of circumstances or people with contrary aims undermines cohesion building.

In summary, cohesion must be developed and sustained during peacetime. It is constructed from groups of soldiers who inculcate Army values and standards. It is sustained by very personal and daily contacts with comrades and leaders. This process must be jealously guarded.

Against this background, then, it would appear that cohesion in Army units would be jeopardized by the introduction of homosexuals. The integration of openly homosexual soldiers will result in distorted bonding phenomena: bonds among homosexuals, bonds among homosexuals and heterosexuals, and bonds among heterosexual soldiers. This multiplicity of bonding defeats the

Army's need to foster cohesion in small units. The introduction of homosexuals will polarize small units — the cornerstone of combat effectiveness.

The recipe for the exact characteristics needed in individuals who, when put together, can achieve high levels of small unit cohesion is not totally validated. However, the experience of combat-seasoned military professionals indicates that people with certain behavior patterns will not contribute positively to unit cohesion.

The behavior patterns which most military personnel consider detrimental to the development and sustainment of cohesive units must be considered. The following scientifically-documented homosexual behavior patterns can undermine the development and sustainment of cohesive units.

First, homosexuals define themselves by behavior which many soldiers find repugnant. Their sexual behavior (sodomy) is also a violation of the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). Heterosexual leaders and soldiers who subscribe to the intent of the law will in large numbers reject the forced integration of homosexual soldiers. The forced integration of homosexuals will undermine the trust and confidence among unit leaders and their comrades. It will also jeopardize leader trust in the integrity of the civilian leaders who placed the military in a dilemma between the commander-in-chief and the law-giving Congress.

The typical heterosexual soldier possesses a value system from middle America which says that homosexual behavior is abnormal. These soldiers do not want to associate with homosexuals. Forced association with homosexuals will damage the soldier's confidence in the Army and unit leaders and foster greater distrust of homosexuals.

Second, homosexuals are by definition sexually attracted to people of the same sex. The potential for sexual competition among homosexuals in a unit may destroy mutual trust and engender suspicions among heterosexual soldiers.

People involved sexually with one another may be less than effective. Relationships that involve intimate activities can stifle individual objectivity by participants in the relationship. For this reason, married couples do not serve in the same units. Homosexual soldiers in the same unit who are openly or secretly involved sexually will lack the objectivity required in cohesive units.

Third, self-disciplined soldiers are an essential building block of cohesive units. Considerable scientific research suggests homosexuals are very promiscuous when compared to heterosexuals. This documented behavior pattern will raise suspicion about their personal discipline and their willingness to inculcate the discipline demanded by the profession of arms.

Fourth, homosexual men have trouble establishing male relationships characterized by mutuality and equality. This is attributed to an underlying feeling of masculine inferiority which becomes the basis of envy and resentment toward heterosexual men. Consequently, the homosexual has difficulty relating to other men as equals, due to this resentment and because of the heterosexual's sexual and romantic significance to the homosexual. Additionally, heterosexual men who possess power and authority over the homosexual become particular symbols of masculinity, which only

intensifies the homosexual's same-sex desire. These factors will inevitably affect the important asexual bonding among peer soldiers and among leaders and homosexual soldiers. There is also a significant potential for increased incidents of fraternization among homosexual leaders and subordinate soldiers. This can be more devastating than relationships among peers. The critical vertical and horizontal bonding characteristic of cohesive units will likely be compromised by the introduction of homosexuals.¹³

Fifth, there are potential and psychological consequences for heterosexual soldiers serving with homosexuals. The homosexual has a far greater probability of contracting sexually transmitted disease (STD) due to a promiscuous life-style. The heterosexual will be sensitive to this probability and the increased chance that a homosexual soldier may contract the deadly HIV. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) indicates that two-thirds of all HIV cases are in the homosexual community.¹⁴ This information alone will have psychological consequences for heterosexual soldiers. They will constantly be aware that contact with a homosexual's body fluids could result in exposure to the HIV. Soldier bonding will suffer.

Sixth, homosexuals recruit sex partners, by necessity, from the heterosexual community. Young heterosexual soldiers who have not yet fully developed their own sexual identity will be threatened by the presence of homosexuals. Additionally, older soldiers with children at home will be especially hesitant when dealing with homosexuals in family housing areas.

SUMMARY

Cohesion cannot survive in an environment racked by a lack of discipline, poor morale and distrust. Scientific studies indicate that homosexuals as a category of people evidence behavior patterns that will potentially undermine the social ingredients that contribute to the development and sustainment of cohesive units. Their presence may well polarize units.

The Army must maintain a hard and illiberal view of life and the world. It must prepare for the battlefield. It must stand ready, if need be, to die. It is, in essence, a national resource to be used by society. This resource is most ready when it has well-trained and highly cohesive units. Openly serving homosexual soldiers will undermine the development and sustainment of this now well-honed force.

ENDNOTES

1. The committee heard testimony on March 31, 1993 from COL William Darryl Henderson, USA Ret., Dr. David H. Marlowe (Chief, Department of Military Psychiatry, Walter Reed Army Institute of Research), and Dr. Lawrence J. Korb.
2. Marlowe and Henderson.
3. Ardant du Picq, *Battle Studies: Ancient and Modern Battle*, translated by John N. Greely and Robert C. Cotton (Harrisburg, Pa.: Military Publishing Co., 1947), p. 100.

4. S. L. A. Marshall, *Men Against Fire* (New York: William Morrow, 1947).
5. Lord Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1967), p. 61.
6. *Ibid.* The German victories on the Eastern front significantly contributed to this ratio.
7. Gregory Belenky, Shabtai Noy and Zahava Solomon, "Battle Stress, Morale, Cohesion, Combat Effectiveness, Heroism, and Psychiatric Casualties: The Israeli Experience," pp. 11-29. Cited from *Contemporary Studies in Combat Psychiatry*, ed. Gregory Belenky (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987).
8. William Darryl Henderson, *Cohesion: The Human Element in Combat* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1985).
9. Testimony by COL Darryl Henderson before the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces.
10. U.S. Department of the Army Field Manual (FM) 100-1, *The Army*, outlines four critical values: integrity, loyalty, duty and selfless service. It also outlines four soldierly qualities: commitment, competence, candor and courage.
11. Army standards of performance as outlined in Army regulations. Interpersonal relationships are outlined in Command Policy (AR 600-20), Standards of Ethical Conduct (Executive Order 12674), FM 22-100, *Military Leadership*, and more.
12. This is cited from testimony by Dr. David H. Marlowe, Chief, Department of Military Psychiatry, Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, to the Committee on Armed Services, United States Senate, on 31 March 1993.
13. Joseph Nicolosi, *Reparative Therapy of Male Homosexuality* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson Inc., 1991).
14. "HIV/AIDS Surveillance," Division of HIV/AIDS, U.S. Centers for Disease Control, October 1992.