

# **Improving Unit Cohesion**



**The First Step in  
Improving Marine Corps  
Infantry Battalion Capabilities**

**Brendan B. McBreen**

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## **The First Step in Improving Marine Corps Infantry Battalion Capabilities**

by

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## Executive Summary

Of all the ideas for improving the combat capabilities of Marine Corps infantry battalions, only one really matters. Improving the stability and cohesion of our units is a prerequisite for all other improvements. Improving the cohesion of our units supports and maximizes the effectiveness of all other improvements. The future Marine Corps requires more capable infantry units. Cohesion is the first and most effective answer.

In combat, soldiers fight for their comrades. The primary group motivates humans. Cohesion is the bonds of trust between members of a group. There are four types of cohesion: horizontal cohesion among peers, vertical cohesion from subordinate to leader, organizational cohesion within an army, and societal cohesion between an army and its society. Cohesive units fight better, suffer fewer casualties, train better, do not disintegrate, require less support, and provide members with a higher quality of life.

Cohesion's central requirement is personnel stability. Stability, stress, and success build horizontal cohesion in units. Leaders who understand their people build vertical cohesion. Horizontal cohesion between leaders is built on shared experiences. Vertical cohesion between leaders is built on clear standards. Organizational cohesion is built on history and traditions. Competence and honesty between the army and its society build societal cohesion. Cohesion is difficult to measure, but familiarity can be measured for both small units and leaders. Reconstitution is a technique for maintaining stability by transferring personnel only at the beginning and end of long training cycles.



**The best infantry squad in the 3rd Marine Division, 2020:** Sergeant Corona, Corporals Holdorf, Groshong, and Alliger, Lance Corporals Pham, Imperato, Andrzejek, Griffin, Argueta, Helms, Atwood, Zuniga, and Agnew, and Petty Officer 3rd Class Iffrig.

Marine Corps Order 3500.28 (1999), which defines the unit cohesion program, only applies to new Marines. Officers and non-commissioned officers join battalions at various times. Unit commanders serve short tours. Training is not harmonized with the cycle.

The Marine Corps needs to update the 3500.28 order to mandate four-year assignments for officers, non-commissioned officers, and new Marines. The Marine Corps needs to implement “reconstitution windows,” periods when all Marines in the battalion transfer in or out, at the beginning and end of each

two-year reconstitution cycle. The stability index of each unit should be part of readiness reports. Units should be overfilled at the beginning of each training cycle. Supporting organizations should publish training guidance, tour lengths, and manuals to explain the techniques of cohesion and reconstitution. The Ground Combat Element Advocate should represent the operating forces and coordinate cohesion efforts.

Cohesion is more important now than at any time in our past. The challenges of the future can best be met by strengthening our infantry units. Significant improvements to infantry units will come primarily from increasing unit stability and cohesion.

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## Part I: The Challenge of the New Century

### 1.0 Premise

Of all the ideas for improving the combat capabilities of Marine Corps infantry battalions, only one really matters. Improving the stability and cohesion of our units is a prerequisite for all other improvements. Improving the cohesion of our units supports and maximizes the effectiveness of all other improvements.

Unit cohesion is a largely unrecognized force multiplier. It is a people-based competency, completely unrelated to new technology. Stabilized units are far more combat capable than units manned by haphazard individual replacements. Cohesion indirectly improves leadership and training. For infantry forces, units that train to engage the enemy in close combat and who have historically taken the preponderance of our casualties, cohesion is more than an improvement, it is a critical moral imperative. In addition to increasing combat power, cohesion safeguards our Marines, physically and psychologically.

Numerous trends external to the Marine Corps constrain potential improvements to our infantry battalions. New equipment, new technology, new organization, new training, and new doctrine will improve our units, but all these will be irrelevant if we cannot stabilize our units and improve the way we think about and use our *people*. Cohesion is the hub of the wheel. Meaningful improvements to the capabilities of our infantry units can only be made by increasing unit cohesion.

### 2.0 The New World

In the coming century, threats to the United States will vary widely. Current and future conflicts represent a broad array of potential threats.

Future war will emphasize quality over quantity. Despite great advances in the science of weapons, skill still trumps technology. The rapid advance of technology merely serves to further separate skilled armies from the unskilled.

Since World War II, ground units on the battlefield have become smaller and more widely dispersed, while weapons of increasing lethality have become more precise. The decentralized nature of future combat will demand increasingly lower levels of authority and autonomy and increasingly higher levels of individual skill, judgement, and competence. These trends will benefit armies that develop high quality manpower and units. Many western armies are now moving from large conscripted forces to smaller professional forces capable of multipurpose missions.

The expanded role for armies in Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW) also reinforces the need for well-trained forces prepared to handle challenging non-traditional missions.



### 3.0 Challenges for the Marine Corps

In 2002, the commandant defined the role of the Marine Corps as “America’s sea-based, expeditionary, combined-arms force” (Jones, 2002). Worldwide expeditionary operations and sea basing limitations will constrain the size of our operating forces as well as the size of our footprint ashore.

Marine Corps transformation is not focused on weapons systems. The Marine Corps seeks to use new technology by matching it with adaptive organizations and evolving doctrine. Marine Corps doctrinal concepts, from *Operational Maneuver From the Sea* to *Expeditionary Maneuver Warfare*, envision far more versatile units than those fielded today. New platforms and command and control infrastructures will support smaller, more capable forces. Marine Corps Doctrinal Publication-1 *Warfighting* requires units with high levels of competence who can fight outnumbered with initiative, creativity and flexibility. Future Marine Corps organizations will need to balance the need for cyclic deployments with the need for continuous war readiness, the give and take between the MEU and the MEB. The common denominator for all of our future doctrine and organizations is the robust and capable infantry unit.

The training required for units preparing to fight asymmetric threats will need to improve significantly. Marines will need to be mentally agile, culturally aware, and combat capable. The “Strategic Corporal” that General Krulak spoke of, the non-commissioned officer who can make a decision which affects the combatant commander, the president, and national policy, underscores the importance of high-quality Marines and leaders. Our future capabilities are based on people—Marines, leaders, and units—who are more capable than they are today.

Future domestic issues, from defense budgets to declining numbers of young Americans available to serve, will constrain the size and shape of the Marine Corps. Domestic support for foreign policy decisions is now more than ever dependent on the performance of high quality, capable forces whose performance is reported daily by the media. More than half of our budget is spent on personnel. This is a fixed cost. Improvements to the units that we are already paying for maximizes the value of this expense.

The United States, in addressing future foreign policy challenges, will require a broad range of

options. For military forces, readiness is a virtue. Relevance is a virtue. Policy makers and national leaders must be confident in the capability of Marine forces in order for our forces to remain relevant and useful.



## 4.0 What is Needed?

The requirements of the future, both external to the Marine Corps as well as within the organization, all underscore the importance of improving our infantry units. Equipment and organizational improvements are additive. Significant improvements can only be found in improving our people and our units.

How do we gain more combat capability from our current Marine infantry units? People are more important than hardware. Quality is more important than quantity. Because our size and costs are fixed, we need to wrest the highest possible readiness and training levels from the units we now have. We need to change those personnel practices that constrain our potential.

“Our highest priority remains unchanged: Marines, their families and our civilian workforce. The most advanced aircraft, ship, or weapons system is of no value without highly

motivated and well-trained people” (Jones, 2002).

We need to improve unit stability and cohesion. This, in turn, will improve leadership and training. Only well-led, stabilized infantry units can be progressively trained to the high skill levels needed to meet the requirements of the future. Highly trained cohesive units:

- Can operate well as small units. This supports expeditionary and sea-basing requirements as well as potential foreign policy restrictions for smaller forces. Smaller combined arms teams can only be built with high quality units.
- Meet the maturity and flexibility needs for challenging military operations other than war.
- Train to higher standards and train to operate high technology equipment.
- Are versatile enough to operate in evolving organizations executing new doctrinal concepts.

We cannot afford to remain idle. In a world of rapidly emerging threats and challenges, the cost of complacency is irrelevance. The indirect benefits of cohesion—lower costs, safer units, and higher quality of life—are immediate concerns. Within the Department of Defense, the competition for roles and missions will push some other force to eventually come forward with the units and capabilities needed.

Cohesion is unaffected by technology. Cohesion, competent small-unit leadership, and intense training are needed to execute our Warfighting doctrine. Improving cohesion will improve our readiness and provide us with smaller, less expensive, safer, and more effective infantry forces.





## Part II: Cohesion and Reconstitution

### 5.0 Cohesion

*“Soldiers have to eat soup together for a long time before they are ready to fight.”*

— Napoleon

### 5.1 Why do We Fight?

Soldiers do not engage in combat for motherhood, the flag, or apple pie. They do not fight for patriotism. They may have volunteered for these reasons, but when their lives are at risk, and the incredible stress of close personal violence is immediately at hand, the key truth emerges. Soldiers fight for their friends. The primary group is the major factor in explaining behavior in combat (Henderson, 1985).

Leaders throughout history have urged their armies into combat with charismatic leadership and enthusiastic references to patriotism or esprit de corps. Soldiers, however, have advanced and fought well only when organized as cohesive units.

Soldiers bond with their primary group when the group meets their social needs for affection, recognition, esteem and protection, as well as their physical needs for food, water, shelter and medical support.

The soldier, bound by the demands of the members of his group, fights well as long as the primary group avoids disintegration, is well led, and provides for his needs. These human factors—cohesion, trust in peers, trust in leaders, teamwork and competence—are critical in determining why some units fight well and some do not.

In combat, primary groups face a common threat. This increases their solidarity, reduces internal friction, and increases the group's odds of survival. Individuals do not flee from a cohesive unit. Their self-image is tied to the opinion of their peers. Alone they have less chance of survival. The unit has become their life. Soldiers fight for their friends and their comrades, the esteem of their peers, to protect their team, and to achieve their unit's goals.

## 5.2 What is Cohesion?

Cohesion is the bonds of trust between members of a small group.

Cohesion is demonstrated when the day-to-day goals of each individual in a primary group correspond to the goals of his group. Cohesion is demonstrated when the first loyalty of each individual is to the group, when individuals resist leaving the group, and when individuals in the group act as a coordinated, collective whole. Cohesive groups speak of “we” rather than “I.” Cohesion is demonstrated by group pride, solidarity, loyalty, and teamwork. Cohesion is demonstrated by soldiers willing to risk death for the preservation of their unit or the accomplishment of their unit’s mission.

Cohesion only applies to small primary groups with close face-to-face relationships. Cohesion is inversely proportional to the number of people in the group.

Cohesion is not morale, fighting spirit, or patriotism. Cohesion is not esprit de corps. Cohesion is not habitual relationships. Individual morale is the state of mind of an individual, his sense of self-worth and confidence. Cohesion is a property of groups who share face-to-face relationships. In the Marine Corps, this means squads, teams, sections, and crews. Spirit is the common collective pride felt by large collections of individuals above the face-to-face level (Ingraham and Manning, 1981). Some research, using an overly broad definition of cohesion, actually addresses the wider phenomenon of esprit de corps (Johns, 1984).

For ground combat units, a *cohesive unit* is a small unit, a squad, crew or section, that has trained together to develop the collective will and bonding, the mutual trust and interdependency, and the collective skills needed to fight successfully on the battlefield.

There are four types of cohesion (Stewart, 1991):

- *Horizontal Cohesion* is the trust shared between peers. Horizontal cohesion is the bonds of confidence between those in a single unit or horizontally between leaders of separate units.
- *Vertical Cohesion* is the bonding between subordinates and leaders. Cohesive units are strengthened when subordinates trust that their leaders are competent and caring.
- *Organizational Cohesion* is the relationship of the soldier to his larger military organization. Organizational cohesion binds small groups to a higher purpose.
- *Societal Cohesion* is the relationship between an army and the society it serves. Societal cohesion is a function of the cultural, economic, and political heritage of the nation.

## 5.3 Why is Cohesion Important?

Centuries of armed conflict and decades of research into the performance of ground units in combat and in training have shown that cohesive units display the following strengths:

- *Cohesive units fight better.*
- *Cohesive units suffer fewer battle casualties.*
- *Cohesive units suffer fewer non-battle casualties.*
- *Cohesive units train to higher standards.*
- *Cohesive units do not disintegrate under stress.*
- *Cohesive units require less administrative support.*

- *Cohesive units provide a higher quality of life.*

*Cohesive units fight better.* At the tactical level, small unit cohesion is a key predictor of combat performance. This linkage has been recognized in accounts of battles for hundreds of years and well-demonstrated during the last century by the German army in World War II (Shils and Janowitz, 1948, Van Crevald, 1982), the North Vietnamese forces of the Vietnam wars (Henderson, 1979), the Israeli army of the Arab-Israeli wars (Luttwak and Horowitz, 1983), and the British army of the Falklands war (Stewart, 1989 and 1991). The U.S. Army's systematic failure to create and maintain cohesive combat units, and the resulting problems, have weakened the Army's fighting units from World War II (Van Crevald, 1982), through Vietnam and beyond (Henderson, 1985).

An Israeli study found that soldiers in cohesive units had a higher sense of sacrifice for their fellow soldiers and performed more heroically in combat (Stewart, 1991). Analysts credit cohesive units with providing positive peer pressure. A soldier who values the opinions of his comrades, who trusts his primary group for support and protection, overcomes his fears and fights well. Honor and self-esteem minimize the effects of fear and the override the impetus to shirk or run. The known fighting ability of his comrades and the group collective experiences founded on trust and interdependency serve to increase a soldier's own confidence and combat abilities. A soldier can focus outward on the enemy only when he knows his comrades will support and protect him.

In simulated combat during multiple training exercises in the U.S. Army, observers found that sixty-six percent of high performing units had above median cohesion (Oliver, 1988). Although performance was affected by other variables such as leader style and abilities, the tactical skill of non-commissioned officers, a critical measure of good units, was also found to be better in cohesive units.

Since combat effectiveness is a function of collective action, cohesive units executing team evolutions with skill and experience are more effective in combat. Faris Kirkland was a researcher for the U.S. Army's COHORT program, a cohesion effort for combat arms units that stabilized new soldiers in the same unit for three years. Kirkland estimated that the least capable COHORT unit was three times more skilled and effective than the most capable standard, individual replacement unit. The most effective COHORT units were superb, impossible to compare with individual replacement units. "The best COHORT units took people's breath away" (Canby, Gudmundsson and Shay, 2000).

At the U.S. Army's National Training Center in Fort Irwin, California, researchers found that vertical cohesion between soldiers and platoon level leaders was "an effective predictor of performance" (Alderks, 1992). Intense interpersonal relationships kept soldiers performing well in extremely trying circumstances. Leaders of platoons with strong vertical cohesion displayed quality leadership, technical ability, and a sincere caring for their soldiers. Alderks also found that few or no breaks in the vertical chain from soldier to squad leader to platoon leader created a stronger and more capable team that resulted in better platoon performance. Other research showed that cohesive platoons had stronger performance even when weakly led (Braun, 1983).

Cohesive units execute more effective tactics, display better problem solving methods, and generate more unique ideas. These strengths further serve to increase their fighting abilities (Braun, 1983).

*Cohesive units suffer fewer battle casualties.* Cohesive units with well-developed team skills and high degrees of confidence fight better and suffer fewer casualties in combat. Long-serving leaders, attuned to their unit's capabilities and having the confidence of their team, make more accurate risk assessments and are less likely to

make poor decisions which result in unnecessary casualties. Forty percent of U.S. combat deaths in Vietnam occurred during the soldier's first three months in combat (Thayer, 1985). In Vietnam, "Battalion commanders who managed to command longer than six months suffered battle deaths at a rate only two-thirds that of their less experienced contemporaries" (Krepinevich, 1988). Military skill, particularly leader experience and competence, is one of the most important factors in reducing all casualties (Canby, Gudmundsson and Shay 2000). Cohesive units display teamwork and higher combat skills that reduce the risk of casualties. Additionally, cohesive units make greater efforts to evacuate their casualties.

*Cohesive units suffer fewer non-battle casualties.* Soldiers who know they can depend on each other and who have gained confidence in their leader's abilities suffer less anxiety in combat. This trust protects soldiers from psychological injuries and reduces stress casualties. A sense of shared belonging increases the support that members of a cohesive unit share with one another. This reduces stress and prevents breakdowns by informally treating symptoms of stress early.

Israeli army battle stress treatment emphasizes returning a soldier to his unit and his buddies as quickly as possible (Henderson, 1985). Soldiers' confidence in their leaders is critical to protecting them from battle stress. They seek competence, credibility, and a perception that the leader cares about his troops (Canby, Gudmundsson and Shay, 2000).

In World War II, U.S. Army doctors recognized that soldiers who complained of "loneliness and helplessness" would rapidly become stress casualties. To prevent a soldier from being overwhelmed, he needed to be part of a team. The lack of attention that the U.S. Army in Europe in WWII paid to unit cohesion was directly reflected in the casualty statistics. In 1943, U.S. Army divisions in Europe averaged twenty-six percent psychiatric casualties a year,

ten times that of the German army. Soldiers either broke down during the first five days of combat, as a result of the replacement system, or after four months, as a result of the lack of unit rotation out of the line. British soldiers, on average, lasted twice as long (Van Crevald, 1982).

A comparison between World War II, Korea, and the 1973 Arab-Israeli war showed a huge increase in the lethality of the battlefield and a corresponding decrease in the average time needed to cause stress casualties: from 3 weeks in 1945 to 24 hours in 1973 (Phipps, 1982, Wong, 1985). In the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, Israeli paratroopers suffered fewer stress casualties, despite a higher rate of combat, than other army units. Researchers attributed this to the strong emotional support of their cohesive units and to trusted leaders. In the wider army nearly half of the Israeli stress casualties were found to be the result of the cumulative stress of marriage, mortgage, a pregnant wife, elderly parents, plus the additional stress of battle.

Forty percent of these stress casualties reported 'difficulties with peers' or 'difficulties with the chain of command' prior to battle, indicating the importance of tightly knit, well-led, and supportive units. Soldiers without support systems—especially supportive peers in their unit—had the greatest risk of becoming stress casualties (Mangelsdorff, 1985). Israeli Tank crews that were thrown together during the first hectic hours of the war had higher stress casualties and higher post-war incidence of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) than standing tank crews, even given that the ad-hoc crews saw less combat and suffered fewer casualties (Stewart, 1991).

PTSD, the effect of anxiety and stress that occurs long after leaving combat, is less prevalent in Vietnam veterans who served in tightly knit, supportive units. The social costs of PTSD—prison, crime, family violence, and unemployment—can rightly be laid on the military organizations that failed to adequately

protect these veterans while they served (Canby, Gudmundsson and Shay, 2000).

Other non-battle casualties are also less prevalent in cohesive units. Cohesive units show less incidence of unauthorized absence, sick call, desertion, drugs, alcoholism, accidents, and crime (Stewart, 1991). Prevention of all types of non-battle casualties preserves the fighting strength of a unit.

*Cohesive units train to higher standards.* The U.S. Army's COHORT program showed that stabilized units could be trained to significantly higher skill levels than non-stabilized units. Cohesive units had the capability and motivation to continuously learn new skills. The effect was cyclic. Training built unit cohesion and cohesive units executed better training. One COHORT battalion commander said, "We reached the skill level of a conventional unit in 60-90 days and just kept going up" (Canby, Gudmundsson and Shay, 2000).

By all standard Army training measurements, Skill Qualification Tests, Physical Fitness Tests, Army General Inspections, and Army Readiness and Training Evaluation Programs, COHORT units scored higher than control units (Braun, 1983). Compared to non-stabilized units, COHORT units scored 18 percent better in common skills and 17 percent better in individual skills (Wong, 1985).

Stabilized units are a requirement for progressive training. With no new people, these units do not have to continuously re-start training cycles. This reduces boredom and apathy. Continuity permits units to continually train on higher level skills and additional challenging tasks.

Long tenure provides leaders with the experiences to learn how to train well and use their training time more effectively. Long command tours insure that training matches the needs of the unit and avoids the tendency new leaders have of repeating previous training or

aiming training too low. Officers and non-commissioned officers attain higher training levels in stabilized units. Some officers and senior enlisted leaders in the Army COHORT program found that they were forced to increase their own skill levels in order to keep up with the progress of their own soldiers (Canby, Gudmundsson and Shay, 2000).

Refresher training on previously learned tasks is quicker and more effective when done with the same individuals who learned the skill together the first time. U.S. Army tank crews lose 25 percent of speed and accuracy three months after training. Refresher training with identical crews is faster, more effective and generates new higher levels of skill. This state-dependent training benefit is one of the reasons that the Israeli army goes to great lengths to stabilize their tank crews for *years* on end (DePuy, 1974).

Collective skill training—team training—is directly dependent on unit cohesion. Well-trained teams display an intuitive communication that is built on shared experiences in complex team skills.

*Cohesive units do not disintegrate under stress.* During the last years of the World War II, German army units faced defeat on all fronts, disillusionment with their leadership, and casualties among their families at home. Despite these tremendous pressures, cohesive units of German soldiers remained viable and fought skillfully until the very end of the war (Shils and Janowitz, 1948, Van Creveld 1982).

In contrast, the American army of World War II totally disregarded the importance of cohesion. One of its least cohesive units, the 106th Infantry Division, totally collapsed in combat with the Germans. Its surrender was the largest in U.S. Army history. None of the units of the division had been given the time, training, or personnel stability to develop even the slightest levels of cohesion. Thousands of men had been rotated in and out while the division tried to prepare for combat. Sixty percent of its soldiers

had been used as battle replacements for other divisions. Before being sent into combat, 6300 new soldiers of various backgrounds—air cadets, men from other divisions, cooks, bakers, and drivers—had been added. The units of this division were not trained teams, but collections of unrelated men. They did not fight well and disintegrated under the pressure of combat, despite high quality supplies, weapons, and equipment.

In German prisoner of war camps, units of the 106th Division ignored their chain of command, and collapsed still further (Watson, 1997). Shared privation is easier to bear. In training, cohesive units maintain their discipline even in reversals (Wong, 1985). Cohesion keeps units together despite forced marches, exhaustion, fatigue, hunger, thirst, privation, sleep deprivation, vermin, loneliness and disillusionment. Cohesive units are less likely to break, run, or dissolve under the strains of combat. Historically, units collapse from within when their primary groups are destroyed by alienation, powerlessness, and desperation.

Trusted leadership—vertical cohesion—reduces the outside stresses not related to combat that can destroy a unit. Uncertain information and rumors, common in combat, that contribute to friction and lost morale, can be clarified by trusted leaders. Confusing war aims, opposition at home, unsound strategy, and other questions can all be mitigated by nurturing, caring commanders that have the trust of their soldiers (Stewart, 1991). During the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Israeli soldiers continued to advance as long as they had confidence in their leaders, and as long as cohesion was strong, despite their questioning the overall legitimacy of the invasion (Gal, 1983 referenced by Henderson, 1985).

Cohesive units stay combat-capable and do not disintegrate even after significant losses. Cohesive units that maintain their structure despite losses are easier to reconstitute, to rebuild, and retrain.

*Cohesive units require less administrative support.* Units with tight social bonds and higher morale suffer less legal and administrative problems. They experience less sick call, less non-judicial punishment, less unauthorized absence, less drug problems, less serious accidents, and less peacetime psychiatric casualties (Stewart, 1989). Cohesive units in the U.S. Army's COHORT program had higher reenlistment and retention rates, lower first-term attrition and less requests for transfers (Wong, 1985). Cohesive units commit fewer crimes (Manning and Ingraham, 1987). Leaders who know their people well can address potential problems early. These actions can improve family issues, reduce emergencies, and further build vertical cohesion. Fewer transfers mean less paperwork and record keeping: fewer orders, fewer evaluations, and fewer medical and service record reviews.

*Cohesive units provide a higher quality of life.* Human beings seek group membership for social recognition, protection, resources, and support. An individual's status and identity is directly tied to his primary group. Loyalty is very strong to this support system (Braun, 1983).

Armies that treat their people properly insure that they belong to meaningful groups. This sense of belonging generates job satisfaction and a willingness to sacrifice for the good of the group. Cohesive units look out for one another and take care of one another. Long tours in tightly knit communities increase the stability of families and permit people to make friends and establish social ties, a quality of life benefit that increases retention (Canby, Gudmundsson and Shay, 2000).

## 5.4 How is Cohesion Built?

*“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. That is the science of armies in a nutshell.”*

— Ardant Du Picq

Cohesion’s central requirement is personnel stability. Cohesion is a function of continuity, of personal relationships built on trust and common experiences.

Cohesion cannot be built the night before battle. Units cannot be ordered to “be cohesive.” Building strong armies takes years of developing stable, socially cohesive small units. History has demonstrated both the techniques and the results.

### **How to Build Horizontal Cohesion in Units**

*Stability plus Stress plus Success equals Cohesion* (S + S + S = C) (Wong, 1985).

*Stability.* Familiarity among peers is the most important requirement for horizontal cohesion. Soldiers should serve in their initial unit with the same peers for as long as possible, ideally for their entire first enlistment. Soldiers should be re-assigned during reconstitution periods only. The longer a person is a member of a group, the more he learns whom to trust.

Cohesion is promoted the longer a soldier anticipates being with his unit. Lack of anonymity and an expectation of future service together reinforce positive team-building behavior. Humans do not cooperate well if they know they will never see each other again.

Horizontal cohesion is built by building teams. Individuals are not spare parts. The carburetor and the brake cylinders do not have to practice together in order to operate. They have no need to trust each other. Machines have no collective unit skills (Canby, Gudmundsson and Shay, 2000). Like sports teams or musical groups, individual skill is a prerequisite, but a unit needs to practice and interact extensively and

continuously. The cohesion imperatives for small unit leaders are clear and straightforward: keep units together as much as possible, assign units, not individuals, to duty on guard and maintenance, billet units together, emphasize unit uniqueness, insure barracks and other facilities support distinctive unit identity and clear unit boundaries, schedule non-training appointments together to minimize absences, manage off-duty time, grant leave and liberty to entire units, and plan picnics, sports, and family days together (Wong, 1985, Henderson, 1985). Leaders should minimize affiliations outside of the unit. Soldiers should be assigned to units far from home in order to increase their dependency on their unit. Leaders need to ensure that the unit satisfies the soldier’s physical needs for food, water, medical, shelter, social needs for esteem and affection, and security needs. These actions, and others, increase interdependency, trust, respect, and peer bonding, which all contribute to horizontal cohesion. When soldiers share the same background, cohesion is can be built more rapidly. When they are not of the same background, more effort is required (Braun, 1983).

*Stress* increases the quality of training time and speeds the cohesion process. Training events should challenge a unit’s problem solving abilities and force units to overcome hardship together. Tough, progressively difficult mission training builds morale and unit pride, but more importantly, builds teams of survivors which multiplies their familiarity. Collective tasks need to be done by collective groups, collectively trained. This builds cohesion. Teamwork is built by knowing the weaknesses and strengths of comrades, learning to trust peers and training to fight together. Executing challenging and dangerous training to high levels of tactical and technical proficiency builds tight units. High standards should be set and all events should be well critiqued. Research has shown that realistic training does not contribute to PTSD. Vietnam veterans who are victims of PTSD complained that a *lack* of realistic training caused more

casualties in combat (Canby, Gudmundsson and Shay, 2000).

The continuous communication and high interactions that are needed to address stressful situations build high cohesion. Forced interaction is why teams who serve machines, like tank or aircraft crews, tend to be very cohesive.

An external threat to the group provides increased cohesion. Veterans of units that undergo the tremendous stress of actual combat speak of becoming bonded like family for life.

*Success.* Teams that win build cohesion. Frequent successful exertions to the utmost limits of their strength show soldiers their capabilities, and show them that they can depend on each other. These ‘cohesion events’ are shared success. The success of overcoming realistic training challenges leads to shared celebration, shared confidence, and shared experiences (Wong, 1985). Success raises the status of the unit. Members are more likely to feel loyalty to a high status group. A leader should continuously provide timely feedback and recognition to his unit concerning success on military tasks, especially success that exceeds well-defined standards (Wong, 1985). Leaders should recognize and reward units, not individuals. Cohesion and success are cyclic. The greater the success, the greater the cohesion. The greater the cohesion, the greater the success. Soldiers are proud of hardships overcome and dangers faced. This pride in success is essential for overcoming future challenges and inoculating soldiers against the psychological and physiological fear of combat (Canby, Gudmundsson and Shay, 2000).

There are four steps a unit takes on its way to horizontal cohesion:

1. *Forming.* Initial development of roles and billets. Testing and assessing of new personalities.

2. *Storming.* Competition for positions and informal authority. Cohesion cannot exist until this stage, which is marked by considerable emotional tension, has been completed.
3. *Norming.* Development of group norms and cohesion. Development of group pressure to enforce conformity.
4. *Performing.* Productive task activity.

Constant replacements keep a unit continuously at step two, making steps three and four unreachable (Braun, 1983).

### **How to Build Vertical Cohesion from Unit to Leader**

Leader stability is the central requirement of vertical cohesion. Small unit leaders must serve long tours in the same billet, ideally equivalent to the length of their soldier’s tours, to build credibility and teamwork. Leaders should join a unit early and train that unit throughout its training cycle. Armies that keep leaders in place stabilize unit habits, standard operating procedures, expectations, and performance.

In cohesive units, leaders know and understand their people. They know why they fight and show a paternal concern and respect for each individual. Soldiers who fight must be convinced that their leader has their welfare in mind. Leaders must continually set a strong personal example, especially in combat, in order for their unit to follow them. Leaders eat with, live with, empathize with, and love their soldiers (Henderson, 1985, Stewart, 1991). Long-serving leaders increase the quality of intraunit communications. Leaders share discomforts and danger and their optimism and courage is contagious (Stewart, 1991).

Vertical cohesion is strengthened considerably and soldiers gain critical confidence, trust, and respect in their leader when the leader displays

professional competence and tactical abilities while leading his unit in training evolutions that simulate combat.

High-level policies can strengthen small unit vertical cohesion. Decentralized leave and liberty decisions, promotion recommendations, and assignment policies empower small unit leaders, strengthen each leader's contributions to the welfare of his team, and thereby increase the vertical cohesion of the unit (Tillson, 1990). Punishment should be handled at the lowest level possible. When a leader is missing, a qualified leader should be sent down from the higher headquarters staff to permanently take over the small unit. This action clearly shows the importance given by the organization to quality small unit leadership (Henderson, 1985).

#### **How to Build Horizontal Cohesion between Leaders**

Horizontal cohesion among leaders of different units is built upon a basis of shared doctrine, a shared language, and shared standards. Armies inculcate these commonalities by providing their leaders with common schooling, common career paths and responsibilities, and similar experiences. Additional horizontal cohesion is gained in organizations where leaders come from similar backgrounds. Common systems, however, cannot replace face-to-face interaction. Challenging training increases the professional interaction between participating leaders. Social activities increase the human interaction between leaders. Regimental systems, where officers serve in the same units off and on throughout their careers, create familiarity and trust, common procedures, and shared experiences. These personal bonds between leaders build substantial horizontal cohesion.

#### **How to Build Vertical Cohesion from Leader to Leader**

Leaders bond with their superiors for the same reasons they bond with their peers: when they

share the same doctrinal language, military education, organizational culture, and personal interactions. Commanders should serve long command tours of years, not months. Well-understood standards of promotion and command selection, based on experience and competence, help build vertical cohesion between one commander and the next.

#### **How to Build Organizational Cohesion**

Organizational cohesion is the bonds between each soldier and his army. These organizational bonds are built around symbols and stories, the legacy and the culture of the military organization. The history and traditions of a fighting organization, the valor and heroism of its members, the patriotism and loyalty that the service has provided the nation, are all reinforced during training and ceremonies. Distinctive uniforms and insignia give members a sense of exclusiveness and a strong sense of belonging. Promotions, awards, and retirement ceremonies are all opportunities for increasing organizational cohesion.

Nationalism and patriotism contribute to organizational cohesion. However, these are symbolic ideas and rarely generate individual commitment. Similarity of attitudes promotes organizational cohesion, but creating these larger group attitudes is difficult (Henderson, 1985). Organizational cohesion, esprit and morale do not translate directly into small unit cohesion and fighting power. Military sociologist Morris Janowitz has found, "If there is no social cohesion at the primary group level there is no possibility of secondary symbols accomplishing the task" (Henderson, 1985).

#### **How to Build Societal Cohesion**

The factors that contribute to the relationship between a military and the society that supports it are complex and not easily changed, especially since most of these factors are generated over decades.

Internally, the army needs to convince its soldiers that society values their sacrifices and contributions. Externally, the army can best affect societal cohesion by insuring that it executes its missions well and supports the policies of the country, that it safeguards the citizens that are entrusted to it as soldiers, and that it acts collectively with competence and honesty. These actions build societal cohesion and gain the trust of the citizens and national leaders.

### **Example of How Other Armies Build Cohesive Units**

A German army officer initially serves six years in the same battalion. This builds unit loyalty and fosters both horizontal and vertical cohesion. After serving in supporting billets, career soldiers return to their original regiment. This also enhances cohesion, quality of life, family support and retention. Command tours are stabilized for up to thirty months (Phipps, 1982).

In the British army, officers and soldiers usually served in the same regiment for their entire career. The British army regiment has historically been viewed as an unrivaled builder of cohesion. In peacetime morale and wartime doggedness, the British regiment was a tightly knit family. This family bonding minimized stragglers, deserters and shirkers, and maximized a shared spirit of sacrifice and teamwork.

The U.S. Army has tried numerous cohesion programs in attempt to counteract the effects of the individual replacement system. The most notable program was COHORT. COHORT soldiers were found to be more competitive, trained to higher levels, had more feelings for their unit, experienced lower attrition, and stronger unit bonds. COHORT, and all the other Army cohesion programs, failed because it was not supported or valued by the senior leaders of the Army and could not overcome the

individualist nature of the personnel system (Wong, 1985).

In the early 1960s, United States Marines Corps infantry battalions on the West Coast rotated back and forth to Japan using the transplacement system. This system was a unit reconstitution system. All Marines, including officers and non-commissioned officers served 30 months, two 15 month cycles, with a 50 percent personnel turnover at the end of each cycle (Canby, Gudmundsson and Shay, 2000). This system was discontinued during the first year of the Vietnam War when the Secretary of Defense pressured the Marine Corps to conform to the Army's individual personnel system.

### **How Cohesion is Destroyed**

Cohesion is destroyed by personnel turbulence. No matter how hard a unit trains, team skills cannot be maintained if the teams are not maintained. Constant turnover requires continuous but fruitless retraining. People who do not know and trust each other only cooperate under a system of rules. In combat, rules break down and only personal relationships matter.

Introducing new leaders on top of trained cohesive units particularly damages vertical cohesion.

“Where the turnover involves leaders... units are forced to expend enormous amounts of adaptive energy getting used to the style and emphasis of each...new commander. And each new commander takes time to become familiar with the unit's situation and personnel...with inevitable loss of momentum and direction...” (Sorley, 1980)

Although personnel stability is not the only thing needed to build cohesion, a lack of stability is the only thing needed to *destroy* cohesion.

## 5.5 How is Cohesion Measured?

Measuring cohesion is difficult. Surveys have been used to measure each individual's estimation of the cohesion within his unit, but this polling is subject to many variables. Questions have included, "The soldiers in my platoon really care about each other" (Mael, 1989). Measuring unit performance is also an imperfect technique because some aspects of performance may be unrelated to cohesion.

Measuring stability, the prerequisite for cohesion, is more straightforward. Unit stability can be captured by generating a *familiarity index*, an average of the time each person in the unit has shared with his comrades. Researchers have used familiarity indices to compare individual replacement units with stabilized units. Simulations have showed that the lowest familiarity index of stabilized units is generally twice as high as *best* familiarity index for individual replacement units (Tillson, 1990).

Stability is only a measure of shared time. The familiarity index does not capture the quality of the time, the time a unit has spent training in teamed events, being tested, and overcoming challenges. A high familiarity index is therefore a measure of *potential* cohesion. Unit leaders and the training that they schedule are responsible for maximizing the value of this shared time.

**Table 5-1** is a matrix worksheet used to generate a **Unit Familiarity Index**. The index represents the average number of months that each person in a small unit has shared with the others in the unit. Higher familiarity index values represent higher potential unit cohesion. Introducing new individuals brings the average down. **Table 5-2** is an **Example Unit Familiarity Index** for an infantry squad that has been together for six months. The three senior Marines have the

benefit of having served together for more than a year, and two of them served together in the same training company prior to joining the unit. One man has just joined the unit. Note how the common experiences of the Marines, including recruit training, the school of infantry, and prior service in the same squad increase the index, while the addition of one new person decreases it. The squad's familiarity would have been higher, 6.75 months versus 6.11, if the new man had not joined. Note also how a single person's one-month absence reduces the familiarity of every Marine in the squad.

**Table 5-3** is a worksheet to generate a **Leader Stability Index** for a unit. This index represents the average number of months that each leader has served in his particular billet. Above the squad and section level, Officers and Staff Non-Commissioned Officers contribute to vertical cohesion with their subordinate units, and horizontal cohesion among themselves, only as long as they remain in the same billet. Changing billets disrupts vertical cohesion. Introducing new people brings the average down. **Table 5-4** is an **Example Leader Stability Index** for an infantry company. Two platoon sergeants, despite serving in the company for over a year, have just changed billets when a new platoon sergeant joined the unit. This has the detrimental effect of creating three new billet holders in response to the introduction of only one new Marine.

Measuring stability at these levels is required because cohesion is a function of small units. Tracking transfers only between battalions ignores the internal friction that is generated by turbulence within the battalion. Organizational policy affects external turbulence, unit leaders affect internal turbulence. Leaders need to appreciate the importance of cohesion and track their units' stability in order to help them make good personnel decisions that reinforce unit cohesion



Table 5-2. Example Unit Familiarity Index.

Unit: 1st Squad, E/2/5

As Of Date: June 2002

Notes on the Example:

1. Meagher, O'Donahue and Dixon have all earned in this squad for 12 months. Meagher did not know O'Donahue or Dixon prior to this.

2. O'Donahue and Dixon earned in different squads of the same company in recruit training and the school of infantry for six months. Each of these prior months counts for 1/2 month.

3. The five Lance Corporals all joined the squad 6 months ago. All of them have worked together for six months in different squads in the same company; in recruit training and the school of infantry. Each of these prior months counts for 1/2 month.

4. Waverly was IAD one month, advancing his time in the squad to 5 months. PFC Newby joined the squad 12 days ago. Each part of a month counts as a full month.

5. Eachman's average is calculated by adding scores and dividing by his number of years (8).

6. The total average months in the last column are added and then divided by the number of men in the squad (9).

7. The final index is just a little over 6 months. Note that all the common experiences of the men are advanced by the addition of one new man.

|                   | 1. Sgt Meagher | 2. Cpl O'Donahue | 3. LCpl King | 4. LCpl Garibaldi | 5. Cpl Dixon | 6. LCpl Emmet | 7. LCpl Waverly | 8. LCpl Perez | 9. PFC Newby | Total Months           | Average Months |
|-------------------|----------------|------------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|--------------|------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Sgt Meagher    | 12             | 6                | 6            | 6                 | 12           | 6             | 5               | 6             | 1            | 54                     | 6.75           |
| 2. Cpl O'Donahue  | 12             | 6                | 6            | 6                 | 15           | 6             | 5               | 6             | 1            | 57                     | 7.13           |
| 3. LCpl King      | 6              | 6                | 9            | 9                 | 6            | 9             | 8               | 9             | 1            | 54                     | 6.75           |
| 4. LCpl Garibaldi | 6              | 6                | 9            | 6                 | 6            | 9             | 8               | 9             | 1            | 54                     | 6.75           |
| 5. Cpl Dixon      | 12             | 15               | 6            | 6                 | 6            | 6             | 5               | 6             | 1            | 57                     | 7.13           |
| 6. LCpl Emmet     | 6              | 6                | 9            | 9                 | 6            | 6             | 8               | 9             | 1            | 54                     | 6.75           |
| 7. LCpl Waverly   | 5              | 5                | 8            | 8                 | 5            | 8             | 8               | 1             |              | 48                     | 6.00           |
| 8. LCpl Perez     | 6              | 6                | 9            | 9                 | 6            | 9             | 8               | 1             |              | 54                     | 6.75           |
| 9. PFC Newby      | 1              | 1                | 1            | 1                 | 1            | 1             | 1               | 1             |              | 8                      | 1.00           |
| 10.               |                |                  |              |                   |              |               |                 |               |              |                        |                |
| 11.               |                |                  |              |                   |              |               |                 |               |              |                        |                |
| 12.               |                |                  |              |                   |              |               |                 |               |              |                        |                |
| 13.               |                |                  |              |                   |              |               |                 |               |              |                        |                |
| 14.               |                |                  |              |                   |              |               |                 |               |              |                        |                |
| 15.               |                |                  |              |                   |              |               |                 |               |              |                        |                |
|                   |                |                  |              |                   |              |               |                 |               |              | 55.04                  | 6.11           |
|                   |                |                  |              |                   |              |               |                 |               |              | Total Average Months   |                |
|                   |                |                  |              |                   |              |               |                 |               |              | Unit Familiarity Index |                |

Table 5-3. Leader Stability Index.

| Leader Stability Index |                  | Unit:                  |                  |
|------------------------|------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| As Of Date:            |                  | Instructions           |                  |
| 1.                     | Months in Billet | 31.                    | Months in Billet |
| 2.                     |                  | 32.                    |                  |
| 3.                     |                  | 33.                    |                  |
| 4.                     |                  | 34.                    |                  |
| 5.                     |                  | 35.                    |                  |
| 6.                     |                  | 36.                    |                  |
| 7.                     |                  | 37.                    |                  |
| 8.                     |                  | 38.                    |                  |
| 9.                     |                  | 39.                    |                  |
| 10.                    |                  | 40.                    |                  |
| 11.                    |                  | 41.                    |                  |
| 12.                    |                  | 42.                    |                  |
| 13.                    |                  | 43.                    |                  |
| 14.                    |                  | 44.                    |                  |
| 15.                    |                  | 45.                    |                  |
|                        |                  | Total Months           |                  |
|                        |                  | Men                    |                  |
|                        |                  | Leader Stability Index |                  |

Table 5-4. Example Leader Stability Index.

| Leader Stability Index |    | Unit: Echo Company 2/5 | As Of Date: June 2002 | Notes on the Example                                                                                                                                                                                                               |  |
|------------------------|----|------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
|                        |    | Months in Billet       |                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |  |
| 1. Capt Means          | 14 | 16.                    | 31.                   | 1. Arroyo has been the XO for 5 months. Each of his previous 10 months as weapons platoon commander count 1/2 month.                                                                                                               |  |
| 2. 1stSgt Rush         | 18 | 17.                    | 32.                   | 2. Lawler has been with the company for 6 months, but spent three months detached to division schools.                                                                                                                             |  |
| 3. Lt Arroyo           | 10 | 18.                    | 33.                   | 3. Devenichi joined the company from weapons company two weeks ago. His weapons company billet does not count. Two weeks is rounded up to one month.                                                                               |  |
| 4. GySgt Wayman        | 7  | 19.                    | 34.                   | 4. Peterson and Malbow had served in the company for 18 months. They both changed platoons when DeVenichi arrived. $(1 + (18/2) = 10)$                                                                                             |  |
| 5. Lt Rapicault        | 20 | 20.                    | 35.                   | 5. Note how the platoon sergeant switch created three new billet holders instead of one and reduced the stability index. If Peterson and Malbow had remained in their original billets, the Leader Stability Index would be 11.58. |  |
| 6. SSgt Malbow         | 10 | 21.                    | 36.                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |  |
| 7. Lt Puttloff         | 6  | 22.                    | 37.                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |  |
| 8. SSgt Anguiano       | 18 | 23.                    | 38.                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |  |
| 9. Lt Lawler           | 3  | 24.                    | 39.                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |  |
| 10. SSgt Devenichi     | 1  | 25.                    | 40.                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |  |
| 11. Lt Barr            | 4  | 26.                    | 41.                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |  |
| 12. SSgt Peterson      | 10 | 27.                    | 42.                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |  |
| 13.                    |    | 28.                    | 43.                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |  |
| 14.                    |    | 29.                    | 44.                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |  |
| 15.                    |    | 30.                    | 45.                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |  |
|                        |    | Total Months           |                       | 121                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |  |
|                        |    | Men                    |                       | 12                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |  |
|                        |    | Leader Stability Index |                       | 10.08                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |  |

## 6.0 Reconstitution

### 6.1 Three Models

Infantry units continually gain and lose people. There are three basic models for how this process is controlled. Each model reflects different philosophies on the importance of personnel stability.

*The Life Cycle model* treats each unit like a living organism. It is born, it lives on active duty for a number of years, lives on reserve duty for a number of years, and is then abolished. At the birth of the unit, a large number of new soldiers are linked up with a cadre of officers and senior non-commissioned officers. The unit trains and operates as part of the active force. At the end of the soldier's enlistments, all the soldiers are released to the reserve *as a unit*. The unit, including the regular officers and non-commissioned officers, lives on in the reserve forces. When the reserve obligations of the soldiers are finished, the unit is abolished. The regular cadre then return to active units. Many European armies use this model. It is based historical requirements to organize each year's worth of conscripts, usually by geographic area, and maintain them as units for rapid war expansion. These types of units usually have significant cohesion (Canby, Gudmundsson and Shay, 2000).

*The Reconstitution model* rebuilds units by introducing blocks of new soldiers at clearly defined points on a regular schedule. In peacetime, each unit trains together with the same people for a number of years. At a pre-determined date, half the soldiers depart the unit and an equal number of soldiers join, bringing the unit back up to strength. The reconstitution cycle is usually set at half the length of a soldier's enlistment, permitting each soldier to serve two cycles. This overlap permits the seasoned soldiers to serve their second cycle as junior leaders and assist in training the new people. Regular officers and non-commissioned

officers serve two complete cycles as well, with half of them departing each cycle for other duties and half remaining to provide continuity. This model permits cohesive units to accept newcomers all at once and then focus on rapidly regaining their cohesion through focused training.

*The Steady State model* sacrifices unit stability for fully manned units and organizational efficiency. This is the model that U.S. forces have used since World War I. Units are maintained at near full strength by a continuous supply of soldiers on a regular, sometimes daily, schedule.

General George Marshall's experience on the Western Front during World War I was with an army built on mass numbers of hastily trained riflemen. Large infantry units, packed in tight terrain corridors, experienced high casualties. These units needed a daily replacement of casualties in order to continue to fight. General Marshall used this model during World War II to ensure that divisions received daily replacements to keep their numbers up. The type of warfare and the type of army that generated this system no longer exist. The irony today is that large-scale mobilization is the last priority of today's force, yet mobilization assumptions drive the personnel system. A smaller cohesive team fights better than a larger non-cohesive team. Infusing new troops to restore numbers does not preserve combat capability, it *reduces* capability. It also does not improve morale. In one study, when infantry Marines were asked, "If your squad was reduced from thirteen to nine, would you want four newcomers to join just before a fight?" Marines overwhelmingly did not want to figure out the newcomers just before a fight (Canby, Gudmundsson and Shay, 2000).

"The worst personnel policy in history" was how the steady state, individual rotation system for U.S. forces in Vietnam was described by one critic (Krepinevich, 1988). During the Korean War, individual tour length and individual

replacement policies generated numerous complaints by commanders.

“A unit must train and fight as a whole from the beginning of a training cycle or campaign to its completion.”

“Unit commanders...seldom commanded their units for a sufficient length of time to grasp knowledge of their units’ capabilities.” (Lowe, 1955)

Even in peacetime, the steady state model has detrimental effects on a unit’s readiness. Units devote major portions of their training time to meet only basic soldier skills. The U.S. Army’s 2nd Infantry Division in Korea, supported by one-year assignments, suffers almost one hundred percent turnover a year. A readiness report on the 10th Mountain Division showed personnel turnover for the previous two years had been 85.3 percent and 98.5 percent (Senate Staffer, 2000). General Don Starry, U.S. Army, observed that when personnel turbulence exceeds twenty percent per quarter, no militarily useful training can be accomplished (Canby, Gudmundsson and Shay, 2000).

## 6.2 The Benefits of Reconstitution

Of the three models, reconstitution is the most robust. Unlike life-cycle units, which at their birth and death have a combat potential of near zero, reconstitution units never fall to dangerously low levels of readiness. Unlike steady-state units, which are continuously forced to retrain new people, reconstitution units benefit from cycles of stability. As an additional benefit, peacetime reconstitution is the same procedure needed to join batches of replacements in combat. This is a combat skill for units. The process is the same, but in combat the interval between reconstitutions is shortened.

Reconstitution does disrupt a unit. In peacetime, this disruption is minimized by keeping the reconstitution cycle as long as possible and

scheduling progressive training that is tailored to the introduction of new personnel. In combat, this disruption is minimized by pulling a unit out of contact to join replacements and reconstitute the unit.

Reconstitution *cannot* be done while a unit is in contact. Replacements need to make two significant adjustments: (1) to the unit, leaders and team mates and (2) to combat, the enemy and terror. This is too much to do all at once. During World War II, the Marine Corps assigned replacement drafts of men to divisions prior to an operation. The intent was that these Marines would be used to reconstitute depleted units. When Marines were instead joined under fire, it *decreased* rather than increased combat power and had a vicious effect on the cycle of casualties.

The replacements lacked confidence. They did not know their leaders nor their unit, had not trained with the unit, and they were seeing combat and terror for the first time. To overcome this, non-commissioned officers had to lead and encourage them at great personal risk. This resulted in *increased* casualties among the most experienced leaders. Based on his World War II experiences, Lieutenant Colonel Robert E. Cushman, United States Marine Corps, later to become Commandant, recommended that units go into combat overstrength, and when losses occur, they be pulled out of combat and reconstituted out of the line (Cushman, 1947).

The U.S. Army manual *100-9 Reconstitution* claims that “Reconstitution is extraordinary action...to restore units to...combat effectiveness.” The manual recommends reconstitution only when a unit is completely combat ineffective (United States Army, 1992).

Nothing could be further from the truth. This view is based on the Army’s individual replacement mentality. Reconstitution is a normal process. The unrecognized irony of the Army manual is that units that receive new

replacements on a continuous basis are undergoing the disruption of reconstitution *almost every day*.

The general steps of reconstitution include:

- Remove the unit from combat.
- Join new members to existing cohesive teams. Join new leaders.
- Share combat lessons learned.

- Integrate new equipment.
- Train to reestablish cohesion.

Every activity must be designed to increase the integration of new personnel. Previous teams should be maintained. Leaders must resist reorganization and the breaking up of experienced teams. Reformed small units then need to experience as much as possible the stress and success of training to build their cohesion before returning to combat.



## Part III: Cohesion and the Future Marine Corps Infantry Battalion

### 7.0 Cohesion and the Marine Corps Infantry Battalion As-It-Is

#### 7.1 The Marine Corps Cohesion Program

General C.C. Krulak, a former Commandant of the Marine Corps, initiated a Marine Corps cohesion program in December 1996 (Krulak, 1996). Marine Corps Order 3500.28 *Marine Corps Cohesion Program Standing Operating Procedures* was formally approved in May of 1999. The order established two initiatives to support unit cohesion for first term Marines.

*Synchronization* matches a ‘fill window,’ the period of time when new Marines report to their unit, with each unit’s training and deployment schedule. The goal is to join Marines at least eight months prior to unit deployment to ensure that sufficient unit training time is available. Additionally, each Marine’s 42-month usable length of service is synchronized with the unit schedule so that a Marine deploys twice with the unit and departs after a deployment, during the normal lull. This maximizes the number of

Marines who serve in the same battalion during their entire first enlistment by avoiding transfers of Marines unable to deploy due to their end-of-service dates.

*Team Integrity* creates and builds cohesive groups of privates in training schools and then assigns these groups to a single battalion. These teams train together, garrison together, deploy together and possibly fight together (United States Marine Corps, 1999).

#### 7.2 Infantry Battalion Cohesion Strengths and Weaknesses

The cohesion order, 3500.28, improved cohesion among first term Marines within infantry battalions and called attention to the importance of the cohesion concept. Marine Corps infantry battalions benefit greatly when large numbers of new Marines are joined during a single fill window. Battalions designated for Marine Expeditionary Units (MEUs) receive all their personnel, new Marines and leaders, 180 days before deployment. Battalions slated for the Unit Deployment Program (UDP) in Okinawa receive

all their personnel 90 days before deployment. Both of these standards aid in building cohesion due to the stabilized training that can occur prior to deployment overseas. The training cycle for battalions, while not defined by any training orders, is well understood to be parallel to the deployment cycle. Units train progressively toward an end state of readiness for combat before deployment overseas. Training exercises are continuously scheduled. When units are stable, these exercises serve to build experienced Marines and cohesive units.

As far as possible, battalions attempt to stabilize their leaders with their training cycle, further building vertical cohesion. Additional horizontal cohesion between leaders is enhanced when leaders know and have served with each other before. The relatively small size of the infantry officer and staff non-commissioned officer population, their attendance at common schools, as well as frequent return of leaders to the same units where they had served before, serves to increase familiarization between leaders.

Officers and non-commissioned officers, however, do not join battalions during established fill windows. This lack of synchronization between new Marines and their leaders weakens vertical cohesion. Some Marines serve under four separate platoon commanders during their first enlistment. When addressing the problem of late additions to battalions, the 3500.28 cohesion order states "Out-of-cycle replacements run counter to the philosophy of unit cohesion." Yet out-of-cycle replacement is exactly how officers and non-commissioned officers are joined. The cohesion order applies only to new Marines.

Officers and non-commissioned officers who serve in their billets for only portions of the training cycle degrade vertical cohesion with their Marines and horizontal cohesion among their peers. Battalion commanders typically serve for the majority of a training cycle. Some company commanders, however, serve for less than a year. The Marine Corps does not publish

guidance on recommended tour lengths for platoon, company or battalion command, nor do tour length guidelines exist for staff non-commissioned officer billets.

The Marine Corps' emphasis on giving as many officers as possible a chance to command at the company and battalion level contributes significantly to unit turbulence. The effects of new leaders are sometimes made worse by local decisions. Often the introduction of a new leader causes the local command to shuffle a number of leaders. Thus one new person may create two to four new billet holders. On return from overseas, some Marines transfer to another battalion that is immediately deploying. This action gains the Marine two deployments at the expense of his unit and his unit's cohesion.

Battalions suffer from a lack of qualified junior non-commissioned officers. The lack of sufficient numbers of well-trained small unit leaders significantly weakens unit cohesion. The 3500.28 cohesion order addresses this problem with guidelines for assigning sergeants to battalions prior to each fill window. However, the Marine Corps accepts the fact that units will fill, train, and deploy with well below the number of Marines authorized by the tables of organization.

The Government Accounting Office has found that a shortage of non-commissioned officers is one of the biggest detriments to readiness. These shortages prevent units from being trained and led by experienced sergeants (Gebicke, 1998).

The majority of training events for infantry battalions do not focus on the small unit. Company training time is near the bottom of the priority list, commonly superseded by large exercises, annual training requirements, ceremonies, and support details. Large training events receive the majority of effort, time, and resources. Ironically, despite their expense, these large events are the least effective vehicles for training units below the company level. Even when company training does get on the

schedule, there are few resources and many inhibitors for small unit leaders. A fill window eight months before deployment does not allow sufficient time for a battalion to train, especially in those units where six months are reserved for Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) training (McBreen, 2000).

Cohesion is weakened by support requirements. Units typically sacrifice Marines for the "Fleet Assistance Program" (FAP) to work for months at the pool or gym, for training exercise support, maintenance support, or other activities unrelated to unit combat requirements. These Marines miss unit training. Both the individual and his unit suffer in terms of cohesion.

Formal school courses also serve to interrupt unit cohesion for both the individual and his unit. Organizational schools cannot be synchronized with each unit's schedule, and the resulting conflicts are usually solved at the expense of the small unit.

Married Marines spend less time together off-duty, decreasing social bonding. Even training time is affected when family issues remove a Marine from training events. Deployments and training exercises, which eliminate distractions and keep Marines together for long training periods, as well as the improved stability of married Marines, serve to offset this potential decrease in cohesion (Lawson, 1996).

Marine leaders, faced with numerous competing priorities, frequently sacrifice unit cohesion for other goals. The effects of shortsighted personnel decisions and the importance of stability are not well understood. Procedures for receiving replacements in combat are not well understood. Habits and assumptions generated by years of individual replacements are not easy to change.

There are no good cohesion references for troop leaders. There is no organizational guidance on

the benefits of keeping Marines in the same platoon. General Krulak intended that team integrity Marines be assigned to the lowest possible unit, ideally the squad. Unit needs usually make this impossible. The 3500.28 order provides very little guidance for unit commanders.

Transfers between units within the same battalion are common. Research has shown, however, that the benefits of cohesion only take place within the social horizon of an individual. The social horizon of most infantry Marines is the company, and for officers and non-commissioned officers it is the battalion (Canby, Gudmundsson and Shay, 2000).

Despite solid efforts, the Marine Corps has not put sufficient emphasis on cohesion. The most telling evidence of this, and the most serious shortcoming of our system, is that unit stability is invisible to unit readiness reporting (Sorley, 1980).

## **8.0 Cohesion and the Marine Corps Infantry Battalion As-It-Will-Be**

### **8.1 What is To Be Done?**

Marine Corps infantry battalions should be composed of the most cohesive small units that the Marine Corps can build. The benefits of cohesion are widely recognized. The difficulties are in implementation.

Personnel and training decisions are a balance of many competing goals. To improve cohesion in the Marine Corps, we need to prioritize those factors that contribute to cohesion and reduce the importance of other factors.

The most important steps should be changes to the cohesion order. The Marine Corps needs to:

1. Assign officers to infantry battalions for four years.

2. Assign non-commissioned and staff non-commissioned officers to infantry battalions for four years.
3. Establish a two-year “reconstitution and training cycle” for each battalion. Tie this cycle to the deployment cycle. Establish six-week windows at the beginning and end of each cycle. Transfer *all Marines* during this window. Change the term “fill window” to “reconstitution window.”
  - a. During the reconstitution window, new Marines join, career Marines join, Marines at the end of their active service depart, and career Marines who have served four years depart. With rare exceptions, no one joins or leaves the battalion except during reconstitution windows.
  - b. Joining all Marines 18 months prior to deployment eliminates separate “lock-on” targets for battalions supporting the Unit Deployment Program and Marine Expeditionary Units, and the “fill window” targets of 8 to 16 months prior to deployment. All units are “locked-on” by a single reconstitution fill.
  - c. Assignment of unit leaders should be staggered from cycle to cycle to provide continuity. When necessary, service obligations for infantry Marines should be extended in order to ensure those Marines serve two full cycles.
4. Collect quarterly stability reports from infantry battalions. Add stability indices to readiness reports.
  - a. **Section 5.5** includes techniques for reporting stability at the small unit level. Using those techniques, a sample infantry company report would read:

**Alpha Company**  
**30 June 2002 (12th month of cycle)**

Leader Stability Index:  
 10.7 months

Average squad/section Familiarity Index:  
 13.3 months

High squad/ section Familiarity Index:  
 17.1 months

Low squad/section Familiarity Index:  
 10.9 months

- b. The 3500.28 cohesion order stipulates one Measure of Effectiveness as the percentage of Marines who serve in same battalion for their entire first enlistment. This should be changed to company.

5. Overfill units. To account for normal losses during the two-year reconstitution and training cycle, battalions should be over filled during their reconstitution window.
6. Rewrite Marine Corps Order 3500.28 to implement the above five steps.

A series of supporting actions are also necessary to build an institutional ‘culture of cohesion’ within the Marine Corps:

1. *TECOM*. Publish training guidance for battalion training cycles. Recommend that the first eight months of training focus on building small units. Recommend large unit exercises be scheduled only during the last eight months prior to deployment. Recommend school schedules that support the training cycle (McBreen, 2000).
2. *Manpower*. Publish recommended tour lengths for infantry unit commanders and staff non-commissioned officer billets. The U.S. Army recommends 24 months for platoon commanders and 18 months for

company commanders (Senate Staffer, 2000). Publish stability targets and goals for readiness reporting.

3. *Marine Corps University*. Publish a "Leader's Guide to Cohesion." Publish a "Leader's Guide to Reconstitution." Educate leaders on the importance of cohesion, and the techniques of building cohesion and executing reconstitution.
4. *Manpower*. Officially discourage marriage among first term infantry Marines.
5. *Operating Forces*. Increase the authority and responsibility of small unit leaders, especially non-commissioned officers, regarding personnel decisions that affect their Marines. Review regulations and policies to grant small unit leaders responsibility for punishment, schools, leave, and liberty.
6. *Manpower*. Assign career Marines returning to the operating forces to the same regiment where they served previously. Stop transferring career Marines upon promotion. Permit Marines selected for school to delay attendance for up to two years.
7. *Ground Combat Element Advocate*. Like equipment programs, improving cohesion needs a strong advocate to energize the issue and coordinate the above recommended actions among the multiple organizations within the Marine Corps (Bedard, 2002).

Proposed long-term initiatives will be easier to implement if infantry unit cohesion is strengthened. Some Marines have argued that six-month deployments to Okinawa overly decrease a unit's readiness and ought to be ended. A better solution may be to make multiple training deployments of one or two months to Okinawa and other locations to support both world-wide presence and conduct intensive area-specific training (Dixon, 1999).

Improving the capabilities of the Marine Expeditionary Unit program, off-shore basing, support for the Special Operations Command in the global war against terrorism, and other developments may change the way we man and deploy infantry battalions. Increasing the number of infantry battalions would fundamentally change the equation that balances deployment obligations, number of units, and deployment lengths.

Future Marine Corps deployment concepts could extend the reconstitution and training cycle to three years in order to include back to back deployments with only a few months between deployments. This would permit experienced second-float units to be assigned more difficult missions, especially military operations other than war. Future changes to the organization of the infantry battalion may include a higher percentage of career Marines. All these ideas would benefit if the Marine Corps fielded stronger battalions of cohesive units.

## 8.2 Why is Cohesion *More* Important Now?

For Marine Corps infantry battalions, small unit cohesion is more important today than at any time in our past. We are faced with an increasingly wide variety of threats and potential missions that demand improvements in our unit's capabilities. Our doctrine and equipment demand highly skilled and trained units. The American people and our elected leaders expect very high levels of warfighting competence. We strive to meet these goals today. But only an increase in cohesion will let us rise to the levels of competence now needed.

Cohesion is more important now for the following reasons:

### *Warfighting Doctrine*

- Expeditionary forces, capable of going to war at any time, need peacetime cohesion.

- Cohesion, leadership and training are the key combat multipliers for small expeditionary forces.
- *MCDP-1 Warfighting* requires that leaders share implicit communications, understanding of the commander's intent, mission orders, and tactics based on trust. These concepts require cohesion.
- Leaders, confident in their units' abilities, and units who trust their commanders, can execute with more initiative and engage in more sophisticated tactics. These capabilities require cohesion.
- Decentralized units on the future battlefield require more trust and cohesion.
- A professional force with a reduced emphasis on coercive discipline requires more cohesion.

#### *Training*

- New technology and new doctrine have increased training requirements. Cohesive units know how to train, train more effectively, train to higher levels, and retrain faster.
- Cohesion reduces the importance and expense of centralized unit training centers. Conversely, cohesion permits experience to be retained long after large, costly exercises.
- Current retraining requirements unnecessarily increase our tempo of operations. Cohesion produces better-trained units with less repetitive training effort.
- The Marine Corps' diverse population requires more training to build cohesive units from individuals of different backgrounds.

#### *Casualties*

- Cohesion reduces casualties of all types, saving trained manpower.
- The sheer terror modern combat causes more stress casualties. The Marine Corps is largely married and more susceptible to stress casualties. Cohesion reduces stress casualties.

#### *Expense*

- Personnel is the Marine Corps' greatest expense. Cohesive units maximize the value this expense.
- Small less-expensive cohesive units are as combat capable as large non-cohesive units.
- Cohesive units reduce training expenses and equipment maintenance expenses.
- Cohesion among officers permits leaner staffs.

#### *Relevance*

- Highly capable Marine Corps units are more relevant in a variety of crisis situations. Employment decisions between joint forces will go to the most relevant and capable force.
- Safety is increased in cohesive units. Force protection is increased in cohesive units. Units that suffer fewer casualties are more relevant to foreign policy decision-makers.
- Highly capable units reduce the risk and political cost of deploying ground forces. These forces are more valuable and relevant to foreign policy decision-makers.

## **9.0 Conclusion**

The Marine Corps can implement many programs for increasing the combat capability of infantry battalions. No enhancements will be effective, however, until we address and improve unit stability and cohesion.

Unit cohesion costs almost nothing, yet it has historically proven to be the single most valuable and effective method for building highly capable infantry units. The long-term benefits of cohesion are competence and readiness.

Arguments against cohesion, some of which are discussed in Appendix D, focus on the difficulties of implementation. The importance of cohesion to the Marine Corps far outweighs the costs and difficulties. The Marine Corps' 1999 cohesion program for entry-level Marines needs to be upgraded. A comprehensive program

should address the infantry battalion as a whole and coordinate the multiple supporting efforts needed to significantly improve the battalion's stability and cohesion.

We need to seize every possible opportunity to strengthen the capabilities of our infantry units. The challenges facing the Marine Corps in this next century make cohesion more important now than at any time in our past.

The duty of Marine leaders is to build and lead combat-capable units prepared to support the needs of our national defense. The obligation of Marine leaders is to prepare Marines for combat, and to protect our Marines from unnecessary casualties. We should strive to ensure that our Marines go into harm's way alongside comrades that they know and trust. Only when we are engaged in actual combat does the Marine Corps reap the true benefits of cohesive units. We need to start now.





## Appendix A

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Chapter 9 is “Tactical Cohesion.” Chapter 10 is “Why Men Fight.” “If [the soldier] is serving among men whom he has known for a long period...he will strive to hide his terror.”

**McBreen, Brendan B.** [“The Strength of the Wolf is the Pack.”](#) *Marine Corps Gazette*, February 2004, 47-49.

Improving infantry unit cohesion is more important than any combination of doctrinal, organizational, training or equipment improvements. It costs nothing. The author describes the benefits of unit cohesion and how it is built. Current Marine Corps manning practices are described as well as ideas on new manning practices that should be adopted.

**Meloy, Guy S.** [“General Ridgway’s Personnel Management Policy.”](#) *Army*, November 2002.

During WWII, General Ridgway froze all officer reassignments in the 82nd Airborne Division. Reassignments were only made if absolutely required, most-times due to casualties. The only moves were up – platoon to company command, company to battalion command. No lateral transfers were permitted, from one company to another or from one battalion to another. By the time the division jumped into Normandy, every man in every company could identify every other man from a hundred yards away; just by the way he walked. Stable leadership is a requirement for unit cohesion and combat effectiveness.

**Meyer, E.C.** “The Unit.” *Defense*, February 1982.

General E.C. Meyer, as Army Chief of Staff, instituted two cohesion programs in the early 1980s: The Regimental System (TRS) and COHORT.

**Nelson, P.D. and N.H. Berry.** “Cohesion in Marine Recruit Platoons.” Washington, DC: Navy Medical Neuropsychiatric Unit, Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, Department of the Navy, report No. 66-26, 1968.

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**Office of the Chief of Military History.** *The Replacement System in the U.S. Army: An Analytical Study of World War II Experience.* Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 14 September 1950.

**Palmer, Wiley and Keast.** “The Procurement and Training of Ground Combat Troops.” *United States Army in World War II: The Army Ground Forces*, Washington, DC: Historical Division, United States Army, 1948.

**Rush, Robert S.** “The Individual Replacement System: Good, Bad or Indifferent? Army Replacement Policy, Cold War and Before.” Inter-University Seminar on Armed Forces and Society, Biennial International Conference. 26 October 2003.

A study of the 22nd Infantry Regiment during WWII and U.S. Army replacement policies following the war. The author believes that individual replacements were critical to keeping units battle-ready. Commanders would rather have a full unit with some combat veterans, not a well-trained and cohesive unit with no combat experience.

**Sarkesian, Sam Charles, editor.** *Combat Effectiveness: Cohesion, Stress, and the Volunteer Military.* Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1980.

**Skull, Kenneth C.** “Cohesion: What We Learned from COHORT.” Carlisle Barracks, PA: United States Army War College, 2 April 1990.

**Straub, Christopher C.** [\*The Unit First: Keeping the Promise of Cohesion\*](#). Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1988.

**Thurman, Max.** “TRADOC Assessment of the Unit Manning System.” Memorandum for the Chief of Staff of the Army, 4 March 1989.

**Towell, Pat.** [\*Forging the Sword: Unit Manning in the U.S. Army\*](#).” Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, September 1994.

**Van der Schee, Wyn.** “The Regimental System: Outdated Anachronism or Adaptive Institution?” Calgary, Canada: The University of Calgary, Centre for Military and Strategic Studies, 12 April 2000.

An examination of the regimental system in the Canadian army and its effect on military effectiveness. The author uses his own experiences in two Canadian regiments as examples.

**Wong, Leonard, T.A. Kolditz, R.A. Millen and T.M. Potter.** [\*Why They Fight: Combat Motivation in the Iraq War\*](#).” Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, July 2003.

During OIF, the true strength of U.S. forces was not technology, but the individual soldier. This survey reaffirms historical findings: soldiers fight for each other. U.S. soldiers fight well when they trust each other and trust their leaders.



## Appendix C

### Glossary

|                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>cohesion</i>                 | “The existence of strong bonds of mutual trust, confidence, and understanding among members of a unit.” <i>FM 22-100 Military Leadership</i>                                                                                   |
| <i>cohesive unit</i>            | A small unit, a squad, crew or section, that has trained together to develop the collective will and bonding, the mutual trust and interdependency, and the collective skills needed to fight successfully on the battlefield. |
| <i>fill window</i>              | The period of time when new Marines join a battalion, when the battalion is “filled” with personnel.                                                                                                                           |
| <i>PTSD</i>                     | Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Psychiatric disorder that affects victims long after a traumatic event.                                                                                                                        |
| <i>primary group</i>            | The primary social circle of an individual. The most important people in a person’s life.                                                                                                                                      |
| <i>reconstitution</i>           | The process of rebuilding a unit by introducing new members into an already established organization.                                                                                                                          |
| <i>reconstitution window</i>    | The period of time when a unit is reconstituted. New personnel join and former personnel depart.                                                                                                                               |
| <i>social horizon</i>           | The limit and extent of one person’s social interactions.                                                                                                                                                                      |
| <i>state dependent learning</i> | The relationship between a learned task and the environment in which the task was learned.                                                                                                                                     |
| <i>turbulence</i>               | The upheaval of a unit due to changes in billets and the reassigning of personnel. Changes can be both inside the unit, <i>internal turbulence</i> , and outside the unit, <i>external turbulence</i> .                        |





## **Appendix D**

### **Arguments Against Cohesion**

#### **Existing Marine Corps Programs**

Q: Doesn't the Marine Corps already have great esprit de corps and morale?

A: Yes. Cohesion is not esprit de corps or morale. It is teamwork at the small unit level. A team must work together before they become a cohesive unit. Any random group of Marines will have esprit de corps, but this same group cannot execute complex team skills.

Q: Doesn't the Marine Corps already have a cohesion program?

A: The 1999 cohesion program only applies to new Marines. A more comprehensive program needs to address career Marines, training cycles and standards, unit manning levels, and other issues. Great strides have been made, but we are only halfway to where we should be.

Q: Don't habitual relationships, like those with engineer detachments and helicopter squadrons, help cohesion?

A: Yes. Habitual relationships build common experiences and increase our combined arms combat power. They do build horizontal cohesion between unit leaders. They do not build horizontal cohesion, however, within units interacting at the face-to-face level.

Q: Doesn't cohesion automatically happen when we go to war?

A: No. Before the Gulf War in 1991, some units had months in theater to train and build their cohesion. If a unit is introduced into combat immediately, its lack of cohesion will be a tremendous drawback. When individuals go into combat with strangers, the dominant emotion is self-preservation, not teamwork.

Q: Isn't the term 'cohesion' just the same as 'well-trained?' Don't we already have well-trained forces?

A: We have well-trained individuals. Cohesion is a function of collective unit training. In today's Marine Corps, we continuously reform and retrain units in an inefficient and expensive cycle. Despite exhausting training schedules, our infantry battalions are not as well trained as they need to be.

### **Personnel Policies**

Q: How can officers serve for four years in the same unit? Wouldn't that ruin their competitiveness?

A: Competence increases competitiveness. Fewer transfers equates to better-trained officers. Our emphasis on individual careers hurts unit cohesion. School seats can wait. Promotion should not trigger a change in billet.

Q: Don't leaders burn out if they serve too long? Especially in combat?

A: No. Officers served in World War II for the duration of the war. The six-month command tour in Vietnam was created to improve officer opportunities, not to avoid burnout. Only 8 percent of Army Command and General Staff Students in 1976 stated that burnout was a factor at the end of their six months in Vietnam, the majority felt that frequent changes hurt morale and discipline (Krepinevich, 1988).

Q: Aren't four years in the operating forces too strenuous for officers and staff non-commissioned officers?

A: No. Leader stability would actually serve to reduce some of the excessive operational tempo. Additionally, four years in the same unit reduces uncertainty and increases family quality of life. Families, like units, require trust, commitment and loyalty. Families can live in the same neighborhood and develop friendships with neighbors. Children can attend the same school for four years.

Q: How do security force Marines join an infantry battalion during their first enlistment?

A: They don't. Security force Marines, like Marines in infantry battalions should serve their entire initial enlistment in the same unit. Career Marines transfer into a battalion only during its reconstitution window.

Q: If all privates join on the same day, don't they all get promoted to Corporal on the same day?

A: No. Cohesive units in other armies select leaders based on years of observed competence and responsibility. The problem isn't cohesion, the problem is the promotion system. Centralized promotion for non-rated Marines is a legacy of an individual replacement mentality.

Q: How does a unit deal with normal losses due to medical, family, or non-EAS attrition?

A: The unit operates with fewer Marines. At reconstitution, units should be overfilled to anticipate small losses. Non-EAS attrition is less of a problem in cohesive units.

Q: Personnel turbulence is good training for war. Won't we need daily replacements in combat?

A: No. Experienced cohesive units remain quite combat capable even after significant losses. The history of combat shows that cohesion and capability are far more important than numbers of soldiers (Wainstein, 1986).

## **Leadership**

Q: Aren't cohesive units harder to lead?

A: Cohesive units are challenging to lead. This serves to increase the leader's growth and skills. Cohesive units can unsettle inexperienced or weak leaders. However, the self-sacrifice and effort that a cohesive unit will lavish on a respected leader far exceeds the effort the same leader could garner from a group of strangers. One enthusiastic Marine Platoon Sergeant, commenting on a newly-trained cohesive squad, stated that he "didn't need to teach them to work together...[they] did our work...before we even arrived." (Canby, Gudmundsson and Shay, 2000).

Q: What happens to leaders who arrive after their units have already been built?

A: A leader earns the trust of his soldiers through competence and caring. In the COHORT program, cohesive units proved especially difficult for late-joining lieutenants (Canby, Gudmundsson and Shay, 2000). Units have always challenged new leaders. Cohesive units encourage a leader to stretch his abilities.

## **Comrades**

Q: How do you promote non-commissioned officers from inside the same squad? You can't lead your buddies. People won't listen to their buddies. Leaders should be brought in from the outside. Isn't it difficult to order a friend into danger?

A: Some armies give an advantage to new leaders by insuring that they only lead strangers. Professional armies know that leading peers is difficult. That is why officer candidate

schools, non-commissioned officer training schools, military academies, and businesses use this technique to test and evaluate leaders. It is more difficult, but in the longer run, it's more effective. Questioned about small unit leadership in squads formed under the Marine Corps cohesion program, one Marine said, "At first it's hard, but once you get past that, it's so much better, because you know these guys...in leadership roles...[its] a lot easier to get things done." Another said, "It's easier to lead a cohesive squad" (Canby, Gudmundsson and Shay, 2000).

Armies with strong cohesion traditions have used this system throughout history. George MacDonald Fraser, serving with a British regiment in Burma during World War II, has commented that only in a cohesive unit with long experience and observed performance could a junior man of his ability be promoted ahead of his comrades to lead his unit (Fraser, 2001).

Q: Don't cohesive units reject newcomers?

A: Close-knit teams accept newcomers warily. Replacements need to be introduced during a well-structured reconstitution process. Reconstitution should emphasize a unit's unique capabilities, make the newcomers appreciate the unit, and then subject the unit, new members and old, to stressful training in order to bond this new group. Newcomers are accepted only after the unit has overcome new challenges and acquired new experiences. This is why units cannot be reconstituted while in contact with the enemy.

Q: Isn't a death in a cohesive unit far worse?

A: Yes. But a tightly knit team can share their grief, memorialize their peer, and help each other overcome the loss.

### **Battalion Issues**

Q: War plans need entire regiments, not battalions in rotating cycles. Regiments have to be ready at all times. How do reconstitution and training cycles support war readiness?

A: Regiments cannot be ready at all times. During any six-month period, a regiment will have (1) battalion deployed, (1) battalion ready to deploy, (1) battalion training, and (1) reconstituted battalion just starting the training process. During the Gulf War, brigade-sized units were formed by assembling battalions as they arrived in theater. This arrival date was based on their readiness. War Plans should follow this model.

The most ready battalions, one from each regiment, should form the initial brigades. The next battalions on the step should form the second tier of brigades. Regimental headquarters should be training headquarters, not warfighting headquarters. Another challenge during a mobilization is to keep units together. Stripping cohesive units to fill others creates two weak units. If we cannot build cohesive units in peacetime, how can we hope to do it in war?

Q: Won't long training cycles generate less readiness? Greater periods of unreadiness?

A: No. Readiness is not a function of numbers, it is a function of training and capability. Two-year training cycles will produce units that are far readier for war than the current system. At the beginning of a cycle, a unit will lose half of its people, but the remaining Marines represent the remnants of a well-trained unit. Training after reconstitution is faster and more effective because it is built upon the experience of this seasoned cadre.

### **Behavior**

Q: What if a cohesive unit is a band of criminals? Isn't a cohesive unit more prone to collective disobedience?

A: No. Disobedience is less likely in highly bonded units. Fewer crimes occur (Manning and Ingraham, 1987). Good small unit leaders prevent collective disobedience. Well-led cohesive units do not tolerate misbehavior that discredits their group (Henderson, 1985). In the worst case, a commander always has the option of breaking up a unit completely.

Q: How does a platoon sergeant deal with problem Marines or Marines who need help?

A: The best place for a Marine who is in trouble or in need of help is with his comrades. In some circumstances, a Marine will have to be moved out of his unit, but this should only be done as a last resort.

Q: Doesn't a cohesive unit become lazy and complacent?

A: No. If not challenged, any unit becomes complacent. Well-trained units need increasing levels of challenges. Progressive training, which is only possible with long service stable units, erases complacency and keeps Marines energized by increasing their skill levels and broadening their experiences and capabilities.

