

PSYCHOLOGICAL MODEL OF SOLDIER BRAVERY

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ABSTRACT

The paper contains a psychological model of bravery summarizing the knowledge from reference and from studies and experiences by Croatian psychologists.

Rather than give a thorough explanation of bravery, the model was intended to compare all factors recognised. A well-laid out scheme of factors and the order of their impact might encourage bravery, whereby the model also has instructive importance.

The model recognises three determinating groups of factors: conditions, incitements and circumstances.

Preconditions primarily concern individual soldiers characteristics presetting them for acts of bravery. Preconditions imply abilities required for the duty. Inefficient behaviour will not lead to bravery, and that factor can be influenced primarily by selection of personnel. Another critical factor is soldier's value system, offering motives for bravery; this implies the importance to attach to value system in the classification process.

Incitements refer to factors creating an appropriate setting for bravery. This primarily applies to togetherness (motivating a soldier to go as far as sacrificing for the sake of his fellow-combatants), qualification (which combined with capabilities enables soldier efficiency), command system, affecting the general esprit de corps, and awareness, primarily being informed of the goals of the campaign and the situation in the battlefield. Second in degree, yet important, are discipline and equipment.

Circumstances - that is, situation, is a key factor, characterized foremostly by danger. As evidenced from reference, circumstances especially favouring bravery are those of surrounding, rescuing (wounded) fellow combatants, fighting a superior enemy and combat "to the last round".

Acts of bravery will occur when soldiers display goal-oriented behaviour in extremely dangerous situations, There are situations, unfortunately, when soldiers misjudge the situation and unnecessarily expose themselves or even the whole unit to danger. Those, however, are not instances of bravery but of unnecessary exposure to peril. Soldiers should, therefore, receive instruction on how to behave in dangerous situations as described, and an emphasis should be put on differentiation of true bravery from the aimless or foolhardiness.

INTRODUCTION

Bravery is a phenomenon mostly associated with warfare and the military. Acts of bravery are admired and commended by the military. They make an integral element of the entire pop-culture depicting the military (war films, fiction, feature stories). Classical theorists of war too addressed bravery; cf. von Clausewitz: "... fear looks to physical preservation, courage to the moral preservation. Courage, then, is a nobler instinct. But because it is so, it will not allow itself to be used as a lifeless instrument which produces its effects exactly according to prescribed measure. Courage is therefore no mere counterpoise to danger in order to neutralise the latter in its effects, but a peculiar power in itself" (von Clausewitz, 1997; English translation by Lord Ellesmere), or by Sun Tze "The commander stands for the general's qualities of wisdom, sincerity, benevolence, strictness and courage" (Sun Tze, 1995).

The military itself is interested in understanding the essence of bravery, and the ways to reinforce it. Suggestions concerning bravery as a psychological notion have been sought from psychologists. However, efforts towards a in-depth research into bravery revealed serious reference void in the field, unlike other (military) psychological concepts (e.g. fear, combat stress, leadership...).

The authors of this paper, motivated by training needs also, set to furnish notions and theories on factors favouring bravery to respond to the hard task of exploring soldier bravery. The factors have been mapped into a "model of soldier bravery" for easier reference (Figure 1).

Only the principal sources for the model will be listed here.

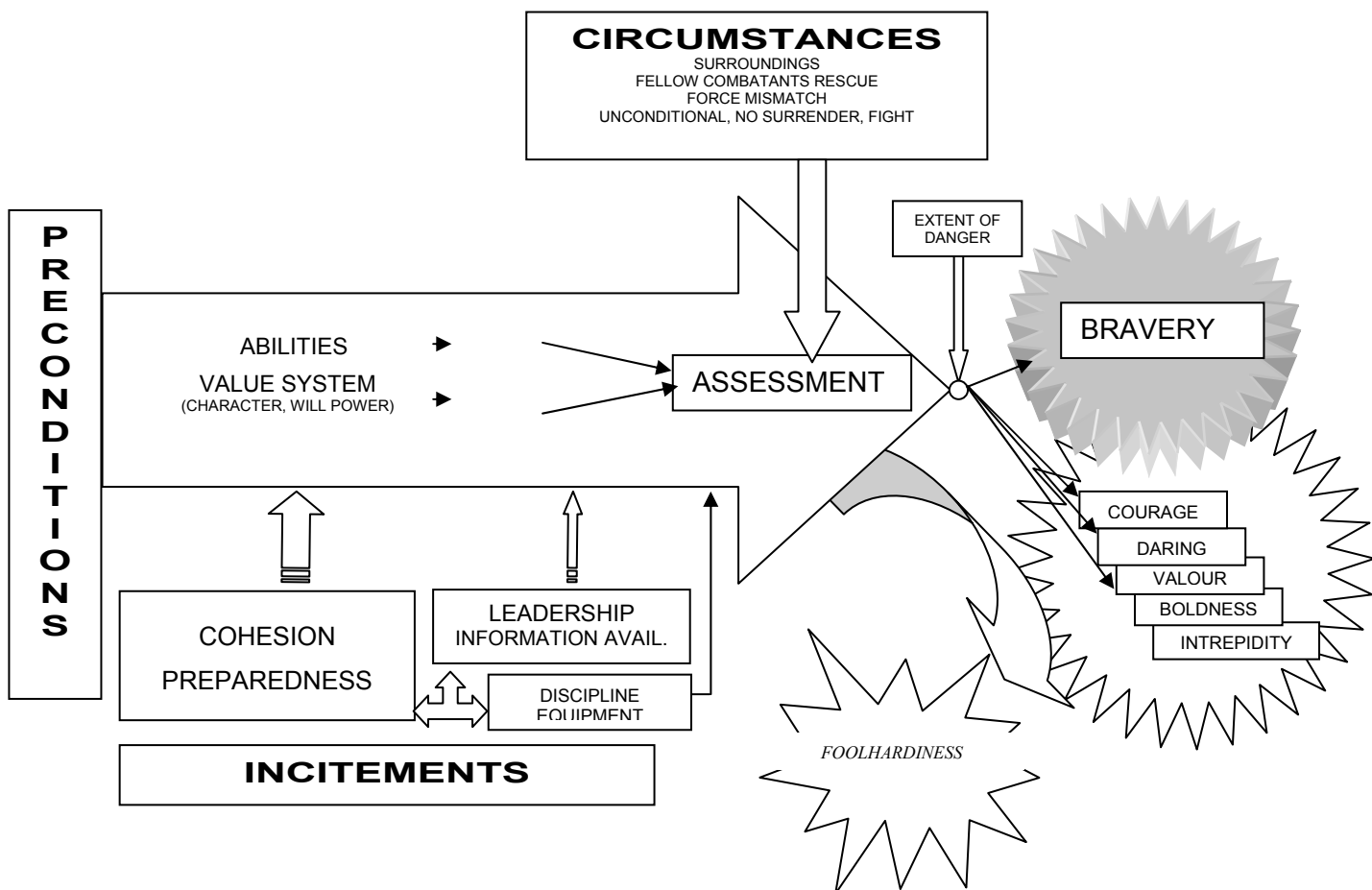


Figure 1: PSYCHOLOGICAL MODEL OF SOLDIER BRAVERY

HERO IMAGE

The basic question “How do you recognise a hero” still remains a question, on which opinions diverge. Ideals of heroes differed across epochs in the history. In Middle Ages, for instance, heroes were knights endowed with 7 virtues: faith, hope, mercy, justice, reason, strength (valour) and modesty (Lull, 1995). Modern studies reveal overlapping of the modern perception of a hero with the classical medieval model, allowing us to state features of a hero. According to the research by American psychologist Frank Farley (1995, Psychology today), a true hero displays excellency in five facets - *determinants* (bravery, honesty, generosity, authority, risk acceptance, skill and ability), *depth* (a mythical, timeless, almost otherworldly quality above the hero and his acts), *domain* (the field of bravery), *database* (where we get information about the heroes and where heroes and their deeds are evaluated) and *distance* (a sense of inaccessibility).

Agree or not with the description, it still does not tell much as to what bravery is conditioned and motivated by.

PRECONDITIONS

“Anatomy of Courage” by Lord Moran (1987) presents a widespread view of psychological structure of bravery, based on the author’s experience from the World War I. Lord Moran characterises bravery as will strength overcoming fear, and argues that soldiers displaying modest abilities make “a good warfighter stuff”; the lord goes on to tell about the entire battalions enlisted in remote areas where soldiers “did not seem to think at all”, and their strength lay in inability to recognise danger. Briefly, he sees bravery as overcoming of fear and ignorance of danger, implying inferior intellectual capability. Modern studies however, show the contrary.

For instance, Table 1 concisely presents results of a study on fear as experienced by “heroes” compared to the rest of soldiers:

TABLE 1.:

Varying fear experience in combat by decorated compared to non-decorated soldiers

Group	Fear experienced in combat	
	Increases	Decreases
Soldiers awarded the “Silver Star”	66%	20%
Comparable group of non-awarded soldiers	55%	32%

(sorted according to Watson, 1978)

The “hero group” consisted of soldiers awarded the “Silver Star” decoration, the most appreciated soldier decoration in US, presented for acts of heroism in combat. Evidently, “heroes” experience fear too, and in combat it may even grow, contrary to the belief that a hero ignores fear and that bravery means overcoming the fear.

US studies dating from the end of Korean war (Egbert et al., 1957) revealed individuals viewed as superior fighters (if not heroes) as more intelligent, socially and emotionally mature, preferred by the peers and displaying greater leadership potential. Accounts of combat episodes have showed superior combatants more frequently exposing themselves to fire, and to lead and encourage their fellow combatants (e. g. to advance towards the enemy’s lines) or to support them (e.g. by fetching ammunition or assisting the wounded), displaying individual responsibility (e.g. being the last to leave the combat position) and preserving calmness in combat.

The Israeli study on 283 soldiers decorated for bravery in the Israeli-Arab war in 1973 (Gal, 1978) placed the decorated soldiers in the top quarter on all psychological tests (superior intelligence, motivation, more stable personality). The sociodemographic data revealed more COs and NCOs among the decorated, lower age, single status and fewer children (i.e. minor non-soldier responsibilities). Also, the decorated were good rather than perfect soldiers, with more unallowed absence (AWOL) and minor offences instances than the rest of the soldiers, suggesting a less conventional attitude towards military discipline and, in a way, lasting inclination towards autonomy and initiative.

Next, the decorated performed better in military training, but did not outperform other soldiers in either civilian education or physical preparedness.

The overall results allow us to define “heros” as psychologically and generally superior soldiers with marked value system emphasising individual responsibility.

However, among many soldiers displaying characteristics of the kind heros are hard to distinguish. Combat skills and individual ability and responsibility should therefore be viewed as preconditions of bravery.

SITUATION AND INCITEMENTS

The Israeli study also addressed the very context of bravery. Analysis of acts of bravery allows the following classification of most of the situations:

- acts of bravery demonstrated in breakout from a far stronger enemy encirclement, in cohesive units whose commanders took the lead in bravery
- acts of bravery realised in close combat and in rescue of the wounded; usually by individual soldiers, often isolated (in psychological sense too), and not assisted by commanders
- acts of bravery in small units fighting against a far stronger enemy; the soldier decorated actually died rescuing his fellow combatant
- individual acts of bravery performed in “to the last round” situations, although not in saving oneself or fellow combatants nor obliged by the order

Common to all the categories is heavy fighting. The results of the study reveal the aforecited categories contain greater likelihood of bravery compared to other combat situations, i.e. bravery is highly situational.

Fairly expectably, the description of the categories suggests bravery occurring in highly cohesive units under a superior leader, as military effectiveness always reflects social climate of units.

The correlation between situation in a unit and bravery has also been supported by evaluation by 218 Croatian Army officers, veterans of the Croatian Homeland War 1991-1995, (Filjak and Pavlina, 1998), who credited the situation as the best “bravery inductor”, followed by togetherness and trainedness. Quite expectably too, as acts of bravery occur only in extraordinary situations demanding strain and dedication (abovestated). As bravery always implies exposure to danger for others’ benefit or sacrificing for a common goal, it is fostered by strong cohesion too. Furthermore, bravery implies military effectiveness, so “heroic” individuals are at the same time skilled combatants too.

Briefly, acts of bravery are anticipable in extraordinary situations by trained soldiers exhorted by togetherness. Less credited, but still significant, were leadership and information availability that directly reflect on the situation in the unit and soldier commitment. Next in line was *discipline*, followed by *logistics*, and last, almost “irrelevant”, *enemy weakness*.

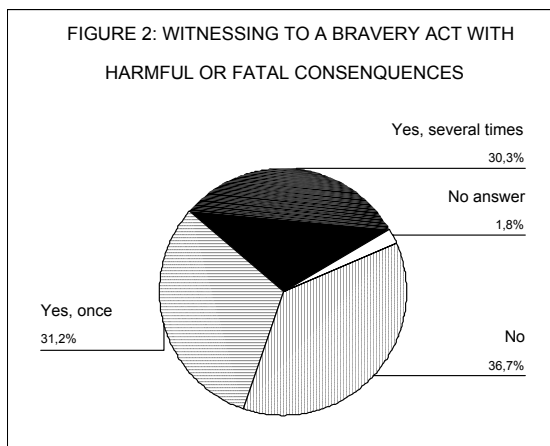
The enemy makes the chief “external” factor in a bravery situation. Although a weak enemy might be supposed to induce bravery spirit, the abovecited assessments revealed the incidence of risky enterprises not exceed those performed against an equally strong or superior enemy, at least those who do so are not considered brave.

Assumably, fighting against a strong enemy is likely to incite combat spirit and defiance and create situations that favour bravery.

Unit conditions (primarily togetherness and trainedness) are an important incitement to bravery, next in line being leadership and information availability, followed in their turn by other aspects of the situation (e.g. discipline, equipment, provisions).

FOOLHARDINESS

The order of the listed groups of factors is schematised in Figure 1. Briefly, the decision to do a brave act is determined both by one's personal and unit characteristics. Bravery and foolhardiness, which has fatal consequences, are two different things, however.



Foolhardiness is not uncommon, as evidenced by figure 2. illustrating responses by 218 Croatian Army officers to the question "Have you witnessed to a basically brave act that had harmful or even fatal consequences (e.g. unnecessary exposure to peril, positions exposure, drawing the enemy fire)" (Filjak and Pavlina, 1998). Non-witnessing was reported by a 1/3 of the respondents, while another 1/3 saw it repeatedly. Countermeasure for unreasonable exposure to danger is contained in military discipline, soldier preparedness, sensible leadership, i. e. all factors highlighting reasonable combat behaviour as

opposed to jeopardizing bravery that hardly is bravery at all.

BRAVERY "GRADATION"

Finally, along with bravery, there are other terms denoting efficient acting in perilous situations. The abovementioned study (Filjak and Pavlina, 1998) suggests gradation of the terms related to bravery, mostly as a function of the threat to which the "hero" was exposed. Thus, in the Croatian language, outstanding combatant enterprise is implied in "bravery", followed by courage, daring, valour, boldness, intrepidity, although there is some overlapping among the terms, or nuances, allowing their interchange. Very probably this is the case in other languages too.

CONCLUSION

The model could be summed up as follows: well-selected soldiers, highly motivated, trained belonging to cohesive units under a resolute leader in combat are likely to show enterprise which, based on the circumstances and threat degree, will be viewed as courage or bravery, or individual or unit bravery respectively.

The scope of this paper was to enumerate studies that have thrown a new light on the bravery issue and served as a basis of the bravery model presented here, rather than to provide an extensive insight into psychological reference in the field, which, by our assessment, hardly exceeds the reference listed here. It would make an honour to us if this paper incited further discussion, or hopefully research, in this admirable issue.

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