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Christopher H. Hamner. *Enduring Battle: American Soldiers in Three Wars, 1776-1945.* Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011. 281 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-7006-1775-3.

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What Motivates Soldiers to Fight?

Christopher H. Hamner has assembled a bevy of sources to explain the combat motivation of American infantry soldiers from the American Revolution to Iraq. He specifically compares soldiers fighting in the Revolution, the Civil War, and World War II, and explains the varying weapons, training, leadership, and tactics that they faced. Hamner masterfully details the changes in the battlefield setting and weaponry from the eighteenth-century linear tactics to the dispersed battlefields of World War II. In all of these wars, soldiers encountered great mental stress, strove to overcome the instinct to run away, and in the end usually performed admirably. Hamner uses first-person narratives to illustrate the fear evoked by combat and the fear of being viewed as a coward. The author reveals the trauma, fear, and decisions faced by the fighting men across time and place, and also helps to upend the prevailing theories that soldiers continue to fight because of primary group cohesion.

Scholars and writers have previously focused on the idea that soldiers fought for each other; statements made by veterans have bolstered this argument–"I fought for the men in my unit." Since World War II, the prevailing doctrine of why men fight has stressed comradeship and group cohesion, as first put forward by S. L. A. Marshall's *Men against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command in Future War* (1947) and Samuel Stouffer's *The American Soldier* (1949), continued by popular historians James McPherson in his *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (1997) and Stephen Ambrose's *Citizen Soldier: The U.S. Army from the Normandy Beaches to the Bulge to the Surrender of Germany, June 7, 1944-May 7, 1945* (1997), and even emerged in the recent U.S. Army War College publication *Why They Fight: Combat Motivation in the Iraq War* (2003). Supporters of the group cohesion theory assume that combat has a universal element that is shared across time and varying battlefields, thus transcending differences in tactics, technology, training, and culture. Popular literature and veterans' stories are filled with anecdotes of men fighting on because they loved and cared for the men in their unit. The primary group cohesion model has become the "accepted" theory of motivation for combat in the United States. Hamner, however, reveals that comradeship is not the central factor driving men to continue fighting even against great odds. He provides specific arguments that undermine this theory, including the fact that many units (including World War II German army units) that suffered massive casualties, which effectively decimated the "comradeship" of its members, continued to fight on, and that the high casualty rates created turnover in units that made primary groups transient. Also, primary group cohesion could work against the overall goals of the military as it can inspire members to resist authority from above the group. And finally, strong emotional bonds between soldiers do not necessarily lead to a greater desire to fight but rather can spur individual actions that undermine the larger military goals.

Using a detailed bibliography and extensive endnotes that examine the historiography of combat motivators, Hamner concludes that no single theory can explain what motivates men to continue to fight. In six tightly written chapters, the author examines the developments that changed infantry combat from the American Revolution to World War II. He delves into fear in combat as evidenced in a variety of first-person accounts of the three main wars that he covers as well as additional sources that provide a glimpse into the mind-set of American combat veterans of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Chapters on training, leadership, weaponry, and comradeship compare these elements across time and chronicle the development in each category. Hamner describes the linear tactics of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century conflicts where men marched into

battle shoulder to shoulder with their comrades, who were often neighbors and relatives from a limited geographic area, using weapons that relied on a massed field of fire to be effective and that were slow and laborious to load and maintain. These tight fighting formations helped to forge a sense of comradeship and trust; to ensure success, training focused on each man working as part of the group. In these tight formations where the men fell under constant scrutiny from their officers and fellow soldiers, soldiers had no place to hide or run from their fears, and they lived with the knowledge that failure would bring public humiliation after the conflict. Use of fear and coercion proved useful means to keep soldiers in line.

By the time of the Second World War, massive improvements in battlefield technology and the deadliness of weapons, especially artillery, required units to disperse on the battlefield. Soldiers operated individually within loosely connected group, carried massively deadly weapons, and were often removed from direct communication with comrades. In this battle scenario, men operated frequently without direct oversight by officers and fellow soldiers, and thus the use of coercion or fear of failure in front of the group had reduced effectiveness. For modern warfare, to ensure success and increase chances of survival in a much more deadly combat zone, training focused on learning one's specific role within the group. Training and organization for combat changed radically to accommodate these battlefield developments, as Hamner brilliantly elucidates: "Where the effective soldier on the linear battlefield had to be an automaton, the effective soldier on the dispersed battlefield had to be autonomous" (p. 11).

According to Hamner, the constant factor in combat over time and place is the desire to survive. He puts forward the idea of task cohesion to explain the willingness to continue to fight, especially in modern combat. Each unit from the top down has a task to complete, and each soldier is trained to accomplish a specific task. For the individual soldier the primary task is survival. To achieve the unit's and personal goals, men must work together. The means by which they accomplish these goals may change due to developments in technology and weaponry, but the goal to survive remains. The men of a unit need each other to perform their tasks so that they can survive. Soldiers are constantly reminded that if they stay sharp and focus on accomplishing their tasks, they will have the best chance at survival. Soldiers feel comforted by the idea that they can control their survivability and that the unit must train to perform its task and help each soldier have the highest chances at surviving. Hamner argues that this is manifest throughout military training, as it seeks to instill a sense of "control" in the individual soldier–a sense that he can have ultimate control of his future. Of course, the reality of war works to undermine this training as the chaos of battle when first encountered is beyond any attempt to "prepare" men for actual combat. Eventually, if repeatedly exposed to combat, the soldier comes to realize that in many cases his survival is not based on his qualities as a soldier (his ability to accomplish his tasks as he was trained to do) but often by sheer luck. When soldiers no longer believe that they have any control over their survival, they often lose focus on accomplishing their unit tasks.

What is not included that would make the study more helpful and informative? Additional examination of non-American armies in combat would have helped provide a more global foundation for this theory. Hamner only briefly introduces the study of German forces in World War II by Omer Bartov in his *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (1991), which flies in the face of the standard U.S. view of "comradeship" to explain the willingness to fight. Most German units on the eastern front suffered devastating casualties, which all but destroyed the "primary group cohesion," and yet their combat tenacity increased as the war continued. Fanaticism to the Nazi cause does not explain this phenomenon either, as ideology becomes disconnected on the battlefield in the face of bullets and shells. An examination of World War II Soviet units would have offered another contrasting perspective on group cohesion and combat motivation especially with regard to poor training, diversity of troops, and often poor leadership. While Hamner focuses mainly on American combat motivators, the more interesting question is whether Hamner's theory is universally applicable. Or is American combat experience somehow unique? Finally, Hamner does not account for soldiers who give up their survivability by acts of great heroism. What drives those soldiers, especially Medal of Honor recipients, who give their lives so others might live? Hamner briefly mentions in the conclusion that combat medics stand out from some parts of his theory, because, while they endured the dangers of the battlefield, they lacked the resources to influence their own survival in combat. So what then accounts for those acts of "heroism" where otherwise ordinary soldiers choose to perform tasks that do not increase their personal chances of survival but rather those of the primary group?

Hamner has created an excellent examination of American soldiers' combat motivations across time and place. He questions the prevailing theory of primary group cohesion found in American popular lore, from

books to movies. He has shown that soldiers fight on as natural reaction to try and survive, and that by working to accomplish the tasks they have been given as a unit, they believe they have the greatest chance at that survival. Hamner's work provides a vital new examination of combat motivators that can allow military training to focus on how to better prepare soldiers for combat in modern warfare.

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