

MISPLACED LOYALTIES: THE ROLE OF MILITARY CULTURE IN THE BREAKDOWN OF DISCIPLINE IN TWO PEACE OPERATIONS

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Leo Tolstoy¹ once wrote that the deeper we delve in search of causes, the more of them we discover. And each single cause or series of causes appears to us equally valid in itself, and equally false by its insignificance compared to the magnitude of the event. Today I wish to talk to you about just one set of possible causes for the breakdown of discipline in two peace operations – the Canadian deployment to Somalia and the events which occurred in Bacovici in the Former Republic of Yugoslavia. Being a cultural anthropologist my intention of course is to talk about culture and particularly military culture and the role this culture can play in operations other than war.

INTRODUCTION

In December 1992, Canadian Forces personnel, as part of a coalition of forces led by the United States, were deployed for service to Somalia. Many of the Canadian personnel involved in the deployment belonged to the Canadian Airborne Regiment Battle Group, itself made up largely of soldiers from the Canadian Airborne Regiment (a paratroop battalion). On the night of March 16–17, 1993, near the city of Belet Huen, Somalia, soldiers from Two Commando of the Canadian Airborne Regiment beat and tortured a bound 16-year-old Somali youth, Shidane Arone.² The consequences of this

¹ Leo Tolstoy. *War and Peace*. Translated by Ann Dunnigan. New York: Signet Classic. 1968

² It is important to note that Canadians were not the only ones involved in serious Human rights abuses in Somalia. Belgian and Italian paratroopers were also scrutinised by Inquiries in their own lands (see Rakiya & de Waal, 1993)

death have been far-reaching not only for the Battle Group that was deployed to Somalia but for the Canadian Forces as a whole. The following investigations, media coverage and public inquiry shook the Canadian military establishment to its core.

Representatives of the Canadian military maintained that the events that occurred in Somalia were “isolated incidents” and the result of the actions of a few “bad apples”. Yet on another peace operation thousands of miles from Somalia, in Bacovici³ in the former Yugoslavia, Canadian soldiers from a Battle Group based on 12e Régiment blindé du Canada (12 RBC)⁴ were once again involved in serious incidents indicating a severe breakdown of discipline. At the end of the tour, members of the incoming unit received information on and reported various incidents of misconduct by the outgoing unit, including misuse of alcohol, sexual misconduct, insubordination, violence and black market activities. During the ensuing military police investigations, various other concerns came to light regarding the state of discipline and overall effectiveness of the unit. The Military Board of Inquiry into the events in Bacovici concluded that the operational environment could not be blamed for the shortcomings but that flaws existed in the units prior to deployment. Some of these flaws, according to the Inquiry, found their roots in military culture.⁵

As Tolstoy indicated, the explanations for the incidents in Somalia and Bacovici are many and varied. Today I will focus on a group analysis and the culture of the units, a culture that emphasised Regimental loyalty. British military journals have debated the pros and cons of the Regimental system over the years addressing such issues as morale vs. conservatism, autonomism vs. centralisation, resistance to change, exclusiveness undermining co-operation etc. Even though loyalty is perceived as a positive state in military, it is my intention to show that highly intense unit cohesion can,

3 October 1993 to May 1994 were the dates of the deployment

4 In Bacovici there were members from one Army Regiment the R22eR (Royal 22e Régiment) and from one armoured unit the 12e Régiment blindé du Canada in addition to reservists and support staff. The Airborne Battle Group which deployed to Somalia also had reservists and support staff however the bulk of members came from the Canadian Airborne Regiment which has since been disbanded

5 Culture will be defined as a social force that controls patterns of organisational behaviour. It shapes members' cognitions and perceptions of meanings and realities. It provides affective energy for mobilisation and identifies who belongs to the group and who does not (Ott, 1989).

at times, be divisive. Exaggerated loyalty to the group can lead members to work at counter purposes to the overall goals of a mission or even of the army and the Canadian Forces.

SOLIDARITY

Studies emphasising solidarity in military organisations became popular during World War II. In the United States, Marshall (1947), studying the effect of morale on the willingness to fight, noted the importance of unity among soldiers. In an extensive study of the US military, a team of researchers at the US War Department concluded that the primary group “served two principle functions in combat motivation: it set out and emphasised group standards of behaviour and it supported and sustained the individual in stress he would otherwise not have been able to withstand” (Stouffer et al., 1949).

Similarly Shils and Janowitz (1948) who debriefed Wermacht prisoners of war also conducted an important study of affective relationships. They found affective relationships, that is, primary group bonding, responsible for cohesion in the German Wermacht and for soldiers’ willingness to continue fighting in spite of incredible odds.

In the period since World War II some authors (see Savage & Gabriel, 1976) continued to emphasise the importance of primary groups in combat motivations. They support their argument with empirical evidence of strong affective ties in combat units and the implementation of military policies designed to foster group cohesion (see Segal and Segal 1983).

In Canada’s army officers and soldiers are expected to respect values and norms that transcend individual self-interest in favour of a presumed higher goal. According to the official statement on Canadian military ethos, “We accept that it is essential for all members to clearly display loyalty, first to the country then to the group, and finally to each member of the chain of command, both senior and junior to them before taking

thought for themselves.” The ethos statement goes on to say, “We accept that teamwork is essential to the survival and success of the military unit”⁶.

In the Oath of Service, taken by each recruit, officer or enlisted man, the soldier swears allegiance to something larger than him or her self. According to Neill (nd) this is “the first step in ethical socialisation to the in-group — bringing the new recruit into a body of individuals drawn together by a common purpose and thus, a common bond, subordinating individualism to group identity.” And because of the nature of ground warfare the army places special emphasis on reinforcing unit bonding, team playing and supporting one’s comrades (particularly under fire).

In the army, combat skills and values are learned through a socialisation process that begins when a soldier enters basic training, which aims to instil new attitudes, responses and loyalties in the recruit as it is teaching him, or her, new skills. Trainees begin as almost complete strangers to one another, although within just a few hours most begin to develop friendships with a bunkmate or two. The group is newly formed and offers little defence to the assault of initial socialisation. Then, as recruits begin to rely on each other, strong bonds build — strong enough, the military hopes, that they will go into battle for each other. “A little private out in the trenches doesn’t know beans all about why he is there, except he is there with his buddies and they will die for one another. It’s as simple as that” (Canadian soldier quoted in Harrison & Laliberté, 1994).

Coming from civilian society that elevates the individual, recruits are now in a world where the institutional value of the group is supreme. One has to be a team player or risk ostracism. The military does things quite deliberately to intensify the power of group pressure within its ranks. The group is made responsible for each member (Rampton, 1970) even though it may seem manifestly unfair to make the group suffer for the individual. In this way the soldier learns to depend on his or her fellows and on the adequacy of their performance. The extreme to which this can go is demonstrated by an event at CFB Gagetown where reserve officer candidates beat up, harassed and

⁶ Cited in Canadian Forces Officers General Specification, June 15, 1995

abused another candidate because the individual was messy and disorganised. “His bed was always poorly made and he got the others in his room into trouble. So they beat him up and harassed him” (Cotton cited in Winslow, 1997).

Researchers began to notice the potential negative impact of strong bonding as early as the 1940s. Brotz and Wilson (1946) noted that, in the army, bonding was so strong that “covering up for, defence of and devotion to one’s buddy was expected.” This form of loyalty can lead to stonewalling and the refusal to give up one’s buddies to investigators. Group bonding also prevents individuals from speaking out against inappropriate behaviour. As one soldier told me:

We’re so connected physically and mentally, that if there’s one person that we admire, who does good work, who gains the respect of others, of his superiors and colleagues, the others will group around him. If he incites his group to racist behaviour, they’ll follow, even if they don’t agree, because they won’t distinguish themselves from the group. Because the group’s all you’ve got. If you’re in battle, no one else is looking out for you. You can’t count on your family, they’re in another world. (Canadian soldier)

Thus group bonding is a double-edged sword. According to Janowitz (1974), primary groups that are highly cohesive can impede the goals of military organisation because they are informal networks. They only work when they are well articulated with formal authority. In Canada the Regimental system is supposed to be one of the major networks by which primary groups are articulated with formal authority.

THE REGIMENTAL SYSTEM

The Canadian army possesses a strong Regimental tradition based, in many respects, upon the British system but with some uniquely Canadian twists. At the heart of the Canadian army lie three Regiments, which reflect the geographic and linguistic divisions in Canada — western anglophone (PPCLI, Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry), central and eastern anglophone (The RCR, The Royal Canadian Regiment),

and central francophone (R22eR, Royal 22e Régiment).⁷ These territorial divisions define areas of recruitment, training and residence for Regimental members and give each Regiment a certain flavour or character.

The distinctiveness of each Regiment is also marked by unique Regimental insignia such as shoulder badges, buttons, buckles, colours of kit and distinctive tailoring of uniform, headgear and mess dress. Regiments also have their own unique music, rituals and taboos. As Trice and Beyer (1984) have shown rites socialise, integrate and assign social identity. Both formal and informal rites of passage mark entry into a Regiment. While the formal ceremonies welcome individuals into the larger group, it is the informal rites that bond members to the primary group.

In January 1995, the Canadian public was shocked by video taped scenes of humiliating and, at times, disgusting initiation rites in One Commando of the Canadian Airborne Regiment. It may seem incomprehensible to an outsider that the initiates actually participated voluntarily in these rites. Yet, the importance of the ritual is, in part, a reflection of the nature of the requirements of the unit at this stage. Initiates are strangers to each other and to the Airborne. The bonding of the initiation pulls them together in a very short period of time. The impact of this extreme form of initiation was noted as early as the 1950s when Aronson and Mills (1959) remarked that an initiate who endures severe hazing is likely to find membership in a group all the more appealing. In these rituals soldiers are proving their readiness to participate in the group regardless of the personal cost, thus gaining peer group acceptance. As one soldier put it: "I am proud to have done it, it proves to myself and others that as a member of the Canadian Airborne Regiment, I will face and overpass any challenge or tasking given to me." Thus both formal and informal experience promote the dependence of the individual on the group. An example of how the bonding of a group can lead soldiers to defy authority is the testimony of members of One Commando to

⁷ The Regiments are, in turn, divided into three infantry battalions. There are also armoured units such as the Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians), the Royal Canadian Dragoons, the 12e Régiment blindé du Canada and three artillery Regiments: the 1st and 2nd Regiments of the Royal Canadian Horse Artillery and the 5e Régiment d'artillerie légère du Canada. These elements

the Somalia Inquiry. They had difficulty “remembering” details concerning the initiation rite. Another example is when Cpl Robin, the only black initiate in the One Commando video, reviewed the video at the Somalia Inquiry. Even though he was shown in humiliating circumstances on his knees with “I love KKK” written on his back, he still did not want to hurt the good name of the Airborne Regiment and was reluctant to criticise his former unit.⁸

THE REGIMENTAL FAMILY

According to Loomis (1996) the Regiment is a pseudo-kinship organisation. A Regiment is often referred to as a “family” and the family nature of the system is underscored by nicknames such as “old man” for the CO and “auntie” for the second in command (2 I/C). When a battalion is out in the field on exercises the bivouac (the semi-permanent tented camp) is commonly referred to as “home” (Irwin, 1993). One is considered a member of a Regiment for life. This link continues throughout a member’s career in the military and after retirement. Mgen Lessard tells us that

Briefly, the soldier must want his Regiment, his comrades and those around him to survive. The Regiment is his family, where he is not alone. It provides a situation in which his human needs can be met and thus, it is very important to him. As a consequence, the peril to the Regiment’s survival from an attacking enemy becomes so threatening that the soldier’s natural fear of loneliness and death, as well as his disinclination to take life, is less than his fear of losing those who provide him safety, security, a firm sense of belonging, affection, status and prestige, order, system and structure. The Regiment provides the opportunity for him to become the best soldier in the world; he fights for something more than himself; he fights for his comrades and the Regiment; and indirectly, for his home and his family” (DND, 1984).

Regiments are also powerful entities in the Canadian army. A Regiment influences the career advancement of its members through the administration of career assessment and promotion boards and recommendations to promotion boards at

plus combat engineers and other units, are organised into the 1st and 2nd Canadian Mechanised Brigade groups, and 5e Brigade mécanisé du Canada (Bercuson, 1996).

⁸ Testimony of Cpl Robin to the Commission of Inquiry into the Activities of the Canadian Airborne Battlegroup in Somalia. Transcripts vol. 6

National Defence Headquarters (Bercuson, 1996). There are also strong associations, which act to defend the interests of the Regiment, at times to the detriment of the interests of the army or the CF as a whole. As Granatstein (1997) has noted, "The Regimental system has become a problem, a closed shop that too often pits one Regiment against another, that rallies the generals from the Regiment to secure key postings for favoured officers, and that can divide the army with the argument that it is 'our turn' for some position.". Kellet (1986) has also noted that reverence for Regimental customs and traditions can undermine discipline when Regiments managed to 'elude' orders which challenge or modify a cherished Regimental custom.

Thus we see that Regiments have structures of formal and informal authority, which affect the functioning of the army. This observation is very interesting given that one of the original intents of the British Regimental system was to direct the officer corps' loyalty towards the lesser institution (the Regiment) not the greater (the army). In other words, to divide and conquer the army itself. "Rivalry and competition between the regiments then internalises any inclination in the army's officer corps as a whole to act more cohesively" (Strachan 1997). The focus on regimental customs in Britain was a mechanism which diverted militarism into "safe" channels thus protecting civilian society from a unified military. "In the army's case, part of the problem is not that it cannot lobby, but that the regimental system has meant that it is lobbying against itself, and that suits its political masters only too well" (Strachan 1997).

EXAGGERATED LOYALTIES

Although the corporate nature of Regiments has many advantages, there can also be disadvantages such as the development of a "we-they" attitude. Unit pride can become so exaggerated that one only respects the members and/or officers of one's unit, ignoring and sometimes resenting those outside the group. What is clearly an effective and necessary attitude for the battlefield can then become an exaggerated force that undermines good order and discipline. In Bacovici, A Company was from the R22eRegiment. It was attached to the 12 Regiment Blindé du Canada (RBC) for the

mission in Bosnia. Because of the strong sense of Regimental identity the members of R22eR were reluctant to take any problems to the Commanding Officer (CO) who was not from the R22eR. On the other side, the CO of A Company (an RBC) let the unit behave autonomously. As a result, the unit messed, lived and performed their duties apart. Headquarters (formal authority) thus exercised little control over the company and there was a breakdown in command and communication. What is more surprising is that this was not seen as abnormal. "They were, after all, Van Doos and therefore not part of the 12 [RBC] tribe per se" (DND Board of Inquiry, 1996).

The members of Canadian Airborne Regiment also believed themselves to be part of an elite unit, a cut above the ordinary infantry soldier. Members of the Airborne saw other combat troops and non-combat personnel as inferior. They called them "legs" which I was told means "lack enough guts." As one interviewee said, "The Airborne doesn't interact with the legs." Unit pride also affected their relationship with officers.

They didn't seem to respect the higher ranks that weren't Airborne as much as ordinary soldiers might. An officer walking by might not be saluted by an Airborne soldier, whereas most every other private on the base would salute him. To get them to do something it was better to get their warrant officer to order, rather than a warrant officer from outside the Airborne. (Canadian soldier)

Different from the parent Regiments, the Canadian Airborne Regiment (CAR) was a constituted unit without permanent membership. However, it too reflected the linguistic and geographic divisions in the Canadian army. It was divided into three commandos each representing one of the parent Regiments — Two Commando (western anglophone and PPCLI), Three Commando (central and eastern anglophone and RCR), and One Commando (central francophone and R22eR, the "Van Doos"). Some of our interviewees felt that the purpose of having the three commandos was so the Regiments could track their own people and thus control promotion and performance evaluations. The result was that commando units in CAR did not mix with each other on a regular basis. They lived on base in separate barracks. They did not mingle with each other socially and, in fact, openly displayed antagonism towards each other. Particularly, the francophones and anglophones remained separate. Like the

parent Regiments, each commando began to develop its own particular sub-culture, that is, its own way of doing things and an associated identity.⁹ The three commando units of the Airborne Regiment had difficulties in working together as team which undermined overall unit cohesion, command and control.

In addition, officers can develop an attitude of 'looking after their own' only. Officers from the other commando units in the Airborne were reluctant to report the problems in Two Commando to the chain of command. Prior to deployment, a number of incidents in October, 1992, indicated a significant breakdown of discipline in Two Commando during the critical period of training and preparation for operations in Somalia. Military pyrotechnics were discharged illegally at a party in the junior ranks' mess; a car belonging to the duty NCO was set on fire; and various Two Commando members expended illegally held pyrotechnics and ammunition during a party in Algonquin Park, near their base in Petawawa. The illegal possession of these pyrotechnics was the result of theft from DND and the making of false statements. A search conducted on the soldiers' premises uncovered ammunition stolen from DND, as well as 34 Confederate flags. When I interviewed officers from the other commandos they told me that they were aware of the problems in Two Commando but that it was "none of their business." Not reporting on other units can lead to the non-reporting of discipline problems.

Similarly, in the former Yugoslavia there was a widespread tendency for all personnel in the chain of command to concern themselves almost exclusively with their own subordinate commands. "The command structure of 'A' squadron was reticent to concern itself with anything which occurred in the Engineer Sqn and vice versa. Although army culture has inculcated officers and Sr. NCOs not to overlook a fault, there has been a growing tendency not to meddle in the affairs of others." (DND Board of Inquiry 1996).

⁹ F One Commando from the R22eR was French and sported the fleur de lys flag in their barracks. This is the flag of the Province of Quebec. Two Commando, drawn from the PPCLI, began to adopt the rebel flag and 3 Commando from the RCR became known as quiet professionals with the motto of "never pass a fault"

PRIMARY GROUP LOYALTIES

The Regimental system is designed to permit the flow of information up the chain of command but when primary group bonds are strong information is captured at the lower levels thus bad news does not travel up. Officers may simply be unaware of trouble in their unit.

In a leadership position, the guys won't tell you bad news. Cause the chain of command is such that your major is not going to tell you things are really bad down here. What he'll say is we're doing a bunch of investigations and checking things out here. Only good news goes up. (Canadian soldier)

At the Somalia Inquiry, evidence was presented that suggested that the chain of command, during both the pre-deployment and the in-theatre period, failed as a device for passing and seeking information. Throughout the period from early 1992 until the deployment of the Regiment to Somalia in December 1992, several serious disciplinary problems had occurred. Yet few officers in the chain of command were even aware of these problems. Many senior officers in the chain of command, from MGen MacKenzie to Gen de Chastelain, testified to the Somalia Inquiry that they were ignorant of the state of fitness and discipline of the Canadian Airborne Regiment.

In Bacovici soldiers accused of black marketeering were not charged but disciplined by having to put their illegal profits into the Regimental fund. The CO and Regimental sergeant major who were with the 12RBC were never made aware of the matter and thus the incident was kept within the R22e Regiment (DND Board of Inquiry, 1996). Similarly soldiers testified that frequent drinking beyond the established policy was not reported up the chain of command so as not to humiliate the Regiment (DND Board of Inquiry, 1996).

Information that may tarnish the reputation of the Regiment may be hidden. Thus 'whistleblowing' is perceived as going against the corporate nature of the military which

encourages members to "not wash one's dirty laundry in public". It is not well accepted to denounce wrongdoing to outsiders, particularly civilians.

There are some things you just don't talk about. I knew some guys who were taking drugs, but I didn't say anything. Being a stool pigeon is worse than being a homosexual. There's a climate of fear. It's better not to talk about certain things, for your own security. It's not as if they're going to kill you, but it's just something you don't do. It's like a code of behaviour. (Canadian soldier)

It is particularly important to note that residence in foreign lands while on peace missions can intensify the sense of bonding and the view that the primary group is an extended family. Bonds of loyalty can then lead members of a Regiment to protect each other, sometimes by covering up for each other or by setting up walls of silence.

The pressure is so strong that beyond the group, right and wrong lose their meaning. Only the group matters — until it's just too much, and things start to come out on the outside. Like with Somalia. If it hadn't come out from the outside, it probably never would have come out.. (Canadian soldier).

Because of fierce loyalty, there was a tradition of protecting each other in Two Commando of the Canadian Airborne Regiment. At CFB Petawawa, just prior to deployment to Somalia, in-group loyalty was so strong that authorities were unable to find out who had participated in the burning of an officer's car. Investigations only encountered a wall of silence concerning a serious breach of discipline. Walls of silence are erected when the soldiers refuse to give up one of their mates. "Not only might a schismatic group of this kind foster and maintain inappropriate norms, but by assuring anonymity through norms of group loyalty and by imposing severe sanctions for violations of the solidarity norm, it can facilitate acts of subversion and defiance" (Wenek, 1993).

This pattern was repeated in theatre. It would seem that the mistreatment of Somali prisoners had occurred earlier, prior to March 16th (the night that Shidane Arone was tortured to death) and these acts had not been sanctioned. Although impossible to know, the perpetrators of Arone's torture death might have felt that they were operating

in a permissive atmosphere where acts were somehow “unofficially” approved. Even if acts were not “unofficially” approved of, the tradition of group loyalty indicated that individual perpetrators would not be held accountable.

CONCLUSIONS

The CF has an ethos of cohesion, teamwork and loyalty all sustained by cultural phenomena (physical artefacts, collective mental frameworks and manifestations, and collective action patterns). This culture has a long historical tradition rooted in the definition of the CF as a combat force. Thus, military ethos is shaped by Canadian policy decisions to maintain a combat force. Combat readiness, in turn, shapes the values and goals of the organisation, reinforcing primary group bonding which is seen as a necessary component of combat effectiveness.

Primary group bonding is reinforced through formal and informal socialisation however, the intense bonding deemed necessary for combat is a double-edged sword. In this paper, we have seen how misplaced loyalty can lead to stonewalling, preventing the proper investigation of criminal activities. Group bonding also prevents individuals from speaking out against inappropriate behaviour, which can therefore continue unchecked. The Chain of Command thus becomes short circuited by strong affective ties which it itself encourages. Strong affective ties, which are encouraged by combat norms, create highly cohesive units that can actually impede the good functioning of the overall organisation. Research indicates that one of the ways to control this tendency is to assure that the unit is well articulated with formal authority. Thus primary group loyalty must be encouraged in an environment of strong leadership and discipline.

Of particular importance in leadership and discipline at the level of the small unit – particularly the role of junior NCOs. It is through these officers that the formal demands of the organisation are linked with the norms and sanctions of the small group itself. (George 1976). On a recent field trip to the Canadian area of operations in the

former Yugoslavia, I had an opportunity to observe successful units in operation. Older, more experienced NCOs were twinned with young inexperienced troops. The Commanding officer and the Officer Commanding accompanied by senior NCO's also visited every unit in the area of operation on a regular (almost weekly) basis thus assuring close supervision of even the most isolated areas. And in these isolated posts mature NCOs with extraordinary leadership capabilities were chosen to supervise the group. Thus hierarchical cohesion is maintained along with peer cohesion at the lowest working level.

Discipline and leadership offset strong group identification. Thus, a unit with a strong sense of professionalism and discipline would, in fact, be less likely to commit infractions. This is because the individuals are invested in an identity which has components of self-discipline and ethics embedded in it. In the best of all worlds, Canadian military ethos prescribes this self-discipline and ethical code for all soldiers and officers. Nevertheless, personal discipline, self-control and commitment to high standards of personal conduct need to be continually reinforced by leadership at all levels from junior to senior. The cultivation of in group identity needs to be balanced with respect for military authority and the rule of law. Priorities need to be clearly established within the Regimental collective and within individual units so a healthy balance of loyalties is firmly established. The role of leadership in this is clear. "Leaders are the primary agents by which an organisation's culture and role norms are modelled, transmitted, and maintained" (Schein, 1985).

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