

THE FUNCTION IN COMBAT OF ATTITUDES
TOWARD WAR WITH SPECIFIC NATIONS

David B. Truman
Columbia University

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MEMORANDUM FOR WORKING GROUP ON HUMAN BEHAVIOR

by

David B. Truman

1. Topic: The function in combat of attitudes toward war with specific nations, a review of the data developed during World War II concerning the connections between combat motivation and attitudes toward enemy nations and toward the war. What generalizations can be derived from these data? What further lines of research are indicated?
2. Summary: The evidence from Army studies during World War II indicates that attitudes were significantly related to combat motivation and performance. Commitment to war aims and hatred of the enemy were associated with readiness to engage in combat.

But attitudes toward the war and toward the enemy were not consciously of fundamental importance in the immediate combat situation; although they were associated with combat performance. "Good" attitudes on the former count were related to "good" performance in combat, although there is no proof of a casual connection between them.

The limited role of general attitudes in the immediate combat situation was in part a function of the kind of conflict World War II was -- the kinds of threats it held for the central values of American soldiers.

There were marked differences in the degree of hostility toward the Germans and the Japanese. There were also significant differences in attitudes toward both enemies among men in the Pacific, men in Europe, and those in training within the United States. These hostile attitudes generally were not increased by combat experience.

Attitudes toward the war and the enemy were more a product of pre-Army civilian experience than they were a product of Army and combat experience.

Veterans of World War II emerged from the war with the general expectation that another major war would occur within 25 years. They generally felt a deep distrust of the Soviet Union and assumed that a future conflict would be with the Russians. Their expectations further were that the responsibility for causing such a future war would not rest upon the United States.

Additional research is needed along the following lines:

1. Comparative studies of combat motivation in all three services and subdivisions and in different kinds of combat situations.

2. Studies of the relative importance of general attitudes toward the enemy and toward US aims at stages of military experience from training through combat to determine when such general attitudes are most helpful to the acceptance of military service and duties.

3. Continuous studies of attitudes among the civilian population, especially among men of military age, to determine the kinds of attitude patterns with which military training and indoctrination will have to deal.

3. Review of applicable data:

- a. Much of the most useful and significant materials on this topic are those in Samuel A. Stouffer et al., Studies in Social Psychology in World War II (4 vols., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949-50), especially Vol. I, chs. 9 and 10; Vol. II, chs. 1, 2, 3, 7, and 12; Vol. III, chs. 3 and 10.

b. Examination of the following psychology journals for the years 1945-50 has produced nothing of particular significance: Journal of Psychology, Journal of Social Psychology, Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, Journal of Applied Psychology, Journal of General Psychology.

c. No attempt has been made to review studies reported in the sociology journals for the period; these may contain some relevant data.

d. If, as this memorandum argues, the most significant attitudes are derived from experience and indoctrination in civilian life, relevant data on probable combat attitudes should be available in post-war studies of attitudes in the population at large and in the military age group concerning potential enemies, probable allies, and the United Nations activities. For example, useful materials have been collected by:

(1) The Survey Research Center, University of Michigan, including the studies reported in Leonard S. Cottrell, Jr., and Sylvia Eberhart, American Opinion on World Affairs in the Atomic Age (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1948); various other reports by the Center on American attitudes toward world affairs and relations with various foreign nations should be useful.

(2) The National Opinion Research Center, University of Chicago.

For reasons of time, these sources were not consulted in preparing this memorandum.

4. Summary and appraisal of research data:*

I

Evidence concerning American soldiers in World War II demonstrates clearly that attitudes toward the combat situation, including attitudes

* These observations are based on an examination of Stouffer et al., Studies in Social Psychology in World War II (cited hereafter as SSP).

toward the enemy nations and toward the war, were related to combat performance. At the same time it is evident that combat motivation is an extremely stubborn complex whose difficulties have only begun to yield to the efforts of scientific research. The practical difficulties of conducting realistic attitude investigations in or close to combat situations, the question of the validity of the verbal responses constituting the basic data of such investigations, the hazards affecting any attempt to generalize a given body of evidence to different kinds of wars and different types of combat situations -- these are a few of the problems affecting research in this area. In addition, the available evidence deals primarily with army personnel and only slightly or not at all with the other services, in which differences might have produced different results.

The evidence indicates that in general the orientation of American soldiers toward the War was one of "mood," to use Almond's term for the reaction of the general population to foreign policy issues. By this he means that "foreign policy attitudes among most Americans lack intellectual structure and factual content."* There is even some evidence that soldiers' attitudes toward the war showed some of the instability likely to be associated with "mood" reactions to foreign policy issues.** The nature of the Pearl Harbor attack was such that both soldiers and civilians accepted the necessity of war and the imperative of American victory. This gave a certain basic unanimity of attitude and was a source of fundamental strength.

* Gabriel A. Almond, The American People and Foreign Policy (1950), p. 69

** SSP, I, 431-2.

Beyond this, however, there was rather an "absence of thinking about the meaning of war" than a series of stable and differentiated orientations to it.* The war was accepted as a necessity, but there was little positive orientation toward it and there was little or no interest in giving it meaning in terms of "principles" and "causes."**

II

Under these circumstances it is not astonishing that attitudes toward the war and toward the enemy were not important as combat motivations. Acceptance of the necessity of war was a general and rather negative attitude which would not be expected to provide much positive support in the combat situation. Although various circumstances tended to minimize verbalizations concerning idealistic motives, it is significant that officers and enlisted men alike in World War II rated patriotism and general war aims low among the incentives to maximum effort in combat. Sustaining motives were likely to be of a more elementary and elemental sort, such as getting an unpleasant task over with and meeting the expectations of others in the informal group.*** There was generally among combat troops a powerful taboo against idealistic talk, a taboo surpassed in strength only by that against expressing flagrant disloyalty. The dislike of sentimental talk was felt most strongly when it came from non-combatants in and out of the Army who had not "earned the right"

* SSP, I, 431.

** SSP, I, 433 ff.

*** SSP, II, 108-112.

to rate the worth of ideal objectives against the sacrifices of the combat soldier. But the taboo extended also to fellow-combatants, among whom idealistic talk was likely to be regarded as hypocritical depreciation of the rigors of actual fighting. While the ban applied to verbalizations rather than to idealistic attitudes as such, it "probably further limited the role they (i.e., such attitudes) could play in combat motivation."

That the taboo on idealistic talk underrated the role of attitudes toward the war in combat activity is suggested by studies of pre-combat attitudes and combat performance of companies and individuals in the Army.** A study of rifle and heavy weapons companies before and after combat in Normandy rated companies on three attitudes, one of which was "willingness for combat." While this score got at more than orientation toward the war and the enemy, it at least touched on the latter factors.*** When scores on this attitude were correlated with non-battle casualty rates in Normandy (used as an index of performance), "in 10 out of the 12 regiments, those companies with the worst attitudes tended to have the highest nonbattle casualty rates, and vice versa." **** These data, of course, do not mean that bad attitudes necessarily caused poor performance. The two tended to be associated and there may have been a casual relationship between them, but both may equally have been the result of other factors, such as poor physical condition, unsatisfactory leadership, and the like.

* SSP, II, 150-151.

** SSP, II, ch. 1.

*** The questions use on this score were:

"Which of the following best tells how you feel about getting into an actual battle zone?"

"Which of the following best describes your own feeling about getting into combat against the Germans?"

**** SSP, II, 10.

In another study individual attitudes of men in training concerning combat and war were compared with ratings on the combat performance of the same individuals. A conservative interpretation of the results on combat attitudes shows that those men rated above average in combat performance tended to show in the training period attitudes toward combat which were "superior from the Army point of view."* Also attitudes toward the war, but not specifically related to combat, showed a consistent relationship to ratings of combat performance, though this relationship was not statistically reliable.** (The study just cited was the only one during World War II which dealt with the connections between the attitudes and the combat performance of individual men. All others dealt with averages within units. When and if the circumstances permit, there is obviously need for more research in this area. Studies of units are useful, but they are less likely to reveal the dynamics of combat motivation.)

There are additional data supporting the proposition that favorable convictions about the war were in some fashion a part of the complex of attitudes favoring good motivation in combat. In a study of veteran infantrymen in three Pacific divisions an index of convictions about the war and the official war aims was constructed and the results compared with the men's expressed readiness for further combat.*** Even with the factor of their

* SSP, II, 34-5.

** One example of this type is provided by the responses to the question: "Before the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, a lot of people thought we should not run the risk of getting into war by sending supplies to England and Russia -- now what was your opinion before Pearl Harbor?"

*** The three questions on which the index was based were:
 "Do you ever get the feeling that this war is not worth fighting?"
 "If the Germans (Japanese) were to offer to stop fighting now and to give up all the countries and territory they have taken over, what do you think we should do?"

attitudes toward their personal physical condition held constant, in each division the higher the men's degree of conviction about the war and war aims, the more likely they were to indicate relative readiness for further combat. In a more restricted analysis the men in one division who said they rarely or never felt that the war was not worth fighting were more likely to indicate readiness for further combat even when the factors of rank and education were controlled.*

Although these data do not mean that attitudes toward the war were crucial in combat motivation and although they do not even indicate that favorable attitudes toward the war caused superior combat motivation, they do counteract somewhat the evidence of the prevailing taboo on idealistic verbalization. They also indicate that favorable attitudes toward the war were related in some way to motivation and to performance in combat.

On the question of hatred of and vindictiveness toward particular enemies in World War II we have a good deal of evidence. Perhaps the most astonishing finding on this point is that vindictiveness is rated very low, at least by veteran infantrymen in Europe, as a combat motive. It was rated somewhat higher by officers as an incentive for their men, especially by officers in the Pacific, but it was not one of the most frequently mentioned incentives in any situation. Veteran infantrymen in Europe volunteered it less frequently than other motives. ** A second significant finding was that while hatred of the enemy apparently played a more important role as a combat motive in the Pacific than in Europe, the differences were not

* SSP, II, 155-6.

** SSP, II, 108, ff.

extreme, and men in the Pacific were less vindictive toward either enemy than men in Europe or in the United States.* Thirdly, it appears that feelings of hatred were less likely to be combat-derived than to stem from pre-Army attitudes and experience.

Veteran enlisted infantrymen in both the European and the Pacific theaters were asked the direct question, "When the going was tough, how much were you helped by thoughts of hatred for the enemy?" Pacific veterans were more likely to say that hatred helped in combat than were men who had fought the Germans. On the other hand, both infantrymen and company grade officers rated hatred lower than prayer and the desire not to let the other men down.** Also there appears to have been little relationship, among Pacific veterans, between the level of hatred felt and the feeling of readiness for further combat. This does not mean that hatred played no part in combat readiness, but only that it was not a major element in combat motivation. In fact the more vindictive veterans in the Pacific scored ~~higher~~ on the index of convictions about the war (involving acceptance of the policy of unconditional surrender and absence of doubt about the worth of the war) than did the less vindictive.*** Since such commitment was shown to be a factor in combat motivation, greater hatred of the enemy would appear to have afforded a means for more adequate adjustment to the tasks of combat.

* SSP, II, 157-8;

** SSP, II, 164-5, 174-5. Veterans in both theaters were asked about help in combat from: prayer, solidarity with fellow soldiers, desire to finish the job, hatred, and war aims.

*** SSP, II, 166-7. For index on convictions about the war, see note above. (p. 7 ***).

While combat experience apparently had something to do with augmenting vindictiveness, it appears to have been an attitude acquired primarily before entering the Army and certainly before combat. Men who reported witnessing atrocities in the Pacific showed a higher degree of hatred toward the Japanese than those who had not seen atrocities.* Pacific veterans who had seen Japanese prisoners were more likely to say that this experience made them feel "all the more like killing" than were European veterans after seeing German prisoners.** Throughout the Army, moreover, there was greater hatred of the Japanese than of the Germans. Clearly the established racial attitudes among Americans and the attitudinal impact of the attack at Pearl Harbor made the Japanese more "available" than the Germans as a target for hatred by Americans in and out of the Army.

It is striking, however, that the men who were in combat with the Japanese were much less vindictive toward them than were soldiers in the United States and in Europe. At the same time the men fighting the Germans were not much different in the degree of hatred toward the Germans than soldiers in the United States and in the Pacific.*** Hatred of the enemy seems to have been based upon stereotypes derived from civilian experience. It was not increased by combat experience; rather the reverse. The stereotyped hatred of the Japanese seems to have been especially brittle, perhaps

* SSP, II, 162-4. The index of vindictiveness was based on the following three questions:

"What would you like to see happen to the Japanese after the war?"

"How did seeing Japanese prisoners make you feel about the Japanese?"

"When the going was tough, how much were you helped by thoughts of hatred for the enemy?"

** SSP, II, 160-1.

*** SSP, II, 157-8.

because pre-combat hatred of the Japanese was especially high, perhaps because it had weak foundations in reality, or perhaps because combat experience led to a reassessment of the reasons for the horrors of fighting.* Hatred of the Japanese remained relatively high, however, as compared with that toward the Germans. In fact, if hatred of the Japanese helped in combat with them, the low level of vindictiveness toward the Germans "raises the question as to whether identification with the enemy may not have been . . . a liability requiring counteraction in fighting the Germans."**

The general evidence on attitudes toward the war and toward the enemy is comparatively clear. Soldiers usually felt that the war was worth fighting, but idealistic considerations were not important combat motivations. Combat performance and commitment to the war were associated, however. Hatred of the enemy helped in the "mental adjustment to combat;" It was also not a major combat motivation, but was rather an unstable and segmental attitude. The nature of American involvement in World War II was such that our Army and population had less basis for hatred and for ideological repugnance than other nationals in this war or than the same men might have had in a different kind of war -- one involving more actual or threatened destruction to the homeland or one in which ideological considerations were more sharply defined. The implications of these findings for future conflicts include the need for means of determining whether, to what extent, and in what respects such a conflict involves a different attitudinal and cognitive structure within the fighting forces as compared

* SSP, II, 157-9.

** SSP, II, 161.

with that in World War II. While there is no evidence to support the proposition, the logic of the World War II findings suggests that these characteristics would be even weaker in United Nations "police actions," such as in Korea, that they might be no stronger in conflicts with "satellite" forces, and that they would be stronger in a conflict with the Soviet Union depending upon the pre-conflict attitudes developed before entering the Armed Forces.

III

Something more should be said on the nature of attitudes toward particular nations acquired prior to experience in the Army. While the face-to-face group in the Army tended to supply the attitudes of elementary importance in the combat situation, attitudes toward the war and toward the enemy in large measure derived from the setting in which the soldier moved prior to entering the Army.* They were only in part a product of concrete experience in the combat situation. If the evidence from studies of the effects of indoctrination films is accepted, these "civilian" attitudes were not readily subject to change by indoctrination. The "Why We Fight" films operated on the hypothesis that supplying citizen-soldiers with more information would produce more favorable attitudes toward the war. While these apparently did produce changes in factual information and in segmental opinions on matters specifically dealt with in the films, they had little or no effect on more general attitudes such as hatred of the enemy and willingness to serve in the Army.**

* SSP, I, ch. 9, II, 150.

** SSP, III, 53-65.

There are several possible explanations for the failure of indoctrination efforts to affect motivation. On none of these is there any conclusive evidence. Among the most plausible, however, is the possibility that, given the nature of American involvement in World War II, civilian experiences had done so much to develop attitudes toward the war and the enemy that there was little more for Army indoctrination efforts to accomplish.* The "motivational factors present in the immediate and total life situation" were likely to be too pervasive and too strong to be affected appreciably by indoctrination and other experiences after entering the Army.

* SSP, III, 53-65.

Although these findings point in general to the importance of the conditioning effects of pre-war experiences, there are more specific implications which should be emphasized. In the first place, these observations about the attitude structure of men entering the Army in World War II afford no assurance that the same patterns would obtain in future conflicts. They might be different in a war which did not open with an event like Pearl Harbor which all but eliminated the possibility of national debate and national choice; they would be likely to differ if the conflict involved either more or less direct threat to the homeland; they would depend upon the kinds and stability of dominant stereotypes concerning the enemy (Would they be more like the attitudes towards Germans or more like those toward the Japanese in World War II?); they would depend upon the strength of ideological factors in the conflict; they would depend upon the character of popular estimates of the strength of the enemy; and so on. In the second place, the incidence of such attitudes will not be uniform. For example, Negro soldiers on the whole showed less enthusiasm for World War II and for combat than did whites. Their pre-Army experiences had not produced the same kind of identification with the national goals as in the case of white soldiers. They were less easily able to feel that the war meant something to them personally than were white soldiers whose civilian experiences had involved a greater share in the fruits of American ideals and achievements.* Similar segments of the population may emerge in another conflict, segments which may be less compliant with national objectives than were these.

* SSP, I, 507-535.

These findings would suggest the desirability of continuous research aimed at identifying and analyzing civilian information and attitudes concerning possible future conflicts, particularly among men of military age. The incidence of varying estimates of the strength and the "morality" of American and possible enemy positions should be a matter of regular examination. The objective here, of course, would not be to attempt to indoctrinate the civilian population, an improper if not an impossible task for the military to undertake. It would be rather to keep the military reliably informed concerning the kinds and frequency of attitudes among men likely to be called upon for military service, the character of their pre-Army indoctrination, and the probable nature of their motivations in the event of conflict with an enemy. With such information the dimensions of the morale problem among citizen soldiers and the tasks of an indoctrination program could be more precisely understood.

It has not been possible to include in the present memorandum an analysis of any of the studies of civilian attitudes toward possible enemies and allies, toward future wars, and the like, in the period since World War II. * Such an analysis should be an important part of a military program of research in human resources. Studies conducted among the troops in World War II, however, provide a rough base line for future analyses. Studies conducted among American troops during World War II and well before the obvious deterioration in Russian-American relations indicated a strong and pervasive distrust of the Soviet Union and a relatively negligible distrust of Great Britain. Skepticism concerning the post-war intentions of the Russians was deep enough to affect positive

* See 3d above, p. 3.

attitudes toward the war, since victory for the British and the Americans would be victory as well for the Russians.* This distrust was also reflected in the expectation of another major war within twenty-five years. In June, 1945, only one-fifth of a cross-section of enlisted men thought there would not be such a conflict within that period. The overwhelming majority of those who expected war, moreover, anticipated that the conflict would be with Russia.**

Although this measure of distrust in World War II allies apparently had an adverse effect upon the American soldier's orientation toward the war, it did not reflect any significant degree of skepticism about the "morality" of the American position in the future. Less than five per cent of the sample anticipated that the United States would be to blame for a future war.*** Although this may be merely a not very astonishing ethnocentric stereotype, it nevertheless represents a significant assurance concerning the "rightness" of the American cause.

These data are illustrative of the kind of information which it would be valuable to have concerning trends in attitudes toward the strength and morality of the American position and toward that of potential enemies and allies. Trend data along such lines among the civilian population in general and particularly among men of military age should be an important segment of planning information.

5. Service policies and practices to which these data are applicable.

Owing to lack of familiarity with the relevant current policies and practices in the military service, detailed comment on this point will be

* SSP, I, 441-2, II, 573-5.

** SSP, I, 442-5.

*** SSP, I, 445.

omitted. It should be observed, however, that data on the lack of positive effects of orientation films upon combat motivations should not be interpreted as indicating abandonment of such efforts. While positive effects were limited, it is entirely possible that the reinforcement effects of such films (and related material) may have been significant. Secondly, although it is apparent that the evidence on the connection between attitudes and combat behavior involves association rather than a demonstrable cause and effect relationship, it should not be assumed that no effort should be made in the future to influence the attitudes of men in the military forces. The complex of factors impinging on motivation is such that all reasonable means of strengthening it should be employed, including indoctrination as well as improvement of physical condition, confidence in weapons, and the like.

6. Recommended action.

A. Service policy and practice

See section 5, above.

B. Additional research.

1. Since most of the limited data on attitudes toward enemy nations and toward American war aims in relation to combat motivations have been derived from studies of the Army and of specialized segments thereof, it would be desirable to use future opportunities to make comparative studies among different branches of the military service, specialized functions within the three services, and types of combat situations.

2. In connection with such studies it would be valuable, in order to determine more precisely the role of general attitudes toward a conflict and toward the enemy, to conduct successive panel studies at various stages of proximity to combat. It may well be that, although the more intimate and elemental motivations are most important in immediate combat, the general attitudes are significantly helpful in surmounting earlier hurdles in the process of adjustment.

3. On the basis of the evidence cited above, it would be most desirable to conduct a continuing study of relevant attitudes among the civilian population, particularly men of military age. This should involve analysis and exploitation of appropriate studies conducted for other purposes, whether under private or governmental auspices. It should also include specially designed surveys supplementing or done in collaboration with those in other government agencies, such as the State Department. Among the items which would be appropriate to such trend studies would be the following:

a. The nature of attitudes toward and stereotypes of potential enemies and possible allies -- the strength and stability of these and their appropriateness for likely combat experiences.

b. Attitudes concerning the "morality" of American policies in connection with a possible conflict.

c. Attitudes and information concerning American strength in possible conflicts.

d. The relative importance of ideological factors in hostility attitudes toward potential enemies.

e. Class, sectional, and similar differences in attitude among the respondent population.

4. In the event of further "secondary" conflicts and "police actions" such as that in Korea, every opportunity should be exploited to get at variations in motivation in differing kinds of combat situations involving differing degrees of threat to the central values of members of the armed forces.