

The Effects of REFORGER Exercise Participation
On Soldiers' Attitudes

Dennis J. Grill, PhD
William Beaumont Army Medical Center

Abstract

Thousands of DOD personnel annually participate in REFORGER (REturn of FORces to GERmany) exercises along with other NATO Allies. Pre and post REFORGER "Unit Status Questionnaires," similar to surveys utilized by Israeli Defense Force (IDF) battle psychologists, were administered to two hundred and fifty two soldiers in an armored cavalry squadron which participated in REFORGER '83, Exercise "Confident Enterprise." Analysis focused on determining the effects of the unit's participation in REFORGER. A factor analysis of both the pre and post REFORGER "Unit Status Questionnaires" yielded a set of five factors: (1) View of the Unit; (2) Unit Communication; (3) Self-Evaluation; (4) Evaluation of the Enemy, and (5) Individual Morale. Participation in REFORGER had no significant effect on any of these factors. However, further analysis revealed that there were significant differences between certain groups on a number of dimensions such as (1) previous REFORGER participation; (2) type of MOS; (3) pay grade, and (4) unit. Implications for unit training and for the utilization of mental health personnel in combat are examined.

Introduction

It has long been assumed that a unit's participation in a field training exercise, such as REFORGER, has a positive effect on that unit's morale, confidence in its leaders and equipment, and overall combat readiness. After all, deploying to the Federal Republic of Germany, drawing combat equipment, convoying by rail and road, participating in such a large scale tactical exercise, turning-in equipment and returning to the United States, in effect, affords units the opportunity to practice one of their major wartime missions. But is this assumption accurate, or is it more of a wish on the part of exercise planners and commanders at various levels.

Israeli Defense Force (IDF) battle psychologists have effectively utilized unit survey data to provide commanders with feedback about their units during the 1973 Yom Kipper War (Greenbaum, Rogovsky & Shalit, 1977) and the 1982 War in Lebanon (Belenky, Tyner & Sodetz, 1983). The present

study is an effort to conduct similar "action research" which would be value and relevance to commanders and at the same time, examine the effects of REFORGER participation on soldiers' attitudes about morale. In addition, soldiers' attitudes about morale were examined in terms of other relevant variables. Does previous REFORGER experience with the same unit, the type of job (MOS) a soldier performs in the unit, his pay grade, marital status or individual unit, have any effect on morale?

Method

The survey instrument, entitled "Unit Status Questionnaire," included a series of seventeen questions to which each soldier responded on a Lickert scale format from 1 to 5, 1 being the positive end of the continuum, and 5 the low. Thirteen of the questions were taken from the Israeli morale survey questionnaires as reported by Miller (1983). These thirteen questions

TABLE 1
DESCRIPTIVE DATA
UNIT STATUS QUESTIONNAIRE

<p>1. <u>Unit</u></p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="width: 80%;">A</td><td style="text-align: right;">58</td></tr> <tr><td>B</td><td style="text-align: right;">46</td></tr> <tr><td>C</td><td style="text-align: right;">29</td></tr> <tr><td>D</td><td style="text-align: right;">34</td></tr> <tr><td>HOW</td><td style="text-align: right;">29</td></tr> <tr><td>HHT</td><td style="text-align: right;">56</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: right; border-top: 1px solid black;">252</td></tr> </table>	A	58	B	46	C	29	D	34	HOW	29	HHT	56		252	<p>3. <u>Participated in REFORGER '82</u></p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="width: 80%;">Yes</td><td style="text-align: right;">51</td></tr> <tr><td>No</td><td style="text-align: right;">201</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: right; border-top: 1px solid black;">252</td></tr> </table>	Yes	51	No	201		252
A	58																				
B	46																				
C	29																				
D	34																				
HOW	29																				
HHT	56																				
	252																				
Yes	51																				
No	201																				
	252																				
<p>2. <u>Pay Grade</u></p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="width: 80%;">E1-E4</td><td style="text-align: right;">163</td></tr> <tr><td>E5-E7</td><td style="text-align: right;">82</td></tr> <tr><td>E8/Officer</td><td style="text-align: right;">7</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: right; border-top: 1px solid black;">252</td></tr> </table>	E1-E4	163	E5-E7	82	E8/Officer	7		252	<p>4. <u>Military Occupational Specialty</u></p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="width: 80%;">Combat MOSs</td><td style="text-align: right;">190</td></tr> <tr><td>Support MOSs</td><td style="text-align: right;">62</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: right; border-top: 1px solid black;">252</td></tr> </table>	Combat MOSs	190	Support MOSs	62		252						
E1-E4	163																				
E5-E7	82																				
E8/Officer	7																				
	252																				
Combat MOSs	190																				
Support MOSs	62																				
	252																				
	<p>5. <u>Marital Status</u></p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="width: 80%;">Single</td><td style="text-align: right;">111</td></tr> <tr><td>Married</td><td style="text-align: right;">126</td></tr> <tr><td>Divorced/Separated</td><td style="text-align: right;">15</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: right; border-top: 1px solid black;">252</td></tr> </table>	Single	111	Married	126	Divorced/Separated	15		252												
Single	111																				
Married	126																				
Divorced/Separated	15																				
	252																				

dealt with (1) morale, individual and unit, (2) unit readiness for combat, (3) level of trust in unit leaders, in the unit as a whole, in friends, in self and in equipment, (4) self-evaluation of soldiering ability, (5) fear of combat and (6) knowledge of unit mission. Four additional questions which tapped unit cohesion were taken from Manning(1980). The basis for selection of the individual questions was their perceived relevance to commanders in the field, preparing for combat. Soldiers were also asked to specify their unit/platoon/section, rank, military occupational specialty (MOS), marital status, and whether or not they had been on REFORGER with the same unit the previous year. Table 1 contains a summary of this

descriptive/demographic data.

The unit selected to participate in the study was an armored cavalry squadron stationed at Fort Bliss, Texas. The Pre-REFORGER Unit Status Questionnaires were administered approximately ten days prior to deployment. The Post-REFORGER Unit Status Questionnaires were completed within two weeks after the unit's return to the United States. Two hundred and fifty two matched (pre and post REFORGER) Unit Status Questionnaires were collected.

Results

A factor analysis of both the pre and post REFORGER questionnaires yielded the same five factors: (1) view of the unit, (2) unit communica-

TABLE 2
FACTOR ANALYSIS RESULTS
PRE/POST LOADINGS

Factors	Pre-REFORGER Loading	Post-REFORGER Loading
Factor 1. <u>View of the Unit</u>		
-Trust in the Unit	0.837	0.833
-Unit Combat Readiness	0.778	0.827
-Unit Combat Confidence	0.768	0.844
-Trust in Unit Leaders	0.731	0.821
-Unit Morale	0.607	0.765
-Trust in Equipment	0.597	0.687
-Combat Preparatory Talk	0.534	0.530
-Trust in Unit Friends	0.534	0.485
-(Individual Morale)	(-----)	(0.629)
Factor 2. <u>Unit Communication</u>		
-Communication w/Platoon Leader	0.722	0.767
-Communication w/Squad Leader	0.660	0.608
-Communication w/Unit Commander	0.603	0.592
-Knowledge of Unit Mission	0.447	0.518
-(Individual Morale)	(0.481)	(-----)
Factor 3. <u>Evaluation of Self</u>		
-Trust in Self	0.829	0.809
-Self-Evaluation as a Soldier	0.811	0.805
Factor 4. <u>Evaluation of the Enemy</u>		
-Evaluation of the Soviet Soldier	0.688	0.699
-Fear of Combat	0.481	0.631
Factor 5. <u>Individual Morale</u>	0.481	0.629

tion, (3) evaluation of self, (4) evaluation of the enemy and (5) individual morale. Table 2 depicts the highest factor loading for each individual question on a factor analysis of pre and post questionnaire data. Examination of the loadings reveals the stability and strength of the clustering of all the questions except one, individual morale. This question shifted from Factor 2 (Unit Communication) in the pre-REFORGER analysis to Factor 1 (View of the Unit) in the post-REFORGER analysis; individual morale also gain in strength (0.481 to 0.629). For these reasons, individual morale was examined as a separate factor.

TABLE 3
 REPEATED MEASURES
 ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE
 SIGNIFICANT VALUES OF F (p .05)

<u>Source</u>	<u>Factor 1</u> View of Unit	<u>Factor 2</u> Unit Commo	<u>Factor 3</u> Self Eval	<u>Factor 4</u> Enemy Eval	<u>Factor 5</u> Ind Morale
Pre/Post REFORGER On All Variables On All Factors	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
REFORGER '82 Participation	-----	4.52	-----	4.98	-----
MOS(Cbt/Spt)	32.79	6.39	-----	-----	15.67
Pay Grade	9.60	8.47	-----	-----	3.87
Marital Status	-----	-----	-----	-----	-----
Unit	19.18	3.86	-----	2.49	3.76

A repeated measures analysis of variance was performed on the pre and post REFORGER data over all five factors and over five demographic variables. These five demographic variables were: (1) REFORGER '82 participation (yes, no), (2) military occupational speciality (MOS) (combat, support), (3) pay grade (E1-E4, E5-E7, E8/Officer), (4) marital status (single, married, divorced/separated), and (5) unit (A, B, C, D, HOW, HHT). The results of this analysis are listed in Table 3.

There were no significant differences between pre and post measures on any of the five factors or over any of the five demographic variables. Participation in REFORGER had no effect on morale. In several ways, though, this finding is not surprising. The tactical exercise phase of REFORGER is, in reality, a corps level exercise, not one geared to the individual soldier. Following the tactical exercise phase, three to four weeks are spent cleaning and turning-in equipment. This turn-in process usually produces frustration rather than increasing morale or esprit-de-corps. Any increase in morale gained from the tactical exercise phase is soon lost during the turn-in of equipment. Additionally, during turn-in soldiers have only one question on their minds -- "When can I go home?"

While there were no significant differences between pre and post REFORGER measures, there were several significant differences among the demographic variables on various factors. Those soldiers who participated in REFORGER '82 with the same unit felt that unit communication between them and the commander, platoon leader and squad leader was much better than those who did not. (Factor 2). Interestingly also, these same soldiers perceived an enemy as a more competent adversary than those who had not been on REFORGER '82 (Factor 4). Soldiers in combat MOSs (11-19 career management fields) viewed their unit more positively (Factor 1), felt that unit communication was better (Factor 2) and their individual morale (Factor 5) was higher than those soldiers with support MOSs (all other career management fields). Commanders may need to focus more of their attention on soldiers filling support roles. Another significant variable was pay grade. E8/Officers viewed their units more positively (Factor 1), felt that unit communication was better (Factor 2) and their individual morale was higher (Factor 5) than junior enlisted and non-commissioned officer personnel. These results may suggest that first sergeants and officers are out of touch with the junior and senior enlisted ranks, or at least are viewing their unit through rose-colored glasses. Marital status had no effect on any of the five factors.

The final variable in which significant differences were found, and probably the most important, was unit. Units differed on four of the five factors. What is important here is not how the company-sized units of this particular armored cavalry squadron differed, but rather the fact that they did differ. The squadron commander can utilize such unit information to aid in planning for unit training or selecting a unit for a specific mission. Mental health personnel, serving as consultants to command, utilizing similar survey techniques, can help commanders maximize the potential of their units by providing relevant feedback about soldier attitudes and morale.

References

- Belenky, G. L., Tyner, C. F., & Södetz, F. J. Israeli battle shock casualties: 1973 and 1982. Washington, D. C.: Walter Reed Army Institute of Research, 1983.
- Greenbaum, C. W., Rogovsky, I., & Shalit, B. The military psychologist during wartime: A model based on action research and crisis intervention. Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 1977, 13, 7-21.
- Manning, F. J. Assessment of unit cohesion and its relation to unit performance. Paper presented to the Anglo-American Psychiatry Symposium, London, England, 1980.
- Miller, J. A. OCONUS trip report - Attendance at the third international conference on psychological stress in time of war and peace. Personal Communication, 1983.