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The Marine Corps in Vietnam: An Examination of Cohesion and Effectiveness at Khe Sanh

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THE MARINE CORPS IN VIETNAM:
AN EXAMINATION OF COHESION AND EFFECTIVENESS AT KHE SANH

by

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B.A. May 1992, University of Iowa

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ABSTRACT

THE MARINE CORPS IN VIETNAM:
AN EXAMINATION OF COHESION AND EFFECTIVENESS AT KHE SANH.

Gregory L. Davenport
Old Dominion University, 1997
Director: Dr. Craig M. Cameron

The Marine defense of the Khe Sanh Combat Base in 1968 provides an isolated model to study combat cohesion and effectiveness. Focusing on Companies K and L of the 3d Battalion, 26th Regiment, reveals that cohesion and effectiveness were composed of four interlocking components: universal, cultural, institutional, and situational. Universal sources include the primary group, ideology, esprit de corps, small unit leadership, and social systems. Culturally, Marine recruitment images and pop-culture literature and cinema, which highlighted the Corps and combat as epitomizing manhood, influenced the Khe Sanh marines. Institutionally, the Corps used Marine history and gender manipulation during boot camp to create a common bond among recruits. Situational responses selectively combine universal, cultural, and institutional sources. Combining social scientific theory, historical interpretation, and questionnaire responses from Khe Sanh veterans, this study makes an original contribution to military and Marine Corps history, and Vietnam War studies.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I would like to thank my fellow graduate students at Old Dominion University and friends in St. Paul, Minnesota, and Denver, Colorado, who listened to my ideas about the thesis. Let me not forget the Trucco and Kingsley families, who for one summer welcomed me into their homes. Without their support the thesis would still be floundering.

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CHAPTER I
CONCEPTUAL MODELS

The defense of the Khe Sanh Combat Base (KSCB) lasted from October 1966, to June 1968. This study examines the period of 21 January to 12 April 1968, when Companies K and L of the 3d Battalion, 26th Marine Regiment (3/26), participated in the battle. In past studies on Khe Sanh it is not clear why the marines remained cohesive and effective. This oversight combined with the societal legacy of Khe Sanh are the catalysts for the present study. The ability to withstand an intense siege for seventy-seven days warrants a more comprehensive investigation. Combining official and historical secondary material with social science theory, a new contribution can be presented that will broaden the scope of understanding why the marines of Companies K and L survived the siege of Khe Sanh.

The battle for Khe Sanh came to symbolize the defense of American military prestige and to define the Corps in Vietnam. Despite the technological and economic advantages the United States held, the military effort appeared to be weakening by 1968. As a result, many thought at the time that the proud American military history was being tarnished.

The journal consulted for this thesis was the Turabian Manual for Writers, 5th ed.
by a third world nation.\textsuperscript{1} Khe Sanh was America's "last stand" and final chance at redeeming a proud military legacy. The Marines, placed in a losing situation, found themselves defending American military history and institutional honor. The eyes of the nation turned towards Khe Sanh and the onus of history and Dien Bien Phu were placed on the Khe Sanh marines.\textsuperscript{2}

The official explanation by the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) stated three reasons for the KSCB buildup and the extensive support of KSCB during the siege.


\textsuperscript{2}The thesis will use Marines to denote the institution, and marines the men. Dien Bien Phu, like Khe Sanh, was to be a battle to lure the Northern insurgents into a set piece battle. For the North Vietnamese Army both Dien Bien Phu and Khe Sanh represented colonial dominance. The desire to remove these symbols provided the catalyst to attack the garrisons. Both battles hinged on offering a tempting target for the Northern communist forces to strike. The location, however, had to be strong enough to endure a siege. Dien Bien Phu was a gamble the French government felt it must take. Feeling pressured by mounting losses and fighting an enemy that was getting stronger by the day, creating a set-piece battle was imperative. For the French, Dien Bien Phu meant the fate of the French forces in Indochina and France's political role in Southeast Asia, but also the survival of Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia as non-communist states. Dien Bien Phu symbolizes a last gasp at preserving a losing effort. The following discuss Dien Bien Phu: Bernard B. Fall, \textit{Hell In a Very Small Place: The Siege of Dien Bien Phu} (New York: Random House, 1966); Gabriel Kolko, \textit{Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience} (New York: Pantheon, 1985); Guenter Levy, \textit{America in Vietnam} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), George Herring, \textit{America's Longest War}. 

First, KSCB was vital for conducting extensive air and ground reconnaissance to locate enemy concentrations, artillery positions, and learn the terrain for future operations. Second, it served as a staging area to initiate operations in Laos. Third, it interdicted enemy personnel and material going south on Routes 1 and 9. The MACV summary also notes minor reasons for the KSCB buildup: to maintain defensive positions, guard drop zones, and protect the runway and supply depots. The official Marine rationale, like that of MACV, argued the KSCB served as a logical extension of the Corps' three-pronged strategy, which included pacification programs, counter-guerrilla activities, and large scale offensive sweeps. Military analyst Eric Hammel in Khe Sanh: Siege in the Clouds suggests the importance of the KSCB lay in its geographical position astride a major NVA infiltration route. He asserts that MACV believed that if the garrison was not reinforced, the NVA would have an unimpeded invasion route from Laos through Quang Tri Province and into Hue City. In Valley of Decision, authors John Prados and Ray W. Stubbe argue KSCB held minimal defensive importance, but vital offensive implications. Prados and Stubbe state that for defensive

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4Ibid., ix.

purposes KSCB was vital and if reinforced could prevent NVA access to the coastal plains. Offensively, KSCB was necessary for U.S. Army General William C. Westmoreland's plan of launching counter-insurgency efforts into Laos.\(^6\)

Journalist Robert Pisor's banal text *The End of the Line* offers no original contribution to the study of Khe Sanh. Pisor's conclusions are based solely on Marine documents and he offers no justification for the Corps' presence at Khe Sanh or why the marines endured the siege.\(^7\)

U.S. military involvement at Khe Sanh pre-dates the Tet offensive. Established in August 1962 by the U.S. Army as a Civilian Irregular Defense Group (CIDG) camp, Khe Sanh was involved in minor pacification duties. Army control of Khe Sanh lasted until October 1966, when the Marines took possession. The Marines first entered the Khe Sanh area in April 1966, during Operation Virginia when the 1st Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment (1/1), conducted a sweep of the Khe Sanh vicinity. In October the 1st Battalion, 3d Marine Regiment (1/3), took possession of Khe Sanh, while the CIDG camp was moved to Lang Vei, a town thirty miles south of Khe Sanh. One year later, 24 April 1967, an intensive Marine buildup began as did the "Hill Fights."

Fighting for the surrounding hills—800, 861, 881S, 881N, and 950, the marines of the 2d and 3d Battalions, 3d


Regiment seized the initiative and gained control of the surrounding hills. Lacking significant contact with the North Vietnamese Army (NVA), Companies K and L of 3/26 were transferred to the 9th Marine Regiment for Operation Kingfisher. In September the remainder of 3/26th was removed to the eastern Quang Tri Province. On 13 December 1967, 3/26 returned to KSCB as a result of increased enemy activity around Khe Sanh.\(^8\)

Eight days later, 21 December, 3/26 conducted a five-day sweep west of the base and found evidence of a massive enemy buildup around KSCB. Exactly one month later, 21 January 1968, the NVA launched an artillery barrage on the surrounding hills and base. The artillery attack subsequently destroyed the marines' main ammunition dump. As the bombardment pinned down the marines, the village of Khe Sanh was overrun before Combined Action Companies (CAC) and Regional Forces (RF) repulsed the enemy. After a second attack, Colonel David Lownds, Commander of KSCB, withdrew defenders to the confines of the combat base. The siege had begun and would last seventy-seven days.\(^9\)

Unique among the Tet offensive battles, Khe Sanh provides a distinctive model to study cohesion and effectiveness. In contrast to other Tet offensive battles, such as Hue City, Khe Sanh was exclusively Marine. The battle for Hue City involved two Marine battalions—1/1 and

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\(^9\)Ibid.
2/5—but also Army cavalry and Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) units.¹⁰

Further distinguishing Khe Sanh from Hue City were the siege conditions and rural isolation. The isolation of Khe Sanh hindered supply planes. Existing in the furthest corner of I Corps, the KSCB was barely accessible in good weather. Unfortunately for the marines, as the siege lengthened the weather grew worse. As a result, the logistics of re-supply became complicated. Also distinguishing Khe Sanh from Hue City was a rationing of water and living conditions in trenches and bunkers filled with stagnant water and rats. Lance Corporal Phil Torres of I Company, 3/26th discussed the living conditions at Khe Sanh: "We lived like animals. We couldn't take any baths, we rarely shaved, we never had haircuts, we rarely changed clothes. We lived like moles: in by day, out by night . . . we craved sweets, anything that was different than [sic] the C-rats."¹¹

The defensive posture of Khe Sanh is a further separation from Hue City. Khe Sanh veteran Sergeant Patrick J. Fitch of 2/26th discusses this fact with Ray W. Stubbe, co-author of Valley of Decision,

When you condition a man to be a totally offensive weapon, to go out and initiate combat, and then you put him in a fortified position. . . . They [marines] felt shortchanged, cheated, they felt they were doing a


¹¹Hammel, Khe Sanh: Siege in the Clouds, 374.
job that could have been done better by other people. .. It seemed like we remained stagnant and nothing was being done, and the whole atmosphere among the grunts—they just wanted to get out and just kick somebody in the tail.12

The inability to engage the NVA frustrated the Khe Sanh marines. In Hue City the marines were placed in a "shoot or be shot" environment. At Khe Sanh, however, that was not the case, as expressed by Lance Corporal Charles Dahm of Company L: "We were defensive. Wars are not won on defense. We were not allowed to be offensive. We were not supposed to win, just protect."13 Militarily, the distinguishing features making Khe Sanh unique among Tet offensive battles are the combination of siege conditions and the defensive posture. The social importance of Khe Sanh is revealed in how the national media—television, newspapers and magazines—built the siege to epic proportions and created parallels to Dien Bien Phu.

America was obsessed with Khe Sanh. As the battle raged, wartime disillusionment grew, drawing further attention to Khe Sanh as America's last hope in Vietnam. As a result, Peter Braestrup argues in Big Story that the national television networks—ABC, CBS, and NBC—were reckless and speculative in their coverage of Khe Sanh.

12Ray W. Stubbe, Marine Corps Historical Center (MCHC), Personal Papers Collection (PPC), Box 4, 566. Navy Yard, Washington, D.C.

13Khe Sanh Questionnaire 1., Question 14, ID Number--21. App. 1. The questionnaire was sent out to officers, NCOs, and junior enlisted men of Companies K and L of 3/26th, and to Earle Breeding of 2/26th.
Producing what Braestrup labels "marketable film," the networks focused on the base, not the outposts, which in strategic terms were the keys to deciding Khe Sanh's fate.\textsuperscript{14} The networks created a story that depicted the garrison at the complete mercy of the NVA. The pessimistic analysis was highlighted by Don North of ABC and Walter Cronkite of CBS. North's filming of the base focused exclusively on the runway. Viewed as the symbolic lifeline to survival, North took only shots of airplane wrecks with the accompanying narration "along the runway are the skeletons of cargo planes." Further influencing viewers was Cronkite's analysis. Cronkite stated that Khe Sanh was the most significant battle of the war and that "Khe Sanh was a convenient place to bleed the Marines." Cronkite, alluding to Dien Bien Phu, stated that "General Giap has used the same tactics twenty years before."\textsuperscript{15} National newspapers and magazines were filled with stories about the siege. The \textit{New York Times} and the \textit{Washington Post} began their front page coverage in February.\textsuperscript{16} From February to March, both papers covered the siege with such front page by-lines as the Times', "Khe Sanh and Dienbienphu: A Comparison," or the Post's, "Copters Run Constant Risks to Supply Khe Sanh


\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 387.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 404.
Outposts." In two months the Times, published seventeen headline stories, fourteen stories, and twenty-six related stories for a total of 57 stories on Khe Sanh. The Post, had thirteen headline stories, and ten related stories, for a total of twenty-three stories on Khe Sanh.\(^1\)

The impact of media coverage suggests that Khe Sanh was the most focused upon battle of the Vietnam War. The volume of coverage reveals that America was obsessed with Khe Sanh, because of what it symbolized: a chance to regain military prestige, to achieve a decisive victory over the NVA, and an battle that would to shore up domestic morale.

National magazines were also obsessed with covering the battle. The siege dominated Life and Newsweek. A distinguishing feature for the news magazines was their projection of the Marine defense as heroic. This traditional, old fashion approach to combat reporting resembled the style used during World War II, and separated magazines from the networks and newspapers. A 23 February article by Life correspondent David Duncan was typical of the coverage: "isolated and alone, resigned to a position in a situation beyond his control, if not God's, Pfc. Joseph Marshall sings to himself spirituals loved since his childhood at home."\(^2\) Khe Sanh overwhelmed Newsweek. For six straight weeks Newsweek covered the battle and reached its high point on 18 March. On the cover was a marine

\(^1\)Ibid.

shielding himself from a blast that resulted from an NVA shell hitting one of the marines' ammunition dumps. The title was "Agony at Khe Sanh." The article emphasized marine heroism. Newsweek concluded the article with a statement from the Commander of the KSCB, Colonel David Lownds: "What's there to panic about? We're here to stay. That's our job, that's what we get paid for." The obsession with Khe Sanh dominated the national media. The media, however, were not the only ones consumed with the battle.

President Lyndon B. Johnson's obsession with Khe Sanh had no boundaries. Herbert Schandler writes in The Unmaking of a President: Lyndon Johnson and Vietnam that for Johnson the battle consumed all waking moments. As the siege grew Johnson demanded a terrain model of Khe Sanh be placed in the White House's Situation Room so that he could monitor changes in NVA tactics and every marine counter measure. For Johnson, victory at Khe Sanh was imperative for war morale. Symbolizing the president's concern was his demand placed upon the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) to guarantee that Khe Sanh would not fall. On 29 January at the White House, General Earle Wheeler, Chairman of the JCS, presented Johnson with a signed statement by the JCS that Khe Sanh would be held. The act of having a president demand a

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guarantee for victory from the national military leaders was unprecedented, and demonstrates how Khe Sanh consumed Johnson. Johnson was transfixed by the battle and the media coverage heightened his worry over the battle. Khe Sanh consumed Johnson because he felt that America's opportunities to win in Vietnam were becoming fewer, and America needed to witness a dramatic victory to re-vitalize morale and secure his political future.

The attention brought to Khe Sanh was fraught with pessimistic and optimistic implications. Subsequently, Khe Sanh has left an indelible image on contemporary society. Khe Sanh as metaphor for the Vietnam War pervades society. Khe Sanh has come to symbolize the war in popular music and film. Khe Sanh, like the Vietnam War, is sung or discussed in terms of commemoration, not celebration. This is different from World War II. World War II is celebrated by the national media and recognized by the federal government in tributes to Pearl Harbor and the end of the war in Europe each May. Vietnam, like the Korean War, receives no national recognition. The social legacy of Vietnam and Khe Sanh has been captured by the singer Bruce Springsteen. In his song "Born in the U. S. A.," the hardships of the Vietnam generation are symbolized through Khe Sanh: "Had a brother at Khe Sanh fighting off the Viet Cong. They're still there he's all gone."²¹ The song continues to discuss

the difficulty faced by veterans re-integrating into a society that shunned the war and the participants.

In film, Khe Sanh is a battle associated with a sacrifice not victory. Film actor and director Tom Hanks in his 1996 film That Thing You Do, mentions Khe Sanh in the epilogue. Set in the mid-1960s, one of the film’s characters joins the Corps, eventually serving and winning the Purple Heart at Khe Sanh.\(^{22}\) The emphasis is placed on personal giving, not upon outcome.

Few battles have affected the United States like Khe Sanh. A mesmerized nation watched the marines maintain position and survive the artillery onslaught of the NVA. The battle for Khe Sanh ended with both sides claiming victory. Victory was shaped by propaganda, but ironically MACV decided to raze the base two months after the siege ended, with the explanation that the base no longer served a strategic purpose.\(^{23}\)

Central to the study are the terms cohesion and effectiveness. Traditional interpretations of cohesion and effective fail to separate universal, cultural, institutional, and situational sources. As a result, the subtle nuances that influence different situations are negated. The best possible definition for Khe Sanh requires that the four sources of cohesion and effectiveness be


\(^{23}\)Shore, The Battle for Khe Sanh, 149.
separated and examined as individual conceptual models. Cohesion and effectiveness will be defined in three models: universally, in the broad context of Vietnam, and specifically applied at Khe Sanh.

Universally, cohesion and effectiveness refer to a group's ability to fight and complete its mission under adverse conditions. To remain cohesive and effective the unit must retain respect for organizational hierarchy, promote unit *esprit*, have initiative, and adhere to combat doctrine. During the siege, Company K was involved in defensive patrolling of the perimeter and hills 800 and 861. The 3/26th Command Chronology states on 21 January 1968, "at daybreak, Company K swept the area outside the wire ... while returning to the perimeter the detail received a ChiCom grenade from another NVA who was subsequently killed."

The relevancy of this passage is to suggest that the Corps put the marines in situations where organizational hierarchy and combat doctrine must be followed. In contrast to Company K, Company L was stationary. Confined to the combat base to guard the Eastern Drop Zone, Moyers S. Shore writes in *The Battle for Khe Sanh*: "the marines along the perimeters (Company L) concocted their own schemes, which added to the displeasure of the enemy ... the men registered on the close-in trenches with their M-79 grenade

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launchers."²⁵ Patrolling by Company K and defensive firing by Company L composed the operations for the period under consideration.

In the broad context of Vietnam, cohesion and effectiveness are defined on the company and platoon level. During the Vietnam War there were few divisional operations and only slightly more regimental missions. The majority of operations in Vietnam stemmed from the company and platoon. Though the 26th Regiment was at Khe Sanh, the companies were separated from each other. Cohesion and effectiveness were maintained because in their smaller units problems such as racism, institutional upheaval, and distrust of the military hierarchy were avoided. While these problems riddled divisions and regiments, smaller units could maintain institutional structure, follow combat doctrine, build primary groups, and build company esprit. Divisions and regiments were more susceptible to disintegration, because they were further away from combat areas, men segregated themselves, which greatly diminished the need to cooperate and suppress personal desires and bigotry.

One explanation for cohesion and effectiveness at Khe Sanh was small unit organization. The result of respecting the hierarchical structure and bonding among the marines defined cohesion and effectiveness. The smaller structure combined with patrolling and perimeter guarding allowed the marines to endure the siege. The company and platoon

²⁵Shores, Khe Sanh, 121.
structure allowed primary groups to be built that helped marines endure the adverse conditions, helped keep organizational hierarchy intact, and created an internal esprit. Earle Breeding, commander of E company, provides insight into why the marines remained cohesive and effective: "Morale was high in Grunt units because we banded together for Semper Fi. . . . Hell, we shouldn't have been there in the first place, though I'm glad I was--doesn't make sense does it? To many marines, it does." When asked what held the company together, an anonymous Khe Sanh veteran replied

I believe that in combat there is a tremendous reliance on buddies and the organizational structure. As long as those ties exist, a unit will continue to function. At no time . . . did I ever think that marines would not do as ordered. Certainly there was concern about individuals in terms of dedication/competence, but never the unit. The overwhelming bulk of the men willingly carried out their orders because we had good leaders at all levels of command--from the Fire Team through Platoon Commander.26

The first step in exploring the behavior of Companies K and L is to examine, organize, define, and evaluate the conceptual models of universal theories of cohesion and effectiveness. A universal source of cohesion and effectiveness is an element that is not exclusive to one nation, military, or case study. Universal sources of cohesion and effectiveness include: the primary group,

26Khe Sanh Questionnaire 1., Question 5, ID Number--1. App. 1.

27Ibid., Question 8, ID Number--82. App. 1.
ideology, *esprit de corps*, small unit leadership, and social systems.

Primary group theory is the most accepted, yet contradictory conceptual model to explain cohesion and effectiveness. Four salient works demonstrate this paradox and reveal key nuances. Juxtaposing these articles highlights the complex and contradictory nature of primary group studies.

Biological and emotional gratifications are the roots of the primary group. In the article "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II," Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz argue that the high degree of cohesion and effectiveness of the German army was "sustained due to the steady satisfaction of primary personality demands afforded by the social organization of the army."28 The personal demands included integration within the *gemeinschaft* (community solidarity), meeting basic caloric needs, acknowledgement of masculinity, and supplying a sense of empowerment within the military organization. The key to understanding the argument by Shils and Janowitz is to recognize that the group is its own self-supporting entity. This theory is valuable because it disconnects cohesion and effectiveness from a larger social context. The primary group is biologically and emotionally, not ideologically based. The group dynamic is based upon immediate primary

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gratification. The study's value lies in its ability to interpret the group as a "cell" dependent only upon itself rather than on the military organization.

A second primary group interpretation uses the Korean War. No longer a cell, the group is now connected to the larger organization. In his article "Buddy Relations and Combat Performance," Roger W. Little suggests that the individual soldier was part of the small group as well as the larger organization. The group or "buddy" system acts as an extension of the military, which allows for institutional and social influences to affect the primary group. The influence of "buddies" on cohesion and effectiveness was noted by an anonymous Khe Sanh veteran in response to questionnaire 1, "I believe that in combat there is a tremendous reliance on buddies..." Earle Breeding states, "Marines fight for Esprit de Corps, their buddies." Little interprets the primary group as a connecting link to the larger unit. Little's two-man relationship became responsible for providing primary gratification, but also for integrating the "buddy" into the military social system. This argument contradicts Shils and Janowitz, who argue that the primary group acted as a cell removed from the larger organization.

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29Khe Sanh Questionnaire 1., Question 8, ID Numbers--82 and 1. App. 1.

The value of the article "Buddy Relations and Combat Performance" is its ability to expand the scope of primary group studies. This theory, however, is filled with speculation. Little's notion assumes that the group will have constant ties to the larger organization as well as being influenced by society.

Sociologist Charles C. Moskos disputes both the "cellular" and "connecting link" theories of the primary group. Moskos interprets the primary group as a social contract between soldiers. In his article "Vietnam: Why Men Fight," Moskos believes soldiers in Vietnam entered into a social contract with each other for self-preservation. The notion of self-preservation is discussed by Lance Corporal Bill Sigafoos, Company L: "You fight for your life and the lives around you. We accept our job and see it [through] to the end."31 Minimizing ideological motivations and shared societal beliefs, the soldiers understood the value of the group and that only by being in the primary group could they stay alive. Moskos provides one of the better definitions, but it is still based on assumption. By discounting ideology and social beliefs, the method employed is less than foolproof. Moskos assumes that the average soldier had enough understanding to dissect and comprehend the value of

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31 Khe Sanh Questionnaire 1., Question 13, ID Number--62. App. 1.
the group.\(^{32}\)

The primary group model is a paradox. The most accepted, yet contradictory, explanation for cohesion and effectiveness can establish only one common denominator—soldiers. These three works demonstrate the lack of constancy and the myriad of variables that must be considered when constructing a definition of the primary group.

An opposing theory to primary gratification is national ideology. Creating a theoretical conflict within primary group studies is the emphasis on national ideology. Shils, Janowitz, and Moskos reject the notion that ideological indoctrination was the primary source for cohesion and effectiveness. They concede, however, that political, ideological, and cultural symbols act as secondary factors. This occurs once primary personal gratifications are satisfied.\(^{33}\) Omer Bartov, however, interprets ideology as the root of cohesion and effectiveness.

Bartov argues in *Hitler’s Army* that ideological indoctrination sustained the German army in World War II. Bartov asserts that by September 1941, due to a 50% loss in men and equipment, in some units primary group organization had disintegrated. Bartov’s dependence on statistics to prove how National Socialist party members and ideology


\(^{33}\)Shils and Janowitz, "Cohesion and Disintegration," 315.
influenced the Wehrmacht is the linchpin of his argument. National Socialist ideology had replaced primary gratifications. This top-down, rather than bottom-up, approach to cohesion and effectiveness replaced the primary group as a particular source for cohesion and effectiveness. Bartov argues that larger cultural issues were substituted for the primary group. Cohesion and effectiveness were supported by cultural motivations such as German victory and prosperity, preservation of German culture, and the destruction of "Asiatic barbarism" and "Judeo-Bolshevism." These symbols gave the terribly mauled German army motivation to continue fighting.

Janowitz and Little support Bartov's assertion of ideological influence.

In Sociology and the Military Establishment, Janowitz and Little merge their individual theories and conclude, as Bartov does, that cohesion and effectiveness were dependent on political, ideological, and cultural symbols. The notion of fighting for a higher ideal is mocked by Earle Breeding, "Marines fight for Esprit de Corps, their buddies. Not for some high order abstraction. None of us thought for one minute we were stemming the flow of communist oppression." Acknowledgment, however, of ideological influence

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36 Khe Sanh Questionnaire 1., Question 8, ID Number--1. App. 1.
sources demonstrates the contradiction of cohesion and effectiveness studies.

Epitomizing the study of cohesion and effectiveness are the primary gratifications and ideology arguments. The dichotomous theories are separated by approach; one investigates human relationships, and the other examines the substituted component for human relationships. The value of the social science studies lies in the methodology. A specific case study benefits from combining qualitative and quantitative methods, because the study will more likely create a single definition. The weakness of the generalized studies are their size. The reviewed examples lose validity because they are examining entire armies or divisions. Rather than concentrating on individual battalions and component companies, these studies incorporate assumptions and generalizations. The authors reduce cohesion and effectiveness to simple catch phrases. The terms "primary gratification," "ideology," "buddy," and "social contract" become traps to explain behavior. The arguments are restricted through their inability to interweave opposing theories. One universal source of cohesion and effectiveness, however, does combine primary gratifications with ideology.

*Esprit de corps* is the one universal source for cohesion and effectiveness that combines primary group and ideology. In "The Soldier in Battle," Anthony Kellet defines *esprit* as the outgrowth of institutional tradition,
group bonds, and ideology. Kellet argues that esprit links the primary group to military ideology. He believes that cohesion and effectiveness require esprit, because it forces the soldier to look beyond the group and defend organizational mystique.  

Samuel Stouffer writes in The American Soldier, like Kellet, that a combination of pride in the outfit, group bonds, and shared common goals create cohesion and effectiveness. On esprit Kellet states: "Unit pride or regimental spirit not only supplies a more mission-oriented cohesion than does the operation of small group dynamics, but [esprit] relies less on situational factors."  

The arguments raised by Kellet and Stouffer, however, are not valid to Vietnam marines. The dissolution of the Corps' Transplacement program inhibited the creation of esprit in Vietnam. The Corps, between 1954-1961, designated certain battalions to remain intact for thirty months. In the Marine journal Leatherneck, Major Robert S. Geissinger details how these thirty-month battalions increased stability, integrity, and esprit. At the onset of the Vietnam War, the Transplacement policy was replaced with the

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thirteen month rotation. To generate cohesion and effectiveness, the Vietnam marines were forced to rely on universal, cultural, institutional, and situational responses. Small unit leadership was an integral part of building cohesion and effectiveness.

Small group leadership is the foundation for combat cohesion and effectiveness. In his article "The Small Warship," George C. Homans argues that cohesion and effectiveness are rooted in group leadership. According to Homans for a group to become cohesive and effective the group leader must demonstrate technical competence, have the ability to delegate, communicate, and demonstrate compassion for the physical and psychological welfare of the unit. S.L.A. Marshall, in *Men against Fire*, builds on Homan's communication concept. Marshall believes cohesion and effectiveness are based upon communication. Marshall believes soldiers become ineffective once engaged and dispersed in battle. He posits that communication from the unit leader gives soldiers guidance and re-attaches them to the group, thus creating cohesion and effectiveness. Although the primary group perspective offers explanations for cohesion and effectiveness the influence of value

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commitments from society must not be overlooked.

Value commitments to society have direct consequences on cohesion and effectiveness.\textsuperscript{43} Social scientists divide value commitments into three areas: political, social, and ceremonial. H. Wayne Moyer, in "Ideology and Military Systems," believes that Congressional voting patterns on military issues indicate public sentiment. He connects the public optimism or pessimism to cohesion and effectiveness.\textsuperscript{44} The value of Moyer's argument is limited because of its generalized tone. It is presumptuous to assert that a direct link exists between public attitudes and cohesion and effectiveness. There is nothing to indicate that combat marines allowed domestic sentiment to supplant their primary group or self-preservation needs. The impact of "Americanism" is a further example of the influence of social systems.

The preservation of national identity is a driving force in sustaining cohesion and effectiveness. Michael S. Sherry defines "Americanism" as individual perceptions of social, political, and economic systems.\textsuperscript{45} In Men, Stress, and Vietnam, Peter G. Bourne argues that the American

\textsuperscript{43}Value commitments are pre-existing ideas and standards of political, social, and ceremonial structures.


\textsuperscript{45}Michael S. Sherry, In the Shadow of War: The United States Since the 1930s (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 159.
soldier is "unerringly dedicated to the protection of his own national identity and the privileges to which he feels it entitles him." Protection of national identity provides a common goal for the soldiers. Bourne asserts that "Americanism" comes about regardless of public sentiment or personal skepticism. Moskos argues that American soldiers are not overtly ideological, but certain nationalistic sentiments exist that affect combat performance. The notion of defending all that is "American" is often the motivation for cohesion and effectiveness. The value of the "Americanism" argument lies in its persuasiveness to demonstrate the impact on cohesion and effectiveness. Using Moskos' theory that the average Vietnam soldier used the primary group only as a means to ensure survival, "Americanism" becomes the substitute for primary gratifications argued by Shils and Janowitz.

Honoring the dead through ceremony is the final value system that influences cohesion and effectiveness. Ceremonies to recognize the dead are essential for unit cohesion and effectiveness. In Achilles in Vietnam Jonathan Shay writes that without ceremony "long-term obstruction of grief and a failure to communalize grief can imprison a person in endless swings between rage and emotional deadness

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as a permanent way of being in the world."\textsuperscript{48} Emotional retraction from the group will lead to unit disintegration. Ceremony for the dead is as important to overt cohesion and effectiveness as the sanitized parades and ribbon ceremonies.

The stated universal categories for cohesion and effectiveness are not inclusive. For every case study new and varied combinations of sources can be assembled to fit the circumstances. The listed categories, however, provide an outline to begin an investigation into cohesion and effectiveness. Understanding cohesion and effectiveness requires an investigation into primary group theory, ideology, \textit{esprit}, small group leadership, and political, social, and ceremonial systems.

One mistake often made by researchers is defining cohesion and effectiveness in a cause-and-effect relationship. The Italian armed forces during World War II provide an example of cohesion and effectiveness acting independently. David W. Ellwood in \textit{Italy, 1943-1945}, discusses the inability of the Italian government to create cohesion and effectiveness within the armed forces. Ellwood asserts that from 1939-1943, the Italian army was effective in Libya and East Africa against the British. He argues, however, that the armed forces were not cohesive. He suggests societal instability as the cause. The unceasing

effort to mobilize people, resources, and industries placed a great strain on the populace. Ellwood asserts that the social tension of trying to mobilize a fractious nation gradually split the military, government, and citizens. Ellwood argues the result was that various Italian social groups became disheartened with the fascist government and war. The promised tranquility of fascism led to social disorder and reduced military cohesion. The Italian armed forces eventually succumbed to government and social upheaval.

The social science literature reviewed provides a wide range of theory to apply to the Khe Sanh case study. Gaining an understanding of the various conceptual models allows individual theories to be examined. The models are separated to distinguish unique points, so when examining a specific case study the precise theories will be incorporated, thereby avoiding generic application. It is necessary to examine diverse concepts because to rely on one or two models limits the study. Furthermore, a study of social science literature is vital due to the superficial nature of the Marine documents and secondary texts. Official and historical literature provides only an operational explanation of why the marines were moved to KSCB and how they were supported. Revealed when examining official documents is that no effort has been made to

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understand why the marines remained cohesive and effective.

The nature of the Corps’ primary documents and official histories reduce the study of Khe Sanh to tactics and operations. The generic documentation of the siege is demonstrated in the narrative summary of the primary document, Command Chronology for February 1968:

The narrative summary contains only the major events for the battalion during the month of February. From 1 to 29 February, the battalion provided Company K for the defense of Hill 861 vic (XD 803443) and Companies I and M (-) for the defense of Hill 881S vic (XD 777437). For the entire month, Company L defended the Red Sector of the Khe Sanh Combat Base perimeter. The companies also conducted day and night patrols to destroy enemy forces and to detect enemy infiltration.\(^{50}\)

Published secondary monographs are as generic as the official and provide no contribution to the study of cohesion and effectiveness. Similar to the MACV and other official documents, the official legal and religious material also fail to connect social science theories to cohesion and effectiveness. Marine lawyer Gary D. Solis makes no investigation into the influence of discipline and court martial process upon Marine behavior. Solis merely discusses two incidents where Khe Sanh marines broke military law, but fails to connect the outcomes with cohesion and effectiveness.\(^{51}\) Similarly, Navy Chaplain Herbert L. Bergsma does not discuss within his text the

\(^{50}\)Command Chronology 3/26th, 1-29 February 1968, Part II, Narrative Summary, 3. MCHC.

religious and emotional support provided by the Chaplain Corps and the marine's ability to withstand the siege. Navy Chaplain Ray W. Stubbe, who served at Khe Sanh, believes that cohesion and effectiveness were enhanced by a religious presence. When asked to interpret his role as chaplin at Khe Sanh he states,

I did this (providing a religious presence) through being a person to them, a person who was concerned with them. Not only by sharing God's word and the sacrament—which I did by holding brief "services" . . . from trench to trench and bunker to bunker. I did this very intentionally and was aware of doing it at the time. I felt then that God's love and acceptance of them was communicated by actions, not words. A hug, a presence, a sharing.

Stubbe's direct involvement in comforting the Khe Sanh marines contributed to cohesion and effectiveness because the marines were able to grieve and participate in ceremony.

After reviewing the official and historical secondary literature, it is still not clear why the Khe Sanh marines remained cohesive and effective. This oversight combined with the legacy that Khe Sanh left on contemporary society are the catalysts for the present study. The ability to withstand an intense siege for seventy-seven days warrants a more comprehensive investigation. Combining official and historical secondary material with social science theory, a new contribution can be presented that will broaden the

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53 Khe Sanh Questionnaire 2, Question 1, ID Number--1. App. 2.
scope of understanding why the marines of Companies K and L survived the siege of Khe Sanh.
THE successful combination of recruitment programs and combat has entrenched a Marine mystique within the social fabric of the United States. The Corps created images that have satisfied a patriotic fantasy and allowed men to live vicariously through Marine recruitment images. The Marine images include: physical strength, aesthetic perfection, mental fortitude, sexual potency, and freedom from a constraining society. The saturation in pop-culture of recruitment images, pro-Marine literature, and heroic film images contributed to cohesion and effectiveness at Khe Sanh. It was the boys of the Cold War generation, raised in the glorification of Marine victories during World War II, who a decade later were involved in the defense of Khe Sanh and the Marine mystique.

Pertinent elements of cohesion and effectiveness for the Khe Sanh marines began after World War II. Dennis E. Showalter argues that the Corps created images and propaganda for internal and external consumption around the notion that the Marines were a "force of elite volunteers, America's real 'old guard.'" Showalter continues,

The Corps has retained and in many ways enhanced its World War II image as a force of super soldiers--not necessarily death-worshipping fanatics, but men who accept death as an inevitable part of war and who are at home with violence under any circumstance. As a result, the Corps had created for itself a unique place
within the United States' social fabric.¹

Heroic images filled pop-culture. No period witnessed a greater deluge of pro-Marine images than the fifteen years following World War II. To expand an elitist reputation, the Corps exploited its World War II battlefield achievements. World War II marines such as Lewis "Chesty" Puller, Holland Smith, and Alexander Vandergrift embodied Marine virtues of leadership, courage, and the strength never to admit defeat.² The heroic images were transferred to the boys of the 1950s-1960s through a vigorous recruitment campaign.

The Marine recruitment program equated service with quality, elitism, and adventure. The ads present the kind


²Craig M. Cameron, *American Samurai: Myth, Imagination, and the Conduct of Battle in the First Marine Division, 1941-1951* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 147; Lewis B. Puller, Personal Papers Collection, MCHC, Box 11 Folder 5. Excluding medals from foreign governments, Puller won a total of 14 personal decorations in combat, plus a long list of campaign medals, unit citation ribbons and other awards. In addition to his five Navy Crosses (the Navy Cross is the next highest decoration to the Medal of Honor for Navy personnel), he holds its Army equivalent, the Distinguished Service Cross; Holland M. Smith, Reference Section, Biographical Files, MCHC. Smith called the "father of modern U.S. amphibious warfare was one of America’s top commanders in the Pacific theater during World War II. His top awards include the Distinguished Service Medal with three Gold Stars in lieu of additional awards, the Croix de Guerre with palm, Marine Corps Expeditionary Medal with three Bronze Stars, and the Asiatic-Pacific Area Campaign Medal with one Silver Star in lieu of five Bronze Stars; Alexander Vandergrift, Reference Section, Biographical File, MCHC. Vandergrift’s top medals include the Medal of Honor, the Navy Cross, the Distinguished Service Medal, and the Expeditionary Medal with Three Stars.
of men the Corps was pursuing—high quality. In her article "Sexual Fantasies and War Memories," Lynn Higgins argues that a "recruitment ad invokes the dominant western cultural understanding of masculinity defined as flight from the feminine. War has traditionally been considered the quintessential proving ground for masculinity."

A Marine rationale sheet states the strategy of a 1965 poster depicting three Marines running an obstacle course: "The layout of the add is deliberately designed to appeal to the no-nonsense, get-to-the-point individual ... the quality man." When responding to questionnaire one, an anonymous Khe Sanh veteran states,

In my high school years the Athletic Director was a former Korean War Marine who served as a role model for every boy in that school. He was hard, nonsense [sic] individual who got the best out of everyone and I suppose he was the personification of all those Marines I had read about.

A 1967 poster depicts two Marines engaged in a track race. The theme of physical strength is interwoven into propaganda promoting the idea that if a man wishes to get ahead in life, the Corps is the best avenue. The idea of using


4Rationale Sheet--Tough Choice, MCHC, Recruiting File 1-1. The rationale sheet is an attached piece of paper to each recruiting poster explaining from the Corps perspective the poster's intent. The institution is explaining how the images and pictures will be used to encourage recruitment.

5Khe Sanh Questionnaire 1., Question 1, ID Number--82. App. 1.
sheet: "While offering much of the same tangible benefits as the other services, the Marine Corps is the most traditionally elite and exclusive service . . . therefore the toughest to join and the most prestigious and rewarding in which to serve."  

The idea of serving with the "best" is expressed by Company K veteran Michael James. Of the influences that shaped his perceptions of the Corps, James states: "I thought they were the best fighting force in the world and I would have a choice instead of being in the Army with a bunch of draftees." James' statement reinforces the rationale sheet. Understanding the tangible benefits would be similar; James chose the Corps for its elitism and prestige.

Adventure was another tactic used to promote institutional elitism. The appeal of adventure is discussed in a 1960 rationale sheet. Attached to a poster depicting two Marines in their dress blue uniform against a Parisian background, the rationale sheet explains that using foreign locations for recruiting was critical. Company L veteran, Lance Corporal Robert Menzel admits that the lure of adventure influenced his decision to join: "Friends and relatives that were in the Marines with all the stories and

6Rationale Sheet--Tough Choice.

7Khe Sanh Questionnaire 1., Question 1, ID Number--48. App. 1.
places they had been to." The appeal of adventure and overseas duty was used effectively by the Marines to convince Menzel and others that they were signing up for exotic adventures. The recruitment images shaped and influenced how the men of Company K and L would perceive the Corps. Besides recruitment posters, popular books by World War II Marines affected the Vietnam generation.

The Marine mystique was enhanced by popular and sanitized accounts of World War II. Two themes were universal: tradition and esprit. When asked about adolescent influences, Company L Lieutenant John Prince remembers: "My dad, movies, and books I read . . . I forget the name of the movies, but they are always wonderful for young kids. The books were Guadalcanal Diary by Tregaskis, Battle Cry by Uris, and Helmet for My Pillow by Leckie." An anonymous Khe Sanh veteran remembers: "As far back as I can remember I wanted to join the Marine Corps. I read every book in the school library on the world wars, particularly on the Pacific Theater."^9

Marine and American frontier traditions dominate Guadalcanal Diary by Richard Tregaskis. The repeated mention of Marine involvement in the Philippines, China, and Nicaragua suggest that combat is guaranteed in the Marines.

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^8Ibid., Question 1, ID Number--36. App. 1.
^9Ibid., ID Numbers--58 and 82. App. 1.
For Company K veteran Alan Curtis it was the tradition of fighting and duty that shaped his perceptions of the Corps: "My father served in the USMC, during W.W. II, he was in the battles for Guadalcanal and Iwo Jimi [sic]. He was wounded, I was always proud of his service. I grew up believing a citizen does his duty." The statement by Curtis ties the themes of "Americanism" and the Corps' combat tradition together. Lieutenant Raymond Post, Jr. discusses the Marine tradition and how it influenced his adolescent perceptions:

I first became aware of the Corps during WW II and listening to the radio and reading the newspapers concerning the Marines island hopping through the Pacific. Of course, the raising of the flag on Iwo Jima was about as patriotic as you find in those days. It also helped that we had, in our town, five members of the same family in the Corps doing the island hopping. Of course, Korea with the Inchon Landing, and the Chosin Reservoir did a lot for me.11

Tregaskis also links American frontier mythology to Marine service. Guadalcanal Diary depicts marines as happy and comfortable away from technological burdens of modern society, living off the land, and fulfilling socially sanctioned, non-homosexual, fantasies about outdoor living.12

In addition to the Marine combat tradition, the literary depiction of the primary group also affected Khe Sanh veterans. Battle Cry by Leon Uris succeeds in

11Khe Sanh Questionnaire 1., Question 1, ID Numbers--20 and 55. App. 1.

12Tregaskis, Guadalcanal Diary, 3, 16, 44, 111.
dissecting the male bond.\textsuperscript{13} Uris weaves together a group of misogynist marines who are led into combat by their salty sergeants and naive lieutenants. For Uris the primary group symbolizes the Corps. Company L veteran Larry Brady, asserts that the bonding between marines influenced his decision to join: "Several members of my family, mainly cousins had been in the Corps, and I wanted to be part of the close knit group. The brotherhood was the primary factor for joining the Corps."\textsuperscript{14} Helmet for My Pillow by Robert Leckie discusses the traditional topics in post-war literature: tradition, the primary group, and the tension between enlisted personnel and officers.\textsuperscript{15} Popular literature created an image of the Marines as a hard-fighting and hard-drinking band of brothers. These ideas were worked around the glory and honor of being a combat Marine.\textsuperscript{16}

Films, as well as books, enhanced the Marine image. Hollywood films helped build a heroic Marine image and

\textsuperscript{13}Leon M. Uris, Battle Cry (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1953). 7, 89, 125.

\textsuperscript{14}Khe Sanh Questionnaire 1., Question 1 and 2, ID Number--9. App. 1.


\textsuperscript{16}Other novels that detail the Marine experience in combat dating back to World War I include the following: Thomas Boyd's Through the Wheat; William March's Company K; Maxwell Anderson and Laurence Stallings' play What Price Glory?. For World War II numerous texts exist that chronicle the Corps in the Pacific. The following texts provide insights into the Marine experience: John Hersey's Into the Valley; Ernie Pyle's Last Chapter; Vance Rowland's They Made Me a Leatherneck.
enhance institutional mystique. In Hollywood as Historian film historian Peter Rollins writes "motion pictures propagate messages massively and effectively. . . ." He argues that the myths and images produced form a collective memory. Rollins argues that films are produced to alter public attitudes toward matters of social and political importance. Hollywood and the Corps constructed an image about the Marines built upon the glorification of combat. The seductive images portrayed combat as glamorous. Films such as Battle Cry and The Sands of Iwo Jima created an image of combat as exciting, and an arena in which to prove masculinity and challenge death. The lasting image for Marine films was that the Corps always won.

The Corps' relationship with Hollywood dates to World War I. Film historian Lawerence Suid writes in Guts and Glory that beginning with Star Spangled Banner (1917), and the Unbeliever (1918), the Corps established a precedent of using film to enhance organizational elitism. Company K veteran Melvin Sopp recalls movies as shaping his childhood perceptions of the Corps: "As a young man I had watched probably every war movie made from the 1930s-1950s." The Corps used Hollywood for public relations and ensured


19 Khe Sanh Questionnaire 1., Question 1, ID Number--64. App. 1.
accuracy by providing Marine training bases for filming locations, war heroes to provide guidance to the actors, and other technical supervision. By allowing training centers and marines in a film's production, the Corps influenced the images and behavior that would establish a model for societal perception.

The creation of Marine film stars required the construction and representation of the ideal male. The image included an ideal body, sexual prowess, and social independence. In You Tarzan: Masculinity, Movies, and Men Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumin write that the ideal male is constructed around a masculinity that in reality could not be achieved. Enhancing the fantasy is the ability of the character to be stoic, to establish an inner world independent from society, be willing to sacrifice, and be self-sufficient.\(^\text{20}\) The image was best portrayed by John Wayne.

Wayne came to epitomize the mythical Marine Corps. His portrayal of Sergeant Stryker in The Sands of Iwo Jima established a social model. The influence of John Wayne upon the Vietnam War and Khe Sanh marines was profound. In The Code of the Warrior Rick Fields writes: "The John Wayne image included both chivalric and brutalizing images of manhood, and became associated with a principle of honor."\(^\text{21}\)

\(^{20}\)Pat Kirkham and Janet Thumin, You Tarzan: Masculinity, Movies, and Men (New York: St. Martin's, 1993), 13, 65.

Philip Caputo in *Rumor of War* writes how Wayne's images influenced his decision to join the Corps

... if a conflict did break out, the Marines would be certain to fight in it and I could be there with them. ... Already I saw myself charging up some distant beachhead, like John Wayne in *The Sands of Iwo Jima*, and then coming home a suntanned warrior with medals on my chest. ... I decided to enlist."

The impact of John Wayne is discussed by Corporal Lawrence Kranz: "Mainly the movies—John Wayne—etc. Also the public perception of the Corps that the USMC was one of the best fighting units in the world."23 Lewis B. Puller, Jr., son of Marine Lieutenant General "Chesty" Puller, also grew up with Wayne influencing his image of the Marines. Puller writes in *Fortunate Son*, "Furthermore, after a childhood diet of Hemingway novels and John Wayne movies, along with my father's example, I viewed my own prospects, if not with eagerness, at least with equanimity." And later in the Seattle, Washington, airport on the way to Vietnam, Puller remembers: "For all my self-doubt and insecurity, I was beginning to feel like John Wayne in a World War II movie, as I, a Marine lieutenant in uniform on his way to war, bellied up to the bar in the Seattle airport cocktail lounge."24

Wayne perceived the role of Sergeant Stryker as having


23Khe Sanh Questionnaire 1., Question 1, ID Number--29. App. 1.

24Lewis B. Puller, Jr., *Fortunate Son* (New York: Grove Weidenfeld, 1991), 32, 63.
to meld military discipline with fatherly nurturing. The Sands of Iwo Jima movie creates the idea of a father-son relationship between Wayne, the non-commissioned officer (NCO), and the junior enlisted men. The Corps was now viewed as an institution that provided guidance and discipline for America's youth. Wayne's role also promoted another heroic theme—combat death.25

Stryker's death provided a reassuring representation of the marines in combat. Stryker's bloodless death takes on sacrificial symbolism. His death symbolized the ultimate sacrifice of an American in the defense of democracy. Wayne personified the Corps and established norms for bravery and heroism that influenced the Vietnam generation.26 Caputo recalls that during the heat of battle he thought of Wayne: "C'mon and hit me, Charlie," I yelled again, firing a burst into the tree line with my carbine. "YOU SON OF A B**CH, TRY AND HIT ME. FUCK UNCLE HO. HANOI BY CHRISTMAS." I was John Wayne in The Sands of Iwo Jima.27 The legacy of John Wayne shaped an entire generation of marines. Fields writes "for the most part the Vietnam generation received their ideas of what war was like from the flickering images of movies and television—The Sands of Iwo Jima, and the documentary series Victory at Sea."28

25Suid, Guts and Glory, 93-97.
26Ibid., 102-4, 109, 217.
27Caputo, Rumor of War, 255.
saturation of pro-Marine films overwhelmed real combat footage, which subsequently was rarely shown to the public. Another important factor is the father's or sibling's influence on the Khe Sanh marines. The combination of the two contributed to building a romanticized image of the Corps.

Pop-culture representation of Marine images created a heroic institution. The images produced by the Corps' Division of Public Information reaffirmed elitism and esprit for internal and external audiences. Recruitment and pop-culture images presented the Marines as the Praetorian guard of the nation. These forms of advertising encouraged boys to choose the Corps. Lance Corporal Charles Dahm, Company L, echoes this sentiment: "The drill instructors instilled a desire to succeed. It was insinuated that the world was weak, and that we were strong, protectors, a last bastion of hope."³⁰

The successful combination of recruitment programs and the saturation in pop-culture of pro-Marine literature and heroic films influenced adolescent boys who would later fight at Khe Sanh, as well as Vietnam. The creation of cohesion and effectiveness was founded on the ability of young men to perceive the Corps heroically, thus

²⁹Robert Lindsay, This High Name: Public Relations and the U.S. Marine Corps (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1956), 23.
³⁰Khe Sanh Questionnaire 1., Question 4, ID Number--21. App. 1.
establishing a universal source—common will—of cohesion and effectiveness. The Khe Sanh marines were cohesive and effective in part to protect the Corps mystique and their collective memory. Led to believe that war was the quintessential proving ground for masculinity, the boys of the 1950s grew up believing and wanting to ascertain the images they had been given in recruitment posters and pop-culture literature. The appeal to adventure and the influence of film and family members who had served in the Corps created an interweaving paradigm that influenced a generation of marines.
CHAPTER III

THE INSTITUTION, BOOTCAMP, AND COHESION AND EFFECTIVENESS.

Because one of the goals of military basic training is to instill the spirit of teamwork, interpersonal dependency, and desired attitudes in new recruits, it is valuable to examine the ways cohesion and effectiveness are developed in training platoons.¹ To achieve these goals, the Corps interweaves institutional history, gendering—the combination of perceived social behavior and an individual's sex—and dehumanization. Building cohesion and effectiveness around these goals allows the recruit to enter the battle with the proper training to deal effectively with the enemy, minimize behavior that would lead to being killed or wounded, and to complete the assigned mission. The Corps strives to condition the recruits so that once in battle they will avoid disintegration.

Institutional history is used to create a common bond among recruits. In their article "Cohesion in Marine Recruit Platoons," Paul D. Nelson and Newell H. Berry state that cohesiveness is built around a set of common values.² In his article "New Approaches to Basic Training," Captain Frederick S. Thomas, USMC, states: "Feats of individuals and units are described, and in the classroom, on deck, or on

²Ibid., 68.
the drill field so the recruits are continually urged to emulate the attitudes and accomplishments of their Marine Corps predecessors."

Marines emphasize elitism to create a link between Marine history, esprit, and the recruits. When asked about the affect of institutional history and elitism on cohesion, Company K veteran Peter Brown responded: "By teaching us about Marine Corp history, this instilled in me a desire to work hard and carry on as other marines had done before me. Marines are special and the whole world knows this. I am sure just knowing an enemy was going to fight the Marines helped us win many a battle." In The Letters of Pfc. Richard E. Marks, USMC, Richard Marks writes of esprit, elitism, and group bonding inherent in Marine training: "A pride, and Esprit de Corps is building in each of us—a great self-confidence—whether or not it is a result of belonging to a strong group, and deriving strength from the mass, is something I am not sure of—but, it is there, and it is a good feeling." The statements by Thomas, Brown, and Marks are dominated by the themes of legacy, valor, and elitism. These particular values shared by new recruits created a common bond. The purpose of creating a common

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3Frederick S. Thomas, "New Approaches To Basic Training," United States Naval Institute Proceedings (October 1957): 1053.

4Khe Sanh Questionnaire 1., Question 5, ID Number--10. App. 1.

bond among the marines is to limit non-Marine influences on recruit training and to instill the desired institutional beliefs and attitude within each recruit.

Thorough historical indoctrination of elitism builds cohesion and effectiveness. Bruce Lincoln in *Discourse and the Construction of Society* argues that an elitist group is centered around a parochial ideology and special identity that separates members from outsiders. For recruits the special identity is the Corps. Khe Sanh veteran Lawrence D. Kranz agrees: "They drilled it in that we were going to be U.S. Marines and as a Marine we were the best in the world not so much as a person but as a unit." The elitist group identity of the Corps is articulated by an anonymous Khe Sanh veteran: "we were exposed to history/leadership classes which emphasized the Corps tradition and famous leaders. Of course, there was the special unit identity--short hair, jargon, sea stories and tough training, especially drill--all designed to mold us into a disciplined unit." Discipline creates cohesion and effectiveness, because discipline requires teamwork, an understanding of doctrine, and respect for the institutional hierarchy.

Enhancing the separation from the civilian world was the Corps' training environment. In a summary statement

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*Khe Sanh Questionnaire 1., Question 5, ID Numbers--29 and 82. App. 1.*
presented before the House of Representatives Committee on the Armed Services, the Corps' Congressional liaison admitted that the institution purposefully cultivates an "ascetic existence . . . in a social environment more dissimilar to such an existence than has been experienced since this Nation was formed." In *Rumor of War* Caputo writes about the environment in Officers Candidate School (OCS),

The monastic isolation was appropriate because the Marine Corps, as we quickly learned, was more than a branch of the armed services. It was a society unto itself, demanding total commitment to its doctrines and values, rather like one of those quasi-religious military orders in ancient times, the Teutonic Knights or the Theban Band. We were novitiates, and the rigorous training, administered by high priests called drill instructors, was to be our ordeal of initiation.?

The institutional value placed on history, elitism, and separation from civilian values created a "one-ness" among the recruits. Company K veteran Alan Curtis remembers: "We learned the history, through this knowledge we bonded with each other, no more I, but a definite WE." Caputo compares the "one-ness" to a machine: "And by the third week, we had learned to obey orders instantly and in unison, without thinking. Each platoon had been transformed from a group of

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10Khe Sanh Questionnaire 1., Question 5, ID Number--20. App. 1.
individuals into one thing: a machine of which we were merely parts." The notion of "one-ness" is significant, because it indicates that the recruits have suppressed their individual desires and have given themselves to the institution.

As a result of individual desires being suppressed, cohesion and effectiveness were generated. The influence of learning teamwork during bootcamp created combat effectiveness at Khe Sanh. Asked about teamwork, Company K veteran, Paul Knight stated: "Yes. That was the #1 reason for bootcamp. Team work and watching out for your buddy, covering each other's ass." Two Khe Sanh veterans discuss the importance of learning cohesiveness during bootcamp. Kurt Hoch asserts: "Everything was teamwork. With Battalion commanders to platoon squad leaders changing on a daily basis you were tested and the "team" performance dictated your survival. You learned to count on, but also to depend on that team." Larry Brady stated: "You are trained as one unit. A 'One-Ness' that is above all else because of the team or brotherhood. You give up individualism and become one fighting unit. Teamwork is the Marine Corps."

Besides institutional history another component in building cohesion and effectiveness was gendering. Beginning in bootcamp a recruit's masculinity was placed in

\[11\] Caputo, Rumor of War, 8.

\[12\] Khe Sanh Questionnaire 1., Question. 7, ID Numbers--27, 43, 9. App. 1.
question for the purpose of removing non-Marine perceptions of gender and replace them with institutionally desired attitudes. The Corps asserts the more courage and aggression demonstrated, the more masculine the marine. Conversely, hesitancy, fear, lack of mental fortitude or physical strength ostracized the recruit. The recruit, subsequently, was then marked effeminate by the DIs and his peers.

Linking gender to performance of military duties created a collective goal to be accomplished in bootcamp and defended in combat. Richard Stack, in *Warriors*, writes that the DIs stated upon a recruit’s arrival that successful completion of boot camp would ensure manhood. In his text, *Everything We Had*, Al Santoli presents the ramification of linking gender and war. Jan Berry, a veteran who Santoli interviewed, states his perception of Vietnamese women: "We hired women who came and made our beds, shined our boots, kept our little hoochies spick-and-span. I mean, all of us felt entitled to our servants. ... Some people became very arrogant and ordered their servants around." Lee Childress states of his "servant: "She had gone into my hootch and she went down to another soldier’s living area and took a piece of spearmint gum.

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... He shot her point blank through the chest and killed her. We got in more trouble for killing water buffalo than we did for killing people."¹⁵

Gender, as well as race are central to these interviewees. Santoli demonstrates how gender and race depictions during bootcamp created behavior in combat. The result was that Vietnamese women were given second class status. Negative perceptions allowed soldiers to create a male dominated world, therefore, gendering became an element in building cohesion and effectiveness. Gender manipulation is effective because no soldier wants to be effeminate, domesticated, or viewed as a sexual object. Creating negative perceptions toward Vietnamese women allowed American servicemen to reject and separate themselves from the "mother" apron strings of domestic culture.

American attitudes and behavior toward East Asian women are recorded in memoirs. Army veteran John Ketwig describes in . . . and a hard rain fell his experience at a South Vietnamese government funded whoreshouse: "When I was naked I joined her, and as I mechanically pumped at her crotch she struck up a conversation with the girl next to her."¹⁶ Ketwig in hindsight states: "Morality? A Woman? You respected your mother, your wife, your daughter, and any WAC who outranked you. The rest of the women of the world were

¹⁵Ibid., 63.

sex objects. Your orientation to Vietnam warned about gook whores and Vietnamese women in general."  

Caputo remembers his experience with Vietnamese prostitutes: "They had incredible names of Yum-Yum and Yip-Yap and were plump, pleasant, and reasonable." He further states: "she counted out the money carefully, then rolled over on top of me. . . ."  

Caputo overtly refers to women as objects to be bought for sex. Marine Sergeant Jack W. Jaunal's text Vietnam '68: Jack's Journal epitomizes equating women as objects. Jaunal writes: "Lily is a landmark. When the vehicles go by, Lily can be seen waving and motioning to the men. She is very informal about the whole affair. . . . It would not surprise me if she becomes as famous as Marble Mountain."  

Army veteran Stan Goff remembers how Vietnamese women were treated and viewed as commodity: "Hi, GI, you want a girl, GI? She showed me one girl so I paid and got Suzanne out of the place."  

The memoirs depict typical behavior and attitudes of American servicemen towards East Asian women. Viewed as whores, Vietnamese women were perceived as objects to buy. The second class status of these women afforded the American  

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17Ibid., 73.  
18Caputo, Rumor of War, 140, 145.  
servicemen the opportunity to prove their masculinity to themselves and comrades. Proven masculinity was necessary to maintain cohesion and effectiveness because bootcamp indoctrination taught these men that military duties were tied to sexual potency.

Gendering as a source of cohesion and effectiveness has been used in the past. Klaus Theweleit argues in Male Fantasies that the military sub-culture of the German 1920s-1930s Freikorps separated itself from the non-military culture because of the civilian equation with femininity. Theweleit’s concept of the "soft, fluid, and ultimately liquid female body which is a quintessential negative, is a subversive source of pleasure or pain which must be expurgated." His interpretation of the Freikorps is "the hard, organized, phallic body devoid of all internal viscera which finds its apotheosis in the machine."²¹

Theweleit’s analysis of the Freikorps is analogous to Caputo’s experience. Both authors use the concept of civilian separation and image of the machine to achieve institutionally specific goals. Caputo feared the source of emasculation that would come from failure at OCS:

Nothing he [the DI] could do could be as bad as having to return home and admit to my family that I had failed. It was not their criticism I dreaded, but the emasculating affection and understanding they would be sure to show me. I could hear my mother saying,

"That's all right, son. You didn't belong in the Marines but here with us. It's good to have you back. Your father needs help with the lawn." Caputo is repulsed by the idea of going back to the comforts of suburban life. He accepts the institutional indoctrination to escape his mother's doting. Both Theweleit and Caputo perceive recruits as being mere parts in the machine. For Theweleit, physical pleasure "exists as a component within a whole machine, a macromachine, a power machine. . . ." The concept of gendering and equating a man's military worth to his rejection of feminine values was present in American culture at least as early as the Civil War.

In the Civil War (1861-1865) manhood was tested in combat. In *Embattled Courage* Gerald F. Linderman argues that Civil War soldiers viewed combat as the test of manhood and that "a failure of courage was a failure of manhood." Linderman further argues that this mentality was a direct outgrowth of the preservation of the heroic culture of the Victorian age. Similar to Theweleit and Caputo, Linderman states: "the test of male maturity was for some soldiers the

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23Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, II: 149.


assumption that they were also testing themselves against womanly influences in their lives or womanly characteristics in themselves."^{26} For Linderman the foundations of cohesion and effectiveness were courage, honor, and the fear of cowardice and the subsequent social rejection. Courage and defending personal honor are analogous to the male sexual identity, and cowardice is symbolized in Theweleit's liquid feminine images. The fear of acquiring a feminine identity provided an impetus for soldiers to conform.

Gendering is also used as leverage to obtain a desired behavior from a recruit. The manipulation of a recruit's sexual identity was used to promote aggressive behavior. R. Wayne Eisenhart addresses this point in his article "You Can't Hack It Little Girl,"

In one instance during hand to hand combat training, I choked a man into submission while biting and gashing his face. Although I was shocked by my behavior, the drill instructor gleefully reaffirmed my masculinity in front of the platoon, saying that I was a lot more of a man than he had previously imagined.\(^{27}\)

The fear of the feminine drives the soldiers discussed by Theweleit, Caputo, Linderman, and Eisenhart to engage in aggressive behavior. The ultimate point of teaching aggression is to give the recruits the proper training to deal with the enemy and avoid getting hurt. Eisenhart states that demonstrated aggressive behavior became "a means

\(^{26}\)Ibid., 27.

of protecting our lives as well as our masculine self-image." The identity of the group came to reflect an organizational ethos that shunned weakness and labeled undesirable recruits as "faggot" or "queer."

Eisenhart writes that physical dehumanization of the male sexual identity did occur in training. One brutal episode of dehumanization reflects the connection between sexual identity and group cohesion:

While in basic training we were issued M-14 rifles. The breech of the weapon is closed by a bolt which is continually pushed forward by a large spring with considerable force. One night three men who had been censured for ineffectiveness in their assigned tasks were called forward in front of the assembled platoon, ordered to insert their penises into the breeches of their weapons, close the bolt, and run the length of the squad bay singing the Marine Corps Hymn. This violent ritual ended as the drill instructor left and the three men sank to the floor, penises still clamped into their weapons. We helped them remove the rifles and guided them to their beds. There was considerable bleeding as the men cupped their wounded penises with their hands, curled into balls, and cried.

Eisenhart's passage describes the epitome of using phallic symbolism to thwart the onset of feminine qualities. The censured marines for a moment have their metaphorically defining masculinity removed. The removal of their penis, but if for only a moment, is the final humiliation. Susan Gubar writes in her article "This Is My Rifle: This Is My Gun," that the dependence "on the gun saves soldiers from

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28Eisenhart, "You Can't Hack It," 16.

29Ibid., 15.
allegiance of fallible females." The censured marines' behavior in Eisenhart's sordid episode implies seduction by the feminine. Theweleit perhaps would phrase this story as an example of being ruined by the liquid images of the female. Now women, femininity, and sexual frivolousness have undermined the hard, phallic man. The connection between Theweleit, Eisenhart, and Gubar is that the marines have been labeled feminine by their inability to complete an assigned task. This perceived behavior is deemed unacceptable, thus requiring punishment to remove any feminine influence from disrupting future training. The decision by the drill instructor that these marines had committed a feminine act, ushered the marines into Theweleit's feminine paradox of pleasure and pain. The fear of being labeled feminine or losing masculine validation in front of peers is an institutional source of cohesion and effectiveness. Equating a recruit's self-worth to an institutional sexual identity and behavior indoctrinated the recruits with the mentality that only through aggression and killing the enemy would their masculine identity be preserved.

Physical punishment was another institutional source used to achieve cohesion and effectiveness. This base means of teaching conformity is founded upon the "carrot and

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stick" philosophy. The recruit is led to believe that feminine actions will lead to a beating, while conforming to the exacting standards of the Corps will prevent harm. The classic incident that dramatizes Marine over-zealousness in training occurred at Parris Island, South Carolina, 1956. In April, a DI, while leading his platoon in an unauthorized nighttime run through Ribbon Creek, had six recruits drown. V. Keith Fleming in *The U.S. Marine Corps in Crisis*, states that the Ribbon Creek incident was "symptomatic of wider recruit training problems in the Marine Corps."31 Verbal hazing, denying food and water, choking, and beatings were all techniques the Corps used to break recruits of civilian and feminine traits. In *See Parris and Die*, H. Paul Jeffers and Dick Levitan effectively argue the maltreatment received by marine recruits during the Vietnam War was an integral part of training. The particular source of motivation for recruits to conform and avoid feminine qualities is the Motivation Platoon. A Vietnam veteran stated to Jeffers and Levitan that while in the Motivation Platoon he was "hit, and kicked and denied food."32 Eisenhart disputes the effect of the beatings on combat performance and states "in my opinion the training was ineffective."33

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33Eisenhart, "You Can't Hack It," 15.
At the outset of bootcamp one of the goals for the Corps was to create a well drilled and disciplined platoon, well versed in protocol and procedure. Other goals of training include instilling a sense of institutional history, esprit, and elitism. These elements aid in the creation of cohesion and effectiveness, because the recruits are indoctrinated around a common set of beliefs. They are taught that it is their responsibility to uphold the traditions of Corps. This set of beliefs is coupled with a training environment that forces the recruits to create a "one-ness." Gendering is another institutional source used to achieve cohesion and effectiveness. Used during the American Civil War (1861-1865) and during the 1920s-1930s in the German Freikorps this method of building cohesion and effectiveness through challenging a soldier’s sexual identity has been integrated into Marine training. Physical dehumanization was another concept used to achieve aggression and conformity. These three particular sources of cohesion and effectiveness instill a spirit of teamwork and interdependency among the recruits.
CHAPTER IV
SITUATIONAL SOURCES

By January, 1968, the siege of KSCB was in a critical phase. Circumstances demanded strong primary group bonds, competent leadership, and negative images of the enemy. The marines of Companies K and L adapted these three sources of universal cohesion and effectiveness to the specific circumstances.

The primary group was a situational source of cohesion and effectiveness for the marines of Companies K and L.¹ Khe Sanh veteran Ernest Spencer writes in Welcome to Vietnam, "for the marine rifleman, life is his squad."² Company K veteran, Peter Brown, addressed the issue of the squad in his response: "Knowing that without each other we were nothing. The group--My friends. . . ."³ The statements indicate that by the time the siege had started, the institutional lessons learned in bootcamp had been replaced with situational responses. It was, however, institutional indoctrination and esprit that kept them cohesive and effective. Also, the "buddy system" articulated by Little was manifest. Understanding that to survive one must join a


³Khe Sanh Questionnaire 1., Question 8, ID Number--10. App. 1.
indoctrination and esprit that kept them cohesive and effective. Also, the "buddy system" articulated by Little was manifest. Understanding that to survive one must join a group confirms both the "buddy" system and Moskos' notion of a social contract. Khe Sanh Chaplain Ray Stubbe states: "In the Vietnam War in general, men tended to identify with their small unit rather than with Divisions, Battalions or Companies. It is the Platoon, the Fire Team, the Squad, or the Unit that matters."\(^4\) As a result, the bond that developed between the squad members provided the basis for cohesion and effectiveness. J. Glenn Gray in The Warriors argues "that such loyalty to the group is the essence of fighting morale."\(^5\) Gray's supposition of group loyalty is supported by Company K veteran Alan Curtis: "We were there for each other. Anyone who needed to talk, always had someone." Company L veteran, Charles Thornton states of the company: "the largest factor was the personal and lasting relationships formed by the individuals during the siege. The group were [sic] your everyday buddies who understood you completely and knew who could do what and when."\(^6\)

Gray states, however, that primary group relations require more than close physical proximity. Gray asserts

\(^4\)Khe Sanh Questionnaire 2, Question 3, ID Number--1. App. 2.


\(^6\)Khe Sanh Questionnaire 1., Question 8, ID Numbers--70 and 20. App. 1.
that a common will must have a single goal: "a fighting unit with morale is one in which many are of like mind and determination, unconsciously agreed on the suppression of individual desires in the interest of shared purpose." Two shared goals for Companies K and L were insuring personal and group well being and keeping the NVA from infiltrating the lowlands.

Melding these two situational specific sources aided in the creation of cohesion and effectiveness. In addressing the question of common goals, Company K veteran Paul Knight, stated: "The common goal of wanting to stay alive and the fact that we were all in the same boat together," while Company L veteran, Bill Sigafoos wrote: "Believing in each other. You fight for your life and lives of those around you." The sense of a common purpose as the glue holding the company together is stated by Company L veteran, John Prince: "To stop infiltration of the NVA into the lowlands where they have access to the rice supply and could intimidate the population into hiding and supplying them." Company L veteran, Sigafoos stated: "No matter what the numbers, we believed we were better, and would win." Company L veteran, Charles Thornton stated: "During Khe Sanh I became close to men from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds. We became comrades and brothers because of the
common desire—to survive."  

The fact that many of veterans interviewed held the party line as to what boot camp did for them—developing inter-dependency and esprit, none comment that these lessons carried over to combat. It is clear from the questionnaire responses, however, that teamwork and Marine esprit did carry over to Khe Sanh and contributed to cohesion and effectiveness. Almost all of the men interviewed express the sentiment that it was the primary group and wanting to get out alive that were the catalysts for cohesion and effectiveness.

The absence of severe casualties suffered in Companies K and L aided in the development of cohesion and effectiveness. In January Company K suffered 4.5% killed in action (KIA) and 17% wounded in action (WIA), while Company L took .5% KIA and 2.5% WIA. In February and March neither company suffered any KIAs, but in February, Company K had 2% WIA and Company L received 8% WIA, and in March, Company K took 1.5% WIA and Company L had 4.5% WIA. According to the Command Chronology for this period, neither company had to evacuate a single marine.  

Another source of cohesion and effectiveness was proving sexual potency to the squad. Khe Sanh veteran Spencer states,

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9Hammel, Khe Sanh, 485.

10Command Chronology, 3/26th, January-December 1968, 12-13, MCHC. These statistics are based on a 200-marine company.
Most squads have initiation ceremonies in which the fantasies of the squad leader are played out with all members participating. One of my lieutenants tells me about one squad's ritual. First the man has to jerk off in front of the squad members to prove his manhood. Then all members pack the guy's crotch in mud.\(^1\)

The notion of tying masculinity to military performance was thus transferred from bootcamp to combat and became a situational source of cohesion and effectiveness. Brewster Smith argues in "Combat Motivation Among Ground Troops," that the constant pressure upon an individual to prove his masculinity is internalized. Failure resulted in ostracization from the group.\(^2\) Proving manhood to the squad results in the soldier gaining primary gratification from the group. Douglas R. Bey argues in his article "Group Dynamics," that initiation and acceptance for the replacement required verbally confirming his heterosexuality. Bey states: "One unit, for example, held "court" and sat around the new man while one of the old-timers asked him whether or not he performed and enjoyed cunnilingus." After the verbal hazing, the replacement was sent to the rest of the company and sang the following song to the tune of "Camptown Races: "You're going home in a body bag; doo da doo da; You're going home in a body bag; doo da

\(^1\)Spencer, Welcome to Vietnam, 26.

doo da. Shot between the eyes, shot between the legs, You're going home in a body bag, oh doo da day."
Bey asserts that the verbal hazing used by the squad tested the replacement's mental fortitude and established a link to the group.13

Organizational authority and small unit leadership are other situational source used in building cohesion and effectiveness. Formal and informal institutional authority and discipline determine the sanctions that influence combat cohesion and effectiveness. The complex legal code that an organization brings to battle and the willingness of officers to enforce those codes will dictate cohesion and effectiveness.

Quick punishment in two incidents that occurred at Khe Sanh set a precedent that the commanders would not tolerate deviant behavior as a means to escape the battle. In February, a marine sentry was found asleep at his post. The investigation concluded that he was also in possession of marijuana. The marine was acquitted of the drug possession charge, but convicted of sleeping on post. The sentence rendered was a reduction in grade and forfeitures but continued service at the KSCB. The key issue addressed in the verdict was that non-Marine behavior would be prosecuted, but could not be used as a vehicle to escape the

The second prosecuted offense occurred on 16 April, when the Corps' cardinal rule of never leaving wounded or killed comrades on the field was broken. The situation was brought about when a two-platoon patrol engaged the enemy, and after the engagement the officers ordered that two wounded and thirteen dead be left on the battlefield for later retrieval. To prevent the incident from affecting cohesion, the regimental command acted quickly and by 22 April, an investigation had begun. Marine lawyer Gary D. Solis states that in the subsequent trial and verdict: "heads rolled, from the Task Force X-Ray commander on down. The battalion commander was relieved for cause, and the regimental and task force commanders were given substandard fitness reports."\(^{15}\)

The quick action taken by the Corps to investigate and prosecute wrongdoing demonstrated to the marines that no individual was above institutional codes, and that failure to conform to the system would result in stringent sanctions. Cohesion was reinforced because the marines felt that any action taken by the commander matched the crime.

Command cannot prevent causalities or death, but it can increase cohesion and effectiveness. Lieutenant Colonel Jon W. Blades in *Rules for Leadership* argues that four situational sources of small unit leadership will enhance


\(^{15}\)Ibid.
cohesion and effectiveness: enforcement of standards, maintaining a positive perception from the NCOs and junior enlisted men, demonstrated motivation, and concern for the troops.16

First, group cohesion increases with the enforcement of institutional standards. Blades argues that a link between enforcement and cohesion exists because the group understands expected behavior and the ramifications of not meeting requirements. As a result, bonds are formed among the members because they are dependent upon each other to meet the expected code. A positive perception of leadership will also enhance cohesion and effectiveness. Company K veteran, Peter Brown when asked about the leadership responded: "The NCOs and officers were the glue that held us together. It is because of them we were ready for anything the enemy was prepared to throw our way." When unit members believe that their leader is performing at a high standard, group cohesion elevates. An anonymous Khe Sanh veteran stated: "in combat there is a tremendous reliance on buddies and the organizational structure. The overwhelming bulk of the men willingly carried out their orders because we had good leaders at all levels of command from the fire team through Platoon Commander."17 Demonstrated competence also


17 Khe Sanh Questionnaire 1., Question 12, ID Numbers--10 and 82. App. 1.
ensures a cohesive and effective group. Understanding the relationship between leadership motivation and group cohesion was crucial to effectiveness.

Leadership motivation can cause an elevation in member cohesion. Company K veteran, Alan Curtis when asked about the officers and NCOs remembered: "For the officers of Lima 3/26 the attitudes were always upbeat and positive. No one ever spoke of death or defeat." Motivation increased cohesion because members realized that cooperation would enhance combat performance. Company L veteran, John Prince, described the attitude and influence of the company commander: "Captain Camp was a positive can do guy. He listened to the other ideas when considering a decision." Company L veteran Charles Dahm reinforces Prince's point: "If we suffered they suffered by their own accord. They gave us all the encouragement and helped with all our needs. Captain Richard Camp was the best." Company L veteran Larry Brady recalls: "Lima Company 3/26th had outstanding command in Captain Camp. Outstanding officers and NCOs and a good group of fighting marines." \(^{19}\)

The ability of the leader to listen to subordinates is an effective tool to gain unit cohesion. Creating an environment of joint participation between leadership and junior enlisted creates a rapport that improves cohesion.\(^{20}\)

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\(^{18}\)Ibid., ID Number--9. App. 1.

\(^{19}\)Ibid., ID Numbers--58, 21, 9. App. 1.

The actions of Company L Captain, Richard D. Camp, Jr., reinforced Blades' theories. Upon arrival to Company L, Camp immediately motivated his troops through public example that Marine weapons procedures were created for a reason. Witnessing that the mortarmen and M-60 machine gunners did not carry their bi and tri-pods into the field because of their weight and belief that they could sight the enemy without further assistance, Camp stated,

"Look we don't want to take that ammunition back. Why don't you guys hit that tree. It'll be to a good purpose; it'll convince me how good you guys are. Well they started firing and they never landed one by the tree. When I finished with the mortarmen, I let the M-60 gunners know how I felt about their leaving their tripods behind. I had also noticed that the machine gunners were decked out like a gang of Mexican bandidos. They had taken all their linked M-60 ammunition out of their ammo cans and looped it around their flak jackets."

Camp's enforcement of weapons regulations and his relationship between command and junior enlisted, combined with subtle public humiliation, enhanced the company's cohesion.

The final situational source in building cohesion and effectiveness was the creation of a single enemy. Building a common will toward the destruction of the enemy is an effective means of creating combat cohesion and effectiveness. Gray argues that clearly defined perceptions promoted by the disregard of all but one trait of the enemy leads to a dehumanizing hatred. Creating this image comes

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through indoctrination and the saturation of negative imagery.22

Enhancing organizational propaganda of the enemy is the conformist mentality extending from bootcamp combined with general ignorance. Herbert C. Kellman asserts that blind obedience to military ideologies reduces foreign enemies to negative images. The effect of indoctrination is a unified combat force fueled with a common desire—the destruction of the enemy.23

A fundamental premise in creating a dehumanized enemy is the establishment of a racial hierarchy justified through science. John W. Dower posits in War Without Mercy that the basis for a racial hierarchy is based upon anthropological, psychological, and psychiatric studies. Academic studies from the 1920s and 1930s generated "evidence" that enhanced the myth of the sub-human Asian. This racist literature was expressed in anthropological and medical jargon. These theories linked primitive cultures and mentally retarded people to Asians and created an association that tied the Asian mentality to childlike immaturity.24 Lincoln argues that derogatory language reveals a conscious effort to create a racial hierarchy. Anthropological taxonomy became

22Gray, Warriors, 134-35.


a vehicle to manipulate institutions and justify organizational involvement in a conflict. The use of negative imagery by the Corps pre-dates Vietnam.

Manufacturing dehumanized images and embellishing combat atrocities of the Japanese, Koreans, and North Vietnamese, the Corps consciously manipulated images of the enemy. World War II marine author E. B. Sledge states the results of the indoctrination,

Official histories and memoirs of Marine infantrymen written after the war rarely reflect hatred. But at the time of battle, Marines felt it deeply, bitterly, and as certainly as danger itself. They were a fanatical enemy; that is today, they believed in their cause with an intensity little understood. This collective attitude, Marine and Japanese, resulted in savage, ferocious fighting with no holds barred. This was a brutish, primitive hatred.

Enhancing the dehumanization process were entrenched terms. "Gook," "slant eye," "dinks," and "gopher" helped identify the enemy as a singular community and created a human versus sub-human conflict. Moskos writes that the marines' low regard for the Vietnamese stemmed from the NVA's reluctance to engage the marines in a large, set-piece battle, the questionable combat ability of the South Vietnamese Army (ARVN), the high number of Vietnamese men not in the armed forces, and the belief that the entire Vietnamese nation was

\[\text{Lincoln, Discourse and Construction of Society, 134, 137, 140.}\]

\[\text{E. B. Sledge, With the Old Breed (New York: Bantam, 1981), 37-38.}\]
the enemy.27

The Corps employed Cold War rhetoric of "Americanism" versus Communism to indoctrinate a singular perception of the enemy. Marks described the Corps indoctrination on Communism as placed in the context of an "us against them" argument. As bootcamp progressed, Mark's opinion of Communism became more negative:

In our minds has been instilled the thought that the only way to stop Communism is to beat it into nothingness, and this means an armed conflict. We are well aware that if there is a conflict we will be the first to fight—as in the past conflicts. And I can honestly say there is not one of us who would not be proud to give our life for the defense of our nation, and our way of life. With our training comes a great patriotic feeling. . . .28

Sherry and Bourne's theory of "Americanism" played an active role in the creation of a singular enemy. Political labels such as "communist," and "red" allow ethnic groups, regardless of diversity, to have their identity absorbed into a single dehumanizing category.

Kellman asserts that in Vietnam dehumanization of the Vietnamese occurred because of the American inability to delineate between enemy and ally. The Vietnamese were viewed in terms of pre-existing general American and Marine prejudices about Asians.29 Kellman argues that as combat activity increased, marines experienced a state of psychic numbing, a loss of compassion for the enemy, and a sense of

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28Marks, Personal Papers, 17, 36.
detachment. The causal use of "gook" by Companies K and L indicates a sub-human perception of the NVA. A letter from a Khe Sanh marine demonstrates the casual, yet callous perception of Vietnamese: "gooks have slacked off in the last couple of days . . . anxious to get off this piece of shit hill and start running patrols again. But you can't do that with 40,000 gooks in the area. . . ." When asked about his perception of the enemy, Company K veteran Michael James states: "They were not human, just targets, it was sort of like hunting and shooting your first rabbit." Melvin Sopp of Company K wrote of the NVA: "Shithead was dedicated, I hated him and would kill him in a minute." Company K veteran Peter Brown states; "[the NVA were] cowards, afraid to come out and fight."

The Khe Sanh marines' negative perception of the NVA increased when they were not allowed to take the offensive. The negative attitude displayed by the Khe Sanh marines, however, was not exclusive to this one battle. Many American soldiers felt the frustration and developed hatred toward the Vietnamese, but it is particularly noticeable at Khe Sanh. Gray asserts that an unbearable physical and psychological environment leads soldiers to dehumanize the

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30Ibid.

31Ray Stubbe, MCHC, PPC, Box 4, 564. Letter of Cpl. Dennis Mannion to JWD, 13 February 1968.

32Khe Sanh Questionnaire 1, Question 10., ID Numbers--48 and 64. App. 1.

33Ibid., Question 12, ID Number--10. App. 1.
enemy because the enemy is viewed as the cause for the painful situation.\textsuperscript{34} Gray's supposition is supported by Captain Earle Breeding and Rudy De La Garza. Breeding states: "Indeed, the idea of just sitting in holes was repulsive to the Marines. The energy developed from the anger of seeing buddies wounded and killed together with the prospect of that happening to oneself, from the stress of the uncertainty, made almost everyone more than willing to assault and push out and engage the enemy." Corporal Rudy De La Garza states: "We dug in holes and just kept digging every day and building our defenses and putting out mine fields. It was kinda hard at first mainly keeping the morale of the people. . . . Everybody was ready to go out and fight gooks. We all wanted to go out real bad. . . ."\textsuperscript{35} The replacement of offensive with defensive strategy angered the Khe Sanh marines because NVA tactics had removed a basic Corps ethos—combat aggression. Indoctrinated to believe masculinity was linked to an aggressive military performance, the marines blamed the NVA for their inactivity and thus, reduced them to sub-humans. Indoctrinated to dehumanize the Vietnamese before they went to combat, the inability to patrol aggressively and confront the NVA increased the hatred for the NVA. This mentality of

\textsuperscript{34}Gray, \textit{Warriors}, 139.

\textsuperscript{35}Stubbe MCHC, PPC, Box 4, 566., Interview with Earle Breeding, Rudy De La Garza, and Patrick J. Fitch.
Dehumanization was shared on offensive missions, but the dynamics of Khe Sanh exacerbated the situation. The marines, forced to sit and endure shelling and sapper attacks, were frustrated, and when combined with inadequate re-supply and placed on water rationing the NVA were dehumanized. Navy Chaplain Ray W. Stubbe commented in his diary: "The men are careless; they have a covering of 'hardness' that precludes things like religious exercise. They want to kill the VC and NVA rather than take prisoners . . . they are being run by emotions rather than reason. . . ."36

Dehumanizing the enemy was just one element of the situational sources of cohesion and effectiveness. The Khe Sanh marines melded together primary group bonds, were led by competent and respected leadership, and created negative images of the NVA to create cohesion and effectiveness.

As a result, these situational sources fit the circumstances and enhanced the staying power of the Khe Sanh marines. The ability of the units to retain some semblance of hierarchical structure, unit esprit, and institutional code in the face of adverse conditions suggests that the lessons from bootcamp have carried over and have influence in building cohesion and effectiveness.

36Ibid., 517.
CHAPTER V

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

The foundation for cohesion and effectiveness is composed of four interlocking components: universal, cultural, institutional, and situational. In chapter one, the universal sources of cohesion and effectiveness include the primary group, ideology, esprit de corps, small unit leadership, and social systems are examined. The primary group theory has many supporters and is the most accepted means of explaining cohesion and effectiveness. Unfortunately, it is also the most contradictory. The contradiction lies in the inability of social scientists, historians, and scholars to put forth one distinct definition of what the primary group is and how it is composed. As a result various definitions exist that cannot claim any likeness in either general theory or subtle nuances.

This study has considered the three most basic interpretations of the primary group--"cellular," "connecting link," and "social contract." The only common denominator are soldiers. This theoretical conflict among primary group studies requires other universal elements to be incorporated into the research. Without incorporating further universal components the arguments are invalid because they do not draw on all possible sources, rather using only one conceptual model upon which to base their
argument.

The notion of ideological indoctrination as the root of the primary group, rather than "primary gratifications" epitomizes the study of cohesion and effectiveness. The concept of examining the foundation of human relationships from an emotional or ideologically generated perspective has created fissures in social science research. The split within the social sciences has weakened the arguments because they have reduced cohesion and effectiveness to catch phrases, such as "primary gratification," "ideology," "buddy," and "social contract."

The other universal sources, *esprit*, small unit leadership, and social systems, are less encompassing, but provide a more specific examination of a group. These sources, however, cannot stand on their own without the incorporation of primary group theory and ideology. The basic issue and what has been ignored, is that all of these universal theories are interlocking to some degree. For example, effective small unit leadership is dependent upon *esprit* to generate respect for the institution and leadership, which in turn creates a primary group based either on ideology or societal values. This is just one combination of many variables that social scientists have overlooked in their examination of cohesion and effectiveness.

The societal ramifications contributing to cohesion and effectiveness, the subject of chapter two constitute another
area missed in past studies. The effect of Marine recruitment images and pop-culture literature and cinema that highlighted the Corps and combat as epitomizing manhood and proving ground for masculinity shaped the Khe Sanh generation. The insights from Companies K and L veterans prove that as young men the images found in society, in books like Guadalcanal Diary and Battle Cry, as well as John Wayne movies, created a heroic vision of the Corps for the Khe Sanh marines to emulate and protect. The defense of the Marine mystique began in society but was enhanced in bootcamp.

Ensuring that tradition is passed along to the next generation of marines is a primary goal of bootcamp as discussed in chapter three. The use of institutional history in Marine training creates a common bond among the recruits. Marine history becomes a tool to teach values and create the desired attitude among marines. As a result, the Corps separates recruits from their civilian values and indoctrinates them with a new ethos. Based around elitism, the recruits come to believe that they are special and that their responsibility is to uphold the proud tradition of the Corps. A second component interwoven with elitism is gendering.

Linking gender to performance created a collective goal to be earned in bootcamp and defended in combat. The fear of being labeled feminine drove marine recruits to participate willingly in the indoctrination process. The
failure to prove manhood and preserve the Corps' combat legacy meant banishment for the recruit. The manipulation of a recruit's sexual identity was used also to promote aggressive behavior. The identity of the group came to reflect an organizational ethos that shunned weakness and labeled undesirable recruits as "faggot" or "queer." These bootcamp methods were employed to create a spirit of teamwork and interpersonal dependency among recruits. This was transferred to Khe Sanh and demonstrated by the veterans' responses that it was the group and the interpersonal dependency that kept them cohesive and effective in the live combat environment of Khe Sanh.

The paradox of studying cohesion and effectiveness arises when examining situational responses, the focus of chapter four. The circumstances at Khe Sanh that required a combination of universal, cultural, and institutional sources to converge. Therefore, the question arises, are there situational sources of cohesion and effectiveness? The answer is yes, because not all possible sources of cohesion and effectiveness are used.

The most common response by Khe Sanh veterans for cohesion and effectiveness were the primary group, small unit leadership, and a dehumanized enemy. The impact of societal adolescent images found in recruitment posters, popular literature, and Hollywood films all aided in getting the marines of Companies K and L into uniform. A comprehensive study cannot overlook the cause of getting a
recruit into a uniform and what occurs once recruit training begins. The effect of willingly choosing the Marines, either through volunteering or the draft option, and subjection to the sexual identity and physical dehumanization must be examined because these are influences that shaped the recruit. The techniques used by the Corps were enhanced by a social mystique about the Marines that led to cohesion and effectiveness.

The cohesion and effectiveness developed at Khe Sanh did not stop after the war. Khe Sanh has become a life-defining moment for the marines who were involved before, during, and after the siege. To preserve the cohesion and effectiveness, survivors have created the Khe Sanh Veterans Organization. Formed in 1986, and incorporated 1 September 1988, organization co-founder Ray W. Stubbe, when asked about the purpose of the group, stated: "to provide renewed fellowship of those who served in the Khe Sanh . . . preserve accurate historical research, provide a healing environment, and locate and account for those killed in action." Another goal of the organization is to separate Khe Sanh participants from the negative stigma of the Vietnam War. Khe Sanh veterans perceive themselves as "winners" in a lost war. Stubbe's response provided this insight: "the purpose of the group is to maintain individuality, a separation from the 3d Marine Division

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1Chaplain Ray W. Stubbe, interview by author, 30 October 1996, St. Paul. Question 1, App. 3.
Association is intentional." The focus of the Khe Sanh organization is people. According to Stubbe: "The focus is not so much historical, but on the people. The historical interpretation is immaterial, getting to comradeship is important."²

The notion of a shared experience drives these veterans together for reunions. The commonality linking the various armed forces veterans is the shared feeling of isolation, being on one’s own. This common feeling between veterans draws them into the Khe Sanh family. The cohesion and effectiveness created at Khe Sanh has now been carried over into civilian life. Stubbe argues that in comparison to other veterans groups that bolster the mentality "we had it worse," the Khe Sanh veterans try to move beyond the misery and strengthen friendships.³

The Khe Sanh Organization is centered around suffering not celebration. In the spring quarterly of the Khe Sanh Veteran Newsletter, a statement from the association president John Kaheny addresses this point.

Khe Sanh possesses a haunting beauty, but there is a great deal of blood in that red clay. Perhaps what really binds us together are the things we all share in common. All of us experienced the knowledge that . . . we would never yield the field. . . . We never doubted our resolve. Unfortunately many of our compatriots proved our resolve by contributing their own blood to the red clay of Khe Sanh. We stand today with the knowledge that we are still a special group, sharing today the friendships that were formed by

²Ibid., Question 3.
³Ibid., Question 5.
fire and steel so many years ago.\textsuperscript{4} Rekindling friendships and remembering comrades killed is part of the Khe Sanh Organization's foundation. Stubbe believes that the reunions create an environment to "enjoy the company of each other and sharing the common experience." He believes that because the Vietnam War was such a fragmenting experience that large groups such as the 3d Marine Division are not attractive to Khe Sanh survivors. For Stubbe the purpose of Khe Sanh reunions is fellowship: "the reunions become breeding grounds for micro re-unions, such as this year in Philadelphia with the Ontos people, Delta 1/26, and Reconnaissance all meeting in groups of three or five...\textsuperscript{5} This reflects Stubbe's belief that the Vietnam war, unlike World War II and Korea, was fought on the platoon and squad level, not the divisional.\textsuperscript{6} For the Khe Sanh veteran the organization also serves as an outlet for artistic expression.

The \textit{Khe Sanh Veteran Newsletter} is filled with poetry and short stories conveying the emotions of the survivors. Sacrifice, remembrance, and death are themes in three poems. These themes demonstrate that the Khe Sanh Association is commemorating an agenda different from World War II and Korean War groups. For Khe Sanh survivors, the organization


\textsuperscript{5}Interview., Question 6.

\textsuperscript{6}Khe Sanh Questionnaire 2., Question 3, ID Number--1. App. 2.
allows a forum for artistic expression. Stubbe interprets the organization as a place to use "art as redemption," and as a means for veterans to express their inner emotions.\(^7\)

The veterans who joined the group are proud of their service and are not ashamed of being Vietnam veterans. They do not feel that they are living in the shadow of World War II:

"because the organization has given them a social outlet to maintain closeness, cohesiveness, because there was so much intimacy, dependency, and closeness. . . .\(^8\)" Stubbe states that the organization is "life giving and delayed gratification.\(^9\)

The Khe Sanh organization is a unique group that has been fused together by an extraordinary set of events. In many ways the Khe Sanh Veteran Association mirrors the cohesion and effectiveness that was generated before, during, and after the siege. The organization finds its purpose in commemorating friendships, remembering those who died, a sort of continual memorial day, not for grieving, but rather in awe of those who died and those who lived.\(^10\)

\(^7\)Stubbe interview., Question 4. App. 3.
\(^8\)Ibid., Question 7.
\(^9\)Ibid.
\(^10\)Ibid., Question 4.
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Lewis B. Puller

Ray W. Stubbe

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Holland M. Smith

Alexander Vandergrift

Questionnaire 1

ID Number.
1--Earle Breeding, Co. E, Company Commander
9--Larry Brady, Co. L, rank not given.
10--Peter Brown, Co. K. Corporal
20--Alan Curtis, Co. K, rank not given.
21--Charles Dahm, Co. L, Lance Corporal
27--Paul N. Knight, Co. K, rank not given.
29--Lawrence Krane, Co. K, rank not given.
36--Robert Menzel, Co. L, Lance Corporal
43--Kurt Hoch, Co. K, rank not given.
48--Michael James, Co. K, rank not given.
55--Raymond Post, Co. L. rank not given.
58--John Prince, Co. L, Lieutenant
62--Bill Sigafoos, Co. L, Lance Corporal
64--Mel Shoup, Co. L, rank not given.
70--Charles Thornton, Co. L, rank not given.
82--Anonymous, officer, but neither rank or company given.

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APPENDIX I: QUESTIONNAIRE I

The questionnaire was sent out to officers, NCOs and junior enlisted men of Companies K and L of 3/26, and to Earle Breeding of 2/26. The names came from the Khe Sanh Organization Directory. Eighty questionnaires were sent out, with eighteen returned.

1. While you were growing up what shaped your perceptions of the Corps?

2. Why did you choose the Marines over the other services?

3. What was the hardest adjustment you had to make during boot camp?

4. How did the Corps foster esprit de corps?

5. As training progressed did the Corps promote institutional elitism? If yes, how?

6. At the completion of boot camp had your image of the Corps changed?

7. Do you believe that teamwork had been instilled during your training?

8. During the siege of Khe Sanh what held the Company together?

9. At Khe Sanh how did your informal or primary group aid in your ability to deal with the siege?

10. What was your perception/image of the enemy during the siege?

11. How did the Corps as an institution promote morale?

12. What was the attitude and influence of the officers and NCOs during the siege?

13. What were the stated goals given to you to justify the continued defense of KSCB?

14. How do you perceive Khe Sanh in the context of the larger goals of the Corps during the war?
APPENDIX II: QUESTIONNAIRE II

This questionnaire was designed for Khe Sanh Chaplain Ray W. Stubbe.

1. As a chaplain at Khe Sanh during the siege how did you interpret your role?

2. What was the morale of the Marine throughout the Siege? Please explain the variables affecting the morale level.

3. Did you observe small informal groups created by the personnel? If yes, what influence did these groups have upon cohesion?
APPENDIX III: QUESTIONNAIRE III

The following questions were asked to Chaplain Ray W. Stubbe in a telephone interview on 10/28/96.

1. What is the purpose of the Khe Sanh Organization? And when was it formed?

2. Was the organization created to thwart the anti-Vietnam sentiment in America?

3. Does the Khe Sanh Organization wish to separate itself from the negative stigma of Vietnam? You were "winners" while the war and the rest of the Corps took on a losing identity.

4. Is the organization a shelter for veterans to create a positive image of themselves in the wake of a war that received society's anger?

5. Does the organization prevent alienation?

6. When the reunions meet, what are you commemorating? Is it recover and solidarity or remembering what others try to forget?

7. Is the thrust of the Khe Sanh Organization to commemorate an event that receives no nation attention, compared to Pearl Harbor or D-Day from World War II?

8. Do you feel that because the war took on a negative connotation but the Khe Sanh Marines displayed the traditional virtues of courage and bravery that you live in the shadow of World War II, and thus need an organization to create an identity?
VITA

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