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As early as 400 BCE, Xenophon had stated that "not numbers or strength bring victory in war; but whichever army goes into battle stronger in soul, their enemies generally cannot withstand them."[1] A strong soul, in modern times, is equivalent to high combat motivation. Likewise, combat motivation's centrality to a successful outcome in military operations, from patrolling to full-scale wars, cannot be overstated. Given the historical asymmetry of forces between Israel and its enemies, the way in which Israel has managed to parry significant conventional and nonconventional attacks—often in the face of substantial quantitative inferiority—has been due mostly to its superior qualitative edge based on its armed forces' professionalism, superior training methods, and combat morale.

Combat motivation is a key factor in enabling conventional armies to win conflicts; in Israel's case, it has been "referred to as the 'secret weapon' of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF)."[2] On numerous occasions, quantitatively inferior armies have been able to have the upper hand because of their fighting spirit, aggressiveness, and relatively buoyant high morale. Indeed, research has demonstrated time after time that there is a "strong relationship between cohesion, soldiers' level of morale, and combat efficiency."[3]

This article looks at the key factors that can enhance the combat motivation of soldiers. Given the IDF's many operational successes throughout its 56 years of existence, the article provides particular historical references to the IDF's experiences in building and maintaining high levels of combat motivation throughout its combat arms. It also will point to recent negative

trends that have weakened in part the IDF soldier's combat motivation. Its purpose is to instill in the reader an appreciation of the necessity for armed forces to continually focus on and build upon the human element of battle in spite of the technological developments brought about over the last decade by the so-called Revolution in Military Affairs.

Such a focus is especially imperative for the US armed forces, as well as for other modern Western armies, where the search for technological solutions often has been pursued at the expense of personnel. The need to focus on the human element of battle is also due to the increasing probability that most armies will be involved in urban warfare battlegrounds, where the technological edge of conventional armies is significantly reduced by the complex terrain and human elements involved within it.

However, in spite of the fact that combat motivation is such a key ingredient to winning battles, most military and academic establishments have found quite some difficulty in measuring and regarding combat motivation when, for example, analyzing an army's overall power capabilities or when giving a threat assessment of an army's enemies. Their problem often has been the labelling of intangibles—such as combat motivation—correctly, because "an idea that is not observable and measurable (strength of will) is hard to compare against one that is (physical strength)."[4] Yet, if "war is . . . an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will,"[5] as Clausewitz wrote, then it is important to take account of an army's combat morale, because "will" in the context of a battlefield can be equated to combat motivation. This shall principally be the case on the future battlefield where, as argued by numerous military analysts, "the focus of decision and control will shift downward toward the squad and the platoon."[6]

Furthermore, despite all the technological advances in warfare and the continuous debate on the extent to which there has been a revolution in military affairs, the nature of man has not changed. Regardless of the vast technological advances that warfare will undergo, its conduct always will be in the hands of human beings. "This means that individual actions, human imperfections, performance thresholds, and varying personalities will still influence and determine a conflict's outcome."[7]

As Ardant du Picq argued, "The human heart in the supreme moment of battle is the basic factor."[8] Thus it is important to look at the human element

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of the battlefield, particularly combat motivation and morale. Indeed, taking account of the human element is even more compelling in the future battlefield, which in the author's opinion will be for the most part the urban arena. There, because "a battlefield filled with buildings, tight streets, underground tunnels, and the other obstacles of a built-up area takes away the range of many of today's most highly developed weapon systems,"[9] the importance of the individual soldier's initiative and capabilities will be magnified.

Defining Combat Motivation

What is meant by morale in the military context? Among the numerous definitions of morale, the one provided by John Baynes offers a good starting point. He defines morale as "the enthusiasm and persistence with which a member of a group engages in the prescribed activities of that group."[10] In the military milieu, "morale" and "motivation" are frequently used interchangeably. However, morale highlights the condition of the group (or the unit), while motivation describes principally the attribute of an individual.[11]

Frederick Manning defines morale as "a function of cohesion and esprit de corps."[12] Unit cohesion always has been necessary in combat, because each member of the unit relies on the other in order to survive and to carry out successful combat operations. Cohesion has been defined as "the bonding together of members of an organization/unit in such a way as to sustain their will and commitment to each other, their unit, and the mission."[13]

The IDF, since its establishment, has had the reputation of high combat motivation and effectiveness, which have been developed and maintained by its customary emphasis on professionalism and realistic combat training. Nevertheless, unit cohesion and esprit de corps also have been deciding factors of high morale and combat motivation, and in the IDF's case they actually have been considered "the most important source of combat motivation."[14]

In the IDF, efforts to develop unit cohesion and strong esprit de corps have traditionally taken place at the start of a soldier's military service or career with the administration of an oath to him, "a ritual which goes back at least to the *sacramentum*, the Roman military oath."[15] In the IDF's case, for example, armored corps and 55th Paratroop Brigade recruits are sworn into the IDF at Latrun and at the Western Wall, respectively, two highly symbolic and militarily significant places where each fought gruelling, victorious battles in 1948 and 1967. Moreover, the differences in uniform between the various brigades help foster esprit de corps, because they enable the soldier to "promote the soldier's status in the eyes of comrades, civilians, and the enemy." They also help remind the soldier of his regiment's achievements as well as the unit's past near-mythical battlefield successes.[16]

"Combat motivation is a key factor in enabling conventional armies to win conflicts."

The recruit's successful conclusion of training is customarily celebrated by the handing out of a piece of uniform, normally the beret, which not only distinguishes that specific brigade from others, but also creates an atmosphere of competition between them, consequently raising the operational standards across the whole army. Moreover, the end of training is usually marked by some arduous task such as the stretcher march or a gruelling final route march, which are perceived as necessary rites-of-passage. Lectures on the history of the infantry and armored brigades' and of the Special Forces units' military history also create a great degree of esprit de corps. The IDF has extensive training programs that educate recruits and in particular officers about their brigade's heritage. Such programs include trips to Jewish heritage sites, former battlefields, military or regimental museums, and military gravesites.

Another crucial esprit de corps factor affecting combat motivation is the institutional value system a particular army embodies; values which are most relevant to the unit member are especially important. In the IDF's case, these are: "(1) Tenacity of purpose in performing missions and drive to victory; (2) Responsibility; (3) Credibility; (4) Personal Example; (5) Human Life; (6) Purity of Arms; (7) Professionalism; (8) Discipline; (9) Comradeship; and (10) Sense of Mission."[17]

One of the most important institutional values of the IDF has been encapsulated in the concept of *achavatt lochameem* (combatant's brotherhood), which fulfills the IDF's tenet of comradeship.[18] Indeed, "if the soldier trusts his comrades, he will probably perceive more safety in continuing to fight alongside them, than in rearward flight away from them and the enemy which they face."[19] Such trust is developed through shared experiences of mutual support found in a characteristic family unit. Likewise, such comradeship is crucial, because it satisfies another factor impinging on combat motivation, the soldier's need to belong and to feel that he is part of something significant and to which he can personally contribute.[20]

In the IDF, such a family unit is found in the structure of the battalion and is described as "a *yechida organit* (organic unit). Organizationally this involves (1) a framework characterized by a permanent membership and structure of roles, and (2) that upon mobilization the whole battalion (as one

complete organizational unit) is recruited" for up to 25 years after regular military service.[21] Such cohesion, thus, not only has developed in peacetime training, but even more so during combat operations.

Furthermore, according to Anthony Kellett, "Israelis regard fighting as very much a social act based on collective activity, cooperation, and mutual support," whereby every soldier depends on the other and particularly on the professionalism and leadership capabilities of the unit commander.[22] According to the IDF, for example, the company commander should possess several specific attributes and values, such as "face-to-face leadership quality, personal integrity, and the ability to create mutual trust between the sub-commanders and the soldier and to [instill] trust in the weapon and fighting systems."[23]

Indeed, a Combat Readiness Questionnaire survey of over 1,200 Israeli combat soldiers conducted by the IDF Department of Behavioral Sciences in May 1981 showed that the soldier's trust in his immediate leaders contributed positively in boosting his combat motivation and his unit's combat morale. Such trust in their commanders was shown to depend "upon the commander's professional capability, his credibility as a source of information, and the amount of care and attention that he pays to his men."[24]

Competency and Communication

"A leader's professional competency is the primary leadership factor that soldiers say decreases their stress."[25] Lower levels of combat stress and demoralization associated with professional leadership can be explained by the fact that quite often the unit leader is able to show bravery in the face of adversity and set a personal example, becoming a model of inspiration.

For example, the importance of the professional competency of noncommissioned officers (NCOs)—particularly at the *hulia* (team), *kita* (squad) and *tzevet* (crew) levels—was clearly underlined by current Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon when recently celebrating their role in the IDF. He noted, "NCOs provide IDF units with experience and a professional backbone. By carrying out your duty and striving for excellence, a positive statement is made to the soldiers that serve under you."[26] To be sure, NCOs and junior officers play a fundamental part in setting the standards and values of excellence and professionalism, which are needed even in a "people's army" such as the IDF.

Another important role that the leader must take on is that of information provider for his subordinates. Communication and trust between the provider and recipient are crucial, because informing soldiers during combat of the real state of affairs will help lessen the fear caused by the unknown.

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Reuven Gal's "Golan Heights" study showed that the assessment and awareness of the expected combat zone and of the adversary's power and ability not only improved the soldier's self-confidence as a fighter, but also further developed his combat motivation.[27] Such knowledge, in fact, regularly reduces the uncertainty factor, which often plays on the imaginary fears of a combat soldier in action.

Personnel Downsizing

Other circumstances of uncertainty that negatively affect the soldier's combat motivation or the unit's combat morale are related to his time of service both at the operational level and at the professional level. At the operational level, soldiers will often deploy and serve willingly, "but when their redeployment date is uncertain, trust with the institution is strained."[28] At the professional level, uncertainty often comes in the form of personnel downsizing.

Research has shown that "downsizing severely damages the psychological contract between an organization and its downsizing survivors," because it raises the soldier's level of uncertainty in terms of if or when the downsizing will affect him, both in regard to his tenure and in regard to the increased workload he will be taking on.[29] Consequently, extensive budgetary cutbacks and personnel downsizing in the IDF over the last few years may have had a deleterious effect on combat motivation as well as on the general esprit de corps.

Indeed, current plans aim to reduce the number of professional IDF personnel—particularly those belonging to the ground forces—by 20 percent over the next year, and this also will include General Staff members. Although some have argued that such cuts will improve the IDF's efficiency and reduce its bloated rear-echelon support and administrative branches, one senior IDF officer has argued, "There is a fear that, instead of becoming a smaller, cleverer army, we will merely become smaller."[30] As a result of such downsizing, IDF Ombudsman Lieutenant General Uzi Levtzur has reported a rise in complaints by officers who refuse to be discharged due to economic reasons. Such official complaints appear to be a new phenomenon in the IDF.[31]

The Leader as Protector

The leader is also the crucial link between the higher echelons that are geographically removed from the frontline of the battlefield and his subordinates who must accomplish the tasks assigned to them. The unit leader must make sure that such tasks do not recklessly endanger his men, but at the same time are accomplished.[32] To do so, a field commander needs to gain his subordinates' trust before he can exert any influence, which is best achieved when his soldiers are able to identify with their commander, with the organizational values that he embodies, and with the missions that he is ordering them to accomplish. Frequently, the soldier's identification with the unit leader and with the army's values and missions that the unit leader must promote occurs when the leader is involved directly with, if not leading, his subordinates during actual combat, because status differences become blurred when such officers live with their men, sharing their discomfort and their fears.[33] Nonetheless, such identification can take place even when training together.

The unit leader quite often must also demonstrate to his subordinates that he genuinely cares about them by taking care of their physical—and emotional—needs. When leaders take adequate care of their soldiers, then their soldiers will more diligently carry out their duties, typically without the need for much supervision. This is particularly the case when a unit leader is able to provide the best equipment for his unit, because it demonstrates that the leader is making sure that his soldiers have the best chance of surviving combat due to their real or perceived technological superiority over the enemy. Too often, IDF soldiers have had trouble perceiving the importance of their unit's assignment—and their own duties—because they have not been given the supplies they require.

The inadequate equipping of IDF reservists for urban warfare has been a particular problem over the last three years of the al-Aqsa (or Second) Intifada. The Israeli state comptroller's 2003 report, for example, stated in October 2003 that the IDF currently lacks half the ceramic vests needed to protect soldiers in the occupied territories. The report also pointed to the fact that the IDF's primary patrol vehicle, the *Sufa* (Storm) jeep, does not meet basic protection requirements.[34] The IDF's main armored personnel carrier, the M113, still requires infantry soldiers to surround their M113s with sandbags for better protection during urban operations.

Thus, quite often, the unit leader's reassurances about having provided adequate equipment for his soldiers have been insufficient, because "regardless of how logical and well-meaning the explanations may be for the unit's shortages, soldiers will evaluate their role and their unit's mission on the basis of their own perceptions and no one else's."[35]

> *"Unit cohesion in turn creates strong incentives to continue fighting when engaged in combat."*

Moreover, taking care of soldiers does not simply mean providing for their comfort and protecting them from uncalled-for orders by higher command echelons. It also entails "training them to become seasoned soldiers who could survive on a battlefield, because they are technically, physically, and mentally proficient."[36] However, due to the economic crisis and the increasing use of both reservists and regular soldiers, according to the chief officer of the IDF Ground Forces, Major General Yiftah Ron-Tal, over the last year "reservists have not trained at all . . . and the standing army only set aside four weeks out of six months to train."[37]

Soldiers may become embittered with their military leadership due to training restrictions that are often justified by politically motivated budget cuts or continuous operational assignments, because they know that such restrictions could rapidly get them killed in battle due to their lack of expertise in certain combat scenarios and operations. However, it has not been only the lack of training that has endangered inexperienced soldiers while carrying out operational duties. There also has been a series of IDF training accidents recently due to negligence on the part of both the instructors and commanders involved in their preparation and execution. Such negligence has led to a number of fatalities and other casualties and consequently to the dismissal and, in certain cases, indictment of some platoon, company, and battalion commanders.[38]

Survey research of Israeli veterans from the Lebanon War showed that the feeling of loneliness (i.e., lack of support given by a tightly-knit combat unit) was the best single predictor of combat stress reaction and that the best predictor of loneliness was low officer support.[39] Thus, combat leadership, particularly at the unit level, has become even more important due to the fact that modern warfare, particularly urban warfare, requires the dispersal of numerous physically isolated units requiring small and autonomous actions based on tactical ingenuity. The legitimacy of the leader within the specific unit and trust in his capabilities can develop only on a continuous face-to-face relational basis with all soldiers of his particular unit; hence, it is more likely possible to develop at squad, platoon, and company levels.

Such trust and mutual support have been ultimately articulated in the IDF's absolute standard of retrieving casualties from the battlefield at whatever price—that is, even at the price of suffering more casualties. Such loy-

alty throughout Israel's wars has been a powerful inducement for heroic acts on behalf of many soldiers. Indeed, "the normative power of the cohesive group causes the strong personal commitment on the part of the soldier that he ought to conform to group expectations," which in the IDF has often tended to emphasize the spirit of initiative and heroism.[40]

Unit Cohesion

Various studies have shown that unit cohesion or esprit de corps not only strengthens a unit's level of morale, but also acts as "a powerful preventive measure against psychiatric breakdown in battle and as a 'generator' of heroic behavior among the unit's members."[41] This was particularly substantiated for the IDF during the early stages of the Yom Kippur War in the Golan Heights theater of operations: "Members of IDF tank crews who were well acquainted with one another and had trained together were more combat effective, and, despite equally intense battle, had fewer psychiatric casualties than members of tank crews who were not well acquainted, and, though equally well trained, had not trained together."[42]

Whereas such cohesion tends to develop mostly during military service in other Western armies, in Israel such solidarity also has been a result of the collectivistic character of Israeli society. Thus, such cohesion is already in part present before conscription takes place. In effect, Israeli society has been socialized into a cohesive society based on the principle of *gibush* (crystallization).[43] According to Eyal Ben-Ari,

> The *gibush* metaphor implies . . . [that] the internal strength and solidity of both the individual and the group flow from the unifying sense of belonging, of being securely together "in place." The social ideal of *gibush* involves an emphasis . . . on joint endeavours, on cooperation and shared sentiments, on solidarity and a sense of togetherness.[44]

This process of crystallization is reinforced as the members of a unit meet up yearly for their reserve service and often becomes the source of strong friendships, if not brotherliness.[45] Such unit cohesion in turn creates strong incentives to continue fighting when engaged in combat, because the combatant ultimately will fight in order to not let the other members of his unit down. Another social aspect enhancing unit cohesion is "linked directly to broad, societal agreement about the citizen's duty to serve in defense of the nation. . . . Soldiers must be aware that their society will exact penalties for being AWOL and for deserting" and will exact considerable social penalties for dereliction of duty.[46]

Hence, according to J. Glenn Gray, author of *The Warriors*, "Soldiers have died more or less willingly not . . . for any abstract good but be-

cause they realize that by fleeing their post . . . they would expose companions to grave danger. Such loyalty to the group is the essence of fighting morale."[47]

It is essential to strengthen unit cohesion because during combat, isolation and loneliness assault the cohesive power of a unit. Consequently, the enemy will always try to "target the human bonds that the commander has so diligently prepared."[48] If the commander has not developed unit cohesion beforehand, then the unit's combat effectiveness will crumble under the pressure of attack.

S. L. A. Marshall's study of World War II US infantrymen led him to conclude that "men do not fight for a cause but because they do not want to let their comrades down."[49] Due to the principle of *gibush*, this tendency is even greater in Israel. Indeed, most Israeli reservists who report for reserve duty not only do so because they feel a duty to protect Israeli citizens, but also because they do not want let their comrades down and face their criticism the next time they report for reserve duty. After having missed only one tour of reserve duty with his usual unit during Operation Defensive Shield in April 2004, reserve Staff Sergeant Amos Harel explained how his unit comrades reacted:

> But once I got there this time, I got all kinds of looks from commanders, soldiers who were under my command, and so on. They kept saying, "Oh, we thought we would never see you here again" and so on, and I was only absent for one tour which I did, of course, serve somewhere else. . . . People were a bit doubting for the first few minutes—"Where has he been?"[50]

Mission Accomplishment

At the primary or individual level there are other factors that provide IDF soldiers with high levels of morale and combat motivation. These are, "for each soldier, a goal, a role, and a reason for self-confidence."[51] Rather than fighting for a very abstract purpose, the soldier needs to achieve definite and tangible objectives in order to sustain high combat motivation. This is why in the IDF's case the strategic or operational objective takes precedence over the manner in which operations are carried out. Indeed, the IDF's traditional emphasis on directive control gives subordinates right down the chain of command the greatest possible freedom of action.[52]

In combat operations, the criteria for judging whether or not the goal has been obtained are often relatively unambiguous—"conquer the objective and stop enemy troops from advancing. However, [in operations other than war], it is often very difficult to understand what constitutes mission success."[53] This is particularly the case when hostilities continue during diplomatic talks, negotiations, and even after interim agreements, as was the case for the IDF during the whole Oslo era and during the first Israeli-Palestinian *Hudna* (cease-fire) between the months of September and October 2003.

Rules of Engagement

A soldier's certainty about his role in a combat situation is also crucial in maintaining high combat motivation. Such a role is normally outlined during pre-operation briefings and by clear, albeit flexible, rules of engagement (ROE). To be sure, such rules must be flexible enough to allow for tactical improvization during military operations, particularly when soldiers have to deal with guerrillas, terrorists, and civilians contemporaneously in complex urban theaters.

For the Israeli soldier, such ROE have been clear-cut and flexible enough when dealing with conventional forces and tactics. Due to the sensitive nature in carrying out military and other security-related operations in urban theaters and the close domestic and international scrutiny that such operations receive, however, Israeli ROE since the start of the first Intifada have continuously changed and often restricted the Israeli soldier from achieving his mission goals. Thus, not giving soldiers sufficient personal control to accomplish their mission has negatively affected their combat motivation on numerous occasions. As another writer has noted, "restricting personal control psychologically disengages soldiers from the mission, resulting in soldiers not feeling pride in their work."[54]

Despite such limitations, the professionalism and improvization of IDF officers and their unit members have often helped limit the erosive effects of restrictive and sometimes shifting rules of engagement. As one reserve infantry company commander pointed out when asked about the difficulty of operating in civilian-populated areas under shifting ROE, "I consider myself a professional officer and I do what I do from a professional point of view. I have no other considerations. . . . You deal with the situation as it is and if you are trained and you have common sense then you know how to deal with it."[55]

Self-Confidence

A soldier's role and self-confidence are both developed through the extensive training he or she is put through, as well as the combat experience gained through battles or military operations, which in the Israeli soldier's case has been a life-long and extensive endeavor. Training is a key ingredient to increasing or maintaining the soldier's combat morale both at the individual and unit levels, because it is in training that unit cohesion is built before combat troops go on any military operation. Indeed, as S. L. A. Marshall noted, the "tactical unity of men working in combat will be in the ratio of their knowledge and sympathetic understanding of one another."[56]

Extensive training also averts the soldier from losing control of his martial faculties and duties when the extensive chaos created by the fog of

war ensues, because "training is habituation" and he can, thus, execute "by rote . . . under stresses of shot and shell, confusion, uncertainty and the infectious fear of his comrades."[57] He basically will have developed during training the necessary combat skill to make the kill. However, no matter how much energy is put into training the soldier, if he is not adequately motivated, the outcome will constantly be low combat performance, because ultimately "performance equals knowledge times motivation."[58]

Building Cohesion is Today's Task

The nature of warfare is changing dramatically, especially in terms of its actual duration—that is, it is becoming shorter and shorter. Consequently it very important that unit cohesion is created in advance. Short spurts of low-intensity operations simply do not have the same coalescing effect as prolonged or even relatively brief high-intensity conflicts. Nonetheless, peacetime cohesion is not just cultivated in training alone. As revealed in a recent study of US combat soldiers in Iraq, "Much of the cohesion in units is developed simply because there is nothing else to do except talk."[59] It is essential to form in peacetime the friendship ties crucial in time of war, because "in high-performance units, leaders and followers are friends off duty as well as on."[60] Thus, for example, it is easy to understand that the motivation behind Staff Sergeant Sean Sachs' and his friend's decision to join the *Nahal* Infantry Brigade was that "we all wanted to go there, because our friends were there. . . . That's why we all volunteered; we asked to be in that unit."[61]

Training needs are becoming more difficult to satisfy for reservist-intensive armies, such as the IDF, which train one month a year, if at all. This is because the technical and interpersonal skills needed by the 21st-century soldier to carry out sub-conventional military operations in urban or other smaller civilian scenarios are much greater. And unless reservists are thoroughly trained, not only will they lack the necessary military skills to tackle such scenarios, they also will lack the necessary cohesion, which is so vital when coming to grips with the moral dilemmas of operating in civilian settings.

Because of extensive budget cuts and the concurrent growing need for reservists and regular soldiers in carrying out military operations as well as tedious garrison duties, training has dramatically diminished in most IDF combat units since the beginning of the al-Aqsa Intifada. For example, such budget cuts have reduced the time set aside to train an IDF recruit to qualify as an infantry soldier from 14 to 10 months, whereas the course training for elite units has been shortened to just one year, instead of the one and a half or two years it traditionally took. The effects on unit cohesion and individual morale are not yet known.[62]

Despite such reduced training opportunities, and regardless of the reduced threat of conventional warfare, it remains important to heed Ardant du Picq's warnings on the need to maintain cohesion even during times of relative quiet: "A wise organization ensures that the personnel of combat groups changes as little as possible, so that comrades in peace time manoeuvres shall be comrades in war."[63]

NOTES

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45. See my chapter, "The Israeli Defense Forces' Strategic and Tactical Adaptation to Intercommunal Warfare and Its Effects on Troop Morale," in *Perspectives on War: New Views on Historical and Contemporary Security Issues*, ed. David J. Bercuson and Rob Huebert (Calgary, Canada: Society for Military and Strategic Studies, 2003).

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50. Staff Sergeant (Res.) Amos Harel (Defense Correspondent, *Ha'aretz*), interview with the author, Tel Aviv, 22 June 2003.

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53. Thomas W. Britt, "Responsibility, Commitment and Morale," *Military Review*, 78 (January-February 1998), 79.

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58. Geoffrey G. Prosch, "Soldier Readiness: Some Thoughts on Leadership," *Infantry*, November-December 1987, p. 15.

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61. Staff Sergeant (Res.) Sean Sachs (*Nahal* 50 Infantry Brigade), interview by the author, Tel Aviv, 11 August 2003.

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63. Andrew T. Home, "Unit Cohesion?" *Marine Corps Gazette*, February 2001, p. 45.