

**Analysis of the Report on the Canadian
Forces Internal Survey on Homosexual
Issues (An addendum to "The Impact of
Cohesion on the Combat Performance
of Military Units", Aug. 1990)**

by

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The performance of individual soldiers at the highest levels of skill and standards is largely dependent upon the soldier's relationship with his unit and leaders. An earlier report addressed cohesion in terms of "why soldiers fight" and concluded that the primary social group to which the individual soldier belongs is key to understanding a soldier's behaviour in combat. The primary group must satisfy the soldier's major social and physiological needs and offer him the affection and esteem of both his peers and leaders if the soldier is to be bound strongly to his or her unit and mission.

This paper does not take a normative or moral position on homosexuality. The specific question addressed in this analysis is the likely impact on primary cohesion and individual combat performance of a policy that would accept for enrollment and retention in the Canadian Armed Forces qualified individuals who are known to engage in legal homosexual activity. The analysis will relate the question to the basic reasons why soldiers fight in terms of cohesiveness of the primary group and its great influence on soldier behaviour. The bonding among soldiers in a unit, referred to as horizontal cohesion, the bonding between soldiers and their leaders, referred to as vertical cohesion, and the effects of societal values on cohesion will also be examined. Finally, the questionnaire itself and the report by the Urban Dimensions Group will be addressed.

Impact on the Primary Group

If a soldier strongly believes that he or she is a member of a primary group or small unit the soldier becomes bound by the expectations and requirements of the unit and its leaders and the soldier's performance is likely to be good. In other words, the small unit that operates as a soldier's primary group gains the loyalty of the soldier and becomes the prime determinant of the soldier's behaviour. This is extremely important to a nation engaged in war. The only force on the battlefield strong enough to cause a soldier to advance under fire is his loyalty to his group or unit and the group's expectation that he will advance. Today's armies recognize that in modern war the individual soldier is alone except for two or three close comrades on his right and left. There is no formal organizational means to closely supervise the soldier's actions. For this reason the significance of the small unit to which the soldier belongs (and the norms, expectations and rules of behaviour that attach the soldier to the unit) cannot be overstated. The small group develops strong rules of behaviour and expectations about the individual soldier's conduct on the basis of face-to-face relationships and thereby becomes the immediate determinate of the soldier's behaviour. Military policy and unit leaders must ensure an organizational environment that promotes primary group cohesion to ensure the highest levels of combat performance. Any influence or value which hinders the bonding of the soldier to the primary group is also an influence against cohesion and combat effectiveness.

The June 1991 report by Urban Dimensions Inc. on homosexual issues in the Canadian Forces provides much data that indicates values widely held among current members of the Canadian Forces could significantly disrupt and hinder cohesion in Canadian military units if a policy of accepting homosexuals into the Canadian Forces were adopted. Over 60% of the Canadian Forces are very or mostly negative toward male homosexuals. Moreover, a majority of the survey respondents viewed homosexuality as unacceptable to most segments of Canadian Society. These data indicate the potential for major cleavages within the Canadian Forces should homosexuals be enrolled and retained. The survey report also indicates the issues around which such cleavages could develop. A major issue is the high value Canadian society places on individual privacy especially among members of different sexuality. The proportion of members of the Canadian Forces who state they would have difficulty in interacting with homosexuals in situations that intrude into their personal privacy is very significant. It is illustrative to note that it would be either very difficult or moderately difficult for seventy per cent (70%) to share shower facilities and for sixty-four per cent (64%) to share toilet facilities with a same-sex known homosexual. Also, very significantly, fifty-six per cent (56%) feel it would be either very or moderately difficult to occasionally work alone with a same-sex known homosexual.

The values expressed above indicate the potential for likely and serious degradation of organizational effectiveness.

The predicted behaviour of members of the Canadian Forces if homosexuals are permitted to serve strongly indicates that significant disruption in the bonding process would occur among members of small units, especially around issues of privacy. One-third (32%) of the respondents agreed they would refuse to share mess facilities, over fifty per cent (50%) indicated they would not share changing facilities in a gymnasium while fifty-eight per cent (58%) indicated they would not share shower facilities with same-sex known homosexuals.

The potential for conflict in such strongly-held values and the very large proportions of the Canadian Forces that hold these values would make the creation of high performing units characterized by strong teamwork extremely difficult. The survey report might offer false hope to some on the basis of data that indicates contact with homosexuals is acceptable in work-related situations as opposed to the intrusive nature of contact more personal in nature. The perception that military service can easily be divided into work, presumably from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and private time after work, profoundly misunderstands the nature of military service. While some units, especially near area bases, do develop a peacetime routine very similar to civilian occupations, all units must be prepared to serve twenty-four hours a day, with no distinction between work and off-duty time. This is especially so in ground combat units and ships at sea. In these circumstances personal privacy is very difficult if not impossible to achieve. For example, the nature of sustained ground combat requires members of small units to live continuously in very close proximity, often for days at a time. The most personal needs must often be undertaken with

little or no privacy. The presence of known homosexuals in such circumstances would likely be very disruptive in a unit and could prevent that unit from achieving the smooth teamwork required to reach the standards of performance necessary to survive and win on the battlefield.

Survey respondents largely believed that the enlistment of homosexuals in the Canadian Armed Forces would have negative consequences. About three-quarters (74.1%) believed unit effectiveness would suffer significantly while less than one per cent (1%) believed that such a policy change would have a positive impact.

Impact on Horizontal Cohesion

In order to understand how the enlistment of homosexuals might operate to have negative consequences for unit effectiveness the likely impact of such a policy change on horizontal and vertical bonding within units should be examined.

Strongly cohesive and highly effective units are characterized by strong horizontal cohesiveness or strong lateral bonding among the soldiers of a unit. As noted earlier this unit operates as a very strong primary group and as a basic tactical fire and manoeuvre or service unit. At the same time it functions as a strong "buddy group" satisfying basic physiological and social needs for the individual soldier. The cohesive group provides the soldier with dominant norms or values which control the day-to-day behaviour of the soldier. The cohesive unit is also characterized by an informal observation and reporting system that is self-correcting for deviance from

group norms. Group pressures are mobilized and focused in order to correct individual behaviour.

The small group and its operating rules are extremely important in determining a unit's performance in battle. The individual soldier's loyalty to his small group and the group's expectation that he will comply with the group's expectations is the only force on the battlefield consistently strong enough to make a soldier advance under fire. Any influence or value that hinders or counteracts the bonding of the soldier with his unit is also an influence against cohesion and combat effectiveness.

Specific examples of how the recruitment of homosexuals into the Canadian Forces might affect combat effectiveness are plentiful. For example, in an infantry unit in combat there is usually need for added security during hours of darkness or low visibility. Patrols or listening posts are usually employed to increase security. Several two-man listening posts could be employed around a company perimeter each night. The duties of a listening post are as implied. The two soldiers move a few hundred metres beyond their lines after dusk and establish an outpost covering a natural avenue of approach for the enemy, perhaps at the end of a ravine or on a ridge. As darkness increases the exposed nature of the position, the danger, isolation and loneliness of the situation becomes overwhelming. The only immediate comfort is the presence of a buddy sharing the danger and uncertainty. Such situations demand complete trust, confidence and sharing of basic values if the soldiers are to develop and maintain the necessary teamwork and soldierly skills.

Survey results indicate that well over half of the present Canadian Forces (56.4%) would find it either very difficult (34.5%) or moderately difficult (21.9%) to work alone with a known same-sex homosexual. This means that in all probability listening post type missions as well as numerous other missions and details would suffer from below-standard performance. In many situations it could be judged irresponsible of the organization to place together individuals holding known and deeply-held values that are basically in conflict and expect the individuals to perform to the high standards necessary to survive on the battlefield. A soldier with strong heterosexual values could experience the most devastating personal rumours were he to willingly spend the night alone on a listening post with a known same-sex homosexual soldier. Likewise it would be very unfair to subject known homosexual soldiers to required duties that would cause divisions in a unit. It is well-documented that young soldiers fighting a war or training for war are attracted by the honour and romanticism of the experience and the associated opportunities to display the manliness or toughness important to young men. The survey results show that in any number of situations serious conflict could result in units where prevalent norms based on manliness or toughness among young soldiers were organizationally mixed with the conflicting values of same-sex homosexuals.

A further example pertaining to medical care illustrates one of the many possible difficulties the recruitment of homosexuals could pose for the Canadian Forces. It has been determined that a major factor that significantly reassures soldiers in modern armies and encourages them to enter combat more freely is the

presence of a medical care and evacuation system that greatly increases the chance for survival if wounded in action. Survival rates for wounded in wars since Vietnam has never been higher. A key factor has been the immediate action by fellow soldiers and unit medical corpsmen to control the bleeding and take other first aid measures while arranging for medical evacuation. While over one-half of the survey respondents indicate they would give or receive first aid from a known male homosexual for wounds or injuries, over one-third would not. This data was in response to very benign questions in the survey and did not explore the volatile and likely possibilities related to the growing AIDS epidemic and its high incidence rate among the homosexual community. The already unacceptably high rate of one-third of the respondents who would unwillingly accept such aid could rise to extremely high proportions and have a devastating effect on unit effectiveness, given even a rumour of AIDS infection among homosexual members of the Canadian Forces. Already pronounced cleavages separating homosexuals from the remainder of a unit could present unsurmountable leadership and organizational problems causing immediate and long term degradation of unit effectiveness. Recent experiences in the U.S. medical profession (dentistry) have demonstrated how volatile public opinion can be on this issue. In the face of such rumours soldier confidence in receiving immediate first aid from a trusted source and his overall confidence in the medical system could weaken and undermine his willingness to enter combat. Whether founded or unfounded, such fears are capable of quickly rendering horizontal bonding within a unit relatively ineffective with consequences far beyond the medical system.

Impact on Vertical Bonding

Perhaps the most difficult problems for the Canadian Forces if homosexuals are recruited will be leadership problems in small units. The exact nature of these problems will vary depending upon whether some unit's leaders, officers and sergeants are homosexual as well a portion of the soldiers within a unit. In any case the leaders' ability to effectively lead will very likely be significantly limited by his or her inability to overcome strong unit cleavages around the issue of homosexuality.

Even without major divisive issues the task of military leadership is extremely difficult. The individual soldier has the natural instinct to take cover or escape from enemy fire while the military requirement is to advance toward the enemy and engage in combat. To achieve military goals the most successful leaders build enduring, primary and personal relationships with their soldiers. The primary function of the small-unit leader is to bring about congruence between the goals and mission of the military and the personal interests and needs of the individual soldier. As noted in the earlier paper, in order to accomplish this task, the leader must create and accommodate soldier needs by developing agreed norms within the unit that are congruent with military goals. Ideally, in pursuing Army objectives the individual soldier will satisfy his needs. A key leadership objective in this process is the creation, reinforcement or emphasis of similar values among soldier, leader and organization so that these common values become a primary guide in the soldier's day-to-day behaviour.

The recruitment of homosexual soldiers would present major obstacles in achieving and maintaining the leadership process described above. This may be better understood in terms of the sources of influence or power available to leaders of small units. The sources of leadership influence are: (1) expert power, (2) reward and coercive power, (3) legitimate power and (4) referent power. The successful leader must use all four sources of power to the fullest extent especially in combat or wartime situations. Unfortunately, in a unit divided by the issue of homosexuality only two of the four sources of power are likely to be effectively utilized by unit leadership. The two sources of power available would be expert and reward/coercive powers. Unavailable or weakened in many cases would be legitimate power and the most powerful of all sources of leader influence, referent power.

Expert power may be defined as compliance with a leader's orders because the leader is credited with possessing the requisite skills, knowledge and ability to survive on the battlefield. There is no apparent reason why a homosexual officer or sergeant cannot be as fully expert and capable of exercising his skills as any other leader. This base of power is often what is referred to when statements are made to the effect that homosexuals can be as "fully qualified" as anyone to assume all positions in an organization.

Reward and coercive power may be defined as compliance with orders because the officer or sergeant issuing the order has the means to reward and punish. At its most basic level the influence to reward and punish is limited to specific and immediate situations and has little influence when soldiers are not under the direct

observation and control of leaders exercising this power. The limited efficacy of reward and coercive power is seen in the survey respondents' general doubt that Canadian Forces policies will protect homosexuals from harassment by homosexuals and even less assurance that organizational policies can protect homosexuals from heterosexuals. Although very limited, there is no reason why this power generally cannot be fully used in a unit with either homosexual leaders or soldiers.

Legitimate power is often more potent than the preceding sources of power. It may be defined as compliance with orders because of acquired values that provide the soldier with an internalized set of attitudes or beliefs based on a firm sense of what is right and wrong. Legitimate power is firmly based on acquired cultural values rooted in society. Because this source of power can call on values learned in such places as the school, church, family it can be very potent.

Indications are that for a large number of respondents the recruitment of homosexuals would result in the loss of legitimacy for the organization as well as for leaders viewed as being either homosexual or charged with the responsibility for implementing policies bringing homosexuals into the Canadian Forces. Very significant numbers of respondents, in some cases majorities, have indicated they would refuse to perform or otherwise act negatively in the presence of homosexuals in spite of orders issued by legally appointed or otherwise legitimate leaders. For example, over one-half of the respondents (55.3%) stated it would be either very (33%) or moderately (22.3%) difficult to be personally led by a same-sex known homosexual. Almost as many (44.9%) felt it would be difficult to fairly supervise a soldier who was

a same-sex known homosexual. These numbers are very significant and could rapidly undermine effective leadership in a unit. Any number of situations could be instrumental in rapidly eroding the legitimate power of a leader. For example, if a same-sex known homosexual officer or sergeant were to conduct an inspection of the barracks latrines while soldiers who held negative views about homosexuality were showering, that officer or sergeant as well as the organization would no doubt suffer from a loss of legitimate power. This and numerous other examples that entail the violation of privacy by a same-sex known homosexual, either leader or soldier, could have serious negative consequences for the Canadian Forces, given the very strong feelings on the subject expressed by survey respondents. In this regard it should be noted that even very small numbers of disaffected soldiers can bring about sharp reductions in a unit's combat effectiveness. In past wars it has been judged that the absence of about 15% of a unit's soldiers rendered a unit combat ineffective. It is very possible that the presence of even a lesser number of disaffected soldiers would cause a fall-off in unit effectiveness. For this reason, the very high percentages cited in the survey report should be viewed with concern.

The remaining source of leader power is perhaps the most influential, especially on the battlefield. Unfortunately, it is often the most fragile and could deteriorate significantly in a large number of units if homosexual soldiers were recruited. Referent power may be defined as influence or power based on the intense identification of the soldier with his immediate leaders. It is dependent on close, personal relationships between soldiers and leaders. Often, in the soldiers' eyes the

leader achieves the stature of a loved and respected parent, or elder, or charismatic role-model. Such powerful relationships are often based on the younger soldiers' needs for social affection, recognition and security through strong identification with a respected leader who is perceived as being capable of leading through hardship and danger.

The recruitment of homosexuals into the Canadian Forces, in view of reported survey results on the issue, would result in significant deterioration in unit leaders' capabilities to develop their leadership abilities to the fullest extent. As a result Canadian Forces would most likely be denied the opportunity to develop their full potential for combat effectiveness. The presence of homosexual soldiers in a unit, whether as officers, non-commissioned officers or soldiers, would prevent the development of the close personal relationships necessary for this source of leader influence to flourish.

The Survey Instrument

The engineering of the survey instrument appears to be structured to avoid inflaming any negative respondent feelings toward homosexuals. This is significant because the full extent of respondent attitudes towards homosexuals was probably not uncovered yet very significant data was produced. The response rate of 41.5% is not a high response rate given the interest of command authorities. Even though participation in the survey was voluntary, circumstances of administering voluntary

surveys can have a large impact on the response rate. For example, surveys administered during enjoyable duty or break time will generally experience a much lower response rate than surveys administered during regular training. Appropriate guidance for commanders can usually ensure a much higher voluntary response rate.

A related issue is the low number of lower-ranking soldier (NCM) respondents. This lower number is significant for two reasons. First, cross tab analysis shows this is a group with more pronounced negative feelings toward homosexuals, and an average or higher than average representation would have made negative responses toward homosexuals even larger. Second, during a mobilization in a national security crisis the rapid expansion of Canadian Forces should be expected. Those members of the Canadian Forces more tolerant of homosexuals, such as those with higher ranks, longer service, and higher education, as identified in the survey, will be expanded much less than NCMs where, as the survey points out the greatest intolerance of homosexuals resides. On this basis it would not be unreasonable to conclude that pronounced and significant increase in anti-homosexual behaviour could occur during a national crisis involving a large and rapid mobilization.

Finally, the suggestion in the survey that Canadian Forces members have become more tolerant of homosexuals since 1986 is probably not justified. The numbers involved are very small and have not been shown to be statistically significant. Further, it is not clear that the two populations involved are comparable. For example, were the same proportion of NCMs involved in each survey?

Conclusion

Overall, the survey has produced data that appears to be very useful to decision makers addressing the issue of recruiting homosexuals into the Canadian Forces. In my opinion the data makes clear that the recruitment of homosexuals into the Canadian Forces would result in a clear and significant decrease in combat effectiveness. In this regard the data produced gives decision makers the clear option of choosing between maintaining the combat effectiveness of Canadian Forces or equal opportunity for homosexuals.