

## Following Orders on the Battlefield

(from R. Prosterman, *Surviving to 3000*, pp 102-108)

Can Milgram's results be transferred directly to actual warfare? Consider the following account, adapted from Brigadier General S.L.A. Marshall's *Men Against Fire*, concerning empirical research done by him during World War II. Marshall held "post-combat mass interviews" with some 400 companies of infantrymen in the European and Pacific combat areas. His central finding was that:

On an average not more than 15 percent of the men had actually fired at the enemy positions or personnel with rifles, carbines, grenades, bazookas, BARs, or machine guns during the course of an entire engagement.... The best showing that could be made by the most spirited and aggressive companies was that one man in four had made at least some use of his fire power.

The commanders were amazed, but in every case were convinced of the truth of the reports by the end of the interviewing session. The engagements took place in all kinds of settings, mostly "where it would have been possible for at least 80 percent of the men to fire."

*Low percentage of "aggressive" soldiers.* The initial interviewing, done in the Gilbert Islands in late 1943, had shown that only 36 men out of an entire battalion had fired in the course of repelling a series of Japanese "banzai" attacks. Most of the firers were "heavy weapons men," with "[t]he really active firers" usually being "in small groups working together." Further interviewing in both Europe and the Pacific showed consistently the average of 15 percent and the maximum of 25 percent firing any weapon at all at the enemy. (To be counted as firing in these results, a man had only to fire once or twice in the general direction of the enemy, not to fire persistently; however, it appears, from what Marshall says, that most of those who fired at all tended to fire persistently.)

Moreover, the percentage was not increased even when the action lasted several days. The same fifteen men out of each 100 fired, while the others did not. Furthermore, it tended to be the *same* fifteen in engagement after engagement. Out of those who did fire, the men with the heavy weapons - Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR), flamethrower, and bazooka - were generally among the firers. Thus the ordinary rifleman was found to fire his weapon very infrequently in any given engagement of World War II. But those back of the lines and using crew-served weapons, such as artillery, were found to have no such problem. "There, the group will keep them going," Marshall remarks, "a well-fixed principle in human nature."

*Tactics to increase rate of fire.* The average did not change appreciably with the combat-seasoning of the troops, with the nature or extent of enemy attacks, with the theater of combat (that is, the ratio of firers to non-firers was the same against the Japanese as against the Germans), or with any other identifiable variable. An NCO or officer standing virtually over a man's shoulder could make him fire his weapon, but this was generally impractical. Finding ways of getting men to fire without close supervision was considered by Marshall to be a critical problem of training, selection, and motivation. Marshall saw drilling and discipline as having no assured correlation with willingness to fire; many of those who fired their weapons were lazy, unruly, and disorderly outside of combat, although a majority of those firing fit the usual mold of discipline. Because of this lack of correlation, Marshall rejects the yardsticks of "loyalty and obedience" as the means of predicting whether or not a soldier would fire in battle.

Marshall offers a number of possible suggestions for increasing the rate of fire. Junior leaders should, of course, encourage men to find good firing positions and should give direct orders to fire, so far as possible. Those who still hold back could sometimes be put on artillery crews, or could be given heavy one-man weapons like the BAR or flame-thrower. Marshall remarks that he has seen

"many cases" where such a change made a firer out of a non-firer. He surmises that the cause is "self-pride and the ego," noting that a rifleman may tend to feel anonymous and to think that he is not being asked to perform any important task.

Beyond this, Marshall sees the non-firing as resulting from deep cultural inhibitions against killing. He notes that studies of combat fatigue cases in the European theatre of action showed that "fear of killing, rather than fear of being killed," was the chief cause, with the fear of failure (again, not the fear of being killed) running "a strong second." As one response to this inhibition, he urges that the emphasis in training be shifted away from target-firing to massed free fire, directed against features like an embankment or trees. This, he believes, may help "free the rifleman's mind" by disassociating the act of firing from the human being as target.

*Marshall compared with Milgram.* What do you think of this statement: "Marshall's data shows that Milgram's results are not transferable to actual combat. Only 15 to 25 percent of infantry soldiers engaged in World War II would even fire their weapons in the general direction of the enemy. Most men will not kill under orders, even in the face of military discipline." Are Marshall's results wholly inconsistent with Milgram's? Perhaps there are important differences in the setting of the two "experiments" that may explain the apparent differences in results. Considering the effects of an NCO or officer standing at a man's shoulder, do you see a possible relationship between the results? Whose "discipline" was generally stronger, the Army's or Milgram's? Is there any comparison between the graduate nature of the responses ordered in Milgram's experiment, and the new method of training for firing recommended by Marshall?

In what major areas do the results of the two research projects appear to be mutually confirming? What were Marshall's results on crew-served weapons (that is, artillery, and presumably also machine guns)? Consider Milgram's results in the special series of experiments in which the subject acted as a member of a group.

*How to encourage soldiers to kill.* What about Marshall's results showing that those bearing "special" one-man weapons (such as BARs or flamethrowers) used them much more frequently than the riflemen used their weapon? How would you explain this difference? If the explanation is that these "special" weapons men and their actions were more visible, or that the officers were more likely to "keep an eye" on them, would this fact be consistent or inconsistent with Milgram's results? Marshall suggests the difference may have to do with "self-pride and the ego." Might the behavior of the "special" weapons men thus have little or nothing to do with obedience to commands? Do you think it might make an overall difference in the combat results if "special" weapons men were drafted and immediately assigned as such, instead of being picked out of a larger unit undergoing training or even picked out subsequently, on the battlefield? What means might be devised for telling in advance whether a man will fire his weapon? Marshall describes a group of habitual trouble-makers in training, some of whom turned out to be among those who fired their weapons regularly. Would Milgram's work furnish the basis for understanding the behavior of these men? If not, where would you look for an explanation?

The Army switched, late in World War II, to a training system that emphasized "protect your buddy" and "protect the integrity of your unit," instead of "kill the enemy," in urging soldiers to make maximum use of firepower. Do Milgram's results make it seem at all likely that this change in tactics could make a difference? More recently, the Army has been experimenting with an approach to a basic training that emphasizes the "carrot" rather than the "stick." Instead of being "chewed out" when he does something wrong, the basic trainee is rewarded when he does it right, for example with points that can be cumulated towards a week-end pass. Do you think this technique is likely to result in increased use of fire-power? Decreased use of fire-power? If you need more data to be sure of an answer, how might it be developed? Consider, in this regard, the differences in viewpoint between the Army and the Marines, reflected in the following news item:

## *Army Gives Recruits New Dignity in Revised Rules*

*"There'll be hot soup on the firing range, a leisurely atmosphere at chow-time and eight hours of sleep for Army recruits who are to be treated with dignity and addressed as "soldier," not "dud" or "eight-ball."*

*Profane language is out; so is hazing, harassment and mass punishment.*

*It's all part of a new look in basic training spelled out in 16 pages of revised Army regulations to improve the treatment of recruits and make their life more comfortable.*

*The changes, in the works for months, are not an attempt "to pamper or coddle trainees," but should, instead, help turn out a more "disciplined, highly motivated soldier," the regulations say.*

*On the other hand, Marine Corps Commandant Leonard F. Chapman takes an opposite view and believes Marine training should be "tightened up and toughened up."*

*"The object of recruit training," Chapman said recently, "is to instill discipline and other virtues of loyalty and patriotism and to put recruits under physical and mental strains to see if they can stand up to it."*

*Under the Army's regulations, recruit training "is to be devoid of harassment, and respect of the dignity of the individual trainee will be clearly evident at all times."*

*Concentration camps and atomic bombings.* Consider certain other types of lethal violence from World War II. In *Young Radicals*, the psychologist Kenneth Keniston makes the following statement:

*... At Auschwitz and the other Nazi concentration camps, more than six million Jews were systematically exterminated. Although their executioners were sometimes brutal sadists, acts of personal cruelty were the least momentous part of the extermination of European Jewry. Even more impressive are the numbers of "decent," well-educated Germans (who loved their wives, children, and dogs) who learned to take part in, or blind themselves to, this genocide. Murder became depersonalized and dissociated, performed by a System of cold, efficient precision whose members were only following orders in doing a distasteful job well. Bureaucracy, technology, and science were linked in the service of death. Evil became "banal," in Hannah Arendt's words; it was impersonal, dissociated from its human perpetrators, and institutionalized in an efficient and "scientific" organization ....*

Keniston goes on to point out that the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States was probably unnecessary, and that while Germany had done the unthinkable, "Hiroshima demonstrated how simple, clean, and easy (from the point of view of the perpetrator) doing the unthinkable could be." Are Keniston's comments consistent with Milgram's results? With Marshall's as well, keeping in mind the results on crew-served weapons? Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and the fire-bombing of Dresden, all largely non-strategic attacks on predominantly civilian targets, killed perhaps a quarter-million people, while Hitler's gas chambers killed six million Jews. But are there distinctions between these horrendous acts in addition to those that turn on number alone? Consider at least the possible bearing of the following four points: (i) the American attacks on Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Dresden were at least justified at the time in terms of an avowed military function - shortening the war - and most of the people involved apparently believed this justification, while Hitler's slaughter of the Jews was never justified on any war-related basis, but rather with a quasi-religious ideology of "purifying the race;" (ii) the attacks were also by military organizations using weapons of war, not a separate operation using gas ovens; (iii) the attacks were brief, discrete actions, whereas the slaughter of the Jews went on continuously for nearly five years; and (iv) the bombings, of course, were at a distance, and the victims were not in direct view of the bombers. Which, then, may be the more frightening demonstration of the power of Milgram's thesis?

*Possible extensions of Marshall's work.* It could be very useful to do an extension of Marshall's work in Vietnam today, among South Vietnamese and captured Vietcong as well as among American troops. Do you think that riflemen in Vietnam behave the same as their counterparts in World War II? What are possible sources of differences? Would it be possible to develop an approximate answer to this, by techniques that could be employed in a college community? If you wished to get the

highest proportion of candid responses to questions concerning an individual's own participation - as distinct from his general observations of behavior - would you use face-to-face interviews, or unmarked questionnaires that could be returned by mail? If face-to-face interviewing in a group situation biased Marshall's results, in which direction would bias be likely - *more or fewer* people saying they had fired their weapons than had actually fired them?

*Implications of Marshall's work.* Do you find it significant that Marshall found little variation between different units, or under widely different conditions of battle? Why? That he got little variation in result between the European and Pacific theaters of combat? Why? One possible explanation for these results is that the soldiers had a concept of themselves as a solid "in-group" as against a hostile "out-group," and that this concept was strong enough to override any other factor that might have influenced combat behavior against the Germans and Japanese.

If Milgram and Marshall provide evidence of a group dynamic process that explains most large-scale killing in terms that have nothing to do with subjective anger or rancor on the part of the actors, then it appears that *man as a species is not notably more "violent" - in the sense of killing with subjective anger or rancor - than the primates or other animal species, even as they behave in the wild state.* Recall that Richardson's data shows that only about one person in 400 could be expected to die as a victim or murder. Corresponding to each of these victims must be approximately one murderer, since there are only a few murders done by more than one murderer, and these are balanced by single murderers who have more than one victim. Assuming that all of those murdered were victims of "rancorous" violence, *it would therefore mean that one human being out of every four hundred in the population would kill another human being in an act of rancorous or angry violence sometime in his thirty or forty active years of lifetime.* To put it another way: an "average" person would live through 400 active lifetimes - perhaps 14,000 years or over 5,000,000 days - before he came to a single day when he was moved to kill another man out of subjective anger or rancor. Even adding all those killed intentionally in riot or revolution would not increase the rate to more than one person in 250, and the increase would not represent generalized behavior but would be chiefly confined to a half-dozen countries.

Thus, an adequate model for explaining most *organized* group killing in terms other than rancor would bring the data for *all other* human lethal aggression well within the range of the results from the naturalists' observations of "pacific" animals.

Do Marshall and Milgram between them seem to explain a significant part of the dynamics of modern warfare? Or do their findings apply only to the significant but limited area of actual combat? Do they explain why wars *start*? Does their work seem as likely to apply to a guerrilla insurrection as to a classic "war"? To a riot? If not, why not?