



# Normative Behavioral and Psychiatric Effects of Alcohol Abuse in Military Special Forces

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## Abstract

A Normative Behavioral and Psychiatric method makes use of focus group surveys and individual interviews rather than simplistic analyses of variance that soon becomes outdated. This paper makes use of normative behavioral and psychiatric to analyze the effects of alcoholism and alcohol abuse on the operational-readiness of Special Force (SF) units in Southeast Asia. Many such abuses occur during airborne, ranger and other specialized skills' training. These specialized skills include Military Free Fall (MFF) courses; parachute Jumpmaster courses; Pathfinder courses and demolition courses. The paper also explains why there is a virtual absence of women in Military Special Forces (SF). The paper concludes with the prospects for the deployment and development of Military Special Forces (SF) in America, Southeast Asia and around the world. The main focus of this paper is on the behavioral and psychiatric effects of alcohol consumption among military personnel with special reference to Special Force units in Southeast Asia. There are several factors involved in alcohol abuse in the military. One of the enablers of alcohol consumption and alcohol abuse in the Special Forces (SF) is ease of access. The other factors include discounted alcohol; peer-pressure; hypermasculinity and hero-worship; and, the system of rewards.

## OBJECTIVE

The objective of this paper is to analyze the normative behavioral and psychiatric effects of alcoholism and alcohol abuse on the operational-readiness of Special Force (SF) units in Southeast Asia.

## Introduction

This paper briefly considers the background history, evolution and functions of Military Special Forces (SF) units. The creation of SF units from its western beginnings<sup>1</sup>. The reason for considering the historical background of SF units is because it is purported that the evolution of traditions and values of SF units entrenched certain behavioral and psychiatric roots that are examined later on in the paper.

SF units have their roots in WW2 during the British war with Rommel's Afrika Corps. The British units that were deployed were known as the Long-Range Desert Group (LRDG). The LRDG was an iconic group of men known to be psychiatrically-disturbed

<sup>1</sup> This paper explains the evolution of the LRDG and the SAS because it is generally accepted by most military historians and SF writers. However, it should be noted that the concept of SF operators and units have been around since the ancient Chinese and Hindu civilizations as seen in the Laws of Manu and Kautilya's Arthashastra. Another reason for adopting this approach is because the author was trained by NZ SAS personnel who fought and killed Communists in Borneo and the Malayan Emergency and as a result, the author has several deep insights that were provided by his SAS trainers from Papakura and Waiouru.

and lacking the ability to fit in with normal and regular troops. Most of these men had prison records and were known for looming psychiatric problems including a history of personal assault and violence on and off the base; before, during and after military operations. One such psychiatrically and behaviourally-disturbed military leaders was Erwin Rommel.

The "Desert Fox" Rommel's 1st Panzer Division fought Montgomery and the British Eight Army. Ironically, it was the lack of resources that led to the formation of the LRDG. Major Ralph Alger Bagnold is often credited for the formation of a covert, long-range, reconnaissance and intelligence patrols deep behind enemy lines. Bagnold established the LRDG in 1940 in Egypt. Most of the officers and men were from the New Zealand Army (RNZ) and later joined by Rhodesian and British soldiers. In total, the LRDG comprised 350 volunteers. The LRDG were expert desert navigators especially between the long desert road that connects Tripoli and Benghazi. The British Special Air Service

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(SAS) evolved from the LRDG. David Sterling from No. 8 (Guards) Commando (later part of Force Z) believed that modern mechanised warfare required a small team of special operators with great initiative, physical and mental endurance. Lieutenant-Colonel Stirling's new "L Detachment, Special Air Service Brigade" was made up of volunteers<sup>2</sup>.

The LRDG and the Eighth Army successfully defeated the 1st Panzer Division because Allied bombers had almost wiped out all of the Division's re-supply lines from Crete. Much of the success of the LRDG and the SAS was due to the intelligence captured by both units. This is because their jobs involved gaining intelligence and were often sent out with little to no intelligence to guide them<sup>3</sup>. The LRDG was disbanded in August 1945.

One of the most famous SF failures was the case of callsign Bravo Two Zero. In January 1991, 8 SF operators of Bravo Two Zero were deployed at 2000hrs in Iraq about 180 miles behind enemy lines. The Commanders of Bravo One Zero and Bravo Three Zero (also of B Squadron, 22 SAS) decided not to proceed with the mission after assessing the situation. Apparently, the sub-mission of Bravo Two Zero was to locate a fibre-optic cable along a Main Supply Route (MSR) about 180 miles behind enemy lines. Another sub-mission according to patrol leader (P/L) Steven Mitchell (codename Andy McNabb) was to search & destroy (S&D) any Scud missile bases along the way. This was proven to be a lie as it would be foolhardy to perform an intelligence-gathering operation as well as an S&D operation at the same time. Bravo Two Zero faced hypothermia, goats, a bulldozer, and Iraqi foot and vehicular patrols. Each operator carried in excess of 200 lbs of ammunition, water, food and other equipment. In his assessment of one of the team members. The ensuing years revealed contradictory, fantastical, and exaggerated accounts by the P/L, the 2P/L, the Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM) of B Squadron, and a fifth man. The author Anthony King criticized the P/L for including an attack on a motorized Iraqi infantry company in his book (King A, 1977)<sup>4</sup>. The reasons why Mitchell, Ryan, the RSM (who did not go on the mission) and the fifth man had variegated accounts is anyone's guess. This is only part of the range of psychotic episodes that occurred during the Iraq War and their profound effects on the behavior of their peers and juniors leaves much room for behavioral and psychiatric investigations and research.

## Methods

This paper uses the normative behavioral and psychiatric approach to understanding social and medical phenomena. The primary resources used in this paper were drawn from existing original research on alcohol-abuse among soldiers in the US and other Asian armies based in Southeast Asia. There were three focus groups consisting of Singaporean, Malaysian, American and Philippines' Special Forces soldiers and officers. Due to time and space constraints, no distinctions were made

2 Although it was never even close to that size, the new unit's name was meant to confuse and deceive enemy. By January 1943, the 1st SAS Regiment was reorganised into the Special Raiding Squadron (SRS) and the Special Boat Section. The latter was the forerunner of the Special Boat Service (SBS). An all-volunteer LRDG and SAS is a tradition that continues in most SF units today due to the high-risk training as illustrated in the history of the US Navy SEALs; the US Ranger Units (that date back to World War II), Israel's Sayeret Matkal, and the Special Action Force (SAF) of the Philippines.

3 New Zealand SAS members who trained the author in Waiouru and Fiji estimated that intelligence is at best 60% accurate in most situations.

4 Anthony King refers to Mitchell and Armstrong as McNabb and Ryan, the SF operators code names, because when his work was published, no one outside B Squadron of 22 SAS knew their true identities.

between SF officers and soldiers or troopers. Another reason for this non-differentiation is the fact that every SF trooper or operator must be able to function as radio-operator (signaller or communications specialist), boatman, air crewman, driver, explosive specialist as well as the leader of the SF Detachment. Rotation of skillset or function is often the key to successful SF missions. The three focus groups were made up of 7 men each. There were no women as is common among most SF units. Most women continue to play secondary or affiliate roles such as riggers and parachute repairers.

## Special Forces are Special

They are the elite and receive the highest, most expensive training. SF units are also deployed for the most dangerous assignments. This places such trainees under severe psychiatric pressures and have been known to rapidly modify their behavior in peacetime as well as during operations.

It should be noted at this juncture that SF units (also known as detachments) are considered a strategic resource that may or may not be part of an Infantry Division's assets. There are two main types of missions in SF units. One type involves intelligence collection and the other type is a raid or strike. The two mission types are never mixed as each operation has separate logistical requirements resulting in different kinds of ammunitions, weapons, and communication systems; and, the length of the operation or training mission. Within the intelligence collection type are two sub-types: Long-Range Reconnaissance Patrols (LRRP) missions (Rece/Recon) and Medium-Range Reconnaissance Patrols MRRPs. The Raid/Strike type mission has no sub-type as a commando raid is the same as a Commando Strike. It is just that the former was the older version associated with World War 2 till Vietnam War. And the second version or Strike tends to be associated with post-Cold War scenarios. Their behavior during military operations strikes a very similar pattern to that of American SF operators in Iraq and Afghanistan with similar co-morbidity outcomes.

The Recon and Strike missions almost always have additional requirements that may be a combination of (a) assassination; (b) escort; (c) demolition of key infrastructure; (d) mountain, sea, desert and swamp phases; (e) Search and Rescue (SAR); (f) advanced parachute operations: High Altitude, Low Opening (HALO) and High Altitude, High Opening (HAHO); and, (g) Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE). The author himself had received such training and can vouch for the fact that one tends to lose consciousness or black-out a few seconds after exiting the aircraft at about 10,000 feet or more. This has a severe psychiatric impact on the behavior of the SF parachutist if psychiatric and medical therapy is not forthcoming soon after such dangerous training events. Therapy and relevant psychiatric drugs are critical to allow the SF parachutist to regain a sense of behavioral normalcy. Research shows that at least 14-16% of American SF troopers deployed in Afghanistan and Iraq resulted in having Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD) commonly known as depression (Gates et al., 2012).

A SF unit and SF operators are defined as highly-trained, specialized soldiers sent to perform surgical strikes and other high-risk operations. They are also considered force multipliers because it is presumed that one SF operator can kill at least 100 regular enemy troopers, with sufficient firepower and ammunition. The role of the SF trooper may be fluid and operational missions may require immediate or drastic changes on the ground. SF units are able to make such changes unlike

infantry and other larger units. SF operators work in very small numbers, usually 2 to 11 per group. The size of each group depends on the mission. A critical SF characteristic is the ability for each SF operator to be cross-trained in communications (C3), demolition, medical aid, pathfinding, Terminal Air Guidance (TAG); Forward Air Control (FAC); Forward Artillery Observer (FAO), piloting of helicopters and military airplanes as well as parachuting; kitchen explosives and Improvised Explosive Devices (IED). Distinctions between officers and other ranks are not as important as combat experience. Respect from either party depends on fitness levels, command capability, and specialization level<sup>5</sup>. SF operators are trained in foreign language<sup>6</sup>. Another characteristic of is that they are supposed to train local soldiers to become SF operators. This is another function of being a Force Multiplier where a troop of SF operators can train a company of native SF operators within a year (ideally) or 6-months (not ideal). The behavior of these SF operators has shown a very similar pattern to that of Singapore and Philippines' SF operators in Iran and the Philippines with similar co-morbidity results.

The abuse of alcohol is defined as the consumption over alcohol in excess to the extent that the inebriated SF operator is unable to function intelligibly. As a result, the SF operator will be less than 100% alert and is likely to fail in standardized SF Unit performance tests, language skills, physical training, and psycho-motor assessments. This may or may not lead to the SF operator being unable to execute his mission successfully. However, the focus group sessions indicated that many SF operators and SF commanders believe that some alcohol would be good for the SF operator. When asked why, the SF commanders replied that it builds camaraderie. Alcohol-linked activities also make SF operators deepen their bonds and facilitates training programs and other physically-demanding regimes.

### Alcohol Consumption in the Army, Navy and Air Force Special Units

Soldiers with alcohol abuse disorders usually have comorbidity with psychiatric disorders. The simultaneous occurrence of a minimum of two diseases such as alcoholism and mental depression, for example, are similarly common to military SF troopers. Treatment is necessary before such comorbidity affects the rest of the SF unit's population.

Alcohol consumption has been a long-standing tradition in the navy since at least the time of the Portuguese navigators of the 14th century. The British naval tradition offered a monthly ration of rum, beer or wine. The alcoholic beverage offered depending on the length of the mission and how well the selected drink would keep in the ship's galley and hold. The American Naval Bulletin (1908) documents the time when alcohol was perceived as more than a social problem. It became a problem when sailors could no longer perform their duties on board. The Volstead Legal (Prohibition) Act (1919) was based on Christian society's

intolerance of alcoholism, alcohol abuse and other illegal acts with alcohol as it was perceived as a form of moral weakness [2](see also, Fleming, 1942). A desire for alcohol was perceived as a desire to conceal a sailor's immorality. Increasing alcohol consumption in the navy, protected by long-standing traditions of rum rations, was weakened by a newer legal precedent in the form of the Comprehensive Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism Prevention, Treatment and Rehabilitation Act (1970). This was considered a great initiative of the time for two reasons: (1) the status of the Admiralty in the 1970s was falling, perhaps due to the lack of hot wars at sea; and, (2) a vision to completely eradicate the desire and need for alcohol in the navy, army and air forces.

By 1973, sharp rises in alcohol prices due to the rising cost of ingredients such as hops and barley resulted in a general reluctance at the Ministry of Defence to support greater subsidies and budgets for alcohol at sea and in the various messes. In Singapore, the Navy, Army and Air Force Institute (NAAFI) reduced the supply of alcohol in all its messes. This was in line with the eventual plan to withdraw all British forces that lay east of the Suez Canal<sup>7</sup>.

The public image of the happy but inebriated sailor worsened when myth became reality and more sailors and soldiers were arrested all over the British Empire for alcohol abuse. By the mid-1970s and early 1980s, several studies by the American military revealed that the problem of alcohol and drug abuse in the United States was far lower than it was first imagined. Less than 0.04% of men and women in the Marines, Air Force, and Navy had undergone compulsory rehabilitation and treatment for alcohol-abuse. At its high point, this worked out to less than 200 cases per 100,000 military personnel at any one time. Many units were in fact free of alcohol-abusers while most had some illegal drug-abusers especially in the 1970s. This led to thousands of cases of depression and malingering across all unit types. However, alcohol abuse and contraband drug abuse in the Marine Corps, the Marine Recon Battalions, and among SF units throughout the Korean War and Vietnam War were significantly higher than most records from World War II where alcohol was still considered a luxury in the army, let alone the LRDG and the SAS.

In the Marine Corps (as well as the Marine Recon Battalions) incidence rates fell to 40 per 100,000 population after the end of the Vietnam War in 1975. By the 1980s, it fell even further for Navy SEAL units. However, this statistical measure has to be taken with a pinch of (sea-)salt.

This is because the entire Marine Corps never had more than 190,000 active personnel (and 40,000 reserve personnel) at any one time in the 1970s to 1990s. This makes US Marines particularly susceptible to alcohol abuse when compared to other SF units. Navy female officers were unlikely to suffer from alcohol abuse and returned a very miniscule score for the same period. To a lesser extent, the American Air Force Special Units return similar numbers at a lower rate [3,4] (Felker, et al., 2008; Skipper, 2014).

Most peers, superiors and subordinates in SF units do not report their "own kind" to HR departments as alcoholics or alcohol abusers for three reasons: (1) they are "brothers-in-arms"; (2) alcohol abuse is widely perceived to be a court-martial offense; (3) they do not want to be labelled as back-stabbers and no one

<sup>5</sup> All SF operators who pass the first round of assessments, tests, and skills training are immediately immersed into two more years of advanced skills (military free-fall), training and operations as well. SF officers who are specially selected and approved by HQ SF are sent for Command and Staff Colleges locally and overseas. The main gateway to receiving an AF badge is usually known as Hell Week; but that is only the beginning. As they say in SEAL/BUD/S training and selection, "the only easy day was yesterday". So there is a lot of masculine egotism and inflated egos involved among trainees and instructors.

<sup>6</sup> Most SF operators during the Vietnam War spoke Vietnamese. SF units are sometimes attached to an Infantry Division. They are considered Divisional Assets. This has proven to be a bad tactic in Vietnam because most if not many Divisional Commanders do not know how to maximize AF units that are attached to their divisions.

<sup>7</sup> The author's father had close British friends whose relatives worked at NAAFI whose jobs were threatened by the British troop withdrawal in spite of Lee Kuan Yew's protestations and visits to Whitehall. The British finally withdrew all their forces from Singapore in 1973 leaving over 60,000 Singaporeans unemployed overnight.

wants to be an “Uncle Tom”; (4) their families and pensions or pay grades or bonuses might be affected or cancelled; (5) they might lose their “Jump Bounty” if they are Navy SEALs; and, (6) if they are asked to leave the SF community, they will suffer a loss of personal pride. In a minority of cases some SF personnel opt to make reports on their subordinates, peers and superiors. They also report on other matters such as sexual abuse, marital affairs, illegal drug-abuse, gambling debts and other financial problems. The motivations are as human as they are threefold as informants believe that reporting to HR: (1) will reduce the offender’s promotional prospects; and by doing so will increase the informant’s own prospects for promotion; (2) is the right thing to do as the informant is a religious person or the informant is an upstanding member of the Marine Corps; or, (3) as the offender would have done the same thing to the informant if the situation was reversed.

According to DOD Policy Guidance on Substance Misuse (DoDI 1010.04 Problematic Substance Use by DOD Personnel), it is illegal under military law to misuse or consume illegal substances. There are at least 1,1 million American veterans struggling with substance abuse disorders. Less than 2% have received SF training and developed alcohol and drug abuse problems after completion or near completion of their SF training course. Alcohol abuse is associated with Post Traumatic Stress Disorders (PTSD) across all training regimes and especially for SF personnel deployed in overseas operations. A phenomenon known as the “Warrior Syndrome” or “Hero Mentality” (among Asian SF unit personnel); make them unlikely to report substance abuse as pride, honor and embarrassment are complex and intertwining features; hence they prefer not to seek medical treatment (Department of Defense Alcohol and Substance Abuse Disorder Research Program, May, 2017; Asian Institutes of Mental Health, 2020; Center for Disease Control, 2021; Veterans Administration (website), 2022).

Additionally, under military law, all personnel in military units are not allowed to consume alcohol during deployment. Yet, in July 2019 July after allegations were made that some members of the platoon of about 20 SEALs were drinking alcohol during their deployment (ABC News, 2019). Later it was proven that an entire platoon of Navy SEALs were charged and sent back to the US earlier than expected after fighting ISIS forces in Iraq. This had nothing to do with the ISIS soldiers or prisoners but it was for a different reason. The incident that caused a disciplinary hearing from JAG was after the SEALs refused to cooperate with an investigation into allegations of a sexual assault while drunk (Vox, 2019). Although the SF operators had gone out of character, they remained solidly behind the concept of what happens in SF, stays in SF. Perhaps it will be their camaraderie that saves them from further investigations and prosecutions by JAG. The question on the minds of the JAG prosecutors is why an entire platoon of SF operators would behave in such a manner. The answer is simple. It is because of PTSD. Alcohol helps soldiers deal with battle stress and battle fatigue. Ironically, alcohol abuse also increases their level of PTSD (Rappa, Fieldwork Notes, January 2021). Acute alcohol abuse causes depression and eventually further alcohol dependency because the pleasure centers of the human brain registers images and sensations of happiness and carefreeness. When external factors are taken in by the body’s receptors, it activates the pleasure centers of the brain. This makes a given human being desire those positive feelings and emotions again. It creates present desire and develops future desire to satisfy the pleasure centers. Jeremy Bentham, John Mill and his son, John

Stuart Mill argued in Utilitarianism (1863) that society sought to maximise pleasure and avoid pain. Carl Jung, the father of analytical psychology, observed that patients who consciously suppressed their pleasurable desires in waking reality would have them hidden in their sub-conscious. These would then emerge during the Rapid Eye Movement (REM) stage in deep sleep. When humans suppress feelings that enable pleasurable experiences, it tends to traumatize their pleasure centers. If such suppression increases in frequency, it may cause long-term trauma that leads to psychosis. This is amplified, according to Jung’s basic psychological functions. Therefore, SF operators who are devoutly religious, as many strongly believe in some religion or other (Warren, 2013; and, Reynolds, 2019). These police and army SF operators may also experience deep trauma and guilt complexes (Sandoz, 1980; Bucholz, and Robins, 1989)

### Alcohol Abuse in Southeast Asian Special Force Units

In Southeast Asia, the first post-War alliances were the Five Power Defence Arrangement (FPDA) which has faltered over the past two decades with Malaysia refusing to pay and play a part in the annual land and sea exercises. ASEAN began as a political alliance in 1967 (the Bangkok Declaration) but has not evolved into a military alliance. In fact, ASEAN failed for the first time in 25 years to send a Communique of protest against Chinese moves in the South China Sea. This was because Cambodia was the chair for that year and vetoed the other ASEAN states’ decision. Cambodia vetoed the ASEAN China communique because it had already received over US\$5 billion in economic aid from China<sup>8</sup>.

Asian SF units are found in virtually all the ASEAN and Far-Eastern economies with the exception of Brunei Darussalam, Vanuatu, Fiji, Samoa and other Pacific territories. The SF units to watch out for from Asia would be India and China. Indian SF units have been fighting Pakistani SF units in the Kashmir since the 1950s. Indian troops have also had skirmished with Chinese troops in the same region. The Chinese SF commander that was interviewed by the author of this paper revealed in 2006 that Chinese SF units had been operating in the Horn of Africa since the mid-1990s. The South Korean, Indonesian (Kopassus), Malaysian (Polis Hutan), Thailand (Thai Rangers and Thai SEALs) and Singapore (Special Operations Force) have had secret joint operations across Southeast Asia including the borders of Cambodia, Thailand and Laos. The overall standards of regular troops in Southeast Asia ranges from low to middling. However, their SF counterparts have the highest standards in those states. The Thai and Korean SF units are so versatile that they are tri-service in nature for example, very year, Thailand hosts a combined US-Thai beach assault exercise known as Cobra Gold.

### Operation Market Garden

Towards the end of the War, an Allied military operation known as “Market Garden” was launched using airborne troops in the Netherlands on 17th September 1944. The mission of the First Allied Airborne Army was to capture nine German-held bridges over the River Rhine. It was to be the largest airborne operation in history that deployed over 34,000 men. Their enemy consisted of German SS troops, forced conscripts, Nazi propaganda units, armoured and artillery forces that totalled over 100,000. Operation Market Garden had to be made to appear successful for propaganda reasons but in fact was not. In some

<sup>8</sup> *Anyone who has had the pleasure of negotiating or discussing political issues will immediately say that the Cambodians are a shift bunch of people to deal with.*

of the tactical battles, Allied forces lost over 80% of their core troops due to poor British ground leadership, logistical errors and old-fashioned tactics. Some Allied troops were dropped so far from their rendezvous (RV) points that they ended up almost losing people to friendly fire while quietly passing the enemy without even knowing it. Market Garden was not an outright success. Some SF historians believe that it was not even an SF operation in the first place as it had made use of SF delivery system (parachutes and gliders) even though the execution on the ground involved basic Infantry tactics. While the political leaders claimed victory (for propaganda purposes as mentioned) unit commanders fought over leadership issues that stemmed from Eisenhower's and Montgomery's supremely enlarged egos<sup>9</sup>.

### The Malayan Emergency

After Mao Tse-Tung declared Communist China a new independent nation he began a new policy of export Maoism based on his Guerrilla Warfare tactics during the Long March. Meanwhile, after WWII, British SAS units were being disbanded all over the world beginning with the LRDG in 1945. From 1948 to 1960, the British government was involved in a counter-insurgency campaign in Malaya. In 1948, September of 1948, Whitehall appointed Sir Henry Gurney to replace High Commissioner of Malaya, Sir Edward Gent died in an RAF air crash with a civilian airliner. Gurney's vision to win the war against the Communist Party of Malaya (CPM) was to deny them food, information and recruits. But in less than 2 years Gurney was travelling in his rolls Royce along a jungle road when he was ambushed by the CPT and assassinated. However, the British SAS and NZ SAS (the Malayan Scouts) were rejuvenated in 1950 in combat operations against the CPM. This was known as the Malayan Emergency that took place mainly in the Malaysian jungles, towns and cities. However, the SF units apparently squandered this window of opportunity as that there was "poor discipline and general drunkenness among all ranks" (Leary, 1995: 251). Leary's own observations were diametrically opposed to what the author's NZ SAS instructors in Papakura and Waiouru taught him. For them, they fought hard and well in the Malayan jungles of the Semenanjung and on Borneo Island.

By 1952 there were 35,000 British troops and in 1953, the total combined force including the SAS reached 300,000. But the CPM was not losing. This must have led Leary to believe that it was due to poor tactical discipline and drunkenness. In 1952, PM Churchill appointed Sir Gerald Templer as Commander-in-Chief. Other British commanders were rotated back to London. In 1952 the brass decided to drop the "Malayan Scouts designation in favor of the "22 SAS Regiment" which brought honor to the officers and other ranks. There were no other volunteers and no ordinary soldiers as listed in the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)'s manifest. The SAS newly returned from the Middle East was experienced in desert warfare and good at destroying armoured vehicles in large open spaces of sand. They literally had no operational experience in the tropical jungles and had to start from scratch. An officer named Mike Calvert was appointed to set up the SAS but by 1953, Calvert had been affected by his heavy drinking initially and was asked

to quit. That was what he did and several months later he was convicted of being a homosexual in the mid-1950s in Germany. So that was some time after he had left the SAS. In those heady days, homosexuality was a crime in British society as well as under military law. There was no overt negative publicity over Calvert and hence the SAS remained unblemished. This means that Leary had made more wrong assumptions. He had first believed that discipline was lacking in the SAS. He was wrong. Then he claimed that there was drunkenness. Wrong again. This was because the severity of homosexuality as a military crime was so embarrassing and punitive that an officer or other rank would resign and leave the Regiment. Calvert's replacement was an infantry officer named Lieutenant Colonel John Sloane who was a harsh disciplinarian. The MCP failed because it underestimated the support from the natives as well as the capabilities of 22 Squadron. In 1957, before Mopping Up Operations (MOP) could be implemented, 22 Squadron was disbanded. SF units were used very successfully during the Vietnam War by both American and the Thai SF units. If the US government and the American people did not see the dead bodies of young teenage American GIs being dragged along the streets of Saigon or tortured and pilloried by Japanese soldiers, the outcome of the War would have been significantly different.

The success stories of US SF units in Vietnam came at the early stages of the War. But by the time of the Trại Làng Vây operation in Quang Tri Province on February 7th 1968, the SF fortunes had waned. North Vietnamese higher command had selected the U.S. Special Forces Camp (that was manned by Det. A-101, 5 SFG) at Lang Vei as part of the North Vietnamese People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN) and the Viet Cong (VC). Tet had begun in 1967 but by the 11th February 1968, the Americans and French legionaries were forced to retreat southwards towards Saigon which would fall six years later in 1975.

### Alcohol-Abuse among SF Units in Southeast Asia

This section makes use of 6 different but related enabling factors in the military and among SF units in Southeast Asia. These include: (1) ease of access to alcohol; (2) discounted alcohol (3) peer-pressure; (4) hypermasculinity; (5) the effects of alcohol consumption; and, (6) the reward system..

#### Ease of Access to Alcohol

1. Ease of access to locations that serve alcohol; alcohol-serving establishments in the proximity of Special Forces camps and bases make them easy to visit and easier to return to units (RTU). Most ordinary military men reported that such proximity to their bases made them frequent customers even though the bars made excessive profits, the men were duly entertained (Burnett-Zeigler, et al., 2011; and, Besse, 2018). Ease of access to alcohol attracts 7 out of 10 soldiers in many nation-states. Alcohol-abuse resulting in alcohol-dependence was more prevalent among male soldiers and conscripts. There were fewer incidents of alcohol consumption among Australian soldiers than in Australian society (McFarlane et al., 2010). Binge drinking of six or more alcoholic beverages was common among serving soldiers; Navy and Army personnel were more likely to report binge drinking at least monthly than Air Force personnel (Moore, et. al., 2007; Rona, et al., 2007; Meadows, et al., 2022).

Military commanders are unable to remove or demand that bars and clubs serving alcohol proximate to their bases are

<sup>9</sup> *Montgomery was particularly jealous because Eisenhower was appointed Supreme Commander of the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEPF); while he merely commanded the British troops and bullied the Polish generals. After the war, Montgomery was made 1st Viscount of Alamein and appointed Commander-in-Chief of the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) in Western Germany. However, he revealed his true colors again when he supported Apartheid in South Africa. He was also very critical of his old nemesis Eisenhower who had gone on to become the American president.*

removed or demolished. The only way to remove such enticing firms is to cooperate with local government and the media. However, this is easier said than done as seen in Clarke AFB and Subic Naval Base in the Philippines before 1995.

### Discounted Alcoholic Drinks

- Discounted alcoholic drinks within the military's Post Exchanges (Px) is always attractive because the soldier thinks that he is getting a good deal. Young soldiers and conscripts are paid well but not much more that they can travel far to enjoy alcohol at premium outlets. Shore leave for navy personnel and regular leave for army and air force personnel are also limited and hence restrict their levels of alcoholic consumption. This leaves affected military personnel with one choice which is to purchase alcohol at their base Px stores such as the large one in Okinawa (as of today) and NAAFI in Singapore (up till 1966). However, in the Australian case, the soldiers are known to control their own alcohol consumption due to punitive military laws and regulations as well as close monitoring by their MPs. This does not distract or prevent all the affected personnel from purchasing discounted alcohol locally (in Australia), during the pre-deployment phase as well as during actual overseas postings (Harbertson et al., 2016). In any case, most bar-owners are happy to offer discounts to military personnel for two reasons, those who purchase alcohol, buy a lot of it; and most military personnel have limited time on their hands.

### Peer Pressure and Alcoholic Abuse

Emulation of experienced SF veterans, current and former SF training instructors. This may result in everyone consuming six or more drinks per alcoholic drinking session per week for each SF drinking group. This is known as frequent drinking. Binge drinking involves (w.r.t. military personnel) is consuming six or more alcoholic drinks per session, three times or more a week. Frequent drinking would thus involve a minimum of 6 drinks per week and binge drinking involves 18 drinks per week. This means that some SF soldiers would go to the extent of drinking 18 or more alcoholic drinks per week to impress instructors, experienced veterans, and peers resulting in alcoholic abuse. One of the key aspects as shall be seen is the idea of an SF trooper being able to "hold his liquor" and hence, to "be a man", one of the SF men. The peer pressure to conform to alcoholic drinking activities usually take place in common messes, cadet messes, officer messes and sergeants messes but are not limited to these places within the camp. The group may meet outside at a club or bar where there might be ladies to "impress" or to "hit on" as alcohol significantly reduces inhibition in human beings. Sometimes there is something known as bar-hopping where the drinking group has at least one or two alcoholic beverages per bar. At the end of the night, the group may have hopped through 15 bars or more and each time consuming more alcohol than the previous bars. This results in virtually comatose-like inebriation. If the instructors are present, then there will be even more voluminous consumption of alcoholic beverages as training may be cancelled, postponed or delayed the following day. Peer pressure works in combination with festive and public holidays as well as long weekends. Among these military drinkers – including SF personnel on courses – would be individuals who desire to be an outstanding trainee in the eyes of their instructors especially if the instructors

themselves are drinkers and encourage their trainees to drink at the same time. Immoral instructors may take advantage of their trainees but there have been no reports of such immorality within the SF community thus far. This neither means that it has not happened before, is happening now, or will happen in future. Given the pressure to conform and the snow-ball effect of alcohol consumption (made worse through immoral advertisers and marketing "experts" and "consultants") unethical acts may occur. It is in this author's opinion however that most if not all SF operators who indulge in some tittle have significant control over themselves and assist their peers to prevent them from going overboard (as they say in the navy) in order to live another day, and drink again. Moderation is the key for SF operators' drinking groups. Frequent drinking and binge drinking among peers and instructors are not limited to men alone as there are many non-SF women in most camps and there are also many women who perform SF-related administrative works or even those women trained to rig, pack and repair parachutes. These women are free to choose to drink as much as they desire if they have such an inclination in the first place. Our focus group discussions revealed that eventually, the women who join these groups, whether they be single, married or attached, will sooner or later drink alcohol. The focus groups did not return any comments or observations about women in and out of the Marine Corps for example who drink during their pregnancies. Most women who congregate with SF operators want to be perceived to be part of the in-group. Rather than the out-group. No one likes a teetotaler (not in the golfing metaphor)<sup>10</sup>.

### Special Force Hypermasculinity

This concept is about a strong bonding experience. It is defined as an SF norm that is premised on the idea that SF operators must all be more than ordinary men. They are a special breed of men; an extraordinary breed of men. Perhaps men who are not of a woman-born. The consumption of large quantities of alcohol and proving that one can maintain a sense of decorum and poise to train another day is the key to the hypermasculinist model. It is not simply about being able to consume large quantities of alcohol but to be able to show up for work the next day. In fact, most members of the Marine Corps, even the women folk, will tell civilians who are sufficiently interested in the Corps that this is part and parcel of army life, of Marine life. However, this is not the entire story. A recent 2022 Cambridge University Press publication showed that "Military characteristics and experience were linked to high levels of alcohol use across military populations" (Osborne, A. et al., 2022). The concept of hypermasculinity is not a new one but has existed in one form or another for centuries in the navy and armed forces. Even the ancient Greek soldiers who formed a phalanx to fight their enemies or the Roman Legions who lay siege to the ancient Britons were all serious participants in bonds best described as hypermasculine. A clinical study by the University of Liverpool and King's College London is worth quoting at length, "Researchers conducted telephone interviews with 707 serving and 572 ex-serving military personnel who had reported a stress or mental health problem in the last three years, making a total of 1,279 military personnel. The interview examined military personnel's mental health, alcohol use and reasons for drinking. The majority of the sample were male (84%) and nearly one fifth (18%) of personnel met the criteria

<sup>10</sup> See for example, Tim Kirkpatrick, 2021, "7 examples of peer pressure in the military that are all too real" *The Mighty March* 29th.

for alcohol misuse. Researchers found that 18% met the criteria for anxiety, 8% for depression and 8% for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Reasons for drinking were categorised as either drinking to cope, for example to escape your troubles or to forget your past; or drinking because of social pressure, for example to fit in or to be sociable. The research showed that those who met the criteria for depression, anxiety and PTSD were more likely to drink to cope rather than because of social pressure. This suggests they may be drinking to deal with mental health symptoms” (KCL, 2020; Irizar, et al., 202). Note that the breakdown provided by the University of Liverpool and KCL study makes no mention of Special Force operators forming part of their sample. Neither do they make any comment on the kinds of units involved. Their sample size is considered a representative sample survey of the UK military personnel as a whole. There was no breakdown by religion, social economic status (SES), military rank, officers, Other Ranks, sexual orientation, residence, age or nationality (i.e., those born in the UK and its territories or naturalized citizens).

### The Major Effects of Alcohol Consumption in Military Units

There is a significant distinction between substance abuse of deployed soldiers and those only in training. Alcohol-abuse of deployed men and women is part of many studies of deployed military personnel. For example, this is seen in the scholarship on deployed men in Sri Lanka (Hanwell, et al., 2012); general scholarship on alcohol (mis)use in the military (Jones and Fear, 2011). The effect of alcohol-abuse for example impacts variously on relationships between spouses in the military as well as civilian ones. It raises questions of the relationship between combat situations and existing alcohol-abuse problems among soldiers (Vest, et al., 2018).

It is clear from our focus group sessions as well as the general literature on the main effects of alcohol consumption tends to “impair health status, [physical] performance, and increased risk of injuries and violence” (Kheokao et al., w2018). Alcohol-abuse and alcohol consumption is known to be linked to a reduced lifespan, about 5 years less for men. But there could be other independent variables that affect the lifespan of military soldiers in general and SF operators in particular such as (a) war, job stress and PTSD; (b) mission and training intensity; (c) remuneration and bonuses; (d) loss of pension; (e) loss of limbs or senses; (f) training and mission injuries; (g) DNA and genetics; and, alcohol tolerance and alcohol abuse. For example, Goldberg et al., conclude that “that prior military service in a war zone has a relatively modest long-term effect on the alcohol drinking patterns of male veterans” (Goldberg, 1990).

US Navy submariners tend to have normal birth-rates and offspring in spite of the fact that the “environment is prone to a variety of potentially hazardous exposures, including radiation, disrupted circadian cycles, high stress, prolonged isolation, and altered oxygen and carbon monoxide levels. Of these, only radiation has been investigated in studies of paternal occupational exposure and offspring sex ratio, but evidence is conflicting” (Bachmann, 1970). This “normal distribution” was supported decades later in a study that showed, “US Navy submariners tend to have slightly more male offspring than female (Volk, 2004). There were no cross-checks for alcohol abuse or even alcohol consumption.

Alcohol consumption is known to reduce the chances of

having children. Sometimes, only female children are born according to the myth but in reality, some studies have revealed that the number of G forces absorbed by the pilot is a major factor affecting the gender of their children. Also, pilots exposed to long number of flying hours have a tendency to only have female children and no male ones. Various studies in the US and Europe have shown that the likelihood of fathering female children is slightly higher than fathering male children (Mayer, 2019). Bertis Little, a professor of obstetrics and gynaecology at the University of Texas (Medicine) published in *Aviation, Space, and Environmental Medicine* that “Air Force Fliers Really do have More Daughters” (UPI, 1987). The major effects of alcohol abuse can lead to liver cirrhosis, loss of hair, cancer and greater vulnerability to other communicable and non-communicable diseases. Smoking is often correlated with alcohol consumption and illegal substance abuses. For example, secondary smoke inhalation at bars, clubs and pubs may increase the possibility of dangerous carcinogenic consequences.

### The System of Rewards

The previous surveys of the characteristic factors of alcohol-use in the military (mainly the UK military), Southeast Asian, British and American SF units has not touched the system of rewards per se. By this we mean, are there material benefits to consuming alcohol or consuming alcohol in excess? Or does alcohol consumption by military personnel merely represent part of military life and that the rewards are only indirect?

Indirectly or otherwise, military personnel tend to reward themselves with alcohol during festive occasions, public holidays and long weekends. They do so for completing particularly demanding training or operations as well as return from overseas training and operations. Additionally, most unit commanders in our focus group surveys between 2019 and 2021 reported that Southeast Asian military forces provide a level of income stability and other benefits such as dental and medical plans for army careerists. At the top tier of wages and benefits is the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) Commandos and Special Operations Force (SOF) as well as the Singapore Police Force’s Special Operations Command (SOC). Whether or not these SF unit personnel receive material benefits to consuming alcohol is therefore immaterial.

### Conclusion

It is clear that the US Marine Corps and Marine Recon Battalions make the most noise when it comes to making use of social media outlets to boost their so-called achievements. This has been entrenched by American Hollywood movies that glamourize the violence inflicted by the Marines. But in reality, the Marine bark is always louder than their bite as seen in their performance in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. On the other hand, genuine SF units in the UK, US, New Zealand, Australia, and Southeast Asia show no significant difference between civilians and SF operators in terms of alcohol consumption and cases of alcohol abuse. If anything, Singaporeans, Thai, Americans and Australian citizens, understandably, consumed more alcohol and were involved in much more violence locally and overseas (for example in Thailand) than SF operators. This result was underlined by our focus group survey interviews. The major contributions to the existing scholarship on alcohol-abuse in the military center round the following: (1) alcohol-abuse is a serious threat to military and national security; (2) alcohol-abuse results in worsening the psychiatric issues of

being an SF soldier or officer; (3) alcohol-abuse results in serious contravention of military ethics and moral behavior; and (4) bars and pubs that serve primarily military customers are usually located within the proximity of army, navy and air force camps. This makes such profit-driven firms ethically immoral and publicly undesirable due to their predatory nature. Additionally, the misuse of prescription medication misuses endangers personnel, negatively impacts careers and adversely impacts mission readiness, upon discovery. These are all sacrifices made by the men and women of the military and Special Forces in service of the nation. As a result, most SF operators with several tours of duty evoked similar patterns of psychiatric comorbidity.

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