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REVIEW

OF THE BOOK: PSYCHOLOGY IN THE ARMED FORCES

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The recently published book, *Psicología en las Fuerzas Armadas* (Psychology in the Armed Forces), is a unique, complete and much-needed work on Spanish Military Psychology. As Juan Montero Vázquez, Inspector General of Health and General of the Medical Division at the time, aptly pointed out at the book launch, Military Psychology was very much in need of a reference guide and this work has “filled a very obvious void”. While it is true that a number of books have been published on the subject¹, they focus more on historical or legislative matters than on strictly academic and applied aspects, which is the case of the book we are reviewing here.

The coordinator of the book, Daniel Donoso Rodríguez, is a Commander Psychologist

¹ For example, Capdepon Torres, A.J. (1990). *La Psicología Militar en España, Según sus Documentos: (Datos para una historia)*. Ministry of Defence.

in the Spanish Army's Health Corps and is currently serving in the Psychology Division of the Health Directorate of the Army. Donoso has a wealth of experience and has held various posts in the Armed Forces, including the position of commissioner in the area of operations. He holds a PhD in Psychology and has a strong academic background which, coupled with his years of service as a Military Psychologist, have enabled him to obtain an overall picture of the subject which he conveys in the book. Thirty-seven other professionals also contributed to the book so that a wide range of areas could be covered.

This work consists of forty-two chapters, grouped into four broad areas: clinical health, education and research, organisations and human resources and military operations, which take up 1071 pages. In the introduction, the coordinator carries out a brief but complete review of each of the chapters. It is not our intention here to provide a summary of such an extensive piece of work or to repeat what the coordinator has already said, but, for the reader's benefit, we will provide a commentary on the content of this compendium.

The first area covered in the book is Clinical Health Psychology. This section includes forensic aspects and the psychological care provided at the different levels and in the area of operations, while making reference to some specific interventions. Thus, the first three chapters are devoted to forensic psychology in the Armed Forces, and include a review of the legislation and the day-to-day work of psychologists at the different assessment levels, such as the Ordinary Medical-Forensic Board and the Medical-Forensic Psychiatric Board, with special attention being afforded to the tools for detecting symptom simulation (faking bad or malingering) and dissimulation (faking good or dissimulation) in forensic contexts. Chapters four, five and six address clinical intervention in Psychology Practices and Centres. Chapters seven to nine look at the participation of military psychologists in the prevention of drug addiction, and chapter ten, entitled *Trastorno por estrés postraumático. Neurosis traumática de Guerra. Enfoque cognitivo conductual focalizado en el trauma* (Post-traumatic stress disorder. Traumatic Neurosis of War. Cognitive Behavioural Approach focused on Trauma) addresses a subject that has aroused much interest in recent years and given rise to numerous publications; it describes a study in which subjects with this disorder were treated with cognitive-behavioural techniques. Finally, the last chapter in this section of the book (chapter eleven) looks at a unique practice, namely, that carried out by Military Psychologists in the Occupational Centre for people with intellectual disabilities, known as Centro Especial no.1 (CEISFAS). With the exception of this last chapter, the first part of the book covers activities which are carried out by all military psychologists, considering that at all levels and military forces, psychologists perform psychological assessments, participate in plans for the prevention of drug addiction and treat different types of psychological problems.

However, this is not the case with the second part of the book, which is devoted to Educational Psychology and Research – areas that are not necessarily linked. Only

about twenty military psychologists, out of a workforce of more than two hundred, work in military education centres, and because they are no less important, the subsequent chapters in this section cover areas of major interest, which are dealt with style and quality. Chapter twelve, on the training received by military psychologists at the Military Health School, gives readers an idea of the skills required for the practice of the profession. That said, however, a career in the armed forces requires somewhat more than knowledge and skills; it calls for certain values, which are also addressed in military education centres, as described in chapter twelve. The next three chapters cover the practice of psychology in the education centres of the three armed forces. Chapters seventeen and eighteen look at history and research methodology in the field of Military Psychology before making way for four chapters devoted to a review of the research carried out in different fields such as psychosocial risks in military personnel (which we recommend you read in connection with chapter twenty-seven), the simulation of psychopathology in the armed forces based on a review of empirically supported research (to be read, ideally, in conjunction with chapter two), an analysis of stressors and psychological repercussions in peacekeeping operations in conflict zones (chapter related to part four of the book) and jet lag (which should be read, ideally, in conjunction with chapters twenty-four and twenty-five). The coordinator is thanked for addressing these matters, given that it is as important to describe the work of military psychologists and the way they are organised as it is to examine the contributions of other psychologists and scientific findings aimed at improving their performance. A quality manual such as this one could not fail to examine the progress and opportunities offered by science, and we therefore recommend you read this section of the book, even though its position in the book could be debated.

A classical topic opens the area on Organisational Psychology: “Leadership and the exercise of command”, and a general approach is taken to concepts and competencies. The next chapter in this section addresses the selection procedure for pilots and operational staff, an area of operations that gave rise to industrial psychology and, in fact, military psychology in the early decades of the 20th century. Chapter twenty-seven looks at social psychology as a specialty in accident prevention in the Armed Forces and the following chapters deal with negotiation, social skills and another unique activity - the work carried out in military prisons.

The last part of the book is devoted to intervention in military operations. The most current and complex aspects are dealt with extreme professionalism. This is the case of the work of psychologists in emergencies and natural disasters (the subject of chapter thirty-one), where the different techniques and procedures for working with victims are reviewed. The next chapter looks at a specific example, namely, the use of psychology in the Military Emergency Unit.

Chapter thirty-three is devoted to a controversial and highly topical issue: “The Role of Resilience in the Armed Forces”. The subject of this chapter is the well known Comprehensive Soldier Fitness (C.S.F.) programme that the U.S. Army introduced

some years ago to prevent and treat psychological problems using “positive psychology”, and it is obvious that there is a need to introduce psychological resilience-building programmes like those of the U.S. in our armed forces. The next two chapters are closely related to this one; chapter thirty-four looks at how the psychological strength of a military unit can be assessed using an instrument (CEPPU) that has been used for years in our armed forces and which has proven very useful in providing advice to management and designing activities to build resilience and psychological strength. Chapter thirty-five looks at a specific proposal for resilience-building and fitness preparation in operations. Engagement with staff during and after missions is addressed in chapter thirty-six, thus closing the deployment cycle. Chapters thirty-seven and thirty-eight look at survival techniques for hostages and the prevention of traffic accidents in operation areas.

The next two chapters focus on psychology applied to diving and to staff posted on warships, a subject on which very little has been written. In this case, two writers with a long career in the Navy, and who have spent years researching the content presented here, provide very interesting views on the subject. In addition, ailments affecting navy staff such as *tankeritis*, sleeping disorders and hypokinetic diseases are analysed in detail.

The final chapters cover the psychologist’s role in psychological operations, and psychological aspects of violence and terrorism; unique aspects which have rarely been addressed by our military psychologists, but which are nonetheless of great importance to the armed forces and society, and should therefore be included here.

The reader will find an excellent treatise on past, present and future aspects of military psychology in this manual, where classical aspects are interweaved with emerging ones and where the specialties of psychology as a core science have been subdivided to cover specific practices in the military environment, given that military psychologists are not characterised by the instruments they use, but by the aim of the intervention.

Born at the end of the First World War, Military Psychology was listed as an area of expertise by the American Psychological Association in 1946, the year in which Division 19 (the Society for Military Psychology) was established. Psychology was introduced as a Basic Specialty to the Spanish Armed Forces of the Army Health Corps pursuant to Law 17/1999, of 18 May, on the Armed Forces’ Personnel System. It is regulated by Ministerial Order 141/2001, of 21 June, which sets out the functions and structure of Military Psychology; the functions in question are becoming increasingly better defined and the scope of the work is getting wider and wider. This manual is not only a work tool for us psychologists, and particularly new military psychologists, it is an opportunity to increase awareness and knowledge of our work.

Some years have passed since the authors delivered their first drafts to Commander Psychologist Donoso; however, their enthusiasm and expectations should serve as a flagship for the specialty and as an incentive for further publications on the subject.