

Review article

Safety of an individual – at the origin of military psychology

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ABSTRACT

The article presents characteristics of the conducted research on the functioning of a human in a threatening situation and the security of a human individual. The research falls within the strand of military psychology, which has empirical traditions. Although the human psyche has been dealt with somehow in all eras and cultures, the systematic accumulation of empirical knowledge in this field began only in the 19th century as a part of the fascination with science, which can be primarily associated with the development of medical science. A specific role in the intensification of human interest in that issue was also played by socio-economic processes, which led to the development of many scientific disciplines and, through them, academic centres. In the second half of the 19th century, the state of knowledge was strongly influenced by advancements in various fields of practical (empirical) sciences and the humanities. In France, Germany, and the British Isles, attempts to interpret such, and not other, human conduct and types of activity, as well as causal forces, factors, and motives, increasingly appeared in scientific literature and widespread transmission.

KEYWORDS

military psychology, individual security, threat situations, history



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Introduction

Researching human functioning in a threatening situation and their safety as a human being is part of the current of military psychology of empirical tradition. Contemporary armed conflicts have significantly different characteristics than those described, for instance, in the war studies of Carl Gottfried von Clausewitz¹, George Patton², or Tadeusz Kutrzeba³. The wars

¹ Carl Gottfried von Clausewitz – first fought as a cadet at the age of 13, attained the rank of general at the age of 38. In his now classic 1932 work *On War*, he wrote about “friction”, referring to the psychophysical burdens that result from participation in warfare. He believed that personality traits allow one to cope effectively with the burdens, but that they exhaust him/her. C. von Clausewitz. *On War*. Warszawa: Muza; 2008, p. 14.

² George Patton – American general, who during World War II slapped soldiers in a field hospital twice without any physical wounds (one of them had a fever and the other suffered from trench neurosis), accusing them of cowardice. After the case was revealed to the media, Eisenhower took away Patton’s command of the 7th Army, which had serious consequences on the subsequent course of the U.S. Army war effort.

³ Tadeusz Kutrzeba – Major General of the Polish Army, commander of the War College (Wyższa Szkoła Wojskowa), commander of the Army Poznań during the September Campaign of 1939.

and local battles we see today in the Middle East, the recent Balkan conflicts, and civil wars on the African continent have re-evaluated the approach to military action in security studies and psychology. Since the middle of the twentieth century, the latter has been dealing with soldiers' behaviour on the battlefield and the impact of armed conflicts (wars) on human functioning. Observations and research in this field began – as already mentioned – immediately after the end of World War II, and it started with analyses of victories and defeats in the context of different models of military leadership.

Psychology as the science of the “soul”

Psychology is a term derived from the Greek words *psyche* (soul) and *logos* (word) in their literal sense. It is, therefore, the science of the “soul”, which the ancients understood as the power of life, its warp, and necessary condition [1, p. 34]. According to this conception, the life force was possessed by plants, animals, and humans. However, the souls of the latter were more complex, as they were distinguished by their rationality. The consideration of the soul as the power and warp of life was present primarily in philosophy, which dealt with the nature of the world, God, and man. In ancient times, but also in later centuries, many scholars, regardless of their views on the nature of the soul, treated it as the causal factor of all existence, including human activity.

Let us stress at the outset that the human psyche has been somehow dealt with in all ages and cultures. Nonetheless, the systematic accumulation of empirical knowledge in this field began only in the 19th century as part of the fascination with science, which can be primarily correlated with the development of medical science. A specific role in this growth of human interest in this issue was also played by socio-economic processes, which led to the development of many scientific disciplines and academic centres. In the second half of the 19th century, the state of knowledge was strongly influenced by advancements in various fields of practical (empirical) sciences and the humanities. In France, Germany, and the British Isles, attempts to interpret such, and not other, human conduct and types of activity, as well as causal forces, factory, and motives, appeared increasingly frequently in scientific literature and widespread communication. The first attempts to treat psychology as a branch of science relate to the achievements of German scientists – Johannes von Mülller⁴, Hermann von Helmholtz⁵, and Gustav Fechner⁶, whose deliberations and analyses were situated on the borderline between physiology and psychology. Their research results indicated that psychological phenomena have a physiological basis. These researchers were the first to prove that the human psyche can be studied indirectly through experiments and observation of physiological processes. The research direction has developed and deepened the exploration

⁴ Johannes von Mülller – a German natural scientist, physiologist, anatomist and zoologist. Since 1999 the Johannes-Müller-Institut für Physiologie has borne his name.

⁵ Hermann von Helmholtz – a German physician, physiologist, physicist and philosopher. He studied nerve cell connections with axons. Between 1892-1894 he was an honorary member of the Poznań Society of Friends of Science.

⁶ Gustav Fechner – a German physicist and philosopher. He was the founder of psychophysics and the initiator of experimental studies on psychic phenomena. He mainly dealt with galvanic and electrochemical processes, then moved to natural philosophy, anthropology and aesthetics. Fechner's greatest achievement was establishing, together with Ernst H. Weber, the law stating that the increase in impression (as a subjectively perceived difference) depends on the strength (size) of the stimulus in a logarithmic manner. The law – known as the Weber-Fechner law – is the basis of psychophysics.

of the causes and regularities of human behaviour and the impact of various (internal and external) factors on specific reactions.

Despite the rapid development of knowledge on the subject throughout the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, there were no attempts to correlate human psychological problems with conflicts and wars. The first period of development of psychological science (in terms of different and specific proceedings) was rather concerned with strongly pathological personalities, such as serial killers and murderers. It was however an important stage in the development of pre-psychological science, as it provided interesting research results about the regularities and irregularities in human behaviour.

The period of accelerated interest in psychology as a science dates back to the last decades of the 19th century. In 1879, Wilhelm Wundt created the first laboratory of experimental psychology at the University of Leipzig. During the same period, similar laboratories were established in many European countries and North America. Thus, depending on the theoretical and methodological assumptions adopted, various schools and later psychological trends began to emerge. The most important ones include classical psychology, psychoanalysis, behaviourism, cognitive psychology, and humanistic psychology [2, p. 21-23]. The trends listed here differ in terms of the research subject. Classical psychology focuses on the phenomenon of conscious human actions, while psychoanalysis studies mainly unconscious processes. The behaviourism on the other hand concerns itself with the study of human and animal behaviour [3, p. 16]. The psychologists of this stream primarily assume that human behaviour is regulated by stimuli coming from two sources. The first one is the environmental stimuli currently affecting a human, and the other is a set of their personal experiences recorded in long-term memory. A wide range of research problems and various approaches were not conducive to a quick formulation of a definition of this new science domain. It was not until the twentieth century that such attempts were made by emphasizing its distinctiveness from other disciplines; it was then accepted that the specific area of psychology would be the relations between a human and their environment, reflected in specific mental reactions.

Polish researcher Tadeusz Tomaszewski⁷ defines psychology as: “the science of regulation of mutual relations of living organisms with their environment” or “about human activities and a human as their subject” [4, p. 9]. Józef Koziński, on the other hand, describes psychology as “a science about a human, which studies the laws of behaviour and the environmental and personality factors that control them” [5, p. 10]. Other, more detailed attempts at defining the theory of psychology can also be found, and all of them provide grounds for stating that it is independent and scientifically distinct. Based on those definitions, it can be assumed that the subject of psychology as a science of a human being is the regulation of their relations with the environment, i.e., conscious activity based on external stimuli and experience [6, p. 98]. Such an approach integrates the scope of psychology research with the scope of security science, especially in the aspect of personal security, which is identified with such an implementation of life that is conducive to persistence, survival, and development of human personality and its improvement – full self-realization as a human being and a social individual.

⁷ Tadeusz Tomaszewski – a Polish psychologist, creator of activity theory and founder of the Warsaw Psychological School, educator of generations of psychologists representing almost all disciplines of university psychology, and editor of the textbook *Psychologia (Psychology)* (1975). His other important works include: *Wstęp do psychologii (Introduction to psychology)* (1963), *Psychologia jako nauka o człowieku (Psychology as a science about man)* (written in co-operation with J. Reykowski and M. Maruszewski), *Problemy i kierunki współczesnej psychologii (Problems and directions of modern psychology)* (1968), *Główne idee współczesnej psychologii (Main ideas of modern psychology)* (1984).

Since psychology became a scientific discipline, it has been divided into two orientations: cognitive and practical. On this basis, theoretical (scientific) psychology and practical (applied) psychology are distinguished. Applied psychology is not possible to develop without carrying out theoretical research to achieve specific practical goals [7, p. 9]. The proponents of the practical direction do not resign from the achievements of theoretical psychology and vice versa; hence, there is close intercorrelation between them. Each domain of psychology contains both parts of theoretical and practical knowledge [8, p. 15].

The development of areas of interest in psychology was related to the research conducted on its ground and external phenomena. The various wars on the European continent, especially the socio-psychological effects of World War II, were particularly significant. Let us note here that the 1939-1945 conflict was the first on such an enormous scale in world history and involved entire Europe, America, much of Asia, Australia, North Africa, and two of the oceans. Never before had there been such significant losses in human resources (in Poland, it was 1/6 of the population), including civilians. It was also the first time that such a scale of barbarism occurred in modern times, based on the established Judeo-Christian culture. Events such as the Holocaust, the millions of victims of starvation, wandering, expulsion, and the ruthlessness of the occupants were the cause of exceptionally dramatic experiences. All such traumatic events affected the level of security and its feeling. It should be mentioned that they were also experienced by children.

No less important were the harsh experiences of soldiers participating in campaigns lasting many months or even years, burdened with chronic exhaustion, images of death, and involved in barbaric acts. We find descriptions of dramatic, even macabre situations and human attitudes in the diaries or memoirs of senior American, German, and Russian commanders, who observed the specific behaviour of their subordinates participating in battles. The diary literature written by the victims of resettlement in Siberia and life in concentration camps and occupied territories [9-13] contains similar content. Such individual reflections, sometimes transferred in various forms to television and cinema screens, have had and undoubtedly still have an impact on broadening the areas of interest of psychological sciences.

Military psychology as an applied science

On the grounds of new experiences, military psychology was created as applied science. Jan Terelak⁸ states that "Military psychology is an atypical branch of psychology dealing with the effectiveness of human activity in extreme conditions of war, the influence of such situations on people and their rehabilitation after serious mental injuries caused by the war" [14, p. 36]. A slightly broader definition is given by Norbert Sillamy, according to whom military psychology is "a branch of psychology dealing with the organization and forms of activity of the armed forces" [12, p. 211]. In this context, the following definition can also be proposed: "military psychology deals with the personal security of participants in the armed forces' activities, their continuance, survival, and development, as well as improvement in the face of the threat of loss of life and health".

⁸ Jan Terelak – a psychologist, works primarily on stress-related issues. His research has focused on aviators, cosmonauts, polar explorers, mountaineers, stuntmen, soldiers, firefighters, surgeons, and managers. He is a member of the European Association for Aviation Psychology, the International Association of Applied Military Psychology, the Space and Satellite Research Committee, and the Ergonomics Committee of the Polish Academy of Sciences.

While psychological treatment of war victims requires specific knowledge and relevant experience, the application of psychological principles by commanders of the base level is entirely possible. Even though it requires proper preparation, it can be achieved throughout the course of basic training and by specialized courses. Skilful transfer of psychological rules to superior-subordinate relationship and its consistent application is essential in commanding small teams [15, p. 34].

When underlining the distinctiveness of military psychology as applied science, it can be emphasized that it “consists in applying regularities, theories, and psychological methods in military environments. It draws [...] knowledge from many fields, departments and areas of psychological science (general, experimental, social, organizational, psychometrics and psychophysiology)” [16, p. 285]. The area of interest formulated in this way shows the complex nature of this discipline.

When taking that definition as the one that most fully captures the essence of military psychology, its following areas can be distinguished:

- 1) selection, classification, and assignment to military specialities,
- 2) a human factor versus military performance,
- 3) an environmental factor and military performance,
- 4) directing (leadership) versus military performance,
- 5) individual behaviour versus group behaviour,
- 6) clinical, organizational, and psychological counselling applications,
- 7) special problems and special situations (prisoners of war, negotiations, problems arising from women’s military service) [17, p. 67].

Undoubtedly, the development of the art of war and the formation of mass armies forced the commanders to look for more and more effective command methods [3, p. 24-26]. Also, the increasingly complex area of combat operations, including the emergence of completely new threats, significantly influenced the definition of elements supporting command (its effectiveness).

It is not a coincidence that great hopes were placed in psychology, the practical application of which became more and more visible. One of the first considerations of military psychology can be found in the Romanian military doctor Marion Campeano’s⁹ works (1902). He described the issues of functional performance of commanders, individual soldiers, units and analysed the different types of troops and services. Three decades later, the leading psychologist of first the German Reichswehr and then the Wehrmacht, Martin Simoneit¹⁰, took a broader approach to this issue. In his work *Wehrpsychologie* (1933), he analyses in detail various forms of military activity, including listening, observing, marching, measuring distances, shooting, and flying. He also made attempts to describe the selection and composition of troops, training and education, and the conduct of war. Slightly earlier, during World War I, in 1915, Maximilian Möede and Curt Piórkowski established the first psychological laboratory in one of the automobile battalions to examine driver candidates concerning the German Army’s efficiency. In a short time, nearly 15 such laboratories were set up, where over 24,000 driver candidates were examined (20% of them were not allowed to serve) [5, p. 9-10]. It should be emphasized that those were the first tests ever conducted on such a large scale on a comparable group of people. Their implementation was not accidental, as

⁹ Mariona Campeano – a Romanian military doctor.

¹⁰ Martin Simoneit – a leading psychologist of the German Reichswehr, then Wehrmacht.

the beginning of the 20th century was the time of the first automotive boom and mass introduction of motor vehicles to the armed forces. At the same time, similar research was conducted by Americans. In 1917, a team of renowned psychologists (including Robert Mearns Yerkes, George Malcolm Stratton, Edward Lee Thorndike, Robert Dodge, Robert Sessions Woodworth, Lewis Madison Terman) conducted tests on the mental level of recruits. One of the practical results of this work was creating two group tests, the Alpha Test and the Beta Test. Over a year, over 172,000 people (including 41,000 officers) were tested using them, and it was one of the most extensive psychological experiments in the US Army. The tests mentioned above, modified many times, were applied until the beginning of World War II. The new Army General Classification Test (AGCT) was developed in 1940, and in the following decades, about 10 million soldiers [18, p. 16] and candidates for military service were tested with it. The American experience spread throughout the scientific world, and as a result, the testing of individuals for various difficult occupations quickly became widespread. The United States was undoubtedly the forerunner of widespread research of this kind.

In Poland, interest in psychology emerged in the army after World War I. The first such studies were conducted in 1920 by the Soldier Individualization Department of the VII Sanitary Department of the Ministry of Military Affairs. Then, the group examined were cadets. The first mass qualification examination was carried out in 1930 by order of the Minister of Military Affairs. It covered about 30 thousand soldiers. The examinations were a result of general interest in psychology as a science.

In the interwar period, psychology was included in the process of the training of commanding staff. Initially, this matter was included in the psychology and didactics subject. Subsequently, psychology was separated as an independent subject, which additionally included soldiers' behaviour on the battlefield. Just before the outbreak of World War II, ambitious plans were made to train line officers that would be specially prepared to use psychological techniques in the broader scope; however, they were thwarted by the war conflict [19, p. 3].

Although no Polish textbook on military psychology was written until 1939, the steps taken in the psychological analysis of soldiers' qualifications and knowledge from this field for more effective command and action found recognition among senior military commanders. Unfortunately, many prominent specialists in military psychology and psychiatry died during the war. War losses and a ban on the specialization of military physicians in psychiatry, which functioned for many years after 1945, resulted in a dozen years of stagnation in that field. It was not until the 1960s that the first psychological laboratories were established to conduct classification examinations of soldiers in recruit service and candidates for military schools. A little later, psychological counselling centres were also set up, and further transformed into military mental health counselling centres. During that period, most of the scientific research in psychology focused on the repressiveness of the military. These included quitting the job by professional cadres and soldiers, arbitrary departures from the place of duty and desertions, suicides and self-mutilations, and other phenomena considered pathological at that time.

In 1957, military psychology was introduced as part of the reform of training programs for future commanders and political officers in officer schools. In the 1970s, the Political-Military Academy produced the first master and doctoral theses on the application of psychology in the armed forces [20, p. 87]. The year 1970 saw the beginning of the Psychoneurological Clinic at the Military Institute of Aviation Medicine in Warsaw [18, p. 121]. It was there that the first scientific papers on occupational stress and acting in extreme conditions were written, many of them describing specific features required in military pilots.

The reason for the growing interest in psychological aspects of military service before 1989 was undoubtedly the pathologies in interpersonal relations revealed in many (if not most) military units, commonly referred to as “the surge”. In the mid-1980s, on the initiative of Iwańc, the first social research in this area was undertaken, which took several postulates of military psychologists into account. Colonel Stanisław Ilnicki, MD, Ph.D. in psychiatry, who many years later initiated creating the Department of Psychiatry and Combat Stress at the Military Medical Institute in Warsaw (WIM), played a unique role in the initiation of research on this topic¹¹.

It should also be mentioned that some issues of military psychology were pursued as part of graduate theses conducted at military academies. There are also more than a dozen major book publications in this field from the second half of the 1980s. Despite the tendency to idealize military science – which was a characteristic feature of the communist period – they were fundamental for increasing the knowledge of the staff about the psychological aspects of military service.

Currently, in the Polish Armed Forces, psychological care is an integral element of educational activities. Its scope is defined in the Regulation of the Minister of National Defence on psychological prevention [See: 21], which lists the base institutions and persons responsible for psychological care. These institutions include military psychological laboratories, psychological consultation points, and a psychologist in a military unit – a commander’s consultant for psychological prevention. Such an organized structure, where a military psychologist is present in each military unit, provides an entirely new level of psychological care.

The emergence of qualitatively new resources of military psychology is associated with the socio-political transformation that occurred after June 1999. The first civilian deputy ministers of national defence, Onyszkiewicz and Komorowski, played a primary role in establishing the new service. Before 1989, psychological warfare subunits functioned within the structures of the Polish Armed Forces (WP). Structurally, they were placed in the department of military reconnaissance, but the most significant influence on their functioning was Division II of the General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces (military intelligence and counter-intelligence). A unit of this type operated in each of the military districts (including Legionowo). Their tasks included, among others, psychological influence on the troops of a possible enemy and civilians located in the area of combat operations.

After 1989 the units of this type were reformed. In 2002, the Central Group of Psychological Operations in Bydgoszcz (CGDP) launched its activity. It is a specialized unit ensuring psychological operations on the battlefield and in peace support operations at operational and tactical levels and providing specialized psychological support elements to NATO forces. It has at its disposal electro-acoustic radio stations, printing equipment for printing materials, and radio and television systems and equipment. Soldiers of the group are constantly participating in Polish missions abroad, e.g., in Iraq, and currently, CGDP soldiers are serving as part of the Polish Task Force in Afghanistan [See: 22].

¹¹ The Military Medical Institute is a research center that conducts research and development work in the field of medical sciences, considering the needs of the Polish Armed Forces, including battlefield and emergency medicine, maritime and tropical medicine, and adapts the results to practical implementation. Rozporządzenie Ministra Obrony Narodowej z dnia 27 listopada 2002 r. w sprawie utworzenia Wojskowego Instytutu Medycznego (Dz. U. 2002 Nr 201, poz. 1699) [Regulation of the Minister of National Defence of 27 November 2002 on the establishment of the Military Medical Institute (Journal of Laws of 30 November 2002)].

Officers and non-commissioned officers of this speciality take active part in specialized training carried out in allied cooperation. The modern scope of military psychology has not only expanded, but has also been concretized and refined. Thus, the following issues may be mentioned:

- 1) preparation of commanders of various branches to use psychological knowledge in the processes of leadership and command,
- 2) psychological support for soldiers and their families and military personnel in different contexts of military service (work),
- 3) therapy and rehabilitation of victims of combat operations (somatic and psychological injuries),
- 4) development of optimal models of military service and psychological testing of candidates for various military functions,
- 5) activities in the field of psychological warfare,
- 6) scientific research in the field of military psychology,
- 7) training of the future psychological and psychiatric personnel.

Summary

The year 2015 was significant for psychological activity in the Ministry of National Defence. It was then that the decision on psychological activity was issued in the Ministry. The main idea was to integrate the whole environment of military psychology [See: 23]. That decision introduced significant changes in military psychology. According to its provisions, the supervision of psychological activity is exercised by a person holding a managerial position in the Ministry of Defence, responsible for social affairs through the director of the Department of Military Health Services. Since 1 April 2015, the Department of Military Health Service of the Ministry of Defence has been functioning in the Ministry. Furthermore, within the structure of the latter, the Psychology Team was established and tasked to initiate and coordinate tasks in the field of psychological testing and psychological support of soldiers, military personnel, veterans, and their families, as well as to prepare new legal regulations on the functioning of psychology and psychologists in the Ministry of Defence. This functioning is related to dealing with personnel and structural security problems in the implementation of the Armed Forces' tasks.

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Conflict of interests

The author declared no conflict of interests.

Author contributions

The author contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

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Biographical note

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Bezpieczeństwo jednostki – u źródeł psychologii wojskowej

STRESZCZENIE

W artykule przedstawiono charakterystykę podejmowanych badań nad funkcjonowaniem człowieka w sytuacji zagrożenia i jego bezpieczeństwa jako jednostki ludzkiej. Badania te wpisują się w nurt psychologii wojskowej posiadającej tradycje empiryczne. We wszystkich epokach i kulturach w jakiś sposób zajmowano się psychiką człowieka, ale systematyczne gromadzenie wiedzy empirycznej w tym zakresie rozpoczęło się dopiero w XIX wieku, w ramach fascynacji nauką, co można przede wszystkim skorelować z rozwojem nauk medycznych. Pewną rolę w intensyfikacji zainteresowania człowieka tą problematyką odegrały również procesy społeczno-ekonomiczne, które doprowadziły do rozwoju wielu dyscyplin naukowych, a poprzez to ośrodków akademickich. Na stan wiedzy w drugiej połowie XIX wieku mocno wpłynął postęp w różnych dziedzinach nauk praktycznych (empirycznych) oraz humanistycznych. We Francji, Niemczech, na Wyspach Brytyjskich w literaturze naukowej oraz przekazie powszechnym coraz częściej pojawiały się próby interpretacji takich, a nie innych postępowania człowieka i rodzajów jego aktywności, a także sił, przyczyn i motywów sprawczych.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE psychologia wojskowa, bezpieczeństwo jednostki, sytuacje zagrożenia

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