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<p>Worn symbols and their role in the military</p> <p>- a study of their effects and perceived value in the French army</p> <p>ABSTRACT:</p> <p>This study aims to explore the perceived value and effect of symbols worn in the military. Since uniforms create uniformity, symbols are one of the few ways individuals can distinguish themselves. These symbols hold more value than just a piece of fabric which serves a practical purpose. Within the Swedish armed forces, this has given rise not only to debates but also incidents regarding the trials in which these symbols are earned. However, contemporary research on the topic remains limited. Through an interpretive applied-theory approach, using Anthony King's theory as a framework for analyzing empirical data collected from interviews with officers and cadets within the French foreign legion, army, special forces, and infantry several discoveries were made.</p> <p>Symbols used beyond organizational necessity could be linked to both positive effects such as cohesion, trust, motivation, and pride, as well as negative effects such as shame, exclusion, and prejudice. The study indicates that symbols are often valued based on two concepts: distinction and difficulty in obtaining it. By better understanding the case in the French army, the study contributes to existing research by providing an outline of the area for continued research and a clearer way forward for practical applications of symbols in the military.</p> <p>Key words:</p> <p>Symbols, cohesion, shame, motivation, military culture, uniform, professionalism.</p>			

Table of contents

1. Introduction.....	3
1.1 Background	3
1.2 Problem statement.....	4
1.3 Literature Review.....	5
1.3.1 Cohesion.....	5
1.3.2 Rituals, awards, and the uniform	6
1.3.3 Conclusions on current literature.....	9
1.4 Purpose of the study.....	10
1.5 Research question	11
1.6 Outline of the study.....	11
2. Theory.....	13
2.1 Anthony King - The combat soldier	13
2.2 Theory discussion.....	15
3. Methodology	16
3.1 Research design.....	16
3.2 Method of data collection.....	17
3.2.1 Case discussion	18
3.3 Operationalization.....	20
3.3.1 Analysis tool	21
3.5 Material.....	23
3.6 Research ethics.....	24
4. Results	25
4.1 Themselves, others, and reputation	25
4.2 Failures, opinions, and motivation.....	26
4.3 Cohesion, value, and trough the trials into the brotherhood	28
5. Analysis	31
5.1 Motivation.....	31
5.2 Professionalization	32
5.3 Cohesion	33
6. Discussion.....	35
6.1 Conclusion	35
6.2 Reengagement with previous research	37
6.3 Discussion regarding theory and method.....	37
6.4 Future research and relevance of the study.....	38
Bibliography.....	40
Appendix I.....	43

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The use of symbols and specific attire to indicate an individuals' belonging within a military organization is both old and logical. As a hierarchical organization with large amounts of personnel; structure enables order and efficiency. From this perspective a beret is just a piece of cloth that shows the individual's organizational affiliation.

Depending on the unit it is common for these symbols, patches, or berets to be awarded to the individual after some sort of trial. An example: In June 2018, the Swedish marine counter-special forces unit Säkerhetskompani Sjö conducted its annual test. This test is one of the harder parts of the training course and serves as a check to ensure that candidates have learned their craft during the previous months of training, usually taking place during the last phase of the 9–11-month long training program. Both physically and mentally demanding, but if soldiers pass it, they are assigned the unit's unique emblem, which symbolizes a milestone in their training. Unfortunately, a combination of poor planning and high temperature made the test more demanding than usual, resulting in a dozen heat strokes and four soldiers needing qualified medical care. The accident report concludes that the several factors had a negative effect but, above all, it states how the participants had *suppressed or ignored their body's warning signals*, as the primary cause of the quite serious injuries (Amfibieregementet, 2018, p. 5).

The Ranger regiment in Karlsborg filed a similar rapport after their annual “ranger test”. Just as in the former case, summer heat made conditions worse and two soldiers were taken to the hospital. Once again, the unwillingness to give up during the test made matters worse and soldiers therefore suffered serious injuries, in this case, ranging from unconsciousness to respiratory arrest (Livregementets Husarer, 2018, p. 3).

Although the reports conclude that several factors were to blame for the accidents, the significant cause were attributed to the soldier's unwillingness to give up. Giving up meant for the soldiers that they would not be awarded their units symbol, instead they would have to watch their friends during the ceremony and maybe get a second try the following year.

These are just recent examples within the Swedish military, and it's likely that the same phenomena around symbols could be found within other military organizations. The French emperor and commander Napoleon Bonaparte allegedly once said "A soldier will fight long and hard for a bit of a coloured ribbon" (Iodice, 2022, p. 19). Given that France hands out almost four times the number of awards compared to England, this could be a favourable place to start (Frey, 2006, p. 380).

1.2 Research problem

The two mentioned incident reports can be seen as the tip of an iceberg where the extreme case has manifested itself. The reports, which indicate that the injuries were aggravated by the unwillingness to interrupt the tests, raises questions in what makes soldiers willing to risk their own well-being during a peacetime exercise for a piece of fabric and why it is so highly valued. Related areas such as rituals, awards, cohesion and military psychology, has not yet provided a precise answer. Instead, they tend to overlook or neglect the subject with few studies from the mentioned research areas regarding non-monetary awards in the military or how these awards affect military members. Instead of investigating the symbols with their *perceived value and effect*, the discussion usually is drawn to esprit de corps or cohesion on a larger level, meaning that the smaller tactical level is largely missed out on and has not been investigated from a cohesion and motivational perspective. To conclude, the military often uses symbols beyond just organizational necessity, however it's not necessarily based on research. This is likely due to the symbols and culture developing over time, and therefore, there is no clear path for how they could be used or what their perceived effects truly are.

1.3 Literature Review

As there is limited existing research on the specific subject this study seeks to surround and bridge the litterateur gap by taking a closer look at commonly linked areas such as cohesion, awards, and rituals within a military context.

1.3.1 Cohesion

During World War II, Janowitz & Shils (1948) investigated cohesion within the Wehrmacht. Despite great losses the German soldiers persisted in their resistance which raised the question of what motivated them to continue fighting. In their theory-developing study, Janowitz & Shils (p. 37) concluded that it was rarely due to political conviction, but rather interpersonal relationships, affirmation of masculinity, and spatial proximity. If their basic needs were met and the soldiers could identify with the leadership and their comrades – cohesion would follow. This is known as the *primary group thesis* and was commonly adopted within militaries. In the 1950's Swedish conscripts, for this same reason, were often placed in the same battalion as their comrades from basic training (Åselius, 2014, p. 97).

However, Moskos (1975, p. 28) was sceptical of this. Throughout his studies of the Vietnam War, both racism and conflicts occurred within groups, but cohesion still existed. Instead, Moskos argued that it was rather a pragmatic response when being faced with a common enemy. Therefore, cohesion was a result of *contextual factors*, which could explain the seemingly strong bonds but also that soldiers who left the group rarely sought contact with their former group members thereafter. The theory is however not able to explain acts of heroism or sacrifice, as this seems rather illogical.

A few years later, Moskos (1977, p. 41) wrote a theory-developing study on how the US military was being professionalized and transitioned from an institution to an occupation. With this change research on cohesion also changed, leading what would be known as *competence-based cohesion*.

Ben-Shalom et al. (2005) qualitative case study explored the Israeli military's success during the Al-Aqsa Intifada. This study challenges the *primary group thesis*, as despite the use of small, specialized units that were often put together temporarily, the units were able to perform effectively and showed cohesion. The explanation presented was that the soldiers were well-trained in standardized operation procedures, which made units interoperable. Therefore, cohesion was built more on the soldiers' competence rather than inter-personal relations. In addition, Ben-Shalom et al. (p. 12) argues that performing tasks together with the new groups or the sharing of specialised knowledge would build cohesion faster. Other authors such as McNeill (1995, p. 4) also argues the importance of joint training in building cohesion. In his study McNeill (pp. 6-8) investigates a phenomenon he calls "muscular bonding" and sees it is an ancient way for humans to build relationships and strengthen bonds within communities, originating from religious ceremonies.

King (2013, pp. 93-94) argues that the great professionalization of western militaries occurred when armies mainly built upon conscripts changed to contracted soldiers. The transformation changed the relationship between soldiers, and King (p. 374) now argues that soldier unite through common adherence to established practices rather than personal friendships. Soldiers evaluate each other based on their drill performance and expertise, making competence the main component for cohesion.

1.3.2 Rituals, awards, and the uniform

McNeill (1995, p. 67) also argued that cohesion is closely intertwined with rituals throughout human history, as people would participate in ritual gatherings. McNeill (p. 68) also gives examples from different religions and their events, but the theory is not very specific when it comes to the military rituals.

Angstrom (2017, p. 145) would instead focus on this as he argues that the military rituals can be traced back hundreds of years, exemplifying with the 16th century knights that would kneel before a king and submit to authority. However, once they stood up, it symbolized their inclusion into the membership of the new elite and its esprit de corps. Secondly, he argues that these were important tools used to reinforce military norms and values. In a comparative study, Angstrom (p. 144) examines the rituals within the Swedish Ranger Battalion from another perspective. Rituals were in this case used to mark the individual's transition from civilian to soldier and ultimately warrior. When in the state of a warrior, new sets of moral rules applied thus enabling a human to commit acts of violence. To help the individual navigate these moral frameworks, rituals were used. Often linked to different symbols such as a beret, ranger tab, and survival tab (Angstrom, 2017, pp. 146-148). The beret which was initially a standard part of the uniform issued to everyone, evolved into a symbol of bravery, perseverance, and fearlessness. As a result, it was given meaning and used alongside other symbols to highlight the transition. Eventually, the ranger tab was introduced as well, taking inspiration from the US Ranger School. While the symbol wasn't officially mandated, it quickly became an integral part of the organization.

Rituals are usually also linked with initiation rites. One of the earliest experiments on initiation rites by Aronson & Mills (1959, p. 181) found that the more severe and demanding rite, the higher the individual's perception of the group became. McCoy (1995, p. 689) would later investigate hazing and rituals in the Philippine Military Academy (PMA). Through interviews with former cadets at the military school, McCoy (p. 695) found that hazing and rituals were used to bring the cadets together as a brotherhood and reinforce the culture of honour and shame. However, the study also found that these practices led to negative consequences such as physical and psychological harm, as well as creating a culture of violence that became ingrained in the cadets. As a result, the author concludes that these rituals were used as a means of social control to establish discipline. Winslow's (1999, p. 429) research focused on investigating unit cohesion in the military. The ethnographic case study examined both

conventional methods like joint training for teaching cooperation and unconventional methods like the use of rituals. Winslow (p. 452) argued that such rituals are essential tools for creating and maintaining a sense of community, loyalty, and trust within a collective. The individuals that passed the training would be given a coin, their wings and red beret to indicate that they were a part of the group. However, there were also negative aspects of these initiation rites. Winslow (pp. 440-443) describes these as often involving excessive amounts of alcohol and humiliating activities. Failure to submit to such activities resulted in ostracism. In contrast to civilian society, ostracism within the military is particularly harsh since individuals cannot easily join another group. These negative sides of initiation rites were however not noted by Aronson & Mills (1959).

Hertz (2006) studied and concluded current research on uniforms. She argues that uniforms, to some degree, can mask certain aspects of identity, such as race, gender, and social class thereby creating organizational cohesion by eliminating differences. This uniformity can however be deceptive, as sharing the same aesthetic, social, and symbolic system does not imply that all members of a culture or group wear the same uniform. Hertz (p. 48) also highlights the use of patches or other insignia in the U.S. military to emphasize more intricate distinctions among members, some of which have been recognized and implemented in the uniform code. This was later noted by Angstrom (2017). In a more recent study, Stapleton (2021, p. 42) analysed British military culture in West Africa during the colonial era. The study highlights the role of visual symbols, including uniforms, emblems, and ceremonies, in creating a distinctive military culture among West African forces. According to the author, these symbols served as a means of connecting with history and forging a united collective identity. Moreover, Stapleton (p. 69) argues that these symbols played a critical role in legitimizing the West African troops and transforming them from paramilitaries to esteemed members of the British imperial military. This transformation was made possible by the visual symbols' power in creating a sense of legitimacy and reinforcing the troops' sense of belonging within the colonial military structure.

Frey (2006) argues that there is a lack of research regarding the impact of non-monetary awards from a motivational perspective. According to Frey (p. 381), people have an innate need to distinguish themselves, which increases in homogeneous societies or when economic income does not create a distinction. Awards are associated with higher social status and are usually valued more than their corresponding actual value. These awards are strongly influenced by supply and demand. Awards that are perceived as more difficult to obtain are significantly more valued. However, there is a requirement for the recipient's dignity – the awards must be carefully handed out to not lose their perceived value. Control over the supply and awarding the individuals on the same standards are therefore critical. Frey (p. 385) also suggests that awards create a relationship between the giver and the recipient, which increases loyalty from an organizational perspective. At the same time, awards are an effective means of creating external motivation when an organization has limited financial resources or when economic incentives play a lesser role.

1.3.3 Conclusions on current literature

Research on cohesion in the military has undergone three major changes in the past 70 years, with the currently dominant one being "competence-based cohesion." However, determining which perspective offers the best explanatory value is difficult since theories are largely based on varying factors and conflicts. For example, many military organizations have partially or completely abandoned conscription, soldiers are expected to have a large skill set and the types of war participated in has changed. Therefore changing the motivational factors, values, and more. Although the primary group thesis is still used in some studies, competence-based cohesion is generally seen as a more suitable model due to western professionalization.

Rituals also appear to have a strong correlation with cohesion, which has been examined from several different perspectives with different conclusions. Overall, it seems like a double-edged sword where it can positively affect the perception of a group, be used as a non-conventional way to increase cohesion and reinforce changes in norms or moral codes. On the other hand, it

can also create negative norms, violate individuals and result in ostracism. There also seems to be a consensus about shared suffering creating cohesion, as formulated by McCoy (1995, p. 695).

Closely related to the competence-based perspective on cohesion and rituals, symbols also appear. Usually, these are not the focus of interest and are therefore briefly mentioned, except for Angstrom (2017, p. 147) who sees them as part of reinforcing rituals or Winslow (1999, p. 438) who sees them as proof that the individual belongs to a specific group.

If these are instead viewed from the perspective of awards, Frey (2006, p. 385) provide interesting conclusions. Firstly, awards serve the purpose of creating a distinction that is often associated with a higher social status. This makes awards more valuable in more homogeneous groups or when an organization cannot compensate the individual with financial means. Viewed primarily from a motivational perspective, these can therefore be valuable tools in certain situations. However, this is largely hypothesised as the subject has not been thoroughly researched, therefore it is still unclear how they affect military personnel from a competence, cohesion, and motivational perspective.

1.4 Purpose of the study

The incidents in the introduction are both interesting and impossible to understand from the perspective of symbols as purely an organizational necessity. Bergman (2019) argues that the beret trial and the ritual when it is awarded symbolize that the individual is accepted into the collective through the trials. From that perspective, the purpose of the study is to understand the value that military personnel attach to symbols such as berets or insignias and how they affect members. If their effects are studied and mapped, it would allow for a clearer way forward regarding their use within the military. In the cases presented above it seemed to have a highly motivational effect, even surpassing the natural instincts in some sense. These symbols and surrounding rituals or culture may also let organization create a sense of unity quicker which

can be linked to unit performance. In a world where small, specialized units are often temporarily assembled into task groups, this may offer an advantage in creating cohesive units in a short time span or ease the process of integration. Cohesion is the cement; without it, the building cannot stand. From this perspective, competence-based cohesion could also be strengthened by awarding different symbols after completing tests as these symbolizes a specific skill or knowledge. The internal relevance of this study is to map out unexplored areas which have been slightly overlooked within research and to help fill research gaps regarding non-monetary awards within the military and the effects upon its servicemembers, by studying worn symbols within the French military.

1.5 Research question

Based upon the lack of research regarding symbols and the culture around them within the military, and with the aim of further investigating this using Kings theory, the research question is following:

How can the perceived effect and value of worn symbols within the French military be understood from the perspective of cohesion, motivation, and professionalism?

1.6 Delimitations

The study examines the *phenomenon* within the French military and is limited to the army cadets and officers at the French military academy. The phenomenon refers to the effect and culture surrounding these symbols within the military. Regarding France, a more detailed discussion can be found under the case discussion.

The definition of symbols is based on the word's origin from Greek *sy'mbolon* which means recognition, a kind of concrete appearance that represents an abstract concept that it shares meaning with or represents a social group (Nationalencyklopedin, 2023). The French uniform

system differs from the Swedish one, where skill badges and patches are more common in Sweden. Variations within units still exist and symbols are defined slightly more broadly than just a piece of fabric worn on the right shoulder to better capture the phenomenon that the study is interested in. In this regard, a symbol is defined as a mark (fabric or metal) or distinctive clothing (headgear, uniform details) that the individual has that can be observed by others. This is further defined and categorized under chapter 4 to facilitate analysis and clarifies the type of symbol respondents refer to. Based on the previous research and the theory used in the framework, the study seeks to understand symbols from the perspective of professionalism, cohesion, and motivation; thus, the subject is limited to these three themes. The study is also more interested in the tactical level due to the focus of cohesion rather than esprit de corps. When the word "group" is used in the study, it refers to the individual's group affiliation, which does not necessarily have to be a physical 8-man team.

2. Theory

This chapter will outline the theoretical framework used in the study, why its chosen and criticism against the theory.

2.1 Anthony King – The combat soldier

King (2013, p. 211) identifies a major shift between the first world war to contemporary conflicts in Afghanistan which he refers to as *professionalization*. The nearly 200-year-old trend of western countries relying mainly on mass citizen armies have shifted towards a largely professional organization with contracted soldiers and officers. With this transformation, conscription has been entirely or partially abolished. This change has far-reaching consequences, not only for how countries treat their military, but also for cohesion, motivational factors, and especially competence. Competence, according to King (p. 346), is the foundation which cohesion arises through. In this case competence refers to the skillset and ability of an individual soldier, which in turn is created through rigorous training.

King (2013, p. 336) reasons that although modern armies are smaller, they are also more efficient than their citizen predecessors. Viewing the military as a job, as opposed to a mandatory service, lets soldiers undergo rigorous training and battle preparation that's increasingly sophisticated and refined. This focus on training to improve individual skills, once reserved for special forces, is now increasingly common for regular infantry soldiers who require a broader skill set as their operating in an increasingly complex environment. Modern soldiers often serve a special role within their group, therefore their unique knowledge enables the group to accomplish their task. The focus on training not only involves acquiring new skills but also establishing a collective identity in performing tasks together, making cohesion a product of competence and collective training, rather than a result of soldiers liking each other (King, 2013, p. 346). Since soldiers are now primarily valued based on their competence and performance, training serves as an important event for soldiers and officers to assess each other's skills and prove themselves to the group (King, 2013, p. 363).

As a result, King (2013, pp. 338-339) sees a distinct hierarchy of status groups with the need to distinguish themselves. Drawing upon Max Weber's concept of "status honour", which represented a unique kind of respect that members of a collective showed toward one another and would also reinforce the distinction between members and non-members. These were then expected to uphold the group's reputation and adhere to the norms that governed the group. King (p. 363) argues that competence serves as a modern example of status honour. Another way to create a distinction would be through clothing. King (2013, p. 341) draws from Émile Durkheim's research regarding the norms and codes within smaller societies. Such members would also bear unique symbols or clothing to reinforce this distinction and thereby creating a social status. A more recent example would be how the British paratroopers proudly wore their berets during missions in Afghanistan as a sign of this professional distinction (King, 2013, p. 371).

As the professionalization has strengthened the culture of honour and shame in modern military services, motivation is built on a desire to be accepted by the group and the fear of shame. The US Marines Corps, for example, have institutionalized "professional shame" to increase combat performance. Belonging to the group requires individuals to contribute to maintaining and managing the corps reputation, and fear of shame functions as a moral code that motivates individuals to push through adversity, hunger, and sleeplessness. To quit, show cowardice or incompetence would thereby not meet the standards set by the group, resulting in not only the individual's reputation being badly damaged but also sometimes the whole unit. The fear of shame and ostracism is often justified since individuals whose reputation is tarnished lose all credibility and are quickly removed from their position (King, 2013, pp. 371-372).

It is important to highlight that King (2013, p. 33) makes a distinction between two related but different concepts: cohesion and esprit de corps. Cohesion refers to the sense of solidarity that arises within a platoon or company due to the immediate knowledge of all its members, along

with their interdependent and mutually supportive actions. On the other hand, esprit de corps is a more abstract concept that pertains to the shared beliefs and values that exist at a higher level, beyond the immediate group.

2.2 Theory discussion

King's (2013) theory is developed within a western military context and uses a competence-based perspective on cohesion. Based on previous research, this perspective seems the most relevant compared to the primary group thesis or contextual factors. It also differentiates between esprit de corps and cohesion, with the latter being more relevant for this study as it focuses on the tactical level. The theory could also be interpreted from the perspective of symbols, as it addresses relevant areas such as motivation, cohesion and shame which could help explain the phenomena like the one described in the introduction. In an anthology edited by King (2015), the theory is further supported through five qualitative case studies.

King's theory mainly focuses on infantry and special-forces units, which has been criticized by Schilling (2015, p. 82) and Åselius (2014, p. 99) for its limited generalizability. However, this is unlikely to be a limiting factor given the case selection. All the respondents come from a fighting unit, which differs from the non-fighting unit that the criticism is directed towards. Additionally, Åselius (pp. 99-100) is hesitant about the comparison between modern commando soldiers and conscripts in Normandy as a valid argument. Siebold et al. (2016, p. 450) also criticize King's definition of cohesion as narrow and misleading. Simultaneously, the author points out that the strong focus on individual skills is not present in all military cultures. Overall, Siebold believes that this means several important aspects of cohesion are being missed. In a response, King (Siebold et al., 2016, p. 461) argues that he actively chooses the definition to escape the old perspective of cohesion as social relations, rather than a product of shared training and competence. Although the theory lacks some specificity, the conclusion is that it can still be applied and operationalized effectively for this study.

3. Methodology

This chapter will outline the research design, how data is collected and why the case was chosen. The process of operationalization is shown together with the analysis tool followed by a discussion regarding material and research ethics.

3.1 Research design

The study aims to understand how symbols are perceived and why military personnel attach a value to symbols such as berets or insignias. To address this research question, the study adopts an interpretivism perspective, which distinguishes between natural and social facts (Bryman, 2015, p. 28). While natural facts are based on objective reality, social facts are constructed through people's interpretation of their reality. For example, a positivist would view a beret as a mere piece of fabric, but through an interpretivist perspective, it would hold a socially constructed value.

The interpretive perspective it is still applicable to qualitative research methods, benefiting the structure of the analysis (Bryman, 2015, p. 36). The study's descriptive ambition is to understand how symbols are perceived, whereas its explanatory ambition is focused on why they hold value. To address both goals, an applied-theory approach is most suitable (Esaiasson et al., 2012, p. 41).

By using the structure and method of an applied-theory study, but interpretive epistemological and ontological assumptions, it allows for a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, which in this case is the effects and perceptions of symbols. The method also gives us the ability to use a theoretical framework more actively than just structuring different perspectives of the phenomena. However, the study does not have the same emphasis on explaining why through precise dependent/independent variables as in a positivistic applied-theory study, nor is it interested in drawing generalizing conclusions, which is in line with an applied-theory study (Esaiasson et al., 2012, p. 89). Despite this limitation, the study's method choice is justified as

it investigates an unexplored area, and understanding the phenomenon before conducting studies with a generalizing ambition is critical as it gives future researchers an outline of the area. As all research is cumulative, this can be seen as a first step in a future direction.

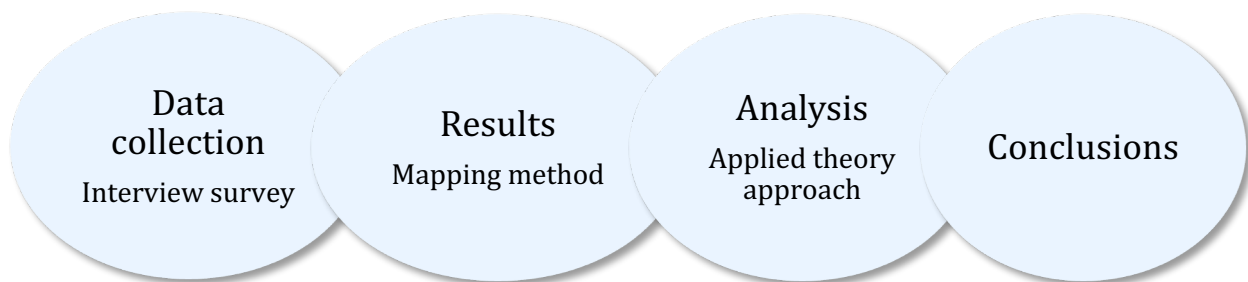


Table 1. Research process illustrated.

3.2 Method of data collection

To collect empirical evidence for this study, the interview survey method was utilized. The choice of the interview survey method is based on two principles. Firstly, the study aims to investigate how people perceive their own world, and secondly the study ventures into an unexplored area of research. There are several advantages to using interviews over questionnaires or surveys. Interviews can provide a better understanding of respondents' interpretation of reality and allow for clarification questions or diving into other interesting aspects. Surveys are not as good at capturing unexpected answers, which is valuable if the topic is unexplored (Esaiasson et al., 2012, p. 253).

To support the interviews, a semi-structured interview form was developed with form and content in mind, meaning various thematic questions formulated based on the previous research and theoretical framework (Esaiasson et al., 2012, p. 265). The content aims more towards keep the conversation flowing and to motivate the respondent to talk about their experiences, using

open-ended question and follow-up questions which can be asked if something particularly interesting is mentioned.

These will then be summarized into shorter case descriptions, coded to individual respondents, and categorized based on the occurrence of different thought processes. This enables the study to both discover different perspectives as well as link different characteristics to the respondents. The material is then summarized in a logical way, and the different experiences are supported by quotes that can be said to speak for that category according to the mapping method (Esaiasson et al., 2012, p. 272).

When the interviews no longer show any new train of thoughts regarding the subject, the analysis process begins. Overall, measures have been taken to minimize the most common errors in the context, such as misinterpretations, poorly designed questions, or memory problems (Bryman, 2015, p. 210).

3.2.1 Case discussion

The study strategically selects respondents based on its explorative purpose. Using the principle of intensity and centrality, the number of suitable respondents were narrowed down to two categories: French cadets and officers. These two categories are chosen since they likely offer two different perspectives on how symbols are used and how their perceived value is affected. To expose as many different perspectives as possible, there is variation within these two categories, partly in line with the principle of maximum variation (Esaiasson et al., 2012, p. 261). This variation includes factors such as previous experience, age, and rank. The additional requirement for English-speaking respondents is simply due to the lack of an interpreter, as well as reducing the risk of misunderstandings that could affect the study's validity (Esaiasson et al., pp. 258-259).

The cadets in the study are from *École Militaire Interarmes* (EMIA), which means that they have previous experience as non-commissioned officers (NCOs). This is considered advantageous, as these respondents better reflect the French military outside a school environment. Other cadets at the school lack this experience and often have only a previous civilian background. The officers in the study are currently working at the *École Spéciale Militaire* (ESM) but have all previous experience as they generally rotate between the school and the regiments. In practice, the study uses a snowball sampling method, where respondents help find other suitable respondents who meet the selection criteria (Esaiasson et al., 2012, p. 190).

This study investigates the phenomenon within the French military, Armée de Terre, for a few reasons. Firstly, the study is conducted at Coëtquidan St. Cyr, the central French military academy for officer training which has a strong connection to history as Napoleon founded the school in 1802. Secondly, France is one of the countries that have devoted early research to cohesion within the military, which led to the term *esprit de corps* being coined. Frey (2006, p. 382) makes a comparison between France and England, stating that France hands out four times as many awards. He argues that France is more homogeneous and, therefore, has a greater need for awards. Likely, this reflects on to the military as well. King (2013, p. 210) mentions how the French military underwent professionalization during the 1990s. This, combined with the fact that France is a Western country that has been involved with NATO for a long time and, therefore, focuses on joint international operations with other countries. This strengthens the perception of the country's military as highly professional, making the case favourable in terms of the study's purpose and representation within the military. In total, ten respondents are chosen but this number may be increased or decreased if it is deemed necessary (Esaiasson et al., 2012, p. 261)

Respondents

- (1) Male, 29 yrs, Cadet, French SAS
- (2) Male, 30 yrs, Cadet, French SAS
- (3) Male, 28 yrs, Cadet, Chasseur Alpin
- (4) Male, 27 yrs, Cadet, Chasseur Alpin
- (5) Male, 30 yrs, Cadet, Army Signal Corps
- (6) Male, 58 yrs, Lieutenant Colonel, Troupes de Marine
- (7) Male, 42 yrs, Major, Armoured Cavalry
- (8) Male, 30 yrs, Captain, Légion Étrangère
- (9) Male, 33 yrs, Captain, Cavalry
- (10) Male, 44 yrs, Captain, Army Logistics

3.3 Operationalization

Operationalization aims to make a theory measurable by defining clearer indicators. In this case, the indicators are derived from King's (2013) theory and applied to empirical data consisting of interviews, which allows the study to use the theory throughout the analysis. However, operationalization significantly affects the study's conceptual validity. To achieve good conceptual validity, either a previous operationalizations can be used or, as in this case, logically reasoning out the indicators (Esaiasson et al., 2012, p. 61). In the absence of previous research, face validity is chosen (Bryman, 2015, p. 171). The process of the operationalization is clearly shown below to create transparency and the key concepts are brought up from the theoretical framework. This is done in two steps: firstly, the theory is operationalized into indicators, secondly, they are made into analysis questions.

King's theory does not specifically focus on symbols, although it does address them to some extent. Therefore, interpretation is necessary in the process of operationalization. For example, King's (2013) theory uses the competence-based perspective on cohesion, which suggests that soldiers' skills, joint training, and trust are fundamental to creating cohesion in military units.

One way in which soldiers assess each other's competence is through training together in different drills (King, 2013, p. 363). However, this is not always possible. Instead, symbols worn by soldiers could serve a similar purpose. Symbols provide individuals with the opportunity to demonstrate their competence without physically doing so. This assumes that the individual has undergone a certain test to obtain it, or for example, symbolizes a specific competence. To clarify the process, the relationship between theory and symbols are shown below and further explained in the analytical tool.

Theoretical theme Analysis unit	Operational indicator
<i>Motivation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Symbols are used to distinguish an individual. ▪ Shame is a commonly occurring motivational factor.
<i>Professionalism</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Symbols signal competence (skill). ▪ Symbols signal a passed trial (trust). ▪ The reputation of the unit is important, and soldiers are expected to maintain it.
<i>Cohesion</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Primarily built upon joint training and skill. ▪ Symbols signal that the individual is accepted by the group. ▪ Individuals are judged upon their skill and less characteristics.

Table 2. Operationalization of Anthony Kings theory.

3.3.1 Analysis tool

The analytical tool consists of questions derived from the theoretical framework that are asked to the empirical data (interviews) with the aim of gaining a better understanding. In a positivist qualitative study, these questions are often presented in relation to a variable value where the degree of the variable's occurrence is measured. However, for this study, the variables do not

have measurable values. Therefore, the analysis aims to systematically ask questions to the material that capture specific aspects of the phenomenon that the study is interested in, in this case, the three central theoretical themes.

Theoretical theme Analysis units	Analysis questions
<i>Motivation</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Does the respondents see symbols as an opportunity to distinguish themselves positively, associating symbols with higher social status? ○ Is incompetence or underperformance is associated with shame, and the fear of shame is a driving motivational force for the individual?
<i>Professionalism</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Are symbols perceived as an opportunity to show their surroundings that the respondents possess certain skills or have demonstrated their ability (physically or mentally)? ○ Does respondent believe that the unit's reputation is important and feels an obligation to maintain it? ○ Does the respondent assess other individuals based on their worn symbols and does this affects how they are perceived?
<i>Cohesion</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Does the respondent experience that training collectively has a positive effect on cohesion within their group? ○ Does the respondent value individual competence more than personal factors from the perspective of group success? ○ Does the respondent feel that the allocation of symbols can reinforce and demonstrate their belonging to a specific group? ○ Have the respondent experienced that not meeting the requirements as associated with ostracism or less cohesive environment?

Table 3. Tool of analysis

3.5 Material

Good validity and high reliability are important in all studies. Validity in this case is strengthened by allowing respondents to speak freely during data collection and by formulating questions that captures what the study is interested in. However, selective questions may arise since the theoretical framework is an important part of designing the interview material (Bryman, 2015, p. 165). This is minimized by open-ended questions that avoid leading respondents into specific answers.

Reliability is the absence of unsystematic measurement errors and can in this study be affected by how questions are formulated or mistakes during data collection/transcription. Reliability is strengthened by recording the interviews and the use of an interview form. However, from an interpretive perspective, reality cannot be objectively observed, and the interviewer may influence the respondent to some degree. Therefore, the study will be as transparent as possible when interpreting the material (Bergström & Boréus, 2012, pp. 42-43).

From a source-critical perspective, there is a risk that the sources have exhibited a tendency when participating in the interviews, adapting, or changing the story to some extent. To reduce this risk the respondents were promised anonymity and the respondents had no previous relation with author. The choice of environment can also affect the interviews, preferably conducted individually, and the *interviewer effect* should be considered (Esaiasson et al., 2012, pp. 235). Based on other source-critical criteria, this is not relevant. The strength of the empirical data comes from understanding respondents based on their world and beliefs. The authenticity of the material is considered good since its first-hand sources that talk about their experience (Esaiasson et al., 2012, p. 259).

3.6 Research ethics

Ethical considerations are crucial in interview studies, particularly where there is a risk of violating an individual's integrity or causing negative repercussions. For example, the culture of shaming within the military. Even if physical harm is not a concern, data collection must be conducted with this in mind. There are several guiding principles to follow in this context. For instance, according to the principle of information and the requirement for consent, respondents must be aware that they are participating in a voluntary study that can be terminated at any time (Esaiasson et al., 2012, p. 257).

While collecting personal information is necessary to create depth, such as time in service, rank, gender, and organizational affiliation, it should be stored in a way that unauthorized individuals cannot access it. After the study, this material will be discarded, and relevant information will be coded to protect respondents' identities. The respondents are however not completely anonymous since the snowball method was used to find sources, which they were made aware of. Illustrative quotes used in the study to highlight a particular perspective have been selected in a manner that does not risk revealing sensitive information. Additionally, ensuring correct reference management and maintaining objectivity in interpreting both materials and theories are other general research ethical considerations. Finally, the information obtained from participants can only be used in line with the study's purpose (ALLEA, 2018, pp. 11-13).

4. Results

This chapter will present the result from the data collected through the interviews, structuring them into different themes and providing the reader with an overview of the answers.

The symbols mentioned in the interviews fall under two categories: (I) *individual* and (U) *unit specific*. Individual symbols in the interviews refers to medals, skill badges or headdress. Unit specific symbols could be patches, berets or kepis that isn't specific for the individual but rather the unit. Additionally (R) *requirements* or (N) *non-requirements* tells us if the individual must pass some form of test or qualification to receive the symbol. An example of IR (*individual requirements*) symbol could be the badges awarded after completing the jungle or mountain survival school and UN (*unit specific non-requirements*) could be the unit patch. Below is a more detailed structured summary of different perspectives based on the interviews.

4.1 Themselves, others, and reputation

In various degrees, the symbols worn by others impacted their understanding of the individual. When seeing somebody wearing symbols, they felt like it was easier to categorize them, not only in terms of regimental affiliation but also their personal characteristics. The symbols (IR/UR) themselves, seemed to inspire respect, and convey important information about the individual's achievements, such as their courage, skill, or mental and physical strength.

You can see what someone has achieved in their career through the symbols on their parade uniform, so you quickly get an idea about the individual. You know that some awards are not given for free. (Respondent 8)

Whenever you see this patch, you know what he has done and [...] instant respect. When they speak, you listen. (Respondent 4)

There was however a downside as certain prejudices were attached to them. For instance, if someone was wearing symbols (UN/IN) that were easy to get, it might suggest that they haven't

accomplished anything remarkable in their career, and therefore, they might be considered lazy. Prejudices that were based on the unit's reputation also projected onto individuals carrying the unit's symbols. Respondent 5 belonged to a unit with poor reputation experienced this and said, "I have to prove myself to others, to get out of the box." On the flip side, individuals from more qualified units felt that people had unreasonably high expectations of them. Respondent 1 mentioned that "People think you're good at everything just because they see where you come from." However, other respondents pointed out that good soldiers could end up in bad regiments and vice versa. "It's not always about where you come from, but rather, it's about who you are and what you're capable of doing" (res. 10; res. 6).

4.2 Failures, opinions, and motivation

Symbols (UR/UN) that are associated with different units' reputation and thus create expectations on the individual also seems to have a motivating effect. Some respondents (res. 1; res. 2; res. 4) expressed similar views and stated that they are representatives of their unit and that high expectations forced them to perform, maintaining the unit's reputation.

When I was in the unit failure wasn't really shameful in the same way as failing here, here it's like I'm shaming my unit. (Respondent 4)

Several of the respondents viewed these symbols (UR/IR) as a goal in and of themselves or a sub-goal towards a larger achievement. As a goal, they were seen as a physical or psychological trial that would grant the individual a sense of accomplishment and the ability to prove their worth to themselves and their peers (res. 2; res. 3; res. 8; res. 10). Respondent 5 stated that "earning the final objective and passing the test is a motivation, having a token that proves that you did it is also one." Those who saw the symbols as more of a sub-goal were often motivated by a desire to become part of the larger collective. They looked up to other members of the group as role models and wanted to earn the unit-specific symbol as part of their journey to be accepted into the unit (res. 1; res. 3; res. 4; res. 6; res. 8).

The respondents were also asked about their motivation and how they viewed failure, which proved interesting. While failure was often associated with negative consequences, the degree of severity varied. The three categories were: failing their fellow soldiers, ostracism, and shame. It was particularly clear in the case of all the cadets, but also among some officers, that the opinions of their surroundings affected the respondents. Failure was seen as failing their group members by not living up to the expectations placed on them, which in some cases was a clear driving force. Below is a quote from both a cadet and an officer.

Sometimes I think the opinion of other guys forces you to surpass your limits, you don't want to let them down. (Respondent 5)

[...] of ours they were ashamed of failing, they would probably be mucked within their company, but it won't break their career and they'll have another chance later.

(Respondent 6)

Failure was also associated with a sense of exclusion to varying degrees. Two respondents stated that it primarily harmed the trust between soldiers as "If you make a mistake, everybody will know it, even if we don't talk about it. [...] skill is everything and we trust each other's skill" (res. 1; res. 2). Others argued that there was some exclusion in not being able to pass a course by the group (res. 5; res. 7; res. 8). It is however important to note that all respondents made a distinction between getting injured or voluntarily giving up, where the latter one was strongly associated with shame.

All officers in the study agreed that there should be consequences for soldiers who do not perform, both to demonstrate that repeated failure is not tolerated and to show that the unit takes its responsibilities seriously. However, respondent 9 believed that failure only matters if the soldiers care, and that the culture in his unit does not shame soldiers. "Failure mainly matters if

you're going to make a career, [...] many soldiers don't even make it 3 years." An opposing perspective was presented by a respondent, who stated that all failures are punished, often with cleaning duty or a shorter jailtime.

If you don't perform in basic training [...] then there's no place for you. We have plenty of others who are applying to the legion. During the contract, if I would send a soldier to the corporeal training and he fails? He is punished for failing with jail.

(Respondent 8)

4.3 Cohesion, value, and through the trials into the brotherhood

When asked about cohesion, how it's built and their experiences answers could be divided into two perspectives, those who regarded cohesion as being founded upon trust for the individual's competence and skill and the other perspective that also emphasized the importance of social relationships in addition to competence, such as social events.

Trust and cohesion are based on skill. I may not like somebody, but I can trust their ability to perform.

(Respondent 1)

All respondents agree that challenging times and joint exercises create a strong bond. They remember these experiences vividly and see them as an opportunity to prove themselves to their colleagues and to themselves. This shared experience helps them get to know their colleagues better and fosters a sense of cohesion.

You remember the guys next to you in the jungle but not the ones you drank beer with here in the pantry and in hard times, you really get to know the other guys.

(Respondent 3)

One of the higher-ranking officers (respondent 6) also described how he saw an advantage in sending entire companies on tougher training courses "[...] suffer together, and cohesion will follow". Another officer (respondent 10) said that the training before missions offered him the opportunity to really get to know his men. When the respondents talked about group trials that would frequently end with a ceremony, such as when they received their first Kepi, they often spoke in plural, "we made it" instead of "I made it" (res. 4; res. 5; res. 7; res. 10).

Only one respondent (8) stated that discipline is an important factor in cohesion, saying "the Legion punishes recruits who only associate with other countrymen or speak their own language.". This was done to avoid subgroups within the unit, something two other respondents both experienced and thought negatively affected cohesion (res. 3; res. 4).

Symbols (UR/UN) were also often used to indicate a transition or strengthen the group identity. During ceremonies younger soldiers were often welcomed by the elders who presented them with a symbol, usually unit-specific, to highlight the transition. Many of these symbols were surrounded by a sense of pride and valued as it offered soldiers something to gather around. For example, one respondent talks about how during their first months they were forced to wear an ugly hat, but when they passed their test two months in, they were assigned the unit's special beret.

When we stood up there on the mountain with the officers, who could be really hard on us, but they actually smiled and said 'good job' while giving me the beret, it was like being welcomed into the family. (Respondent 4)

When they wear the white kepi on their heads, that is when they become legionnaires. It is a sacred symbol and represents the four gruesome months of training. Before that, they're nothing. (Respondent 8)

Although respondent 8 talked about how sacred the white kepi was, when asked about his green beret which is special for the foreign legion, he shrugged and said "oh, it's just something we wear". The respondents continuously make distinctions between different types of symbols throughout the interview.

When respondents were asked about which symbol they valued the most, answers like "[...] this is cool, but this is much harder to get" were common (res. 3; res. 4; res. 5; res. 6; res. 7; res. 9; res. 10). Almost all respondents also seemed to place particular importance on how demanding the test was. This is often linked to the number of people who started the training and the significantly smaller number who completed it and received the symbol.

However, the same symbols that could strengthen the group identity could also weaken it, if the requirements were changed. Respondent 2 gave an example where their regiment's berets were earned thorough the operator course, now instead being handed out to all members who join the company. Respondent 2 made a similar statement.

We have a special beret, and it used to be only the operators that had one, but now everybody in the regiment is given one. Most of the time, you'll only see us with it in our pocket. If everybody gets one, it doesn't really make much sense. (Respondent 2)

We had to work for it, as a platoon, and for some guys it was really hard [...] when I heard they were just giving them to the new guys, but they didn't have to do the climb it made many frustrated [...] and kind of de-valued the tarte for me. (Respondent 4)

5. Analysis

In this chapter the previously mentioned theoretical framework will be used to analyse the empirical data.

5.1 Motivation

According to King (2013, p. 369), professionalization has strengthened the culture of shame within military organizations. Interestingly, shame could have both negative and positive effects such as motivate individuals to push themselves further or hinder them from what the group deemed unacceptable. Although only a few respondents mentioned shame specifically, many agreed that the opinions of their peers and superiors influenced their behaviour and that they themselves would look down upon individuals who failed or gave up. After all, they saw themselves as representatives of their unit and felt a strong need to live up to expectations, which pushed them. While failure was clearly seen as shameful, it was also nuanced. For example, giving up was socially unacceptable, while failing due to injuries was more accepted. This echoes King's (p. 371) quote, "Shame in the eyes of our brothers is a powerful motivator." However, it's difficult to tell whether the officers in the study saw shame as a tool or a natural consequence of their soldiers' shortcomings.

King (2013, p. 363) also notes that professional distinction and status honour can be motivating factors for individuals. Respondents saw symbols as more than just organizational distinctions; they were proud to wear special symbols that represented their individual achievements and their unit, distinguish themselves from others in a positive way often associated with a higher social status. This connection was stronger amongst the cadets, likely since the skills this represented was more valued by them than the officers. As one officer (8) stated, "I'm supposed to be best at leading, that's my role [...] so I don't really care that much". Interestingly, the difficulty of obtaining the symbol, as well as the group it was associated with, created the sense of distinction.

5.2 Professionalism

According to King (2013, p. 367), professionalization has resulted in soldiers being valued based on their competence. Therefore, symbols could be interpreted as providing individuals with an opportunity to demonstrate competence without physically performing it. Although the French uniform system differentiates from the Swedish or American systems, there are still symbols associated with an individual's skills. Consequently, symbols (UR/IR) were used to represent various skills and qualities, such as strength, endurance, and courage, in different areas. It was particularly recurring how individuals viewed others with the same symbol and drew conclusions about their personality or ability, which to some extent seemed to create a kind of initial trust in some respondents. The significance of symbols decreased only when they got to know the individual and instead could form their own opinion. King (p. 352) also emphasizes the function of trust and how it is closely linked to competence. Some symbols, therefore, seem to function as a quality stamp - if worn, it could create a good first impression and "you know they have what it takes".

Several of the respondents saw the symbols (UR/IR) as an opportunity to prove themselves and felt pride in them, but only those associated with a trial. The absence of symbols was also interesting because it meant that the person had not undergone a trial, which in turn could give a lower perceived value of the individual. If a person did not wear symbols that they should reasonably do, such as skill badges, it seemed strange and less trustworthy.

King (2013, p. 353) emphasizes Max Weber's reasoning regarding a group's reputation. He illustrates this with several examples where members are expected to contribute to the collective good of the group and its reputation. The units considered to be more qualified in the study fit this description and testified to a perceived duty to maintain it, which became a pressure, especially outside the unit. Respondents from units that did not have an equally strong reputation felt that they needed to disprove it and were therefore also affected.

5.3 Cohesion

According to King (2013, p. 337), collective training is fundamental to professionalism and cohesion. Empirical findings support this with several respondents mentioned that cohesion is positively affected during training, especially the during trials to earn the symbol which many described as something they remember and value. Officers agreed regarding the effect on cohesion, with one stating, "Suffer together, and cohesion will follow." However, there was a discrepancy in many respondents' own statements, where several emphasized the social aspect of cohesion to get to know their colleagues, the interpersonal relationships, but seemed to give it little importance during the rest of the interview. At the same time, it was clear that training created strong cohesion, and that these trials were an opportunity for both officers and cadets to get to know their colleagues properly. King (pp. 273-274) also notes that under these circumstances, the individual could truly be judged based on weaknesses and strengths.

Cohesion, regarded as a product of training rather than the other way around, according to King (2013, p. 351) does not exclude strong emotional bonds between soldiers, but it is preceded by professionalism. This may explain some of the empirical observations. Competence was also what the respondents assessed and were assessed after. In this context, competence refers to both ability and skill. It was not uncommon for respondents to work with people they did not particularly like but whom they respected on a professional level. Even if they had the same rank, competence often outweighed opinion, indicating that it was valued more by respondents. Standard operating procedures (SOPs) were also mentioned by respondents to facilitate cooperation, allowing them to be added to other units and act seamlessly, even if individuals may not know or like each other, illustrating King's (p. 352) point about individual competence and combat cohesion.

Symbols were also used to strengthen group identity, which can be seen as the second part of the professional distinction (King, 2013, p. 363). These symbols often attributed a value beyond the organizational distinction and were used to show that the individual deserved to belong to

a specific group. In the empirical data, there are several examples of how symbols are used to highlight a transition from one stage to another, for example, to signal membership. Even in cases where the units lacked an official symbol, unofficial ones appeared within the groups, indicating that it was important for the group to be able to gather around a symbol, something that everyone shared and materialized the group. There were also observations suggesting that respondents felt more connected with someone wearing same symbols as themselves.

When membership requirements, such as passing a test, were removed, the perceived value of symbols representing the group decreased. This had a negative impact on both cohesion and the social status associated with the group, as non-members were now included without having met the previous standards.

The exclusion between member and non-members, even ostracism is also a means by which the collective can punish an individual who fails to meet expectations. According to King (2013, p. 268), the fear of this is a strong motivator. It seems to be a prevalent factor in the empirical data to varying degrees. Failing to meet expectations could lead to an individual feeling left out, facing real consequences, such as exclusion. This was more pronounced in highly qualified units such as the SAS, Legion, and Alpine, where membership was tied to an individual's ability to perform, but it also occurred to a lesser extent in other units. Officers also saw the need to exclude individuals from various things as a form of punishment. It is however difficult to determine in what extent it served as an effective motivator, simply that it existed.

6. Discussion

This final part of the study will discuss conclusions, the previous research, method- and theory, and finally the relevance of the study and future research.

6.1 Conclusion

To answer the research question: *How can the perceived effect and value of worn symbols within the French military be understood from the perspective of cohesion, motivation, and professionalism?* The study used King's (2013) theory and its three central themes to better understand the perceived value and impact of symbols. This with the purpose of understanding the use of symbols and their effects since they seem to not only motivate soldiers but might also affect cohesion and trust while simultaneously exploring the often-overlooked research area.

Firstly, the study concluded that these often had a value that was attributed to them, beyond their practical purpose such as indicating organizational belonging. The study also found that cohesion and symbols were strongly connected by the trial in which they were earned. The trial could be carried out individually or in a group, which also affected the perceived effect. Group trials (platoon or company) illustrated King's (2013, p. 337) view of cohesion as a product of the training, which reinforced group bounding. The symbol was the end goal, and the process was seen as an opportunity for both officers and soldiers to assess each other's skills under stressful conditions. However, symbols linked to the individual trial, where the soldier had to pass a test individually, were in greater extent seen as a quality check or proof of strength. With medals or skill badges that could indicate a specific achievement, general skills, or strengths. In several cases this resulted in increased social status, respect, or trust from the surrounding. These views were especially strong when presented to an unknown individual since the symbols were the only thing they could judge, making it a first impression.

The study also argues that symbols play an essential role in group identity by creating a distinction between members and non-members, even if they are in the same unit. If the

individual must prove themselves before being accepted, resulting in increased sense of pride and belonging when the symbol is finally awarded. Along pride, the symbols could evoke strong emotions such as shame. The pride in group membership is as strong as shame in failing the group, making it a powerful object. Shame, in turn, was a prevalent factor to varying degrees but worked in several cases as a strong driving force. Furthermore, the fear of exclusion was present to varying degrees and was stronger in units that were particularly results oriented.

The natural tendency to categorize their surroundings and draw quick conclusions also created prejudices strongly linked to all types of symbols. The study concludes that the reputation of the unit often is projected onto the individual who carried its emblem, either maintain the reputation or proving themselves against it – few were unaffected.

Further, the study argues that the historical aspect of the symbol alone does not appear to create a strong connection to the individual. Instead, the value of the symbol seems to be based upon two concepts, the difficulty of obtaining it and the distinction it creates. The difficulty refers to the requirements that must be met, i.e., a more challenging trial. The concept of distinction is rather how much the symbol sets the individual apart, usually associated with a higher social status. This was strongest observed amongst younger respondents and on a lower level in the organization.

It's important to recognize that these symbols often serve as one of few ways in which soldiers can distinguish themselves in an otherwise homogenic environment. Symbols reserved for a specific group where only members who have passed the same requirements could wear the symbols created a special pride and sense of belonging, if the requirements were lowered, so was the perceived value.

Finally, the study argues that symbols play an important role in the military organization. They can serve as a goal, create a sense of trust, pride and belonging, where cohesion is a product of

the process, but at the same time contribute to feelings of shame and failure. By understanding the mechanism of how value is attributed to symbols and the differences in this culture, leaders can create a positive and supportive environment that fosters cohesion and motivation.

6.2 Reengagement with previous research

While the most crucial aspects of the symbols are captured within the theoretical framework, some empirical findings can also be attributed to the previous research. Firstly, Hertz (2006, p. 51) noted that the uniform creates uniformity but left some details for the individual to create a distinction between members. These details would, according to Angstrom (2017, p. 156), be used to highlight a transition, given a special meaning, and linked to skill requirements. This is clearly seen in the study. Frey (2006, p. 379) on the other hand, would argue that this distinction is also an important part of the individuals fundamental desire, increasing their social status. His theory offers further explanation of how the perceived value decreased when symbols were distributed but the requirements for the recipient's dignity decreased, and maintaining the value means only distributing it on the same terms. This phenomenon can be found in the study and explain the operators view of their SAS or Alpine beret, for example. The rituals surrounding some of the symbols in the study evoke thoughts of what Aronson & Mills (1959) began to discover and what McCoy (1995, s. 695) later observed: shared suffering creates cohesion. However, not much else was revealed about the rituals, likely since this wasn't the study's main focus. Overall, this shows that the previous research is relevant and highlights different parts of the empirical observations in the study.

6.3 Discussion regarding theory and method

The method chosen allowed for a deeper understanding which would have been difficult to achieve using other methods, since the area lacks both research and existing theories regarding the specific phenomenon. However, a disadvantage is the low degree of generalization, which was partially mitigated through strategic selection. The chosen theory wasn't intended for symbols but is a modern perspective of cohesion and motivation that suites several other factors

in the French army, make the case advantageous for the theory. Through operationalization, it could be applied and contribute with an interesting perspective. However, it could've been complimented with Frey's (2013) theory to better explain why symbols were valued, allowing for the study to draw more conclusions based on a proven theory.

The number of respondents was large enough to identify patterns but also variations that could be linked to different characteristics but could have focused more on younger cadets and soldiers where the phenomenon was more pronounced. However, since no females participated it's unclear if these shared the same experiences as other respondents. The interviews were conducted in English, which is neither the author's nor the respondents' native language, which may have increased the difficulty of capturing nuances during the interpretation process.

6.4 Future research and relevance of the study

One suggestion for future research is to investigate whether this phenomenon occurs more frequently in Sweden, possibly through a quantitative approach such as a survey. Additionally, it would be valuable to explore the role of symbols in facilitating the integration of women into military organizations, since the symbols served as proof of strength, which could reduce prejudices about physical ability. While the study mainly focused on symbols related to physical ability, it would also be interesting to examine their connection to technical skills found in non-combat units.

Finally, understanding the creation, value, and culture around of symbols not only broadens our knowledge in a previously shaded area, but also offers an effective tool for military organizations in daily operations. Moral factors are by the Swedish Armed Forces (2022, p. 17) considered to be one of the three pillars of fighting power therefore directly interlinked with the capacity to wage war. In a world were small, specialized units are expected to quickly assemble into taskforces, it may facilitate collaboration by showing the individuals ability to the surrounding, creating an initial sense of trust and respect. Used properly, symbols could

also increase cohesion within groups, uniting them through training and providing a common goal to rally around. More so they can act as motivation and create a positive sense of pride and accomplishment that lasts for years. This also shows that the organization must maintain the value of the symbol, as including everybody may have an opposite effect within certain groups.

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Appendix I

Interview form

To acquire the interview form, contact the author through the Swedish Defence University or by email: STU20320@student.fhs.se