United States Marine Corps
Lejeune Leadership Institute

Leadership

Douglas S. Freeman

"Young man, make the most of the scraps of time."

On 11 May, 1949, Douglas S. Freeman delivered his speech, "Leadership," to the Naval War College. Freeman, American editor and historian, is most familiar to Marines as the author of Lee's Lieutenants. Freeman asserts "Leadership is fundamentally common sense and mankind," explaining his assertion in three parts: First, Know Your Stuff, Be a Man, and Look After Your Men. Using examples of notable American commanders, Freeman discusses the importance of professional competence, personal character, and servant leadership.

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Dr. Douglas Southall Freeman (1886–1953) was a noted editor and biographer. He authored *R. E. Lee,* 4 vols., 1935, which won him a Pulitzer Prize, and *Lee's Lieutenants,* 3 vols., 1942–1945. He retired as editor of *The Richmond News Leader* in 1949 to write a biography of George Washington, for which he won a second Pulitzer Prize.

When I was a lad, I had the great pleasure, the infinite honor, of seeing some of the great men of the War Between the States. Strange as it seems, I can remember Jubal Early. What a somber (I almost said a sinister) figure he was as he walked around town, chewing tobacco fiercely, and leaning on a long staff. As soon as we little lads would see him we would run away because it was thoroughly understood among all of us lads of about five years old or thereabouts that General Early ate a little boy for breakfast every day.

I remember John B. Gordon; I remember Fitzhugh Lee; I remember James Longstreet. I knew well a number of the younger staff officers of General Lee and General Jackson. I knew personally and talked often with three of General Lee's staff officers, one of them his assistant adjutant general, and of course I knew the leaders of the Spanish War, of the First World War, and of the Second World War. Many of these men of the Second World War I taught at the War College. And, it was amusing beyond expression to go to headquarters immediately after hostilities, to go to General Eisenhower's headquarters, or to General Clark's headquarters, or to General MacArthur's headquarters and see some of these men I had known as majors at the War College, stand up and say, "My God, am I going to have my historical photograph taken now?" So those are the circumstances that make me feel, as it were, that I am the Rip Van Winkle of the armed services.

But no man can go through this long stretch of years and have the honor of seeing these great men without having an
admiration for them, an admiration for the service and a reverence for the leadership that these men exemplify. I have seen a new chapter of it during the last year because I have been studying George Washington after he came to the command of the American Army in June 1775. Nothing that he had ever done before showed the qualities that he then displayed. I don't think anybody who studied Washington as he was in 1759 is prepared for what Washington was in 1775. I think strangely enough, that out of his civilian training, out of all the difficulties he had to endure, there developed the patience, the maturity of judgment, the essential sanity that were the hallmark of the remarkable ability of that man.

You know, we look at Washington usually through the silly pages of Parson Weems or as we see him in the portraits of Gilbert Stuart. I think either approach is wrong. Washington wasn't the stupid prig that he is made out to be by Weems, nor was he the embalmed celebrity that he appears to be in Gilbert Stuart's portraits. Of course, many portraits of Gilbert Stuart are pretty good works of art of the type and of the age (he made a good living in portraits of George Washington), but personally, except for the one at the Boston Art Museum, I'd like to see all the Gilbert Stuarts of Washington destroyed. I wish they were all burned up because they give such a false impression of the man.

The Peale portraits of him, even the Trumbull portraits, have so much more of the vitality that was Washington—the sanity, the judgment, the humanity that was his. You who are older used to see George Washington presented to you in front of the East Portico of the Capitol. Washington, being a modest man, I think would have been very much embarrassed if he had seen how nearly naked he was presented in that statue of him in front of the Capitol where he sits in a Roman toga which would suit Washington weather in July and no other weather in the world. And he sits there with his hand outstretched as if saying, as Lorado Taft used to put it, "My body lies over at Mount Vernon—my clothes in the Pension Office."

He exemplified leadership which is not anything like as complicated as some of the psychologists would make it out to be. Psychology is going to be a great subject one of these days. Now it's just in its infancy, and when we try to apply it in the abstract to problems of leadership, we usually make monkeys of ourselves; we don't get very far. Leadership is fundamentally common sense and mankind. Maybe I'm going to oversimplify it for you this afternoon, because I'm going to say that it consists fundamentally of three things and three only. If a man meets these three conditions he is going to be a leader; if he fails to meet them he may be on the roster as the head of a command, but he will never be at the head of that command when it marches down the pages of history—never!

First, know your stuff. Know your stuff, just that. If you are an aviator, know it. And know something else besides. We are entirely too much disposed in the American armed services now to have men who begin their professional career on too narrow a foundation and they go up and up and up, and the higher they go the thinner their knowledge is. We have to have specialists but very few of them can afford to be primarily the leaders of men. Our advanced specialists,

they must be men who know something about leadership but they are primarily laboratory men—research men. The leader must have a broad foundation if he is going to keep his position. Know—know your own branch, know the related arms of the service; you can't know too much if you are going to be a successful leader. And know the yesterdays. I have always said, and said many times here at the War College through the years, "Don't rely on us military historical writers too much. We don't know but so much. We can't fight wars." But after all don't ignore the yesterdays of war in your study of today and of tomorrow.

I always thought that one of the finest things that ever was said about MacArthur was that when he had a period in which he was relieved of active administrative duties and was, for three months, able to do as he pleased, he took those three months and caught up on everything that he could read in order to bring his knowledge of today into line with the yesterdays of war. The same thing is true of Marshall. Marshall is one of the most avid readers of military history that I know. The same thing is true of Nimitz. Of course, Nimitz sometimes made bad choices of his reading. He said to me one time for example, "Ah, Doctor, you never will know how grateful I am to you," and he mentioned one of my books that he had read at Guam while he was in command there. I said, "How is that, Admiral?" "Well," he replied, "every night after I had finished my duties I would go to bed and turn on the light and I would read for about half an hour of some of General Lee's problems in dealing with his subordinates. Then, I would go peacefully to sleep, because I would reason then that General Lee's problems of command were infinitely greater than mine were, and that I had a far easier time with my subordinates than he had with his." I said, "Admiral, you never were more mistaken in your life; you had 'cuckoos' and some 'prima donnas' with you and I'll not argue with you about that, but what put you to sleep was not peace of mind—it was my style."

Know your stuff—know your specialty, know the background of military history. Know it so that when the man comes to you and says, "What do I do in these circumstances, with this weapon, with this gun?" you can tell him, and if you don't know and want to be a leader, then for Heaven's sake tell him honestly, "I don't know." A man very seldom loses the respect of his men if he says he doesn't know something when he can demonstrate that he knows something else, but look out for that man who tries to bluff about his knowledge.

I was dealing one time with a very tough audience and I happened during the course of my remarks to say something about Iwo Jima. I didn't think I was doing so hot myself. I wasn't getting on so well, but when we came around to the question period, some man way back in the audience said, "Doctor, you have been talking about Iwo Jima; would you mind discoursing for a minute on what you think of the tactics of small landing parties as they were employed at Iwo?" I said, "I don't know a thing in God's world about it." I saw my audience was very much relieved from that minute. If you don't know, say so and try to find out.

Know your stuff. Now that means a lot in the way of the utilization of your time. And, it means a lot in the way of utilization of a Navy wife or an Army wife. You boys think have a hard life to lead. You don't have any tougher life than the life of a Navy wife. And both the Navy husband and the Navy wife need to learn all they can, when they can. I'd like to give you a little

motto on that question. I gave it to one of my historical secretaries. She happens to be the one who came up with me this morning. She said it was the must useful thing I'd ever told her. It came from Oliver Wendell Holmes, a justice of the Supreme Court of United States, who should have been chief justice. Holmes would get a boy from Harvard Law School every year and that boy would have one year as Holmes's law clerk, a magnificent training, out of which in their generations have come some of the best lawyers in public service in America. And one of the favorite things that he would tell these boys was, "Young man, make the most of the scraps of time." Now believe me, if you want to know your stuff and know it better than the other man, you've got to spend more time on it, and if you are going to spend more time on it, you've got to make the most of the scraps of time. The difference between mediocrity and distinction in many a professional career is the organization of your time. Do you organize it, do you make the most of the scraps of time? Bless my soul, I don't suppose that the admiral with his dignity and justice and regard for all the amenities says "no" to you about playing bridge, but there is many a man would have three more stripes on his sleeve if he gave to study the time that he gives to bridge. Don't say that you have to have the recreation. You have to have enough recreation, but diversification of work is the surest recreation of the mind. You don't have to go and forget the whole world. You have to work different brain centers and that is all you need to do. If you do it you get the recreation and out of the recreation you will get the training. Write it down, my young seamen, my young mariners (I love the word "mariner")—write it down. Make the most of the scraps of time.

If we have another war, which Almighty God forbid, and I know not one single leader in the armed services who does not say Amen to that—if we have another war it is going to be a highly technical war, but the older principles of leadership will stand. Number one will remain—know your stuff. I have not a record of a single American soldier, a single American admiral who, when all was said and done, was not proficient in the knowledge of his specialty. Don't think the time spent at schools is lost either. Professional training for war is a categorical imperative of efficiency. In history, I believe I knew General Lee's brigadier, major, and lieutenant generals pretty well. I think I have written about most of them, however poorly. Of all that company there were only two who became distinguished division commanders who had not had professional training.

This idea of the inspiration of the soldier is nonsense. The idea that out of the great body of our people, you are going to get soldiers of high eminence—there is absolutely nothing to it. If you require professional training to save the lives of men in peace, and you call the man who does it a physician—are you not likewise called upon to have professional training for war in order to save the lives of men in war? And that man you call an admiral or you call him a general. Professional training is worthwhile. The best money that ever was spent on the Navy of this country has been the money that was spent here at Newport. I don't believe any man can contradict that.

Know your stuff—and be a man. That is number two. Be a man. We have had some leaders in American history who may not have been all they ought to have been in their regard for some of the amenities of life, but I never knew a great American seaman, I never knew a

great American soldier, or read about one, who was not fundamentally a man. And that means a man of character; it means a man of industry; it means a man of fair play. We were talking at the house of the president of this college a little while ago about the matter of courage. And the admiral said to me, "Doctor, have you ever found in history any process by which you can tell whether a man is going to show courage in action?" I said, "No, you never can; I don't believe you ever will. If we do, it will be thousands of years hence and by that time, please God, we may have sense enough not to fight wars." But this is a fact—the type of courage that keeps a man from turning his back on his adversaries and running away is one thing. That is not so uncommon. But the type of courage that is shown by a leader who will take his part of the load in all circumstances—that's a much rarer type of courage.

What is the coward? Who is the coward in the high rank? He is not apt to be a physical craven but he is a man who sometimes tries to pass onto the other fellow the more difficult job and won't do his own. You take that great captain of the state from which I have the honor of coming. You can see beautiful stories of the physical courage of Gen Robert E. Lee. I never go to Washington from Richmond on Highway No. 1 that I don't see the house where he was standing one day on the porch, with a glass of buttermilk between the table and his mouth, when a round shot came within four feet of him and shattered the lintel of the door. You can see the place there today, and it was said that no man observed a quiver when the glass went to his mouth. I have read the story of how he conducted himself on that bloody field of Spotsylvania Courthouse. That is fine, but if you want to see what courage is, what the real test of the man is, you read Lee's farewell to Jackson on 2 May 1863. When Jackson, called upon to make the great turning movement there at Chancellorsville, was asked by General Lee, "What troops do you propose to make this movement with?" Jackson said, "My whole corps, sir." Lee then had about 50,000 men. Jackson wanted to take 28,000 of them, put in motion around the flank and leave Lee 22,000 men with which to face the Federals while Jackson was out of action and making that movement around the flank. Lee could have said, "Why those are impossible figures. Take fourteen thousand men, and leave me enough at least with which to defend this line against these seventy-five thousand Federals here in the wilderness." Not so. Lee knew what concentration of force meant; Lee knew the doctrine of superiority of force at the point of contact. Lee had the courage to take his chance in order that his comrade might have superiority of force for difficult offensive operations. In that, gentlemen—and it is repeated gloriously a hundred times in American history—in that you see what I mean by the word courage. What I mean by the words: be a man.

Aye. Be a man who is disciplined in spirit. Be a man who is observant. How many fine persons there are who go through this world. Never forget and, as God gives me might, I shall never fail on a lecture to mention Cadmus Marcellus Wilcox—Cadmus Marcellus Wilcox and his observation of a string over the shoulder of the Federals in that same battle of Chancellorsville. Remember Cadmus Marcellus Wilcox? What a name. Cadmus had his orders, "You move when the Federals do. You've got one little brigade here; you are holding Banks Ford and when they move, you move." Cadmus went out the next morning early. (Every good seaman ought to be out early. People talk about what you ought do for the redemption of the American people. American people need nothing in this world more than they need to get up

earlier and go to bed earlier.) Cadmus Marcellus got up earlier than most men, and he went out and looked, which a great many people never do, and over Banks Ford he saw that Federal sentinel walking his post, another and another down the line, in plain view. Well is there is nothing uncommon about a sentinel walking his post, is there? But Marcellus wasn't content with that; Marcellus took his glasses and he looked at that sentinel who have been thinking about anything under the sun other his military duties; and Marcellus observed that over the sentinel's shoulder there was a string, and behind that sentinel's left hip as he looked at the end of the string was his haversack. And Marcellus looked at the next sentinel and he had on his haversack and the next and the next and Marcellus said to himself, "Those birds are getting ready to move because if they were simply in camp they wouldn't have on their haversacks and their haversacks wouldn't be full. They have got their rations on them because they are getting ready to move." He ordered his artillery hitched, got his infantry in position and within 15 minutes after those Federals started their withdrawal, Marcellus was in the road and he hadn't gone three miles before he had the great opportunity of his career to stop a Federal offensive.

Observation! Be a man, not a blind man. Might as well go down in the engine room and stay there if you are not going to look and see.

Last of all, the third point. Look after your men. Look after your men. What a simple thing you are saying, Rip Van Winkle! Here, you have three-fourths of the brass and nine-tenths of the brains of the American Navy before you and you are saying that leadership is three things and you have listed those things so simply. Know your stuff—-be a man—and look after your men. We came a long way to hear you, Rip Van Winkle, and is that all you have to say? Yes! That is all, because that is the sum observation of my travels. Look after your men.

I mention to you the fact that, as a youth, I saw those gray columns moving up the street and I heard the clatter of cavalry 40 years after. I saw those men who had thrust through the wilderness, those men who had stood at Second Manassas, and those who had climbed the hill at Gettysburg and had their red banners with them until 22 of those flags were there on one acre in the Federal position. I saw them; I knew many of them, and often I asked them, "Tell me, that great man who is our southern demagogue, this Lee, what was there about him that made you reverence him? What was there in him that made you tell us that next to the love of God and His Son, there had to be reverence for him?" An incredibly simple answer, my friends, they gave me. "Oh," they said, over and over again, "he looked after his men! We knew that when he demanded anything of us, it was because he had to. And when he said, 'Men, you must take that height,' we took it, because we knew that was the cheapest thing to do." He looked after his men. So did the lieutenants—some of the men to you unknown. Did you ever hear of the name of John R. Cooke? Some of you did; just a brigadier general in the Confederate Army. I remember him well, an old man running a grocery store, an unprosperous grocery store. He had in his head the most beautiful bullet hole you ever saw in your life. He must have been hardheaded—it never cracked his skull. One day when he was in his thirties he was commanding two little regiments at Sharpsburg. On his left early in the morning something had happened. Something had gone wrong even with Stonewall Jackson, and the flank had been swept back. The Federals were at the Dunker Church, and Hood's great Texans, the Grenadier Guard of the Confederacy, were

panting in the woods. The tide swept around to the center of that segmented battlefield. There an impression was made, not too deep. Cooke stood there, a little salient—two regiments; and against his fire, with the supporting artillery around the Dunker Church, a Federal corps broke itself in vain. During the fight Longstreet sent word to him and asked him if he wanted help, and I am told that of all the classic cussing that as been heard in the American Army—and the American Army sometimes casts reflections on its adversary's ancestry back six or eight generations—there never had been heard such words as those that Cooke sent back. "Give him help! Not until every man he had was pursuing through hell the last Yankee in front of him!" Or words to that effect. I said to myself, "What is in that man? What made that Twenty-seventh North Carolina regiment that way? This Third Arkansas—Arkansas is a good state, good fighters. They have some mighty long-winded politicians among them, but what made that Third Arkansas regiment do that? And I took the pains to go back and I found that from the time that Cooke had taken over that regiment (he had been a captain in the regular army before the war) he had done everything he could to tell those men, "I am going to demand the maximum of you and I am going to do the maximum for you." He held them to the highest standards and he did for them everything that a man could to protect them from casualties.

Look after your men—it means many things; it means many things that you don't think about. It means mail facilities; it means food. General Lee, no matter how much impoverished his commissariat was, never failed to increase his men's rations after they had won a fight. Hot food is one of the greatest builders of morale in the history of war. Looking after your men means looking after their clothes. I was telling one of the officers today how much how much emphasis George Washington laid on the cleanliness of person. That great builder of morale, that same Lee, when he got his men out of a dirty campaign always tried to put them by a stream where they could wash. And the most valiant men were the men who, if they needed it, got the new uniforms. Look after your men and your men will look after you. I don't believe there has ever been an exception to that dictum.

I said one day to MacArthur, "You know, I think when I come to write the history of your campaign, there from the Solomons northward, one of the things I am going to find most difficult to understand is how you did so much with so little." Well he lighted his corncob pipe for the 453d time that afternoon, and made the 17th oration that he had delivered to me that day, and he said many things that were absolutely true and sound. And we talked about his casualties, about how few there were in terms of what was done. I said, "Difficult as it was, you looked after your men." And I quoted him some of the things I told you. He said "Well, if there was economy of life, it is something for which"—and he dropped all his theatrical manner—"something for which I will be grateful to the end of my days." He said, "When I thought about the number who were killed, nothing could console me except the thought that maybe by God's grace and hard effort we had saved some that might otherwise have been slain." He is a tall man; he got up and walked the floor as he sometimes did when he spoke, but believe me he grew taller and taller in my eyes as he spoke those words.

Gentlemen, have I oversimplified this case? I think sometimes we overcomplicate it. I think sometimes we take these books on psychology, we take all the arts of salesmanship and we

try to apply them to the armed services in a manner that is too elaborate. I don't believe I'm oversimplifying when I say to you, know your stuff, be a man, look after your men.

Remember, you may in God's mercy have had your day of battle. You who were there in the Arctic night—you who flew across the hump—you who went from South America to Africa—you who fought those submarines up and down our coast—you who went out from Pearl Harbor never knowing whether that submarine would come back again or whether your burial place ever would be known to men—you who were in the supply service—you who were in the battlefield—you who had the immortal honor of serving with Spruance, with Kinkaid, with Halsey—you may have had your day, you may live until over it all comes the glamour of the years and you may tell the tale so often that you'll hardly be able to distinguish the fabric from the embroidery. Such things happen. On the other hand your challenge may lie ahead—the era of atomic warfare may bring us problems vaster than anybody ever faced before.

I covet but one thing for you and that is, if you come to the final day which must for America always be the day of victory, I covet for you nothing more than that in the day of victory you can say with a clear conscience what was said by the vanquished as he rode back through those thin gray ranks across the red hills of Appomattox one day in April 1865. The men knew that something had happened because he had been in the midst of the Federal lines. They broke ranks, they thronged the road, they gathered around him, they put up their hands. "General!" they said, "General! Are we surrendered? General! Give us another chance, we'll fight them now." He said, "No, my men. I've done for you the best that I knew how to do." Your nation demands of you no less than that; your conscience should ask no more than that you do your best.

DUTY.