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*The following article is based on an address by General Ridgway at the U. S. Army Command and General Staff College, 19 May 1966.—Editor.*

**I**N DISCUSSING the subject of leadership, I am struck by two diametrically opposite concepts. One conceives leadership as an exact science capable of being understood and practiced by anyone. This view is ably developed by Colonel Sherman L. Kiser, US Army, Retired, in his book, *The American Concept of Leadership*. An opposite concept holds that "no amount of learning will make a man a leader unless he has the natural qualities of one." This latter view was that of General Sir Archibald P. Wavell, and is expounded in his published lectures in *Generals and Generalship*. One concept treats leadership as a science; the other as an art.

I incline strongly to the Wavell concept. While recognizing that there are many principles, or truths, pertaining to the exercise of leadership, and while firmly believing that powers of leadership can be greatly increased in any individual through knowledge of these principles and practice in their application, I still think the variables

of human nature combined with those of combat, and to a lesser degree with those in peacetime training, make the exercise of leadership far more of an art than a science.

There is, of course, a great deal of bad leadership as well as of good. It, too, deserves study so that its pitfalls may be avoided. But in general, I believe bad leadership is the result either of violation of basic principles, or the lack or failure to develop one or more of the qualities of good leadership. In any event, I want to speak now of the good type of military leadership with some specific reference later to combat leadership of large units—the division, corps, and army.

The chief ingredients of leadership, as I have known it to be exercised by those whose careers I have studied, or under whose command I was privileged to serve, are three. I call them the three C's—character, courage, and competence.

Character is the bedrock on which the whole edifice of leadership rests. It is the prime element for which every profession, every corporation, every industry searches in evaluating a member of its organization. With it, the full worth of an individual can be developed. Without it—particularly



in the military profession—failure in peace, disaster in war, or, at best, mediocrity in both will result.

### Types of Character

We often use this word "character" carelessly. There are those of notoriously evil character, as well as those of an exemplary one. Yet in its usual acceptance it stands for those magnificent traits which placed George Washington first among his countrymen and, in fact, made him the Father of his Country—the unanimous choice for our first Presidency. It stands for the time-honored code of the officer corps. It stands for self-discipline, loyalty, readiness to accept responsibility, and willingness to admit mistakes. It stands for selflessness, modesty, humility, willingness to sacrifice when necessary, and, in my opinion, for faith in God. Let me illustrate.

During a critical phase of the Battle of the Bulge, when I commanded the 18th Airborne Corps, another corps commander just entering the fight next to me remarked: "I'm glad to have you on my flank. It's character that counts." I had long known him, and I knew what he meant. I

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replied: "That goes for me, too." There was no amplification. None was necessary. Each knew the other would stick however great the pressure; would extend help before it was asked, if he could; and would tell the truth, seek no self-glory, and everlastingly keep his word. Such feeling breeds confidence and success.

### Self-Discipline

Only those who have disciplined themselves can exact disciplined performance from others. When the chips are down, when privation mounts and the casualty rate rises, when the crisis is at hand, which commander, I ask, receives the better response? Is it the one who has failed to share the rough going with his troops, who is rarely seen in the zone of aimed fire, and who expects much and gives little? Or is it the one whose every thought is for the welfare of his men, consistent with the accomplishment of his mission; who does not ask them to do what he has not already done and stands ready to do again when necessary; who with his men has shared short rations, the physical discomforts and rigors of campaign, and will be found at the crises of action where the issues are to be decided?

I know your answer: self-disciplined, self-controlled, and so in control of others, no matter how tough the going—Washington at the Battle of Long Island and at Valley Forge; Grant at Shiloh; Mackenzie of the 4th Cavalry in his epic raid; the junior officer pursuing hostile Indians in sub-zero weather on our western plains, closing up at dark for a dawn attack, with no fires permitted and only cold rations, if any, before H-hour—much the same many times in Korea, I might add, and I am sure under equally arduous conditions in Viet-



## LEADERSHIP

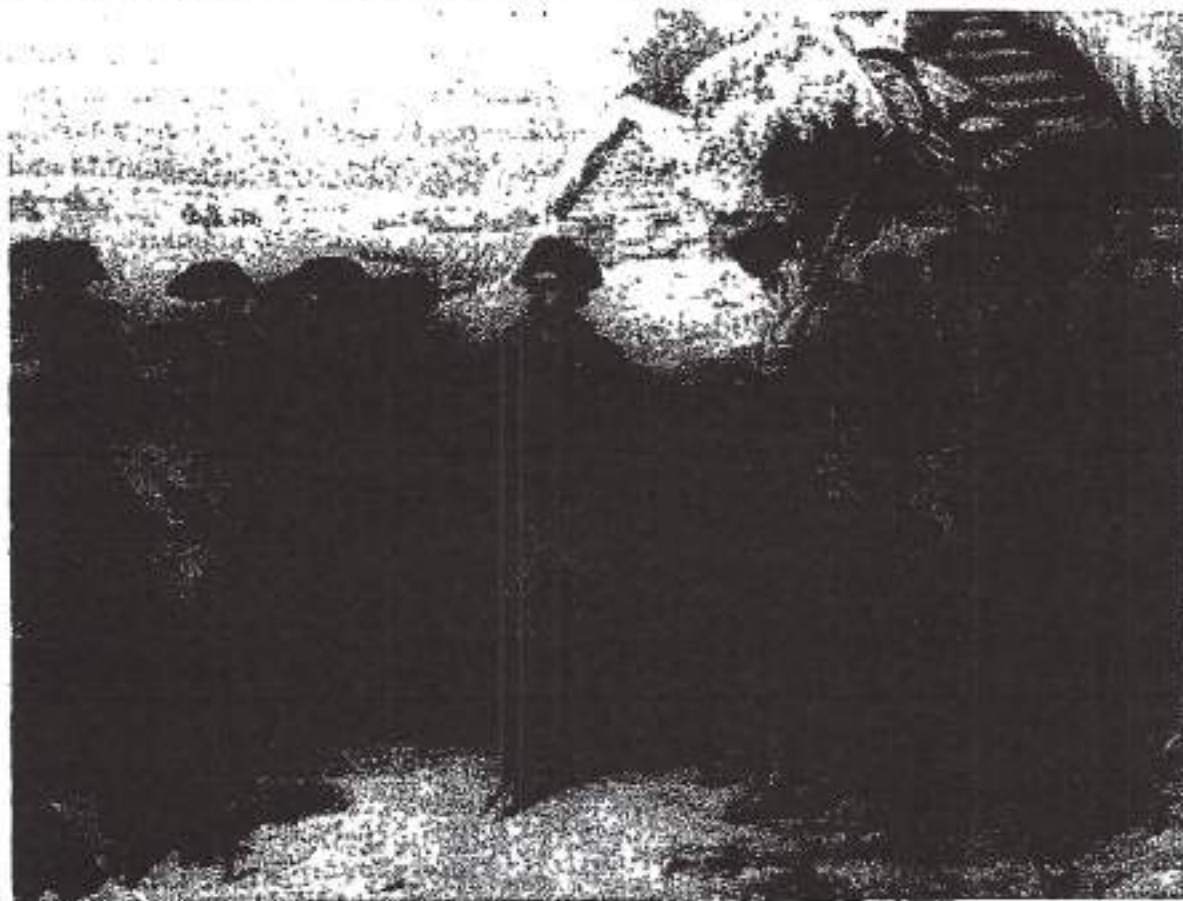
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nam today; the young ship commander named Kennedy, his patrol torpedo boat sunk in action, his crew safely on the beach, then swimming out in shark-infested waters to try to intercept a friendly destroyer and rescue his men.

The world's annals and our own are studded with the names of such men,

General Washington wrote to Congress from Valley Forge:

*... without arrogance or the smallest deviation from truth, it may be said that no history now extant, can furnish an instance of an Army's suffering such uncommon hardships as ours have done, and bearing them with the same patience and fortitude. To*



US Army

General George Washington shared the privations and short rations of his men and earned their unswerving loyalty

of all services and all grades. Always ready to assume responsibilities, they could always assign them to others and know they would be willingly accepted. True to themselves and to their conscience, their men sense they will be true to them, giving them full credit, and frankly admitting mistakes and accepting responsibility when they themselves are to blame.

*see men without clothes to clothe their nakedness, without blankets to lie on, without shoes, by which their marches might be traced by the blood from their feet, and almost as often without provisions as with; marching through frost and snow, and at Christmas taking up their winter quarters within a day's march of the enemy, without a house or hut to*

*cover them till they could be built, and submitting to it without a murmur, is a mark of patience and obedience which in my opinion can scarce be paralleled.*

And what Washington did not say—a mark of his own unexcelled leadership.

An eyewitness report of Lee after Pickett's failure stated:

*His face did not show the slightest disappointment, care or annoyance, and he addressed to every soldier he met a few words of encouragement; 'All will come right in the end, we'll talk it over afterwards.' And to a Brigade Commander speaking angrily of the heavy losses of his men: 'Never mind, General, all this has been my fault. It is I who have lost this fight, and you must help me out of it the best way you can.'*

For leadership through willingness to admit mistakes and instantly to accept responsibility, I think, history can offer few examples to surpass this.

#### **Willingness to Sacrifice**

Archibald Rutledge once wrote that there can be no real love without a willingness to sacrifice. Tuck this away in your inner minds. It may pay off in some crisis coming to you in the years now hidden beyond the horizon. Do you love your country and its flag? Do you love the branch in which you are serving, the men with whom you will be privileged to share service and to command? If you do, then you will be prepared to sacrifice for them, if your responsibilities or the situation so demands. The commander of Torpedo Squadron 8 at Midway; the four Army chaplains on the torpedoed *SS Dorchester* off Iceland in predawn darkness in February 1942; the many aircraft commanders who have ordered "abandon ship,"

then stuck overlong to the controls to insure that their last man was out.

Courage, the second "C," could well be treated as a trait of character, as, indeed, it is. Yet it deserves, I believe, a separate category, for I know of not one recipient of history's accolade for battle leadership of enduring fame who was not known for great gallantry.

#### **Physical and Moral Courage**

There are two kinds of courage, physical and moral, and he who would be a true leader must have both. Both are products of the character-forming process, of the development of self-control, self-discipline, physical endurance, of knowledge of one's job and, therefore, of confidence. These qualities minimize fear and maximize sound judgment under pressure and—with some of that indispensable stuff called luck—often bring success from seemingly hopeless situations.

Putting aside impulsive acts of reckless bravery, both kinds of courage bespeak an untroubled conscience, a mind at peace with God. An example is Colonel John H. Glenn who was asked after his first rocket flight if he had been worried, and who replied: "I am trying to live the best I can. My peace had been made with my Maker for a number of years, so I had no particular worries."

Examples of physical courage are neither confined to combat nor limited to a stouthearted few, but are common throughout the world among men and women of every color, creed, race, and age, in peace as well as in war. However, examples of moral courage are less well known. They can be considered as proof of true greatness of soul. Where the individual has not measured up, he has generally failed fortune's bid to fame.



To me such incidents most frequently found in war are those where the career of the leader is at stake, and where his actions or decisions will determine the saving or slaughter of many of his men. History is full of these cases. The lure of glory, the fear of being thought afraid, of losing personal power and prestige, the



US Army

General Robert E. Lee

mistaken idea that blind obedience to orders has no alternative—all have been followed by tragic losses of lives with little or no gain.

History often glosses over the countless thousands of lives which have been fruitlessly sacrificed to the pull of power, prestige, and publicity. Haig's Flanders Campaign in 1917 is a conspicuous example. Here, 100,000 men were sacrificed for the gain of 1,000 yards of almost bottomless morass.

It is easy to gamble with other peo-

ples' money, and sometimes easier still with other men's lives, particularly when your own is in no great danger. You remember the commanders' conference prior to one of the big offensives of World War I, when a corps commander—whose command post was miles behind the front—spoke out during a lull in the meeting, saying: "I'd give 10,000 men to take that hill." And a liaison officer from a frontline infantry unit remarked to a brother officer standing beside him in the back of the room: "Generous, isn't he?"

### Opposition to Orders

The military services deal harshly, as they should, with failure to carry out orders in battle. The commander present on the scene is entitled to full, instant, and enthusiastic execution by subordinates. Yet when faced with different situations from those anticipated, as well as in the transition from plans to orders, there sometimes comes the challenge to one's conscience, the compelling urge to oppose foolhardy operations before it is too late, before the orders are issued and lives are needlessly thrown away.

Or the leader may be faced with the decision: Shall I take the responsibility of discarding the original mission? Shall I take the initiative and strive for success along different lines? He will have to put those questions to his conscience. "Blind obedience," said Napoleon Bonaparte, "is due only to a superior present on the spot at the moment of action." I concur.

I still support a statement of mine of some years ago:

*It has long seemed to me that the hard decisions are not the ones you make in the heat of battle. Far harder*

*to make are those involved in speaking your mind about some hare-brained scheme which proposes to commit troops to action under conditions where failure seems almost certain, and the only results will be the needless sacrifice of priceless lives. When all is said and done, the most precious asset any nation has is its youth, and for a battle commander ever to condone the unnecessary sacrifice of his men is inexcusable. In any action you must balance the inevitable cost in lives against the objectives you seek to attain. Unless the results to be expected can reasonably justify the estimated loss of life the action involves, then for my part I want none of it.*

General George C. Marshall, one of the noblest men who has worn an American uniform since Washington, once said of decisions of this kind: "It is hard to get men to do this, for this is when you lay your career, perhaps your commission, on the line."

Twice in my personal experience as a division commander I felt compelled to protect against tactical decisions that were about to be assigned to my 82d Airborne Division.

The first occasion was the planned drop on Rome in September 1943. I have recounted the incident in some detail in my book, *Soldier*. Recently, however, published memoirs of German generals then present in the Rome area have confirmed my views. One passage from the account of that incident illustrates the point I wish to make:

*When the time comes that I must meet my Maker, the source of most humble pride to me will not be accomplishments in battle, but the fact that I was guided to make the decision to*

*oppose this plan, at the risk of my career, right up to the Theater Commander.*

The drop was not ordered.

The second experience was a proposed attack by the 82d across the Volturno River where the Germans had brought the Allied advance to a halt. The sector chosen involved getting across an unfordable river and, then, after an advance of roughly 1,000 yards across open flat terrain, the attack and seizure of a line of hills, curving away from the river on



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#### Colonel John H. Glenn

one flank, then like a bow curving back almost to the stream again on the other flank of the zone of attack, so that the assaulting troops would be under concentrated fire from the front and both flanks.

While the proposal to use the 82d was a high compliment—since it was the weakest numerically, and much



the most lightly armed of any of the divisions in the 5th Army—I could only view the proposed operation as a suicide mission that would result in the loss of most of the assaulting troops and, then, with small chance of success. I could not accept such a mission without protest. But first I decided to discuss the plan with Gen-



*Army News Features*

Physical fitness is part of the competence required of a good leader

eral Lucien K. Truscott, Commanding General, US 3d Infantry Division, a field commander conspicuous for competence and gallantry, and an old friend. He said he wouldn't touch it with a 40-foot pole, even with his heavier division. So I spoke my mind, first to the corps commander, under whom the operation was to be mounted—and I recall I used the word “fantastic”—and, finally, to the army commander. The plan was canceled.

In action and out, there is often a thin dividing line between recklessness, boldness, and caution. Even

later study of battle records may fail to erase that line, for it is next to impossible to reconstruct the exact picture as it was thrown on the screen of the commander's brain at any particular crisis of combat. Yet experience, your own and that of others which you have absorbed, together with commonsense, will be your best guides, and with good luck will see you through.

### Physical Fitness

Physical fitness comes under competence, the third of my three basic ingredients of leadership. It plays a great part. My own earlier training at Fort Leavenworth, Fort Benning, Fort Sam Houston with the 2d Division, with the 33d Infantry in the Panama area, and with the airborne paid off in battle—first as a division, then as a corps, and, finally, as an army commander. Because of strenuous and unremitting physical training, I was able to keep up with the best of my troops in the hottest sectors and the toughest terrain and climate.

Let me mention briefly what I think the standards should be for commanders of large units. The division commander should have the physical endurance, stamina, and reserves of his best infantry battalion commanders, because that is where he belongs—with them—a good part of the time; the corps commander, those of his infantry regimental commanders; and the army commander just about the same.

And remember this, since no one can predict today when you may be thrown into combat, perhaps within hours of deplaning in an overseas theater—as happened to thousands in Korea, and as I have no doubt to many in Vietnam—you will have no time to



get in shape. You must be in shape all the time.

There is another element in battlefield leadership which I want to mention and illustrate. It is a cardinal responsibility of a commander to foresee insofar as possible where and when crises affecting his command are likely to occur. It starts with his initial estimate of the situation—a continuing mental process from the moment of entering the combat zone until his unit is pulled out of the line. Ask yourself these questions. What are the enemy capabilities? What shall I do, or what could I do, if he should exercise that one of his capabilities which would be most dangerous to me, or most likely to interfere with the accomplishment of my mission?

#### Personal Presence

As commander of a division or smaller unit, there will rarely be more than one crisis, one really critical situation facing you at any one time. The commander belongs right at that spot, not at some rear command post. He should be there before the crisis erupts, if possible. If it is not possible, then he should get there as soon as he can after it develops. Once there, then by personal observation of terrain, enemy fires, reactions, and attitudes of his own commanders on the spot—by his eyes, ears, brain, nose, and his sixth sense—he gets the best possible picture of what is happening and can best exercise his troop leadership and the full authority of his command. He can start help of every kind to his hard-pressed subordinates. He can urge higher commanders to provide additional fire support, artillery, air, other infantry weapons, and, in the future, perhaps, nuclear strikes.

No other means will provide the commander with what his personal perceptions can provide, if he is present at the critical time and place. He can personally intervene, if he thinks that necessary, but only to the extent that such intervention will be helpful and not interfere with his subordinates. He is in a position to make instant decisions, to defend, withdraw, attack, exploit, or pursue.

If, at this time, he is at some rear command post, he will have to rely on reports from others, and time will be lost, perhaps just those precious moments which spell the difference between success and failure. Notwithstanding the console capabilities of future television in combat, I still believe what I have said is true. In any event, keep this time factor ever in mind. It is the one irretrievable, inextensible, priceless element in war.

#### Relief of Commanders

The occasion for the relief of commanders may regrettably arise. If it does, there are three points to consider: Is your decision based on personal knowledge and observation, or on secondhand information? What will the effect be on the command concerned? Are you relieving a commander whose men think highly of him—even with affection—regardless of professional competence? And, finally, have you a better man available?

Every man is entitled to go into battle with the best chance of survival your forethought as a leader can provide. What best helps you discharge this responsibility? Sharing things with your men; to be always in the toughest spots; always where the crisis is, or seems most likely to develop; always thinking of what help you can give your commanders who are executing your orders; doing your ut-



most to see that the best in rations, shelter, first aid, and evacuation facilities are available; being generous with praise, swift and fair with punishment when you have the facts, intolerant of demonstrated failure in leadership on which lives depend, yet making full allowances for human weaknesses and the stresses and strains of battle on individuals.

### **Know Your Men**

Know your men, and be constantly on the alert for potential leaders—you never know how soon you may need them. During my two years in command of the 82d Airborne Division in World War II, I was in close and daily touch with every regimental and most battalion commanders. Before acceding to command of the division, and while I was General Omar N. Bradley's assistant division commander, I had learned to call by name every infantry officer in the division.

Later, by frequent exchange of views with the infantry regimental commanders and the divisional artillery commander, I knew in advance whom they had earmarked for battalion command. I do not recall any instance where I thought the regimental commander had not picked the right man. The payoff came in Normandy. I went in with 12 infantry battalion commanders—four regiments—and I had 14 new ones when we came out, for some battalions lost as many as three commanders during the 33 days we were in that fight.

The qualities of a leader are not limited to commanders. The requirements for leadership are just as essential in the staff officer, and in some respects more exacting, since he does not have that ultimate authority which can be used when necessary and must rely even more than his commander

on his own strength of character, his tact and persuasion in carrying out his duties.

Between the commander and his chief of staff in a division or larger unit there should be thorough mutual respect, understanding, and confidence with no official secrets between them. Together they form a single dual personality, and the instructions issuing from the chief of staff must have the same weight and authority as those of the commander himself.

But this does not mean that a commander who delegates such authority to his chief of staff can allow his chief to isolate him from the rest of his staff. If that happens, the commander will soon find himself out of touch, and the chief of staff will be running the unit.

There is a fine balance here. The chiefs of staff sections should know that they always have access to their commander. He should see them and visit their sections with sufficient frequency to understand their problems, to let them know he appreciates their efforts, and that he stands ready to help where he can.

### **Inform Subordinates**

Closely akin to the relationship with staff officers is keeping in close personal touch with your principal subordinate commanders—in the division, with your brigade and separate battalion commanders; in the corps, with your division commanders, their chiefs of staff, and as many of the commanders of attached corps units as you can; and in the army, with corps and division commanders and their chiefs of staff. There is always time for these visits; administrative work can be done at night. By day you belong with your troops.



Keep them informed of your thinking and plans. When you have the concept of an operation first in mind, consult your principal commanders without delay and get their reactions. No matter how sound a tactical plan may be, the chances of successful execution will be greatly increased if you have first secured the willing acceptance by commanders responsible for execution of the missions you plan to assign them. Insure that they receive notice of your decision and the principal details of your plan as approved in ample time to permit them and their subordinates to make their necessary reconnaissances and issue their orders.

These are some of the reasons why I hold that leadership is not a science, but an art. It conceives an ideal, states it as an objective, and then seeks actively and earnestly to attain it, everlastingly persevering, because the records of war are full of successes coming to those leaders who stuck it out just a little longer than their opponents.

Some suggestions for leadership are:

- Read widely and wisely all the history and biography possible. Soak up all the personal experiences you can of battle-tested brother officers. This broadens your understanding of an art of which you can never hope to know all.

- Study thoughtfully the records of past successful leaders and adapt their methods to yours.

- Work hard to keep fit. That little extra stamina may some day pull you out of some deep holes.

- Work hard, in your own way, at being tops at your job.

- Keep the three C's—character, courage, and competence—always before your mind, and with faith in God, be yourself.

- Remember there are many others on your team, and be inwardly humble. Every man's life is equally precious, although all are at the disposal of our country, and the contribution each makes in battle is of equal potential value.



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