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Hints for Combat

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IN LOOKING back on the Tunisian campaign one sees the completeness and soundness of training and tactical doctrines employed by our Field Artillery School. These things are essential because there is very little new technique learned by personnel under fire except methods of self-preservation. Training then must be complete, leaving only mechanical execution for the battlefield. Training also, insofar as possible, should be progressive so that the unit may be committed to action at the peak of its cycle much as a coach works his team up to the important game of the season. The intent of this article, then, is not to advance new ideas but to stress the importance of certain old ones.

Much has been said on the subject of leadership. No one denies the importance of this attribute so essential to an officer, yet too little is known of how to lead troops in combat. On one hand, young officers who are thrown into rather intimate contact with their men in the field permit the spirit of comradeship, which is the natural human reaction to sharing danger, to break down that reserve and self-reliance which must be retained. On the other hand, other officers in their consuming desire to do a good job resort to loud, bombastic, exaggerated phraseology which reduces the weight of subsequent orders and definitely induces a feeling of tension or excitement among subordinates. In combat the initial problem of the individual is to overcome his natural tendency to be excited in order that he may think and act most efficiently. Excitement transmitted by a strained or high-pitched voice is most contagious among troops. They may function in spite of it, but certainly not because of it. If an officer must change his normal manner in combat he should be to slow down in every way except mentally, and regardless of circumstances he must retain his self-composure. Patience and a good sense of humor are invaluable characteristics. An officer should push and drive his command, be it a platoon or regiment, throughout its precombat training, so that obedience and the proper performance of duties are instinctive. Prior to combat he must make himself known to his men as a person of inflexible will

who accepts no alibis and will be satisfied with nothing but results. Then, on the battlefield, the command will achieve results because it knows nothing else. Other suggestions for obtaining the confidence and maximum efficiency of troops are as follows:

1. Let it be thoroughly understood before your unit is committed that the slightest evidence of cowardice will be punished. See that the troops themselves attach a stigma to neurosis and weakness.

2. In your first action, commit your command under the best circumstances possible within the limits of your mission. Make no blunders, for a unit is profoundly affected by the success and confidence achieved in its first engagement.

3. Always know the tactical situation and keep subordinates informed. If you don't know it, find out immediately even if it involves personal reconnaissance. No American troops fear anything they know is coming, and if they know the mission of the unit they will accomplish it without you.

4. When not within range of small-arms fire, keep your men out of foxholes and busy. Under aerial attack and artillery fire, don't let your officers display fear by rushing to the deepest and best slit trench in the area.

5. Encourage humor when the situation is tough. It relieves tension and increases efficiency.

6. Never make important decisions based on reports received from an excited and exhausted man without verification of the facts. Often a cup of coffee will reduce the number of the enemy he saw by 99%.

7. When you visit front line troops, depart at the speed at which you approached the front.

8. Keep troops in combat either marching, fighting, eating, or sleeping. Arrange in advance for relief teams for functions normally carried on twenty-four hours a day regardless of tables of organization.

9. Instruct personnel in all possible uses of their principal weapon and develop their complete confidence in it. They must understand clearly that they will not leave, move, or destroy that weapon without orders, and the safest place to be in an attack is behind the gun and operating it.

10. Habitually site your CP no farther back than your reserve elements or rear battery. This facilitates communication, insures your knowledge of the situation, and inspires confidence among subordinates. Nothing is more disgusting than spending half a day traveling to and from a CP to receive orders.

11. By your actions, not words, impress your command with your desire to get the most of the best available for them. At the same time don't make a fool of yourself coddling them.

12. If you command a battalion, make your most promising young business man personnel officer and give him plenty of ration savings or other funds with which to buy on the local market. The arrival at the front of eggs, fresh fruits, vegetables, etc., does more for morale than a letter from home.

There is a tendency among some of our units not to employ all the supporting weapons available. I have seen an infantry regiment in the line with its 37-mm antitank guns sitting in a ravine 500 yards to the rear in march order and without gun crews. Even if loss of personnel requires that antitank gun crews be used as machine gunners, the guns can be placed in position on their MLR, dug in and available for use if needed. Also, in the case of the infantry regiment mentioned above, only half the mortars were set up and the assault guns were not being used. A German memorandum contained a severe reprimand of a unit commander by the division commander because records indicated his unit had fired only one-tenth of the ammunition available for his heavy weapons. Perhaps that is a good method of checking when personal inspections are impossible.

On another occasion a reconnaissance unit was assigned the mission of taking a mountain which rose abruptly out of a flat plain. The battalion commander asked for all the artillery support he could get, and while I was working out his fire plan with him I noticed he was bringing up every mortar, assault gun, and 37-mm he had. When the attack was launched everything he had opened up, and his troops pushed through to their objective without heavy loss.

On 24 March our forces were finally stopped, after a fifty-mile advance, by well-prepared defenses on the high ground east of Maknassey. A chief of section from an infantry cannon company came to my CP that morning with an urgent request for a forward observer to come and adjust fire on two guns that were being dug in near the crest of the hill. All of the observers were with the infantry; so I accompanied the sergeant in my radio jeep. Upon arrival at the position of the cannon company I saw no officers present. The sergeant pointed out the two German guns and I asked why he didn't knock them out with his self-propelled M3A1 75-mm howitzers. He said he had been using the howitzers, but their shells ricocheted off the front parapet of the partially dug pit. I then asked him why he didn't use a lower powder charge and drop the shells into the pit. He had never heard of that, nor had any of the other NCO's who gathered around. Serving the piece as gunner, I demonstrated the simple procedure. We

knocked out one gun with the sixth round after splitting a four-tenths mil bracket. I left them bracketing the other gun with charge two and using a gunner's quadrant for the first time in their lives. There were still no officers around. Those men were doing their best, but no one had instructed them in all the uses of their principal weapon.

In the initial stages of the campaign a little difficulty was experienced in getting infantry to jump off after an artillery preparation and follow its barrage closely. As they became more accustomed to it and saw the results of enemy machine gunners "coming to life" after the barrage passed, they followed at approximately two hundred yards. In one highly coordinated attack they stayed within fifty yards. A battalion of infantry had previously attacked "Question Mark Hill" across the valley from "Hill 609" in the sector east of Beja. The attack was unsuccessful. The next day, 1 May, an artillery forward observer occupied a large fox hole with the infantry battalion executive who had radio communication with the assault company commander. They were on the forward slope of a hill about two hundred yards from the company. The forward observer fired a short preparation with his battalion, starting near the top of "Question Mark Hill" and shortening range in fifty-yard bounds until the fire was falling on the forward German elements. The battalion executive then ordered the company to crawl up as close as possible to our fire. When they reported themselves in position the forward observer increased the range fifty yards and the company commander was told the next volley would be the last at the old range. When that volley hit he was to run into the smoke and dust and take cover in the shell holes. This was executed, and when the company commander again reported ready some five minutes later, the fire was lifted another fifty yards and the company plunged into the smoke and dust of the last volley at the old range. Enemy soldiers not injured by the fire were quickly handled in the bottom of their fox holes. This procedure was repeated until our troops were on top of the hill, and then our fire was kept on the other side until they reported they were dug in and organized. Only two men were slightly wounded in the entire operation, and when asked how he felt with our fire falling so close, a sergeant said, "Hell, sir, it felt kinda friendly!" Our troops are learning the accuracy of the old British axiom, "It is more economical to suffer one per cent casualties by following our artillery fire closely, than to lose ten per cent from enemy action."

Another use made of artillery by one infantry regiment was to mark with smoke certain hill tops to orient patrols which reported they were lost. This was easily done with map data, but to pick out one barley-covered hill from the others on the ground was almost impossible. Artillery was also used to mark a terrain feature in enemy territory with

smoke in order that Allied dive bombers could orient themselves immediately.

Never depend entirely on other units for local security; and always, regardless of how little sleep you've had, hold a morning "stand-to" thirty minutes before daylight, in which every man is inspected by an officer to see that he is alert and has his arms in his possession.

On the night of 16 February, near Sbeitla, an artillery battery commander posted the usual outpost guard even though his battery was 3,000 yards back of the front line. At 2100 hours a report of heavy firing at the front and the withdrawal of several friendly units was made to the battery CP. At 0100 hours a patrol walked into a German Mark III tank. He quickly found a slit trench and opened fire with tracer ammunition from a tommy gun. When the tank returned the fire, the soldier dropped into the trench; and the battery opened fire on the tank. Other German tanks opened fire and disclosed their positions. The attack was repulsed and three tanks knocked out because they were discovered in time.

On 20 February in Kasserine Valley a battery went into position in the evening; and since they were some distance behind the line and hadn't had any sleep for two days, a small guard was posted rather close in. No "stand-to" was held, and the battery was awakened at daylight by battle cries of an infantry battalion which had infiltrated back to their position. All the guns and about half the personnel were captured.

Radio security is a most important subject. The German intercept service is well organized and passes information to line troops very rapidly. When no useful information can be gained from an AM [amplitude-modulation] net, they frequently jam it with a mechanical three-tone transmitter. I have never seen or heard of their jamming an FM [frequency-modulation] net, but I have seen the results of interceptions on that net. Apparently the German artillery was monitoring an artillery battalion fire-direction net with a captured radio. An excited battery officer reported, "A shell just burst four hundred yards in front of this position. Request permission to displace." Before displacement could be started the accurate sensing was applied by the German bat-

tery and upon intercepting the next message, "That one was right in the position," they fired for effect. Likewise, the transmission of adjusted data in the clear is bad practice because the Germans will go to the trouble to plot your position; and their map data corrected is not bad. There was rather convincing evidence of their locating a CP in one stabilized sector by the operation of an AM radio position-finding station. However, this was not common and can be expected only when a set transmits from one location for several days.

The aid CP (L-5 airplane) was found to be indispensable, but not exactly in the way it was anticipated. In the first place, the situation never occurred when the approximate location of the target was known in order that the guns could be laid before the plane took off. In every case of accurate location of a target, the man who located it adjusted the fire at the time and on the spot where he located it. By radio and telephone relays, even reconnaissance platoon commanders and tank and infantry officers conducted fire more effectively than by trying to locate the target and make an adjustment from the air OP. Ground observation is definitely better for two reasons: (1) you can approach the target more closely; (2) you can use glasses or a spotting scope in a stable position. However, we were able to keep a plane in the air long enough to pick up muzzle flashes, especially early in the morning and at dusk, and then make an adjustment. We never lost a plane due to enemy action, and that included flights from 31 January to 3 February at Station de Sened when enemy planes were overhead approximately twenty minutes out of every daylight hour. It was found after a few weeks use that enemy batteries would usually cease firing when the L-5 appeared in the air, and it therefore became a passive counter-battery measure. Other very important uses for this plane are reconnaissance and security, particularly in fluid situations when you know there is either enemy or nothing on the other side of the hills on your flanks. An L-5 well piloted can hardly be shot down by fighters because of its maneuverability and ability to land quickly. The only chance a fighter has is on his first "pass," and by taking evasive action just before he comes within range the L-5 pilot can avoid the fighter. The plane, of course, might be destroyed on the ground; but this never occurred to my knowledge in Tunisia.

I have made this letter rather long only because I have not had time to make it shorter.

—Pascal in *Lettres Provinciales*, 1656.