

Some Thoughts on Leadership

Major General Alexander M. Patch, US Army

Major General Alexander M. Patch wrote this December 1943 article primarily to educate junior officers about leadership. Fancy equipment won't win wars, Patch says, but strong leadership—which is based on character—and disciplined soldiers will. When Patch penned this piece, the United States was building its Armed Forces to fight a well-disciplined German army whose morale was high. Here, Patch gives emerging leaders some basic and timeless tips on how to handle troops and, ultimately, march toward victory.

ANATION COMMITTED TO combat must have materiel with which to fight and the men to use such equipment. It is unnecessary to discuss the relative merits of these two essentials, for one without the other is valueless.

The equipment of war seems to equalize itself between combatting nations. Let one develop a mortar of new caliber or a field piece of different muzzle velocity and it is only a brief time until his opponent has a similar weapon. Likewise there is a continual race between offensive and defensive weapons. The rocket launcher will stop the tank and the AA is rapidly improving as are the antibomber planes. There is only a temporary advantage in any new effective weapon; the advantage lasting until the opponent has built the same weapon or a defensive one to neutralize it. Our troops are proud of the materiel which the highly ingenious and industrialized forces of the nation have given to them. They feel, with confidence, that the weapons with which they fight will always equal if not exceed those of their enemy.

What has been said of the equalization of equipment is likewise true of tactics. The movements of the armies of Napoleon startled the world until an equal in Wellington appeared. In Africa, Rommel was most successful until Alexander and Montgomery displayed their talents. The strategy of von Schlieffen, Lee, von Moltke and all the rest are thoroughly known. There may be a temporary advantage in the application of one form of maneuver over that of another, and should that move come when the opponent is almost prostrate it may well be decisive. But nations cannot afford to risk their very existence on the hope of evolving a new or more effective form of maneuver.

To what, then, may the nation look for success in this and other wars if it is not to equipment and tactics? The answer can be found in a reply made by a general to Peter the Great: "Success in war does not depend upon the number and size of armament; nor upon movement, least of all upon movement. It does depend upon these and these and these," at which he pointed to the men in the ranks. Modern equipment and knowledge of the tactics of by-gone years has not lessened one iota the importance of the role of the individual soldier. He is still the supreme factor of success. Without sterling soldiers, the finest equipment is valueless and the best general in the world is helpless. With individual soldiers well led by zealous officers and fortified with a martial ardor, physical stamina, and a mental determination to fight to the end, a mediocre general and equipment of lesser value will win over a superior force.

The task of converting citizens of a free nation to soldiers for the battlefield is the biggest job of the United States Army. Our people, blessed with the bounties of nature to an unequalled degree, have never adopted a philosophy of aggression which is conducive to a strong military program. In fact, these resources with unbounded facilities for commerce and an absence of nearby geographical belligerents have created an anti-war complex which is overcome only when free intercourse and the American way of life is endangered. Thus from an easy-going life of peaceful pursuits we are now required to undergo a quick transition to the tempo of war; a transition which calls for physical hardening, mental readjustment and the building of morale that will fortify individual soldiers upon the field of battle.

“The inherent worth of the soldier is everything,” said Hindenburg. Into his very fiber must be woven the principles for which he fights. No one will deny the ferocity with which the German and Japanese soldier have fought. Their spirit in battle is traceable to the teachings of their leaders. When the Ecole Militaire Supérieure in 1877 undertook a study of the German military plan and the causes of their success, they were surprised to learn that it was not a uniform method or a centralized intellectual administration of the German Army, but a philosophy which was a folk possession. On the west were the Dutch, the Belgians, and the French; to the south the Italians and the Balkans; to the east were the Russians and on the north the Scandinavian countries—all of whom were restricting the economic growth and free expansions of the German people. Since the time of von Moltke, the elder, such have been the teachings of the German leaders. It is, therefore, no surprise that twice within one generation the determination to expand the empire has flared in the turmoil of war. The morale, the will to fight—the power that drives the machinery of war—is present in every German and Japanese soldier and it is that which makes them such formidable enemies.

So the events since December 7, 1941, have aligned upon the one side highly disciplined, well-trained, organized, experienced armies, indoctrinated with the necessity of expansion for their survival, against a people on the other hand who desire peace, no territorial expansion, and whose very life revolts against regimentation and compulsion. Having been compelled to commit ourselves to combat, it devolves upon us to develop in the shortest period of time an army well organized, superior in discipline, morale and training to that of our enemies. This in short is the problem of the Army of the United States. It is a challenge of the highest order, and upon the officers of our military forces it places an extremely grave responsibility. Our success over our enemies will depend upon the degree of development of certain essentials of military personnel:

1. Skillful and resolute leadership.
2. A high morale.
3. Well-organized and disciplined troops.

If we have the first of these three we are bound to have the last two and it is for the development of those qualities of leadership that I have the temerity to offer my opinions for whatever they are worth. These remarks are addressed particularly to officers of junior grade.

Many times junior officers feel that they have been handicapped by lack of economic position and educational foundation. But upon neither of these two

is real leadership dependent. Men of great academic accomplishment are often inclined to vacillate while those of lesser degree are much more aggressive and possess a high degree of initiative. I recall recently having observed the workings of a platoon leader who came from a very wealthy family. It was natural to suppose that he, having enjoyed the luxury of wealth, would expect great difficulty in adjusting himself to a soldier's life. Probably he did, but when I saw him he was sharing with his men every known form of hardship. The finest reports were received from his superior officers, and the soldiers of his platoon would follow him anywhere under any conditions. As contrasted with this man of means, I witnessed a corporal, an Italian boy from the eastern shores of the United States. He had known only the barest of necessity and possessed very little education, but he was a leader of the higher order, respected by men and officers alike.

The foundation of leadership is character. Any young officer who possesses the virtues of character or who is willing to cultivate them will have no trouble in acquiring effective leadership. If he does not possess them and is unwilling to develop them, then the quicker he is removed from command the better will the interests of the military be served. I have observed too long to believe that any man can fail to develop these attributes of character which develop leadership if he will only make his mind so to do.

The characteristic which higher command looks for in any officer is honesty. Honesty in thought, word, and deed. No man can dream of becoming a military leader who gives lip service to one God and by action serves another. The officer who will agree with his battalion commander on a certain course of action and quickly thereafter complain to his men and otherwise berate his superior has lost the foundation of leadership. It is true that he will find some officers and some men who will join with him in belittling his commander, but even with these and certainly with the greater majority of his command he has lost respect. Cheerful compliance with the orders of a superior, whether they are to your liking or not, will pay dividends from senior and junior officers and among all of the men of the command.

There is a mistaken idea of many junior officers that being a good scout and sympathizing with the hardships their men must undergo is an indication of leadership. An officer who asks his men to drink with him will find that they are quick to respond, but the next day on the drill field or in garrison, he will learn that they are equally quick to take advantage of that proffered friendship. Discipline is vital for a



Staff Sergeant George Talbert of the 19th Infantry Regiment crouches at the edge of a firebreak near Sourbrodt, Belgium, 19 December 1944.

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well-trained unit and it cannot be developed through undue familiarity. Furthermore, an officer who has been unduly friendly may find himself embarrassed when he meets a situation where punishment must be applied. It is most difficult to rebuke a man with whom you have been familiar. The other men of the unit will be quick to sense a degree of partiality, and this will lessen the esteem in which they hold the officer. In dealing

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with men, a junior officer should bear in mind (1) that he must always be courteous but businesslike in his dealing with men; (2) that when they make mistakes, he must correct their fault, but let them know in no uncertain terms that repetition will not be tolerated, and (3) if they are repeated that firm and immediate action will be taken and that there will be no resort to compromise. Such procedures will command respect among the men of any unit whether they like you or not and there is no substitute.

Every officer should realize that in dealing with the men of his command he is dealing with men who have been schooled in the same general philosophy of life as he; therefore, he can expect the same treatment from his men which he, in turn, gives to those who are superior to him. This implies that there must be sincere honesty in every act, tangible and intangible, by the officer if he expects response in kind. He may be able to fool his commanding officer, but he will never be able to fool the men of his unit, and when the men observe an officer displaying a front to a senior and then acting counterwise, they will indeed lose all respect for that individual. As he reacts towards his superior, so may he expect his men to react to him.

There is no standard treatment for all of the men of a unit. The American soldier is indeed an individualist and each must be handled as such. To one man you may make an appeal; to another, firm discipline must be applied. This requires a thorough study of the attributes and qualities of each, and diligent attention

to their individual problems. Such treatment will be readily understood by the men and recognized as generally fair.

An attitude of superiority detracts from the effectiveness of an officer. The insignia which he wears upon his blouse is not a recognition of accomplishment, but rather an indication of responsibility and of the faith that his country has in him. It will be through his examples to his men, his unselfish concern for those under him, that he will be fulfilling the obligation which he should feel.

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By virtue of the insignia which he wears, the men have a right to expect of an officer more than they themselves possess. An officer loses quality when he addresses his unit upon some subject about which he knows very little. The War Department has provided a system of Service Manuals in which all the answers to military procedures and problems can be found. In the instruction of men of a unit, officers are directed to follow the procedures of these Field Manuals and to tell them what they have learned therefrom. The men have the right to expect, when you are consuming their time and engaging their attention on these subjects, not only to know what the Field Manuals state, but what contemporary publications may emphasize. Do not fail them! Every officer must study incessantly that he might give to his men in the few short hours which are permitted for their training the very utmost that his ability will permit.

I am unalterably opposed to the use of profanity by officers in their official relations with soldiers. While it is trite to say it is lack of vocabulary, it is also indicative of lack of self-control and it is usually used to cover deficiencies.

I would like here to quote a maxim from which I think every officer could learn a valuable lesson: "Be more than you appear to be; do much—say little; let your work speak for you."

Another characteristic of a good leader is always to have a plan. This is true upon the training grounds as well as upon the field of battle. Design the program for the day's work with meticulous care so that each minute challenges both officers and men of the unit. Every officer should have a plan devised for any emergency which might arise. This will tend to create confidence in himself and his men. When an outdoor program is suddenly interrupted by inclement weather, a quick transition to indoor training without loss of time and poise by instructor will breed confidence in the men. When the unit arrives upon the field of battle, have a plan by which any expedient will be met. It may be that the plan which was formulated is not the best under the particular circumstances, but the fact that there was a plan, any plan, will develop great confidence. Men who come under enemy fire for the first time are frightened and frozen into inaction. To say otherwise would be dishonest, but if the officer has explained to his noncommissioned officers a plan which they will follow once the enemy bullets begin to fly, and you carry out this plan, you will find that it may be the difference between panic or command

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control. A prior plan tends to develop self-control under excitement, and a calm exterior with a matter of fact voice will indeed inspire confidence.

Great military leaders have always possessed undaunted courage. History abounds with stories of leaders who have dared to do those things which their opponents never would dream they would. All young officers should dream of those events which would demand of them courage, fortitude and personal sacrifice and thereby prepare themselves against the day when they will put into practice that of which they dream.

Strong and resolute leadership will result in a well-disciplined Army of the United States. The time to apply it is now, and not after we get on the battlefield. It is not difficult to attain, but can be acquired by all who have the determination to be honest in thoughts, words, and deeds; who have vowed to be impartial in their dealings with men; who possess or have developed self-control; and who have a full appreciation of the responsibilities of their rank. **MR**

Alexander McCarrell Patch Jr. (1889-1945) was born at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, the son of then Captain Alexander M. Patch Sr. He grew up in Pennsylvania and attended Lehigh University for a year before transferring to the US Military Academy, where he graduated in 1913. Patch was the distinguished graduate of the 1925 US Army Command and General Staff School class and served in both World Wars I and II. He has the distinction of forming the Americal Division, the only US division in World War II to have a name, not a number. After forming the division in New Caledonia, Patch took the unit to Guadalcanal in December 1942, where they relieved the 1st Marine Division. Named commander of XIV Corps, which included the Americal and 2d Marine Divisions, Patch led the final offensive against the Japanese on the island. In 1944, Patch became Seventh Army commander, leading the Allied landings in southern France on 15 August—Operation Anvil/Dragoon. In 1945, he became Fourth US Army commander and was appointed to a group to study the US Army's postwar situation. He died of pneumonia within days of completing the study in November 1945.