



Intrepidity and Character Development Within the Army Profession

Don M. Snider, Ph.D.

HOW MANY ARMY soldiers, particularly leaders, who just read the title of this article, knew the meaning of the first word; how many brought to their reading an accurate understanding of the term? More importantly, how many Army leaders could place a true meaning of the word into the context of the Army as a unique profession producing, for the security of the American people, fighting forces for effective land combat? Where does intrepidity fit in what the Army produces and how does the profession develop such a thing?

I ask this question for two reasons. First, I ask it because it is a subject little understood and little discussed in public discourses today within American society. Extended cultural wars will do that. This means that most members of Generation Y being accessed into the Army, whether to be soldiers or leaders, know little of it. And, that means the developmental tasks for the Army are much greater than in earlier periods. Second, I ask this question because without a right understanding of intrepidity and a capability to develop it within its Generation Y soldiers, the Army has little chance of being an effective fighting force. In contrast, as we have seen in Iraq and Afghanistan, where it is found there is not, nor will there be, any peer to the American Army in particular battles.

To refresh our understanding, the summary of action of 28 June 2005, Operation Redwing, Afghanistan, describes the battlefield deeds of Navy SEAL Lieutenant Michael P. Murphy: “By his undaunted courage, *intrepid fighting spirit*, and inspirational devotion to his men in the face of certain death, Lieutenant Murphy was able to relay the position of his unit, an act that ultimately led to the rescue of [Hospital Corpsman 2d Class] Luttrell and the recovery of the remains of the three who were killed in the battle.” As the Medal of Honor citation makes clear, Murphy was able to choose, in the face of certain death, to expose himself in open terrain for better communications in the chance that his teammates might be reinforced and rescued. He was able to do that because within his “fighting spirit” he had developed

Don M. Snider is the senior fellow of the Center for the Army Profession and Ethic at West Point, NY.

PHOTO: From left to right, Sonar Technician (Surface) 2nd Class Matthew G. Axelson, Cupertino, CA; Senior Chief Information Systems Technician Daniel R. Healy, Exeter, NH; Quartermaster 2nd Class James Suh, Deerfield Beach, FL.; Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Marcus Luttrell; Machinist's Mate 2nd Class Eric S. Patton, Boulder City, NV; and LT Michael P. Murphy, Patchogue, NY. With the exception of Luttrell, all were killed 28 June 2005 by enemy forces while supporting Operation Redwing. (U.S. Navy)

intrepidity —“a resolute fearlessness, fortitude, and endurance” according to the Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary.

So the issue we speak of in this article is the soldier’s fighting spirit, his or her individual spirituality or character, and the Army’s ability to understand it and to develop it in its soldiers and leaders. This is not a new subject for the Army. Many older soldiers will remember that for the post-World War II generation for example, General George Marshall spoke matter-of-factly about the common understanding within the U.S. Army:

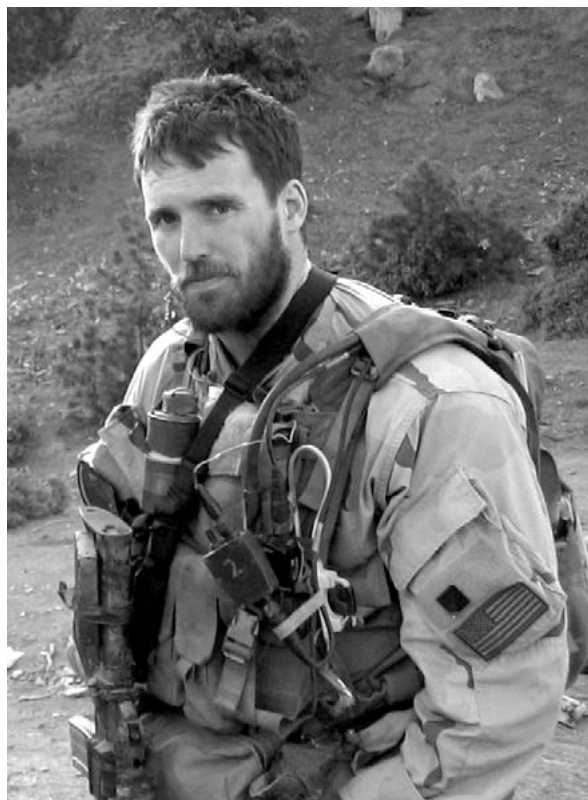
The soldiers’ heart, the soldier’s spirit, the soldier’s soul are everything. Unless the soldier’s soul sustains him, he cannot be relied on and he will fail himself, his commander, and his country in the end. It is not enough to fight. It is the spirit that wins the victory.

Marshall and his colleagues in uniform were not the only Americans who understood and were comfortable to speak openly and publicly about the importance of the individual spirituality of our soldiers. At the new WWII Memorial on the Mall, Washington, D.C. is inscribed:

They had no right to win. Yet they did, and in doing so they changed the course of a war...even against the greatest of odds, there is something in the human spirit—a magic blend of skill, faith, and valor—that can lift men from certain defeat to incredible victory.

The American public understands and, appropriately, has memorialized the role of the human spirit in mortal combat.

Turning to the Army profession, then, how does it understand and talk about the spirituality of individual soldiers and its influence on their behavior, particularly in combat? The Army’s approach centers on the Warrior Ethos, which has been promulgated as a four-sentence portion of the Soldier’s Creed: “I will always place the mission first. I will never accept defeat. I will never quit. I will never leave a fallen comrade.” However, while concluding that it is crucial for “all soldiers [to] truly understand and embody this warrior ethos,” the doctrine is almost silent on how such an element of character is “embodied”—developed and sustained. There is little language, no developmental model, no suggested pedagogy. Even more unhelpful, the



(U.S. Navy)

Navy SEAL Lieutenant Michael P. Murphy, killed in action on 28 June 2005.

doctrine states: “While individuals are responsible for their own character development, leaders are responsible for encouraging, supporting and assessing the efforts of their people.”¹

So how are Army leaders to fulfill this critical leadership role if, as individuals, the Army dismisses character development as “their own responsibility?”

This failure has evolved from the politically correct fear abiding for some time within Army leaders that they cannot approach the issue of individual soldier spirituality for fear of crossing some undiscovered boundary having to do with “religion.” “And you know, don’t you, that we can’t go there?”

So how can the Army get beyond the culture wars raging within our society, beyond having its tongue tied by political correctness, and get back to articulating its expert knowledge of human development? Once it does that, it can move on to its expert work of developing leaders of character who can, in turn, develop soldiers of character and, thus, intrepidity in combat.

...elevate the understanding and discussion of human spirituality to where it belongs and where it exists in current university research programs, to a position above religion...

I offer two suggestions. First, is to update the profession's knowledge of human development with language and developmental models that elevate the understanding and discussion of human spirituality to where it belongs and where it exists in current university research programs, to a position above religion (see, for example <http://www.spirituality.ucla.edu/>). Simply stated, this means that the Army understands and accepts that the spirituality of its soldiers and leaders—their worldview that shapes character—can be informed by many sources only one of which might, at the choice of the individual, be religion.

Fortunately this work has already been on-going, first with a text at the Army's university, West Point,

Forging the Warrior's Character, which proposes that, if the human spirit is “the animating force within living beings; the part of a human associated with mind, will, and feelings; and the essential nature of a person,” then the development of that spirit should form the cornerstone of any leader development program for the Profession.²

Something deeper motivates leaders of character who are more than merely the sum of their educational parts. Such is the concern of, the dynamic quest of reflective people who search for truth and the strength of will to live according to it. Throughout human history, this dynamism has found expression not only in the truths of the great religious and philosophical traditions but also in the worlds of literature, art, music, and other forms of creative expression. However diverse their sensibilities, however varied their answers, these traditions address the perennial concerns of human beings:

- What is real?
- What kind of life is worth living?



(U.S. Army, Susanne Kappler)

GEN George W. Casey speaks with Master Resilience Training School students, Fort Jackson, SC, 12 April 2010.

•How am I to treat others?

•How do I distinguish good from evil, truth from falsehood, justice from injustice?

•How do I develop the strength of will to act upon my beliefs and convictions and to meet my responsibilities?”

Surely the Army seeks soldiers and leaders who are so grounded and matured in their individual beliefs and convictions. Application of these ideas has already occurred in the Army Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program, a deliberate approach to equipping soldiers with the psychological tools—emotional, social, spiritual, and familial—to unlock their potential in this era of sustained deployments.³ More broad developmental application should logically follow as that program demonstrates efficacy.

My second suggestion is that the Army adopt the position that its institutional role and responsibility in the realm of the soldier’s character development is to facilitate the individual’s search for the moral meaning that defines a leader’s character. This means the Army will have to move beyond its “we don’t do that” approach to the character development of its soldiers and leaders. And well it should, since research from Iraq continues to show that authentically moral leaders better earn their follower’s trust and thus a greater ability to exercise high-impact leadership.⁴ And, in a CONUS setting this means leaders who are better able

subsequently to turn to garrison duties, to mentor soldiers and junior leaders, and the developmental process is sustained, and so on.

Please note carefully what I suggest here. I am not suggesting that the Army decrease in any manner its emphasis on developing the tactical competence of its soldiers or leaders. I am suggesting, however, that the Profession restore appropriate balance to the development of both competence and character. Both remain, as operations in Afghanistan and Iraq have repeatedly shown, essential to soldiers and leaders in effective fighting forces.

In sum, the result of implementing these two suggestions over time should be two very salutary developmental outcomes for the Army as a Profession of Arms. Soldiers and leaders will be better grounded individually in what they believe and in their strength of will to act on those beliefs, and the dissonance between what they believe and hold dear and what the institution declares is “right” via the professional military ethic (e.g., oaths, creeds, the seven Army Values, etc.) would be reduced. Both outcomes move the profession in the direction of a more cohesive and effective fighting force.

Both are available by updating and revamping how the profession understands and learns from the intrepidity of the new generation of heroes such as Lieutenant Michael P. Murphy, U.S. Navy.

NOTES

1. Field Manual 6-22, *Army leadership* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, October 2006), 4-12.

2. The author of this article served as project director, chapter author, and co-editor for *Forging the Warrior’s Character* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2008).

3. For a public statement of the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness Program, see

“Building Resilience: Comprehensive Soldier Fitness” (Washington, DC: Association of the United States Army, April 2010).

4. Patrick J. Sweeney and Sean T. Hannah, “High-Impact Military Leadership: The Positive Effects of Authentic Moral Leadership on Followers,” *Forging the Warrior’s Character*, op.cit, 65-90.