



U.S. Army Sgt. Thomas Neenan, a military police Soldier assigned to 110th Military Police Company, 759th Military Police Battalion, 89th Military Police Brigade, approaches the midpoint of a 12-mile ruck march early in the morning during part of the Fort Carson Best Warrior competition at Fort Carson, Colo., April 26, 2019. The competition is a multi-day, annual event designed to test the physical fitness, military knowledge, marksmanship, and endurance of each competitor. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Micah Merrill)

The Warrior Poet

By Capt. Ronald F. Roberts

Special Operations Joint Task Force - Operation Inherent Resolve

The term *warrior poet* has its roots in the ethos of the medieval knight. A knight was trained from early youth to be a professional man-at-arms and had to progress through the requisite positions of page and squire, where other skills were needed beyond just weapons proficiency.

“There were also non-martial but still important accomplishments to acquire such as a knowledge of music, dance, as well as reading and writing in Latin and French. They learnt to recite poetry and cultivated good manners, especially in front of aristocratic ladies with whom they went hunting and played games like chess. (Cartwright, 2018, para. 10)”

The concept of chivalry, in terms of honorable and courteous conduct, reached its height in the 13th century. It was expected that knights acted with grace and virtue when interacting with others, especially women. “When we say chivalry is not dead, we are alluding to the high standard of character and conduct typically associated with gallant knights” (“Chivalry,” 2019, para. 6).

The long career progression, the advancement of noble skills and social etiquette, and adherence to the code of chivalry meant knights were warriors respected and looked up to by all. “It not only implied that a knight was adroit with weapons; it was more than that. It personified a stainless and exemplary character that was beyond reproach: fair and just, honest, generous, and gentlemanly” (Dougherty, 2008, p. 74).

"The society that separates its scholars from its warriors will have its thinking done by cowards and its fighting by fools."

— Thucydides (Athenian general - 400 B.C.)

In order to promote the high standards of the knight as a virtuous way of life, several rules were created from which to live by. The following is the *Knights Templar Code of 1150 A.D.* as famously reconstructed by Prince Matthew of Thebes ("Chivalry Upholding," 2018, para. 23).

1. Preserve the ancient origins of religion and spirituality
2. Seek communion with the feminine face of God
3. Practice the discipline of daily prayerful meditation
4. Use one's strength only to protect and uphold the weak
5. Always uphold and represent Justice with fairness
6. Actively pursue scholarly studies of the Truth
7. Strive to embody and exemplify the virtue of Wisdom
8. Respect and include women in balanced harmony
9. Live by simplicity, modesty and humility
10. Practice moderation as the foundation of discipline
11. Shun all forms of pride in oneself and others
12. Avoid and oppose all forms of gossip and defamation

Like the knight, the *warrior poet* embodies the perfect balance between the physical, spiritual, and intellectual being. These ideals were also interpreted similarly by other cultures such as the Japanese Samurai warrior and their Code of Bushido (Clark, 2008).

The American military rightly puts emphasis on college education as well as career broadening opportunities. For this reason, the focus of this article will be on the intellectual pillar of the *warrior poet* ethos.



U.S. Army Master Sgt. Nekia Haywood with 80th Training Command (TC) reads to children at Hopkins Elementary School in Chesterfield, Va., March 2, 2018, as part of the Read Across America program. (Photo courtesy of Fran Mitchell, 80th TC Family Programs)

The Importance of Reading

Leaders must ingrain in themselves a desire for continual professional growth and life-long learning. A recent study by the *Pew Research Center* found almost a quarter of American adults (24%) claim they haven't read a book (in whole or in part) in the past year, whether in print, electronic, or audio form (Perrin, 2018). Reading implies self-improvement, and a well-read leader makes a powerful statement to superiors, peers, and subordinates.

As a leader, reading not only keeps you informed about modern warfare, but also makes you aware of historic battles and tactics. Gen. George S. Patton was a prolific reader and writer. Patton's officers often received lectures on the value, advantage, and benefits of not only reading, but studying history. According to military historian Martin Blumenson:

“The military profession requires an immense technical competence...Hardly appreciated is the amount of time and energy that George Patton expended throughout his career to learn the intricacies of his profession. He read enormously, voraciously, endlessly in the literature of warfare and history. (Blumenson, 1971, p. 10)”

The Benefits of Reading

In *The Leader's Bookshelf*, the authors (retired U.S. Navy Adm. James Stavridis and R. Manning Ancell) mention five reasons reading and writing benefit leaders:

- It provides a chance to experience an enormous variety of life experiences without leaving home or school
- It is the gateway to true evaluation
- Books allow us to think about our heroes and the choices they make
- Leaders can improve their communication skills through writing
- Reading is an efficient way to improve leadership skills by vicariously experiencing difficult situations through others before they happen in a reader's own life (Stavridis & Ancell, 2017, pp. 2-5)

Building a Library

Just as you save for retirement, you can also build a professional library of meaningful books by collecting them throughout a career. The great thing about a personal library is the books are yours. The ones you choose are a reflection of your personality and experiences and is your investment of intellectual capital (Stavridis and Ancell, 2017).

Unless the books you desire are unobtainable secondhand, buy used books whenever possible. For example, *Amazon* has third party sellers and these books can be reasonably priced. Ensure you read carefully to know what you are buying and determine the condition of the book as well as the seller's rating.

If a book has significance to you, consider spending more money for a hard cover version. These books last longer, hold their shape and value, and travel better than paperback books. They are also released earlier during the book's initial launch, so you don't have to wait months for the paperback version.

"Not all readers are leaders, but all leaders are readers."

— Harry S. Truman (33rd president of the United States)



U.S. Army Staff Sgt. Billy Emory writes a situational report during the Army Futures Command Best Warrior Competition at Camp Bullis, San Antonio, Texas, June 25, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Rebecca Westfall, U.S. Army Medical Command)

On Writing

All leaders should write and publish something of value for the benefit of the force. There are many professional journals, online blogs, websites, and social media sites that provide an opportunity to do so. Army University Press accepts submissions for its scholarly products such as the *NCO Journal* and *Military Review*. They also offer opportunities to highlight original monographs and books. Detailed information is available on their website.

<https://www.armyupress.army.mil/>

As a *warrior poet*, publishing can be an interesting and cathartic process. Spend plenty of time revising your drafts, solicit supportive friends, and get their opinions. Be reflective regarding the positive and negative criticism you hear. It will make you a better writer and help you understand what your readers are thinking. This will strengthen your arguments and make you a better communicator both on and off the page.



U.S. Army Paratrooper assigned to the 54th Brigade Engineer Battalion, 173rd Airborne Brigade, puts the finishing touches to her face paint camouflage at Villafranca Air Base (3rd Wing) Italy, in preparation for airborne operations onto Juliet Drop Zone, Pordenone, Italy, May 21, 2019. (U.S. Army photo by Paolo Bovo)

Six Books Worth Your Time

Many senior leaders have reading lists, including the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army (“The U.S. Army Chief of Staff’s,” 2017). The following books will enhance any leader’s library:

The Leader’s Bookshelf, by retired U.S. Navy Adm. James Stavridis and R. Manning Ancell.

The authors surveyed over 200 active and retired four-star officers about their favorite books. A list of 50 recommended books is provided, as well as excellent practical tips for developing leadership qualities through reading.

The Patton Mind: The Professional Development of an Extraordinary Leader, by retired U.S. Army Col. Roger H. Nye.

This book is a fascinating glimpse inside the famous persona of Gen. George S. Patton.

The Challenge of Command: Reading for Military Excellence, also by retired U.S. Army Col. Roger H. Nye.

A former West Point professor, this book includes in-depth reading lists grouped by topic.

The Sword and the Pen: Selections from the World’s Greatest Military Writings, by Sir Basil Henry Liddell Hart.

A compact collection of history’s most significant military authors compiled by one of the 20th century’s most respected historians.

Warrior’s Words: A Quotation Book: From Sesostrius III to Schwarzkopf 1871 BC to AD 1991 by Peter G. Tsouras.

Quotations are a magnificent way to convey inspirational thoughts in a brief and efficient way. They have a myriad of uses and make your writing and arguments better supported and effective.

Call to Arms: The Great Military Speeches by Julian Thompson.

This book is filled with historical speeches still relevant today. The price is worth it, especially for the entirety of Gen. MacArthur’s timeless “Duty, Honor, Country” speech at the United States Military Academy in 1962. That speech alone should be read by leaders perennially for inspiration.

Conclusion

The *warrior poet* model of continual self-improvement and life-long learning is as valid today as it was during the Middle Ages. Improving communication skills is vital to a leader. Reading and writing prose and poetry, or improving public speaking, are all ways to grow not just as a leader, but as an individual. ■

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