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DANIEL BEYOND THE LIONS' DEN

BY

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USAWC MILITARY STUDIES PROGRAM PAPER

DANIEL BEYOND THE LIONS' DEN

An Individual Essay

by

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ABSTRACT

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Daniel Beyond The Lions' Den

All professions experience situations in which ethical decisions are required and a reliance on the traditional values and standards of that profession is demanded. Having such a code of conduct is perhaps the principal criteria that separates being a professional from simply "having a job." The importance of principled conduct in the world of business and the arena of governmental operations has recently received much attention, albeit for negative reasons, after years of complacency. The relationship of ethical behavior to the achievement of excellence is a common theme in professional literature. And, yet, in the midst of this almost faddish emphasis on values and ethics, the military profession continues to build upon a long-revered insistence on ethical conduct by its members. For example, the United States Army recently focused on its foundational principles during its 1986 "Year of Values." This emphasis on attaining the highest measure in personal characteristics in the military is properly placed, for the ethical decisions that the man-at-arms must make ultimately affect the very welfare - even the life or death - of the soldiers entrusted to his care. Also, the values that the military leader imparts, by dint of his example and leadership, to his junior officers and men have institutional effects that multiply and spread throughout his and succeeding generations of soldiers. Because values and ethics in the military profession take on magnified importance, the desirable characteristics of a true military professional have been formally discussed, taught, thought and written about for as long as there have been soldiers.

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There is, however, no intention here to suggest that the military has the subject completely in hand, because the debates and discussions continue, as indeed they should. Nor is the purpose of this paper to "complete the record" on military values; rather, the purpose herein is to add the the understanding and appreciation of selected traits of the military professional by examining a source of instruction often overlooked as not being pertinent or applicable. The source is the Bible; the specific example is the prophet Daniel of the Old Testament book of Daniel. —————) 52 9 11

Why should a reference as seemingly unrelated as the Bible, a book of religion, be used to investigate a military subject? Even the most cursory examination of the Bible reveals that military men and military campaigns take a place of prominence in its pages. Examples abound: Joshua was both secular leader and military commander of Israel. Early in his life David was a guerrilla fighter, then a paid mercenary, and later the king and commander-in-chief. Nehemiah directed the rebuilding of the defensive walls of Jerusalem and military operations against the hostile forces threatening the city. Jesus commended a Roman centurian as one having "great faith,"¹ and another centurian, Cornelius, is honored as the first Gentile to convert to Christianity. Although it is certainly possible to find a few less-than-exemplary military characters, it is fair to say that, on the balance, military men are held in high regard as positive examples in the Bible. Far from being anti-military or even anti-war literature - as it is sometimes portrayed to be - the Bible both

explicitly and implicitly recognizes the value and role of the professional of arms. In this context, the Bible makes an excellent source for the consideration of military professionalism.

The next question may well be: Why should a non-military man like Daniel be chosen as the specific example to be studied, rather than one of the many worthy individuals cited above? If cast into the modern era, Daniel would have to be classified as a civil servant, holding a position roughly analogous to one in the Senior Executive Service or, perhaps more accurately, a high political appointee. The first chapter of Daniel identifies Daniel as one of several promising Jewish youths taken from the Kingdom of Judah to Babylon and, by the direction of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar, trained "to enter the king's service."² Daniel successfully completed his training and served Nebuchadnezzar and his successors for the next sixty-plus years, eventually being rewarded the position of third ruler of the Babylonian Empire³ (though the kingdom endured for less than twenty-four hours after he received this "honor"). His administrative skill and "extraordinary spirit"⁴ were so renowned that he was commissioned as one of the three high satraps (governors) in the Medo-Persian empire that conquered and succeeded Babylonia,⁵ an occurrence even more unusual than a Republican Secretary of State being retained by a succeeding Democratic administration. Daniel continued in service until the third year of King Cyrus of Persia and probably beyond. Daniel was not a military commander or leader, though in his duties as advisor to various Babylonian, Median, and

Persian kings he certainly considered military matters. But his role as a senior government official is not unlike that of many senior military professionals, who must weigh matters of national interest and international politics on an almost-daily basis and advise their civilian leaders. Daniel had to consider his relationship to his superiors as governed by his keen sense of duty and responsibility; he had to calculate political factors and balance them with his own moral imperatives. Senior military officials face these same ethical situations and value-based judgments. As a man of strong moral persuasion serving in a secular government, Daniel is a prime example for contemporary military men of high professional standards serving in a government or organization that may confront them with situations that may test their ethics, values, and character.

Integrity

Early in his professional career, while he was yet in training, Daniel was confronted with a classic moral dilemma that military professionals may have to face: a conflict between his own standards of right and wrong and the directives of his superiors. The common examples are familiar: "LTC Jones, you need to adjust your battalion's readiness figures; they just won't fly at division headquarters" or "COL Smith, I don't care what your honest opinion is, you just can't flunk this unit on its Annual Training evaluation." Even those who are encouraged to wink at the laws passed by the military's constitutional superiors in the Congress, even under the most compel-

ling of circumstances, are being confronted with the same issue. In Daniel's case, he found himself directed, as part of his training program for the king's service, to participate in practices that his religious conviction found objectionable. He and the other youths taken from Judah had appointed for them "a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank,"⁶ a program not too dissimilar to "training tables" for young athletes.

But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice⁷ food or with the wine which he drank.

Exactly why Daniel refused to participate is not made clear, but that Daniel felt that he would be "defiled" strongly implies that the food from the king's table either violated the Jews strict dietary laws or had been offered first to idols - a practice that the Jews had been warned to avoid - or both. The ethical "rock-and-a-hard-place" situation is clear: should Daniel follow the moral imperatives that he had been taught as a youth or obey the dictums of his newly-appointed superiors? The consequences of his decision were certainly more severe than a poor efficiency report or being fired; his very existence was probably on the line.

There were a number of seemingly correct ways that Daniel could have used to extract himself from this moral dilemma. After all, he had not objected to having his name officially changed from Daniel (God's prince) to Belteshazzar⁸ (roughly, Bel's prince, after a Babylonian diety) or submitting himself to a three-year course of

instruction in the "literature and language of the Chaldeans,"⁹ the priestly sect of the Babylonian gods. In fact, he excelled at the latter. Surely he could have reasoned that the meat and the wine were just an extension of the program and respectfully submitted himself to authority in this respect as well. He was far from Jerusalem and in a strange and different culture; he could have avoided conflict by simply "doing as the Babylonians do." Or, he could have looked around him and seen that many of his fellow Jewish students were following the meat-and-wine regimen and decided to do what everyone else was doing. He could have weighed his exemplary life in the balance and reasoned that this one minor transgression was insignificant in comparison to his many virtues. But Daniel was not willing to defile himself with rationalizations or compromises any more than with the meat and wine. All these possible "solutions" are illustrative of moral pitfalls into which military professionals may be tempted to fall in order to escape the pressures of an ethical dilemma. But none of these is right; Daniel knew it, and professional soldiers should know it as well.

Having decided to refuse the meat and wine diet, Daniel could have employed a number of confrontational tactics to reveal the error of the king's way. He could have thrown a tantrum and slung his food out the "mess hall" window. He could have staged a sit-down strike or organized a protest march or any number of equally vivid acts of defiance. But he did not do these things; nor should the military professional who must retain a sincere loyalty to

superior authority, even in the face of an ethical confrontation. Daniel must have felt the same way. Rather than being defiant or confrontational in this situation, he was creative.

Daniel "sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself."¹⁰ He proposed a test wherein

(1) he and three of his friends (also disposed not to eat the meat or drink the wine) would be given water and vegetables for a ten day period;

(2) at the end of ten days, they would be compared to appearance and ability with those who were eating the king's choice food, and then

(3) based on the comparison, the officials could judge what to do.

Daniel had devised a way for the king to get what he wanted (good academic performance and physical vigor) and for Daniel to achieve what he wanted (not to violate his principles). He had created an alternative that was at once ethical and effective. That Daniel's experiment was eventually successful is not really cogent; that he took the responsibility for creatively resolving his moral dilemma is. It is the mark of the truly excellent military professional who takes control of his ethical environment and aggressively maintains its integrity by fashioning an alternative true to the standards of his profession and true to the mission of his superior. Will such an alternative always exist? Probably not, but there will be more opportunities for creative solutions than situations where none exists. There is good cause to believe that, like Daniel,

those who seek and follow through consistently with creative solutions to ethical problems will be respected for doing so.

So as for every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king consulted them [Daniel and his three friends], he found them ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all his realm.¹¹

Candor

Candor is the courage to speak the truth as one sees it, no matter what the personal consequences may be. In a situation where the truth may be unfavorable or unpleasant to the superior, or may be contradictory to his personal view of the situation, the subordinate faces the temptation to avoid pain by garnishing the truth, telling half-truths, or even lying. Such a practice would, of course, be unethical and seriously violate the professional military ethic. Obviously, the whole truth is called for - true candor requires it. Yet true candor also requires respect and loyalty. How did Daniel balance the seemingly opposing requirements of these professional virtues?

Daniel was called before the king in several matters in which his wise counsel was requested, both by Nebuchadnezzar and by his successors. The situation which best illustrates well-balanced professional candor involved Nebuchadnezzar's asking Daniel to interpret a troubling dream.¹² In short, the dream involved a great tree that was chopped down and laid low for seven periods of time.

The interpretation (which Daniel fully understood) concerns God's judgment on Nebuchadnezzar, to be executed by striking him with mental illness for seven years. The problem confronting Daniel is how to tell this truth to the king, knowing that he happens to be the most powerful person in the Middle East, with the power of life and death in his hands.

Daniel could have escaped gracefully by completely revising the truth of the interpretation. After all, only he knew the truth, all Nebuchadnezzar's magicians, conjurers, and diviners having failed in their efforts to interpret the dream.¹³ He could have camouflaged the truth by saying that the dream applied to someone the king knew well! He could have taken an aggressive, arrogant approach, flinging the truth at Nebuchadnezzar on the theory that the best defense is a good offense. None of these devices would have been ethical: the first would have been lying; the second, quibbling (lying by another name); the last bereft of the dignity, loyalty, and respect due a superior. None of these approaches was the course of action Daniel pursued.

First of all, Daniel made it abundantly clear where his loyalties and sympathies lay. His concern for the king was so physically evident that Nebuchadnezzar had to verbally encourage Daniel to speak. Daniel expressed his innermost concerns for the king by wishing that "the dream applied to those who hate him."¹⁴ He habitually addressed the king with respect, calling him "my lord" or "o king"

and recognized his many great accomplishments. There is no sense of
haughtiness or arrogance in Daniel's demeanor. But he does not
"sugarcoat" the truth. He is direct and professional in his ex-
planation: "The tree that you saw...it is you," ¹⁵and

You will be driven away from mankind, and
your dwelling place be with the beasts of
the field, and you be given grass to eat
like cattle and be drenched with the dew
of heaven and seven periods of time pass
over you... ¹⁶

Not very pretty, but the truth. Then Daniel does something that
marked him above those who merely tell the truth and leave it at that:
he offered a solution to the distressing situation facing Nebuchadnezzar.

Therefore, o king, may my advice to you be
pleasing to you; break away now from your
sins by doing righteousness, and from your
iniquities by showing mercy to the poor,
in case there be a prolonging to your pros-
perity. ¹⁷

Daniel's candor pointed to the truth, as it must, but it remained
balanced within a framework of respect and loyalty, reinforced
with positive, sound advice for a difficult situation. This then,
is the triad of professional candor: truth, respect, and positive
recommendations. Military professions may too often allow an
imbalance among these aspects to cloud their relationship with
their superiors, offering truth without respect (arrogance), truth
without solutions (negativism), or respect without truth (sub-
servience). The true candor of the military professional will, like
Daniel, offer all three.

Selflessness

Soldiers who rise to the top of their profession are sometimes accused of having achieved their success by being "ticket punchers", promoters of self, carriers of favor, or outright social climbers. They appear to put their own personal success above everything else - unit performance, development of subordinates, even the good of the service or the nation. They may sincerely believe that there is no other way to get ahead. What was Daniel's attitude toward advancement? Consider that he was variously described as "ruler over the whole province of Babylon,"¹⁸ "chief prefect,"¹⁹ "third ruler in the kingdom,"²⁰ and one of the three commissioners governing the Persian empire;²¹ he obviously knew success. Did he achieve this success by promoting himself and stepping on others to get what he wanted, by pursuing success at all costs? Hardly.

Daniel consistently practiced the principles of preparation, humility, and service. In the first regard, once the matter of diet had been settled, the young Daniel submitted himself to the rigorous three-year course of study prescribed by King Nebuchadnezzar. This entailed learning a new language and then becoming proficient in the literature of that new language. Because he was being trained to serve in the king's court, he most certainly had to learn court policies and procedures that were radically different from what he may have been familiar with back in Judah. The Chaldean culture into which he was being indoctrinated was noted for its advanced scientific knowledge and appreciation of the arts. In all, it was a

program of wide-ranging knowledge that Daniel was required to pursue. That he applied himself diligently and learned well is evidenced by the results of his final oral exam before none other than King Nebuchadnezzar himself. Daniel was found to be "ten times better than all the magicians and conjurers who were in all [the king's] realm."²² Daniel apparently knew the value of sound preparation. One of the distinctives of the military profession is the high proportional of time devoted to education and training. The true military professional will apply himself as diligently and thoroughly as Daniel.

Daniel was never a flamboyant character, needing to attract attention to himself. His actions before his superiors are described as having "discretion and discernment,"²³ characterized by an "extraordinary spirit, knowledge, and insight,"²⁴ and as being "faithful, [with] no negligence or corruption...found in him."²⁵ This certainly is not a description of one trying to advance himself, but rather one who allows his abilities and qualities to speak for him. In two cases where Nebuchadnezzar urgently required someone to interpret his dreams, Daniel waited until others had had their opportunities (and failed) before presenting himself before the king to offer his services.²⁶ Also, in a similar case before King Belshazzar, Daniel waited until he was summoned before interpreting the "handwriting on the wall." He had this attitude of humility in spite of knowing that he had a superior ability to understand dreams and visions, an ability that would have caused some others to elbow their way to the

front of the pack to show off his talents before the king. Instead, Daniel was one who remained supremely confident in his abilities and humbly remained ready and willing when called upon. Daniel never claims any credit for his extraordinary accomplishments, but consistently gives the credit to his God. This was not a person who must constantly expound upon his previous successes; but one who is able to be humble by being able enough to be humble.

Daniel's career is also characterized by a spirit of service. He served Nebuchadnezzar faithfully, as demonstrated by some of the examples previously cited, in spite of probably having some personal misgivings about the king's policies and actions. He served Belshazzar, apparently being called out of semi-retirement to do so, despite having a personal revulsion for him as a person. When the Babylonian kingdom fell, he served Darius the Mede and Cyrus the Persian. Simply stated, Daniel made himself available to serve those in authority, those who needed his talent and wisdom. He seemed to be able to bury his own self-interests in favor of the greater good of those appointed over him and for their nations. Daniel had a remarkable career, without being a careerist. Would that the same could be said for every military professional, for soldiers have often fallen into the trap of equating personal advancement with national good. They must recognize that the spirit of selfless service can lead to exemplary performance, which in turn can lead to advancement. This is the "proper order of things;" it is the order of priority that Daniel followed, to his benefit and to the

ultimate benefit of those whom he served. This is true selflessness.

Courage

Courage is a trait long admired in soldiers; thousands of books have been written about and even more thousands of medals presented commending the physical courage shown by men in battle. While this kind of courage is an elemental requirement for the man-at-arms, it is also the variety for which the opportunity to display comes, thankfully, very infrequently. The everyday kind of courage - the courage of conviction - is much more likely to be an ongoing concern for the military professional. How does one develop such courage? How did Daniel?

After the fall of Babylon, Daniel found himself in the service of Darius the Mede. Because of Daniel's extraordinary skill and wisdom, he was appointed as one of the three presiding governors overlooking the activities of 120 lesser officials in charge of the various districts of Darius' kingdom.²⁸ Perhaps because he was a holdover from the previous Babylonian administration or perhaps because he was a foreigner, the other officials became jealous and plotted Daniel's downfall. They examined his manner of performance and probably searched his personal papers and records in order to find some incriminating evidence ~~against~~ of Daniels's fallibility. They could find nothing. A present-day parallel to such an effort might be the Inspector General special screening that each Army brigadier general selectee is given prior to approval of his selection.

The thorough search through the personal habits and professional practices that the IG performs has led to some individuals being removed from the list. The scrutiny under which Daniel was examined was every bit as intense - probably more so, in light of the fact that his enemies were doing the searching. That they found nothing is a notable testimony to the integrity and character of Daniel.

But what does this have to do with courage? Simply stated, a well deserved reputation is the bedrock upon which moral courage is built. In Daniel's case, this principle would soon be tested. Having failed in their attempts to get something legitimate on Daniel, his adversaries then plotted to "frame" him. Knowing that Daniel had the commendable habit of praying to his God three times daily, they tricked King Darius into passing a law that forbade prayer to anyone but Darius. In his pride, Darius was a willing dupe. But Daniel knew that his practice was right and, even though he knew of the king's decree, continued to pray as he always had. What gave Daniel the courage to stand for what was right in spite of the known consequences? He had his exemplary reputation to fall back on; he had the confidence that only rightness can produce. Had he had something in his past of which he was ashamed, he certainly could not have faced the specter of the lions' den as he did.

The mutually reinforcing effects of integrity and professional courage is sometimes lost on young officers. They fail to see that the habits of honesty and integrity that they establish early in

their careers later affords them the benefits of forthright courage, which, when exercised, adds yet another layer on their foundation of integrity. When that cycle is broken, the whole structure is weakened. The wise lieutenant or captain who desires to be the courageous senior officer of the future must realize that he has that possibility in his hands in the present. Daniel understood that and lived that; and when the moment of truth arrived, he was prepared for it.

This certainly has not been intended as a complete treatise on all the attributes of a military professional. There are other important characteristics of leadership and management that would have to be treated in order to paint a complete picture of the ideal public servant and soldier. The ones selected were traits that the prophet Daniel displayed in unique and refreshing ways and provided additional insights into the true nature of integrity, candor, selflessness, and courage above and beyond the conventional meanings of the words. He demonstrated an aggressive form of integrity that sought alternatives satisfactory to his personal code of ethics but equally satisfactory to the goals of his superiors. He displayed a candor that balanced tact and discernment and still confronted hard truth with viable solutions. He kept the energy provided by ambition channeled into selfless service through the exercise of the disciplines of preparation, humility, and service. And he displayed a level of professional courage that can only result from a founda-

tion of integrity. Senior leaders look for such men, and those same senior leaders, in their roles as followers, can benefit by embracing these principles as well. But, even more importantly, the nation will benefit by having its military professionals walking in the footsteps of Daniel, beyond the lions' den.

¹Matthew 8:10.

²Daniel 1:3-5.

³Daniel 5:29-31.

⁴Daniel 6:3.

⁵Daniel 6:2.

⁶Daniel 1:5.

⁷Daniel 1:8a.

⁸Daniel 1:7.

⁹Daniel 1:4.

¹⁰Daniel 1.

¹¹Daniel 1:20.

¹²Daniel 4.

¹³Daniel 4:6-7.

¹⁴Daniel 4:19.

¹⁵Daniel 4:20,22.

¹⁶Daniel 4:25.

¹⁷Daniel 4:27.

¹⁸Daniel 4:28.

¹⁹Daniel 2:48.

²⁰Daniel 5:29.

²¹Daniel 6:2.

²²Daniel 1:20.

²³Daniel 2:14.

²⁴Daniel 5:12.

²⁵Daniel 6:4.

²⁶Daniel 2,4.

²⁷Daniel 5.

²⁸Daniel 6:2.

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