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COMBAT LEADERSHIP--TROUBLE IN THE NINETIES?

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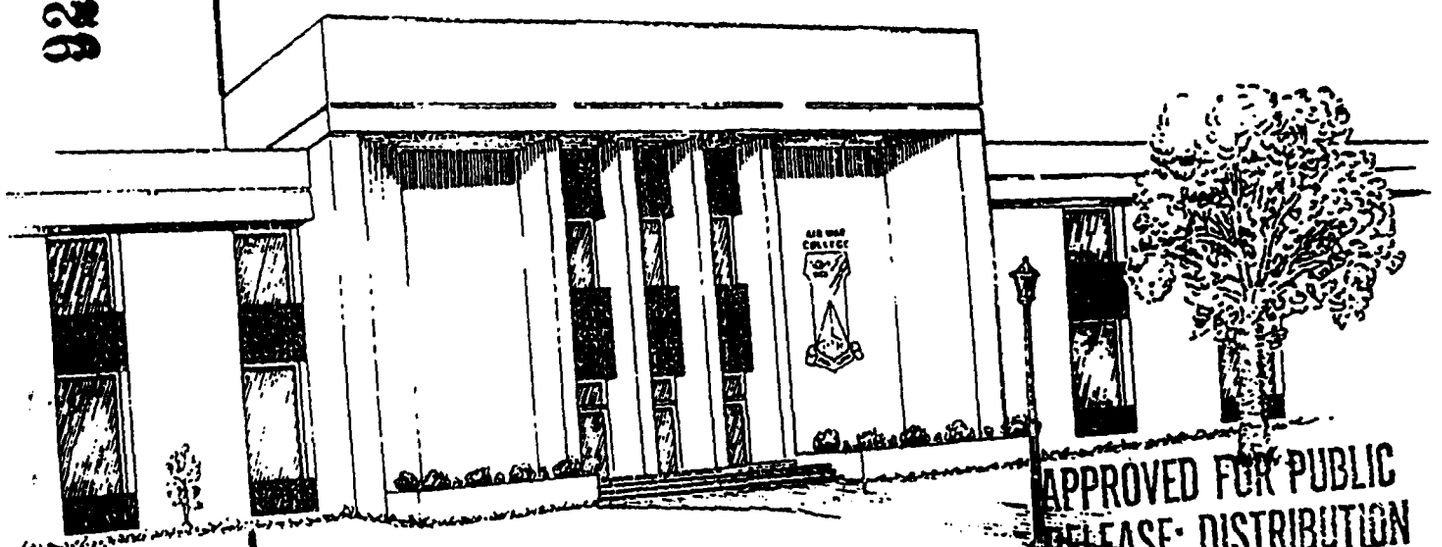

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UNITED STATES AIR FORCE
MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

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COMBAT LEADERSHIP

Trouble in the Nineties?

by
David J. Semon
Lieutenant Colonel, USAF

AN ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

IN

FULFILLMENT OF THE CURRICULUM

REQUIREMENT

Advisor:

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MAXWELL AIR FORCE BASE, ALABAMA

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TITLE: Combat Leadership: Trouble in the Nineties?

AUTHOR: David J. Semon, Lieutenant Colonel, USAF

Today, the United States has effective combat leaders ready to successfully employ U.S. forces if required to achieve U.S. objectives. However, events taking place within the U.S. military and in several East European countries could result in a degradation of the combat leadership ability presently found in the U.S. military services.

The current U.S. combat leadership strength is a result of three elements: the high quality of the individuals serving in leadership positions, experience in World War II, Korea and Vietnam, and finally, the emphasis placed on realistic training in the 1980s. However, as we enter the last decade of this century, three things will challenge this combat leadership: the separation of many high quality, mid-level officers from military service, the retirement of the majority of the officers with combat experience, and the shift in budget priorities due to the enormous change taking place in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

To overcome the negative effects of these events, the development of combat leaders must have preeminent priority. This task is the joint responsibility of the individual and the military services. The individual through personal study and professional reading, and the military services through formal training programs and combat training exercises.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lieutenant Colonel (Colonel selectee) David J. Semon is a U.S. Air Force command pilot who has spent the majority of his career in the Military Airlift Command (MAC). He has participated in almost every major Joint Chiefs of Staff Exercise as either a C-141 pilot, a mission planner, a mission controller or as a mission commander. He served overseas as a Command Post Duty Officer at Clark AB, Philippines from April 1974 to April 1976 and was deeply involved with the withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam including OPERATION NEWLIFE and OPERATION BABYLIFT. He has four years staff experience at the Pentagon on the Air Staff in both the programming and operations arenas. His last assignment, from September 1987 to July 1989, was as the Commander of the 15 Military Airlift Squadron (MAS) which was selected as the Military Airlift Command's "Outstanding Strategic Airlift Squadron" for 1988. He is a Distinguished Graduate of both Squadron Officer School and Air Command and Staff College. His assignment following completion of the Air War College will be to United States Forces Command (USFORSCOM), J-3, as the Chief, Exercise Division.

COMBAT LEADERSHIP

Trouble in the Nineties?

INTRODUCTION

Strong, effective leadership is one of the keys to success for a military force, especially in combat. Today, the United States, because of its high quality military officers, its experience in World War II, Korea and Vietnam and its emphasis on training and readiness in the 1980s, has leaders who are ready to successfully employ U.S. forces if required to achieve U.S. goals. But, will this remain the case in the future? I don't think so. I believe there is a genuine danger that *combat leadership in the U.S. armed forces* could diminish over the next ten years.

I see three things occurring in the 1990s that will adversely impact the quality of our military leadership, especially combat leadership. These are: the separation of many of our high quality, mid-level officers from military service, the retirement of the majority of our officers with combat experience and the shift in budget priorities due to the impact of the tremendous change taking place in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Because I see this "threat" to the quality of combat leadership in our armed forces, and because I believe leadership is a vital element of our military strength, I decided to write this paper. The purpose of this paper is simply to raise the issues mentioned above so that all who are concerned about the quality of our armed forces might think about this premise, and if they agree, do something to prevent the erosion of the quality of our combat leadership. I am writing more to raise questions than to provide answers. My success depends not on whether or not I convince anyone that I am right. Rather, it depends on getting the right people to think about combat leadership and to do something to ensure that the United States continues to have the best prepared combat leaders possible.

My approach to this task is simple and straightforward. First, I will explain why I see challenges to U.S. combat leadership in the 1990s. Second, I will discuss several traits and skills that I think are necessary for a leader to successfully lead a combat organization. Finally, I will make some recommendations on how to maintain the high quality of leadership that we have today.

Before beginning my discussion, I want to clarify where the ideas for this paper originated. I do not proclaim to be an expert on leadership, nor do I claim to have extensive

combat experience. Rather, the elements that influenced the thoughts expressed herein are: twenty years of experience as an Air Force officer, two years experience as the commander of an operational flying squadron (C-141), previous Professional Military Education and the current studies I am doing while at the Air War College.

As with most military officers, leadership is not a new subject to me. Since the first days of my Air Force career, I realized that leadership is the critical skill in this profession. Early on, I was fortunate to have a number of commanders who were excellent leadership examples and who impressed upon me the importance leadership plays in the success of an organization. Since those early days, I made it a point to analyze the leaders I came in contact with to determine those things which separate the outstanding leaders from the average ones. During my tour as a commander, I used those skills which I felt made other leaders successful, and carefully observed the results. When I attended Squadron Officer School and Air Command and Staff College, my main interest was investigating and discussing all aspects of leadership. At the Air War College, I have an outstanding opportunity to read about, discuss and critically investigate leadership once again. And, this time, the majority of the people I am conversing with are experienced leaders

themselves, some with combat experience and most with experiences different than my own.

So, although I do not claim to be an expert on leadership or to have extensive combat experience, I think I have investigated the subject enough to raise some pertinent questions. Keep in mind that my objective in this paper is not to preach or teach anything to anyone. Rather, my intent is to raise issues that I think are important for military leaders to be aware of, to think about, and to do something about. Therefore, whether I am an expert, experienced combat leader or not is not really critical. I will begin with an explanation of the challenges which I think could have a major impact on the quality of our combat leaders over the next ten years.

DECADE OF CHALLENGES

As we enter the last decade of the twentieth century, many changes are taking place in the world, the United States and our military. Several of these changes will have a major impact on the size, composition and capabilities of the U.S. armed forces. In the next few paragraphs, I will address the ones I think will affect American military leadership and the quality of our combat leaders. Again, these changes are: the loss of highly qualified leaders through separations from the

services, the loss of many combat veterans, and the extraordinary change taking place in Europe and the Soviet Union.

During the last two years of the 1980s and the first part of 1990, I saw the unexpected separation of several lieutenant colonels and colonels from the Air Force. Many of these were squadron operations officers, commanders or wing level Deputy Commanders for Operations. Each retired after at least twenty years of service, but each was a "surprise" in that they "had not reached their full career potential." Traditionally, these men were the ones who were expected to move up to more senior levels of responsibility. In fact, some were offered more senior positions before they retired. Yet, they opted to separate and seek their goals elsewhere.

To some, this may not appear to be a major problem. I raise the issue because I'm not sure if the U.S. military can continue to produce highly competent combat leaders if a large portion of our high quality, mid-level leadership elects to separate at twenty years of service. I agree that they have every right to do so and I agree that we can not retain all of the mid-level officers. But, the real question is, are we retaining the right ones and are we letting the right ones go? The number of officers making the decision to leave doesn't concern me nearly as much as who those officers are. From my perspective, many are exactly the ones we need to keep to face

the challenges of tomorrow and to be our combat leaders in the nineties. I believe this is especially true since the combat leadership problem will be compounded by the loss of many officers who do have combat experience.

Early in my tour at the Air War College, I was surprised by the small number of officers attending the college who had combat experience. During one of our seminars on leadership, one individual commented that those who had not served in combat could not possibly understand the problems and challenges of combat leadership. I thought this a rather bold statement, asked some further questions, and discovered an interesting fact. I asked how many of the eleven officers in the room had combat experience in Vietnam. The response indicated that only three had combat experience there in the late 1960s or early 1970s. One officer was in the Army, one was in the Air Force Reserve and the third was the Air Force instructor. Two other Air Force officers performed in support roles, but not direct combat. Although the number was surprising, the really amazing thing was that of the three with combat experience, one expected to retire within the next two years and the other two thought they would retire within the next four years. I asked this same question in another seminar, and the results were similar. Only one officer of the ten had combat experience, and he too expected to retire within four years.

Because of the comment about combat experience and the results of my mini survey, I began to think more and more about what impact the loss of combat veterans might have on the U.S. military in the future. I came to certain conclusions which I will now highlight.

First, regardless of the universality or validity of my mini survey, the fact remains that we are rapidly approaching 20 years since our involvement in Vietnam. The U.S. withdrew its ground forces in 1971 (1:210) and all other forces in 1975. (1:234) Most of the officers who served in a combat role in Vietnam have either already retired or will be reaching that point during the 1990s. Only the select few who make the most senior grades will stay on active duty to the later half of the decade. As a result, there will be very few officers in the military with combat experience in the late 1990s, if not before.

Second, this problem could be exacerbated by the reduction in the size of our armed forces. As we reduce the size of the force, the number of mid-level and senior officers will be reduced accordingly and many of these may be the very ones who are combat veterans and whose experience is needed to guide and train the next generation of combat leaders.

Third, even though we were involved in three combat actions since Vietnam, none of the operations afforded good opportunities for large numbers of officers to gain combat experience. This was due to their size, scope and the nature of the operations. URGENT FURY (Grenada), ELDORADO CANYON (Libya) and JUST CAUSE (Panama) were all clandestine, short duration and relatively small operations. As a result, only a select few participated in the planning and execution because only relatively small forces were involved. Even now, as we study the lessons learned from these operations, there are still many aspects that are not "public knowledge" which makes it difficult to gain quality, second-hand experience from these actions.

Next, the United States can not "have a war" in order to train our officers for success in combat. This statement may seem self-evident and unnecessary, but I want to include it to show that I recognize how important experience is in the development of combat leaders. There may be no substitute for the real thing, but since first-hand experience is not possible, the next best thing, top quality combat training exercises, will have to do. I believe that high quality, combat training exercises provide tremendous opportunities for developing combat leadership skills in officers of all grades. I will not elaborate further on this at this time, because I will cover it later in my recommendations.

A corollary to the previous conclusion, and my final conclusion, is that although combat experience is an advantage to combat leaders, it is not an absolute requirement. Thus, I disagree with the officer who said that unless you were involved in combat, you could not understand the problems and challenges of combat leadership. I say this for two reasons. First, I can not accept the logical extension of such an argument for it would mean that by the end of the century the U.S. military would be woefully short of leaders who could be successful in combat. And, second, I strongly believe that you can train yourself and subordinates to be successful leaders in both peace and war.

The second part of the last conclusion is covered in the recommendation section of this article, so I will not elaborate further at this time. Rather, I want to move on to the third event which I believe could have a major impact on developing combat leaders in the U.S. armed forces. As I said previously, that event is the tremendous change taking place in Europe and the Soviet Union.

Actually, the connection between the events in Europe and the development of combat leaders is not one that is obvious or easy to prove. Nevertheless, I see a definite connection. My four years experience on the Air Staff combined with the

comments made by guest speakers and classmates at the Air War College lead me to the following conjecture. As the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact appear to become "no threat to U.S. national security," the American people and the U.S. Congress will insist on large reductions in the Department of Defense (DOD) budget. These reductions will not be easy to accommodate and the debates over what, when and where to reduce will be extensive. The danger I see is that the programs that are most useful in building combat leadership do not always have the greatest support in Congress or the DOD. These are the unglamorous, but essential, training programs and military exercises.

As "peace breaks out all over" and reductions become a reality, DOD leaders could be forced to devote most of their attention to resource allocation, acquisition issues and force size issues. I am not inferring that these issues are not important to our war fighting capability. Rather, there are other things such as training programs, facilities and exercises which help build strong combat leadership skills which may not compete well because they are costly, but do not create jobs or put "rubber on the ramp." Additionally, there is the danger that solving today's immediate problems may become so critical that the leadership may fixate on today's issues at the expense of developing combat leadership skills in themselves and their subordinates. In similar situations,

I have seen very competent individuals diverted from important issues when those issues were intangible and not of immediate consequence.

I believe that I have already seen indications that this phenomenon is beginning to take place. We were fortunate to have several high-level leaders in the DOD as guest speakers at the Air War College this year. Each of them that addressed the issue of the impacts caused by the changes in Europe started by saying that everyone from the President on down is committed to maintaining the high quality in the services that we enjoy today. They each said that we may be a smaller force in the future, but we will not give up quality as we make the changes. At first, these statements alleviated my fears. However, as I listened more carefully, I realized that with only one exception, all of the speakers then went on to almost exclusively discuss how the changes could impact force size, hardware acquisition, force locations and weapon system capability. Only one individual talked about and emphasized training leaders for that smaller, high quality force. Maybe I'm reading more into their omission of the topic than I should. I'm sure if they were asked they would agree that training is as important, if not more important, than the other issues. But, I still find it very revealing that their emphasis was on "hardware" programs.

I also see a similar emphasis in the discussions among my classmates at the Air War College. Again, each is interested in doing what is best for the United States as we make the tremendous adjustments that are about to take place. But, I also find that the focus appears to be on the more tangible aspects of the changes. The hardware, facilities and personnel reductions seem to be debated the most. It's almost as if everyone believes that someone else is going to make sure that other programs, such as training, are accorded the attention they deserve.

As I said at the beginning of this part of the discussion, my view is not something that is easy to prove or show clearly. *However, it is something* that I feel can be even more critical to our future success than hardware or force size. It is a matter of making sure that we continue to put the proper emphasis on training and leadership development regardless of pressures to do otherwise.

Those are the elements I see as potentially having a negative impact on combat leadership as we enter the nineties. I think that the combination of separations, retirements and the budget issues may result in a generation of military leaders who are less prepared to conduct combat operations than their predecessors. It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine what can be done to retain the right officers

beyond the twenty year point. There is little we can do about the retirement of experienced warfighters for that is the consequence of being without war for almost 20 years. The result may cause concern, but the reason is certainly desirable. However, we can do a great deal about training for combat--both personally and institutionally. In the next section, I will discuss traits and skills which my experience and study has shown to be invaluable to military leaders.

LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Two comments before getting into the leadership skills themselves. First, the skills I will discuss are the ones I think are most important to a combat leader. I singled out these particular skills based on my observations, experience and study. By limiting my selection, I fully realize I am ignoring other combat leadership qualities that others may feel are also vital. Second, I will not attempt to completely explore each of the traits or skills. That labor is already the topic of several books. Rather, I will simply make some comments about each in an attempt to show why these skills are important to a combat leader.

The skills I will discuss can be broken down into two categories, personal and organizational. This is my own distinction to make the discussion easier. In reality, a

successful combat leader interweaves the skills so well that they appear inseparable. The personal skills that I believe to be critical are: knowing yourself, knowing the enemy, unpredictability, passion for success and decisiveness. The organizational skills are: setting goals, communication, measuring performance, developing leaders and taking care of people.

Knowing Yourself

This preeminent trait has two aspects. The first is understanding the capabilities and limitations of your own forces, and the second is understanding your personal strengths and weaknesses.

Understanding the capabilities and limitations of your own forces is fundamental and essential to the success of a combat leader. If a combat leader is not realistic in his appraisal of his own forces' capabilities, the potential for him to make poor decisions is great. On the other hand, if he clearly understands the capabilities of his forces, he might be able to accomplish tasks that others would consider too difficult to attempt. For example, General George S. Patton's remarkable march of the Third Army to the Argonne Forest in World War II was thought to be impossible by most of the other Allied general officers. However, because Patton truly

understood his soldiers and their capabilities, he was able to turn his army, march 70 miles in 48 hours and engage the enemy immediately upon arrival at the Argonne Forest. Because he understood the real capability of the Third Army, he was able to achieve victory, when most others would not even attempt the feat. (2:246, 3:562)

The second aspect of knowing yourself, assessing your own strengths and weaknesses, is probably more difficult than the first. Those who attain high levels of command are normally those who have been very successful during their career. They usually have spent years performing superbly, taking on the tough jobs and effectively accomplishing all tasks. In return, they were rewarded with promotions, increased responsibility and the assurance that they were "a cut above" everyone else. Sometimes, this type of continuous success can lead to a false sense of infallibility on the part of the individual. And, this sense of infallibility can lead to a senior leader being close-minded to the suggestions of those around him because he "knows better." After all, hasn't he always been correct before? And, in this critical combat situation, shouldn't he rely on his own, proven expertise rather than someone else's ideas?

The obvious danger in this situation is that the leader, in fact, is not infallible, and that he will do something

detrimental to his force because of an unwillingness to listen to the advice of others. To avoid this undesirable situation, the leader must first make an accurate assessment of his own abilities and shortcomings (accuracy being the key element of the appraisal). Then, he must ensure that he seeks advice in those areas where he lacks the necessary expertise to arrive at the best decisions for his forces. This way he can be sure that he is considering as many good courses of action as possible and hopefully will select the one that is best for the success of his force.

Knowing The Enemy

One of the prime objectives in combat is to gain the advantage over your enemy. This can be achieved in several ways, such as having superior forces, using terrain wisely, or having better logistics support. However, you can also gain significant advantage over the enemy if you can take actions which will thwart his attempts to gain an advantage over you. To do this, you must understand how he thinks and what actions he is most likely to take, and then take your own action to prevent him from accomplishing his goals. In plain English, you can gain significant advantage if you can "beat him at his own game." Obviously, in order to accomplish this, you must have excellent intelligence information about the enemy's capability. But, even more importantly you must be able to

see the enemy's capability in terms of the mindset of the enemy leadership. You must know how he thinks and what actions he is most likely to take in a given situation.

General George S. Patton exemplified this skill. He studied his opponents carefully and understood how the enemy leadership thought and what their most probable course of action would be. For example, Patton extensively studied tank warfare and Field Marshal Rommel's theories and tactics in the period between World War I and World War II. Because of his insights he was then able to anticipate Rommel's battle plans and take appropriate actions to frustrate the Desert Fox in North Africa. And, he accomplished this victory in spite of less experienced forces and inferior tactical position. (4:179, 5:120)

The importance of this skill is summed up very well by Samuel B. Griffith in the introduction to his book Sun Tzu: The Art of War. In talking about the qualities of a skilled general, Griffith writes:

> His primary target is the mind of the opposing commander; the victorious situation, a product of his creative imagination. Sun Tzu realized that an indispensable preliminary to battle was to attack the mind of the enemy. (6:41)

Unpredictability

If understanding your enemy's mindset can help you gain an advantage over him in combat, it is imperative that you deny this advantage to him. Otherwise, you may find that he is "beating you at your own game."

I think the best way to accomplish this goal is to be as unpredictable as possible in the eyes and mind of the enemy leader. The more uncertain he is about what course of action you will take, the more complicated his planning becomes and the more likely he is to make mistakes that you can capitalize on. By keeping him uncertain about your plans, you will also improve your chances of surprising the enemy with a course of action that he did not plan for and thus improve your chances of victory.

Several examples of unpredictability are found in history. Hannibal's march across the Pyrenees and Alps to attack Rome from the north, (7:4) the German attack on France through Belgium in World War I (8:6) and General MacArthur's "Island Hopping" strategy in the Pacific in World War II. (9:336) In each case, the surprise of the action gained great advantage over the opposing forces who were unprepared for that particular course of action. Even the first two efforts which, because of other factors, did not ultimately lead to

the results their architect planned, did accomplish the immediate goal of gaining advantage over the enemy. In the third case, the action eventually led to victory against an enemy superior in numbers and having better strategic position.

Carl Von Clausewitz in On War expresses the importance of surprise in the following:

> Surprise therefore becomes the means to gain superiority, but because of its psychological effect it should also be considered as an independent element. Whenever it is achieved on a grand scale, it confuses the enemy and lowers his morale; many examples, great and small, show how this in turn multiplies the results. (10:198)

My contention is that Clausewitz's principle of surprise really rests in the mind of the commander. If he thinks along predictable lines, then he will give up the advantages that unpredictability (and surprise) can provide.

Decisiveness

Making good decisions and implementing them at the right time is another key element for success in combat. The consequences of choosing the wrong course of action or implementing the correct course of action at the wrong time can be catastrophic. Lives can be unnecessarily lost, precious resources

can be wasted and advantage can be given away to the enemy. Because the consequences are so great in combat, a good leader strives even harder to make good, timely decisions. However, there is a dilemma which the combat leader may have to face in the process of making his decisions. This dilemma is how to balance quick decisions resulting in quick actions against delaying a decision or an action to a more suitable time.

Young leaders are taught that decisiveness is a desirable skill. The ability to quickly appraise a situation and quickly make a decision is one of the traits we evaluate in our military performance reports. We reward and praise those officers who have this ability and imply that this is the one of the marks of a strong leader. We also teach that offensive actions are the ones that win battles, and that those who "make something happen" are more likely to be victorious than those who wait and react to the enemy. Because of this type of experience, leaders want to be decisive, want to take action. But, by acting quickly, there is the risk of making a rash and bad decision.

On the other hand, we teach that a wise leader is prudent. We cultivate problem solving methods which go through several painstaking steps to analyze the situation, determine courses of action, weigh the courses of action, and finally, select a course of action. We emphasize gathering all

information possible and looking at several courses of action before making a decision. We almost drive a leader to the point of trying to make the perfect decision in all situations. Yet, in reality, the perfect course of action is rarely attainable, and delaying a decision or action in pursuit of the perfect option may actually result in an advantage for the enemy.

Experienced leaders understand this dilemma. They realize that they must not only select the best course of action, but they must also consider when it is best to implement that course of action. They recognize that the timing can be as critical, if not more critical, than the action itself. The successful combat leader accurately balances his desire for quick action and the importance of proper timing. He is neither reckless, nor unnecessarily restrained.

Passion To Succeed

It would be an understatement to say that combat is a difficult undertaking. In fact, it may be the most challenging enterprise that mankind has ever or will ever become involved in. It is one of only a very few human activities where loss of life and destruction is an accepted consequence. It is also unique because in combat one person, the leader,

knowingly directs actions which will result in the loss of the lives of fellow human beings.

To successfully lead troops in this demanding environment requires a person with a tremendous passion for success. A person who can remain focused on the objectives in spite of the emotional events taking place around him. Wess Roberts in his book Leadership Secrets of Attila The Hun discusses this characteristic in a chapter about Attila's idea that to be a successful chieftain "you've got to want to be in charge." (11:23) Two quotes from this infamous, but effective, combat leader illustrate my point. Attila, instructing his Huns on the attributes necessary to be a chieftain, offers, among others, these thoughts. "You must have resilience to overcome personal misfortunes, discouragement, rejection and disappointment." (11:26) And, he continues, "You must have a passion to succeed--a passion that drives you to prepare yourself and your Huns to excel." (11:27)

I think the main point is that given the nature of combat and the stress combat can place on a leader, the leader must have an incredible desire to succeed. And, that desire must allow him to overlook the horrors around him and to maintain a clear focus on the objective--victory.

You have probably seen the organizational skills I will discuss in one form or another in various articles and books. However, the following thoughts are a synthesis of ideas presented to me at the Air War College during the first course in the curriculum on Command Leadership. The concepts were presented by two former Air Force general officers in their books and lectures. The first is General Wilbur L. Creech who authored a pamphlet entitled Organizational Principles (12) and the second is Major General Perry M. Smith who authored a book called Taking Charge. (13) The following is my interpretation of the advice provided by these two individuals. I will comment on five specific areas and then attempt to show why these skills are important in combat.

Setting Goals

Setting goals is the most important organizational skill for the leader of any large organization. He must establish goals, both long and short term, so the organization knows which direction it should be going and what the desired outcome should be. I think the principle is fairly clear in small organizations where the goals are relatively easy to establish and measure (e.g. on-time takeoffs at squadron level), but can be extremely difficult for the leader of a large organization because of the nature and size of his responsibilities. Therefore, the leader of a large

organization must prepare himself for this important task by study, reading and discussion. He should study past histories of similar organizations, read about current thinking concerning large organizations and discuss those histories and readings with other leaders. Then, he must apply his own understanding of how his organization fits into the big picture (how it supports national goals) and finally arrive at the goals his organization will pursue and the principles it will use in achieving those goals. Once established, the next critical element is communicating those goals to the members of the organization.

Communication

Communication is the second most important skill for a leader of a large organization. Goals that exist only in the mind of the leader are worthless. Once established, the leader must communicate the goals very clearly to every member of the organization and ensure that his subordinates understand and support the goals. In a large organization, this is a very difficult task because of the various levels the message must flow through and the danger of misinterpretation at any level. To help alleviate the problem, the leader must ensure two things. First, that he is an excellent communicator and second, that communication channels are open within the organization--up, down and laterally.

Developing his own skills takes study and practice; developing the open system in the organization takes careful, constant watching to ensure that obstacles to communication are removed and do not reappear. If the leader is successful in developing good communication in the organization, his goals and principles will more likely become the goals and principles of each member of the organization and will lead to the entire organization devoting its efforts to accomplishing its mission better. However, the only way to be sure that the desired results are taking place is to establish some way to measure performance.

Measuring Performance

Once goals are established and understood, the leader must ensure that there is an objective way of determining how well the organization is accomplishing those goals. A well thought-out, easy to understand system must be developed and implemented. Above all, the measuring system must be simple. It should not create a myriad of reports that only "intellectual geniuses" can understand. It must be visible to all members of the organization. It must be responsive, that is, it must point out shortcomings in a timely manner. Finally, it must be a system with integrity.

If a proper measurement system is established and the organization has an effective, open communication system, the leader will have a clear picture of how well the organization is doing, where the strong and weak points are, and where he must devote his resources to keep the organization on track. This keeps the leader from wasting resources and keeps the organization from becoming static, either of which can severely damage an organization.

Developing Leaders

Developing leaders within an organization is critical to the long term health of the organization. However, it is sometimes costly in the near term. By this I mean that to develop leaders you must be willing to establish and communicate goals, then "let go." Let them develop and implement the specifics of how to achieve the goals. And, here is the potential problem or dilemma. What if the subordinate leader is making mistakes? What does the senior leader do?

I think the senior leader must always keep two things in mind as he answers these questions. First, the senior leader does not own the organization; rather he is there to guide it to success (victory). And, second, the subordinate leaders must be allowed to develop if the organization is to be

successful long term. So, as a subordinate leader encounters problems and the senior leader gets feedback through his open communication and objective measurement systems, the first action of the senior leader should be to discuss the problem with the subordinate leader and help guide him to a solution. Only when the issue is critical to the health of the organization should the senior leader step-in and directly handle the problem. By allowing the subordinate leaders to "manage their mistakes" the senior leader will be developing the future top leaders of the organization.

One last point concerning subordinate leaders. If the senior leader does objectively determine that a subordinate leader is not able to handle his responsibilities, he must remove the subordinate leader before he causes critical damage to the organization and the people in it. By removing I do not necessarily mean destroying the subordinate's career. Perhaps the individual is better suited to some other area of the organization and could contribute there more effectively. The senior leader must evaluate the individual in terms of the organization's mission and goals, and determine the individual's suitability. If the analysis indicates the two are not compatible, then the senior leader must, for the good of the organization, remove (fire) the subordinate leader. The key is that the senior leader must deal with people objectively and fairly. If he does not, he could do more damage than the

subordinate leader's incompetence would have done. Caring for and guiding the people in an organization is one of the more difficult and time consuming duties of the senior leader.

Taking Care of People

People are the most important element in any organization. Without people, you really do not have an organization, you only have an empty skeleton. Setting goals, communicating, and developing leaders are all meaningless without considering the people. Therefore, the leader must ensure that the members of his organization are cared for--at all levels.

Taking care of people requires the constant attention of the leader. He must be aware of all things that impact his people and their performance. He must build visible programs to reward excellence. He must ensure that weaker members are helped and trained, for an organization is only as strong as its weakest link. He must make sure that the "invisible people," those whose contributions are significant but often low key, are rewarded and noticed. As General Creech said at the Air War College, "Put the business in their hearts, and their hearts will be in the business." (14) When the people believe the leadership cares about them, the people usually have positive attitudes. Organizations in which the people have positive attitudes are more likely to be successful than

those that do not have this situation. And, the leader is the one who must instill and develop this positive attitude at all levels.

Now, how do these skills relate to combat? I believe all five skills I just discussed are as critical in combat as they are in peacetime--perhaps even more. The main difference is that in combat there is a time compression factor that changes the method of implementation.

In combat, the leader must expeditiously establish the goals of the unit and communicate those goals clearly and rapidly to his subordinate leaders. A fighting unit must clearly understand its goals and the intent of the senior commander, or it will not contribute effectively to the overall goal of winning the war. The leader must communicate the goals and let his subordinate commanders implement. Objective feedback, through a good measurement system, will then allow the leader to assess the effectiveness of his organization, and make necessary changes quickly and accurately.

In wartime, taking care of your people is even more critical. Morale and health are not "nice to have" items in combat, they are absolute necessities. Regardless of the sophistication of your weapons, you need well trained, highly

motivated people to fight and win a war. History has shown that forces superior in weaponry and size with poor morale can be defeated by an lesser force with high morale and commitment to the goals of the organization.

I agree that in combat it may more difficult to train leaders because of the critical nature of the situation. But, I still believe that this can be accomplished if the senior leader follows the ideas presented above and watches the situation carefully. By this I mean that he should still let his subordinates implement decisions and "manage their mistakes," but he must be keenly aware of the cost involved. If the cost appears to be unreasonable, the senior leader must step in, and resolve the problem. He can not waste people or other resources at this critical time. People, for ethical reasons; resources for the practical reason of winning the war.

Overall, I see the organizational leadership skills that work in peacetime as basically sound in wartime if the leader recognizes the change in the situation and modifies his actions accordingly. The skills themselves do not change, rather the implementation changes--mainly due to time constraints and the criticality of the situation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Up to this point, I have attempted to show why I believe the 1990s will challenge the quality of the combat leaders of the U.S. military forces and what skills I think are important to combat leaders. Now, what can be done to ensure that the U.S. continues to have the highest quality combat leaders?

I see the task of training and developing combat leaders as the joint responsibility of both the individual and the military services. The individual through personal study and professional reading, and the military services through formal training programs and combat training exercises.

Because combat is so serious a business, individuals interested in becoming successful combat leaders must make a personal commitment to learning all they can about their unforgiving profession and the situations they might find themselves involved in. Because human lives are at risk and mass destruction is a potential outcome of combat, combat leaders must be as prepared as possible for the decisions they will face.

Although not a substitute for combat experience, reading about and studying past military leaders can significantly improve one's understanding of the issues encountered in

combat. These studies should include both successful and unsuccessful leaders, American and non-American leaders. Studying the successful leaders will teach you which strategies, tactics and plans were effective in a particular situation and time. Studying unsuccessful leaders will show you some of the pitfalls to avoid. Not limiting yourself to American leaders, will broaden your horizons and keep your mind open to different ideas about conducting warfare.

If you are able to identify specific responsibilities you will have in wartime, you can significantly improve your ability. If there is a potential adversary that you might find yourself opposing, reading about his ideas, organization and tactics will prepare you to successfully outsmart him on the battlefield. If there is a particular area of the world where you might engage in battle, studying the region terrain and resources could provide you with insights that will give you an edge in conflict. Understanding the customs and history of a potential adversary could show you a weakness you could exploit or a strength you should avoid. Similarly, studying neutral and friendly peoples and territories in the areas you are likely to be conducting operations may give you an insight that can benefit you.

The point is the more prepared you are, the better your chances of success. And, this preparation basically is and

will be the responsibility of the individual leader. Perhaps a good way to summarize this idea is with this quote from Major General Perry M. Smith.

> Leadership skills can be improved by reading, discussion, use of case studies, and wrestling with concepts. By learning from mistakes of others and by thinking through leadership problems and issues, leaders will be better prepared to face most challenges. (13:xvii)

Although General Smith was not specifically speaking about combat in this paragraph, I think the premise applies very well to a leader preparing himself for the uncertainties of conflict. The current Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Alfred M. Gray, Jr. also agrees that professional reading is important in improving the quality of combat leaders. Recently, General Gray instituted a mandatory professional reading program for all officers in the Marine Corps. (15) Each officer is required to periodically read a book from a published reading list and is expected to discuss and analyze the concepts expressed in the book with fellow officers. The expected result is an officer corps that has assimilated and critically examined the best ideas written about combat and combat leadership. General Gray's program also shows how the service can help the individual achieve success in a personal development program. Now, let me address ways that the services can directly develop and maintain expert combat leadership.

As combat veterans and highly qualified officers leave the services, formal training programs and combat exercises become progressively more important. These are the prime opportunities for the services to communicate the formal knowledge acquired from those who have served in combat to those leaders who have not. These opportunities are vital to the development of new combat leaders and must be protected and expanded as the numbers of experienced officers and combat veterans decreases.

Professional military education institutions need to concentrate even more than they do now on military strategy, tactics and leadership. The broad curriculum now being taught at some of these institutions is indeed very beneficial to the services because they improve the overall quality of the officer corps in all the services. But, they do not cultivate the combat leadership skills of the officers attending the schools as much as they could. If these schools focused more on the skills mentioned above, the result could be more competent, more confident combat leaders. But, an even more fundamental change needs to be made in order to implement this type of curriculum.

The officers selected to attend these schools would have to be limited to those individuals in the specific career

fields where the services expect to get their future combat leaders. This is not true today. Today, the officers attending these schools are the ones expected to be the future leaders of their services, but they are not necessarily their future combat leaders. They come from all specialties in all services, and many will never be a combat commander. I'm not saying that these officers and their services do not benefit from the education they receive. But, I am saying that in the future if we want these institutions to produce leaders capable of leading troops to victory in combat, we may have to change both the nature of curriculum and the composition of the student body.

Combat exercises are the final area I see as having great potential for developing and maintaining high quality combat leadership. These exercises are the closest thing we have to the real thing, and used properly can provide invaluable experience for our leaders, especially those who have never seen combat. The more realistic and difficult they are, the better the results. They can not be scripted affairs, with the participants merely playing a role. They must allow for individual initiative, unorthodox ideas and, even more importantly, failure.

The outcomes of these exercises should not be foregone conclusions. Yet, I believe that today we are getting closer

and closer to that situation occurring. There is great pressure on the developers and players in combat exercises to meet the exercise objectives, even if it means restraining free play and innovative ideas. I do not mean to sound like this is some kind of evil plot on anyone's part. The people who put these exercises together work very hard to make them run as smoothly as possible. The constraints they operate under make it very difficult to achieve the objectives of the exercise and still allow free play and innovative action. But, this is exactly what must be done, or our upcoming leaders, who have no actual combat experience, will develop a mindset that believes that things happen in a certain way under a certain set of conditions. And, we know that especially in combat this is not true. The fog and friction of war usually intervene and make the unexpected a reality. Therefore, we must design exercises to allow combat leaders to try their ideas and observe the results. This is the time and place for failure, when the bullets and bombs are not real.

However, even if we could design and conduct the perfect exercise, our main problem in the nineties may be securing the funding to conduct these exercises. As the budget shrinks because of "peace breaking out all over," exercises become an lucrative target for budget cuts. They are an appealing target because cutting them does not appear to be as damaging as decreasing force size or closing bases. But, in the long

run, their reduction may be even more detrimental to our nation's military capability. The current military leadership in this country must ensure that we do not decrease this vital training disproportionately to the size and needs of our force. Again, I realize this is not a simple issue. I also realize that there are many people at the Pentagon and other headquarters who understand the importance of training better than I do. But, as I said earlier, it was a curious omission from the majority of the guest lecturers' presentations at the Air War College this year. And, that omission left me with an uneasy feeling.

CONCLUSION

The United States has enjoyed the benefit of having some of the finest combat leaders in history. Today, the quality of the combat leaders in the U.S. armed forces is second to none. But, the last decade of the twentieth century may see several changes in the world, the country and the military which could adversely impact the quality of the combat leaders in the U.S. fighting forces. These changes are the increasing number of highly qualified, mid-level officers electing to retire at twenty years of service rather than staying on to assume the senior leadership positions, the approach of the twentieth year since our involvement in Vietnam and the resultant loss of many of our combat veterans due to normal

retirements, and finally, the extensive changes taking place in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union and their impacts on U.S. military budgets and programs.

If the United States is to continue to enjoy the benefits of having the best combat leaders, the individuals who make up the next generation of combat leaders and their services must take the steps necessary to develop that leadership. The future combat leader must undertake rigorous programs of personal study and professional reading; the military services must place increased emphasis on formal training programs and realistic combat exercises. The combination of these elements can ensure that American combat leaders remain the best in the world.

Obviously, I do not have a crystal ball to see into the future. And, as current events in the Soviet Union prove, trying to predict the future can be a very risky and imprecise undertaking. But, my observations and experience tell me that there is a real potential for problems with U.S. combat leadership in the next decade.

If your crystal ball indicates a different future, I hope you are correct. But, I urge you to keep a close watch on the quality of U.S. combat leaders as we progress into the decade

of the nineties. And, be prepared to take action if your crystal ball begins to change its image.

If your crystal ball is cloudy or if it agrees with my conjecture, take every opportunity to raise this issue and support those programs that will help ensure that our nation continues to develop the best combat leaders possible. The men and women in uniform and our country deserve nothing less.

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