

**STRATEGY
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**MG (RET) BENJAMIN J. BUTLER:
A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE OF LEADERSHIP
ON THE BATTLEFIELD**

BY

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ON THE BATTLEFIELD**

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ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: LTC DAVID L. EVANS

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This paper is a study in leadership. It is based on the World War II experiences of Major General (Retired) Benjamin J. Butler using the July 1990 version of Army Field Manual 22-100 "*Military Leadership*" as its framework. This study is about a leader who consistently displayed his knowledge, skills, and abilities in meeting battlefield challenges by instilling in his soldiers a will to "fight and win."

Though this paper represents only a brief overview of MG Butler's World War II experiences, it archives an important part of history wherein an individual leader demonstrated the motives and traits necessary to be successful in combat and in life. Specifically, this paper emphasizes to students, as future military commanders, the importance of studying history and the challenges faced by past leaders in applying the art of war.

As part of the Military History Institute's Senior Officer Oral History Program, Lieutenant Colonel David L. Evans conducted interviews with MG Butler in January and February 1998. These accounts of historically significant events experienced by MG

Butler will provide future students and military commanders with a more thorough perspective of leadership on the battlefield in World War II. The MG Butler autobiographical interview transcripts are in the archives at the U. S. Army Military History Institute, 22 Ashburn Drive, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013-5008.

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MG (RET) BENJAMIN J. BUTLER:
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"Wars may be fought with weapons, but they are won by men. It is spirit of the men who follow and the men who lead that gains the victory."

Gen. George S. Patton, Jr.

OVERVIEW

This paper is a study in leadership. Recognizing that leaders emerge as a result of historical forces, we must, at the same time, recognize the impact particular leaders make on history.¹

We gain insight by studying military history. Our study of what combat was like for leaders in the past will enable us to better understand and relate those leadership challenges to those faced by military leaders today.²

The study of history is a must for military commanders. Napoleon recognized this as he "advised his officers to read and re-read the campaigns of the great captains."³ Machiavelli, in his book *The Prince*, wrote:

*"To exercise the intellect a man should read histories, and study there the actions of illustrious men, to see how they have borne themselves in war, to examine the causes of their victories and defeat."*⁴

"War is a grave concern of the state; it must be thoroughly studied."⁵ This is wise advice for any student of war as history shows "that over the ages military commanders have based their operations on the same principles of war as we use today."⁶

Studying past battles and the leaders on the battlefield is one way leading to this understanding. A leader in combat demonstrates certain characteristics or traits. As an introduction to this topic, it must be understood that "to lead in combat, you must be competent and courageous, demonstrate initiative, understand human nature, consistently set the example, and inspire others."⁷ Benjamin J. Butler was such a leader, as shown by his combat experiences during World War II. By the end of World War II, now retired Major General Benjamin J. Butler had served in leadership positions to include Training Officer (Lieutenant), Company Commander (Captain), battalion and regimental operations positions (Captain-Major) and Battalion Commander (Lieutenant Colonel).

"The ancient linguistic root of the word 'to lead' means 'to go forth, die.' In our time, leadership in the military aims to draw forth a person's highest qualities, by influence more than coercion."⁸ As pointed out in Army Field Manual FM 22-100, *Military Leadership*, "in battle, you must inspire your soldiers to do things against their natural will--possibly to risk their lives--to carry out missions for the greater good of the unit,

the Army, and the country."⁹ Major General Butler was such a leader. The lethality of weapons and machinery on the current or future battlefield may change, but certain other aspects will not. "Human nature has not changed since man first engaged in war; leaders and soldiers in future battles will experience the same fears and emotions felt in past battles. Leadership will continue to be the most essential element of combat power, providing the key to mission accomplishment, winning battles, and protecting the ideals of our nation."¹⁰

Before exploring the core traits, motives and historical examples, it is imperative that we have a clear understanding of what constitutes leadership. FM 22-100, *Military Leadership*, defines leadership as "the process of influencing others to accomplish the mission by providing purpose, direction, and motivation. Purpose gives soldiers a reason why they should do difficult things under dangerous, stressful circumstances. Direction gives soldiers an orientation of tasks to be accomplished based on the priorities set by the leader. Motivation gives the soldiers the will to do everything they are capable of doing to accomplish a mission; it causes soldiers to use their initiative when they see the need for action."¹¹

Edwin Locke in his book *The Essence of Leadership* defines "leadership as the process of inducing others to take action toward a common goal. This definition subsumes three elements:

- Leadership exists only in relation to others--namely, followers.
- Leadership is a process. In order to lead, the leader must do something.
- Leaders induce their followers to act in numerous ways."¹²

Locke's model is based on four elements: essential core motives and traits, a leader's knowledge, skills and ability, vision, and the leader's capacity to implement their vision.¹³ The core motives identified are drive and motivation. Sub elements of drive include achievement, ambition, energy, tenacity, and initiative. A sub element of motivation is the want of personalized or socialized power motives. Core traits identified by Locke include honesty, integrity, and self-confidence. Other characteristics needed include originality, creativity, flexibility, adaptability, and charisma.¹⁴

"Acts of leadership take place in an unimaginable variety of settings, and the setting does much to determine the kinds of leader that emerge and how they play their roles."¹⁵ This paper focuses on leadership in action. The present day version of FM 22-100, *Military Leadership*, will provide the evaluation criteria as we take a historical look at leadership on the battlefield using some of the World War II experiences of now Retired Major General Benjamin J. Butler.

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

Benjamin J. Butler was commissioned an Infantry Second Lieutenant in May 1941. While in attendance at the Infantry Officer Basic Course, Butler was among the new Lieutenants given an orientation by Brigadier General Omar Bradley. Butler would never forget one quote from that orientation by Bradley -- "No greater responsibility ever befell a man than to lead an Infantry Battalion in combat."¹⁶ Butler learned that "the taking of responsibility is at the heart of leadership."¹⁷ This was a philosophy he would never forget.

Following his commissioning, LT Butler was assigned as a Platoon Leader in a training company at Camp Wheeler, Georgia. In this assignment he learned about the human elements associated with leadership. He learned the trainee's names, something about them and their families. Butler also had the maturity to realize the importance of training and preparing his soldiers. In doing this he kept the training interesting, the soldiers active, and the standards high.¹⁸

From the very beginning of his military career, Benjamin J. Butler seemed destined to be a great leader. Early on he realized "the best leaders and best teachers understand that the individual's performance is influenced by what others expect of him or her. If one is leading, teaching, dealing with young people, or engaged in any other activity that involves

influencing, directing, guiding, helping or nurturing, the whole tone of the relationship will be conditioned by one's faith in human possibilities."¹⁹

Other key attributes developed in this assignment included taking the initiative, use of good judgment, integrity in standing up for what is right. Butler learned that training new soldiers is the most difficult and demanding task facing a military leader. However, he also knew it was the most important.²⁰

Even in his early military assignments, Butler demonstrated the leadership qualities of **BE, KNOW, DO**. He was a leader who showed a strong determination, initiative, and flexibility even in his initial assignments. There were other qualities evident as well. He demonstrated unquestionable devotion to duty, integrity, self-discipline, and selfless service as he became a role model for new soldiers entering the Army. As identified in FM 22-100, a leader must be a person who exemplifies individual values, have a strong and honorable character and "be committed to the professional Army ethic."²¹

His initial assignment as a Platoon Leader in a Training Company provided LT Butler with his first real opportunity to demonstrate his confidence and competence as a leader. In this task he knew and applied Army standards in teaching, coaching, and counseling newly enlisted soldiers. By studying human

nature, and recognizing its importance to successful leadership, Butler soon knew his unit's capabilities and limitations. This enabled him to develop disciplined soldiers and cohesive units within the time frame allowed prior to the soldiers graduating from basic training. These traits are examples of what a leader must **KNOW** to be successful.²²

NORTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGN

Benjamin J. Butler began his combat service in the North African Campaign when he arrived overseas in February 1943 as a replacement to the 34th Infantry (Red Bull) Division. The Allies were on the defense in Tunisia. However, "the Americans were committed to their share of the task of driving the Germans and Italians from the north shore of Africa."²³ It was in the pursuance of this task that Benjamin J. Butler received his first overseas assignment.

By this time Butler had been promoted to the rank of Captain. The new Regimental Commander Frederick B. Butler (who later became known as the 'JEB Stuart' of World War II and was not related to Benjamin J. Butler)²⁴ assigned CPT Butler as the Regimental Liaison Officer. In this assignment Butler physically tracked and verified reported regimental unit locations. It was during this assignment that Butler got his baptism to fire. He

was subjected to sniper fire, machine gun fire, Stuka bombings and strafing.²⁵

One author described this as "truly open warfare. There were no flanks, no front and practically no rear. One had to be prepared for enemy in every direction. Progress was registered in miles, not in yards. The German airforce was a constant threat..."²⁶ "The only concealment came from scattered clumps of cactus or stunted olive trees which were interspersed over the ground."²⁷

In March 1943 CPT Butler was assigned as M Company Commander in the 168th Regiment. This assignment followed the battle for Hill 609 (Djebel Tahent) in which the former Company Commander was captured by the Germans.²⁸ It was after this battle that the "34th Division found itself."²⁹ General Omar Bradley, Commander of II Corps (which included Fifth Army), in his official report to the War Department described the fighting at Hill 609 as follows:

"A strong enemy was repulsed. Fighting all day was intense and bloody. The enemy was engaged with bayonet and grenade, and there were many cases of outstanding bravery."³⁰

By May 1943, the North African Campaign was in its final days. CPT Butler's company was assigned to prepare a staging area at Tunis where the 3rd Division would prepare for the Invasion of Italy. His company also carried ammo for the British anti aircraft guns located at Ferryville.³¹

Fighting in North Africa had been fierce with the Fifth Army, which included the 34th Infantry Division, suffering many casualties (4,254 men wounded, killed or missing).³² The blame for this large number of casualties was placed on having raw green troops when, in fact, there was a leadership and equipment problem. For example, new soldiers arriving in theater did not receive any orientation prior to their arrival and there was no initial training after their arrival. Soldiers in the Division were issued Bazooka's the day before the battle at Fondouk Pass but they did not receive any training on the weapon. As a result, the Bazooka's were ineffectively employed against the newly fielded German Mark VI tanks.³³ (The 60 ton Mark VI Tigers were first employed in limited numbers during the battle at Kasserine-Faid Pass.)³⁴ In another example, CPT Butler knew of one replacement who arrived in theater without even having gone through basic training. As a result of poor training and preparation for the campaign, the Division experienced low morale and executed poor tactics. Simply stated, the 34th Division was ill-prepared for combat.³⁵

After the Axis surrender in Tunisia ended the North African Campaign in May 1943, the Fifth Army began its preparation for the Italian Campaign. A tough, efficient training program was established at Oran. Units rotated through this Invasion Training Center where they experienced realistic street fighting,

obstacle courses, live artillery barrages and live firing exercises using ball ammunition.³⁶ The soldiers of the Division, to include many new replacements, went through this rigorous combat training that included amphibious landing techniques.³⁷ Great emphasis was placed "on the training of small unit leaders and on the practical way to do things."³⁸ The Division was now considered "one of the toughest, most battle-wise, and experienced combat groups" in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations.³⁹

ITALIAN CAMPAIGN

In January 1943, the Allies had met in Casablanca and established their objectives for the year.⁴⁰ At this conference the American leadership agreed that, once North Africa was secure, it would join in "further operations as were necessary to clear the Mediterranean as a line of communications with the Middle East, with Russia (via the Persian Gulf), and with the Far East."⁴¹

The Allied High Command identified four main objectives for the invasion of Italy:⁴²

1. To retain the strategic initiative gained from the invasions of North Africa and Sicily,
2. To gain more control in the Mediterranean Sea (open sea line of communication),

3. To divert some German divisions away from Europe and to keep them from engaging the Russians, and

4. To provide the Allies with air bases that were located much closer to Austria and southern Germany.

The invasion of Italy was given the code name "Operation Avalanche." Fifth Army was given the mission to "seize the port of Naples and to secure the airfields in the Naples area with a view to preparing a firm base for further offensive operations."⁴³ Most of the 34th Division was to be held in reserve so the units did not pack for combat as they expected to disembark at a controlled port. The 168th and 135th Regiments (both units in the 34th Division) were designated as the first to board ships for Italy. However, the units soon discovered that the port of Naples was still controlled by German Forces.⁴⁴

This turned out to be a near disaster for the Division as their supporting weapons had been port loaded on another ship. The ships had to be diverted to the Salerno beachhead and had to stay at sea longer than planned. The water and supplies were almost depleted before the troops were allowed to land. While at sea, the troops were crowded onto Hindu transport ships. CPT Butler's company was crowded below decks where it was very difficult to get an air flow. To illustrate his initiative and innovative ability, CPT Butler designed a wind scoop to channel desperately needed air below decks to his troops. Once ashore in the Salerno-Benevento area, troops underwent training in the use

of close combat anti-tank weapons. This training would pay dividends in later fighting.⁴⁵

By October 1943, Naples had fallen to the Allies and the Germans had withdrawn to establish the first of their defensive lines (German Winter Line) which spanned the width of Italy.⁴⁶ One description of this German Winter Line identified it as consisting "of a system of interlocking defenses in depth." The line was so solidly emplaced that Allied military leaders doubted that there was any single position in the line that, if taken, would break the entire system.⁴⁷

Being the leader he was, CPT Butler knew tough, realistic field training would better prepare his soldiers for the battles they would experience and result in fewer casualties. Therefore, when not on the front line, he allowed an appropriate rest period, and then trained his troops instead of allowing them to go into town or waste their time.⁴⁸ By providing purpose, direction, and motivation to his unit in these rest halts, Butler successfully developed unit cohesiveness that inspired his troop's confidence and instilled in them a winning attitude. The importance of this was realized in the many days of continuous fighting in which his unit would be engaged.⁴⁹ Consistently, Butler exemplified the leadership quality of **DO** in his everyday life. He always believed in setting the example and stated his

philosophy this way -- "I would not ask the men to do anything I wouldn't do."⁵⁰

The Allies had resumed their offensive actions in September 1943 moving northward on the Italian Peninsula. The 168th Regiment was assigned the mission to spearhead the Division in crossing the Volturno River and securing several small towns and hills north of the river. By mid-October 1943, incessant rainfall had plagued the area. The ground was a quagmire and the cool, damp nights made it very cold for the troops. There was some minefields enroute to the river.⁵¹ By now CPT Butler was commanding Company A, 1st Battalion, 168th Infantry Regiment. The Germans had withdrawn to the northern side of the river so CPT Butler's unit experienced little resistance reaching the Volturno.⁵²

The bridges over the Volturno River had been blown. To cross the river soldiers would have to hold their rifles above their heads in the cold chest-high water.⁵³ In the 34th Division sector, the "river varied from 150 to 220 feet in width and from 3 to 5 feet in depth."⁵⁴ Its waters were swift and over the heads of soldiers in some places. The banks of the river were steep (5 to 15 feet high in some places) and overgrown with shrubbery.⁵⁵ Some of the division's soldiers in other companies drowned and equipment was lost during this first crossing of the Volturno River.⁵⁶

When the attack order was received, 1st Battalion was to take the lead. Further, CPT Butler's company was designated the lead company. Butler had learned early that the easiest route is not necessarily the best route. He arranged to get some assault boats and cross his company where the river was deeper rather than wading his troops across. In doing so his unit bypassed one of the largest minefields encountered by the Allies on the peninsula thus far. The unit came under heavy shelling while crossing the river but only sustained one casualty.⁵⁷ Though this is one example, it is an excellent example of how Butler demonstrated initiative that saved lives. It is important to note that instilling "in individuals at all levels a sense of initiative and responsibility" is one of the moral aspects of leadership.⁵⁸

Once across the river the unit encountered well-constructed defenses. The German machine guns were firing their final protective fires. However, their guns had been emplaced incorrectly causing the rounds to fire above the heads of the American soldiers. With tenacity, CPT Butler and his troops yelled and attacked the Germans who fled their defensive positions. Butler did not lose a man during this attack. A Company crossed the Volturno River two more times before getting to the German Winter Line. The reason for crossing the river three times was it meandered or as Butler said, it "coiled like a snake."⁵⁹ Again, Butler had demonstrated what a leader must **BE**

as he made hard decisions that instilled in his "soldiers the will to fight and the ability to win."⁶⁰

The 34th Division's next obstacle was the Winter Defense Line, the first of three defensive lines occupied by German Forces. The tactical situation now facing the Americans was best described in the book *Carl Von Clausewitz, On War*. "When attacking a widely extended line of defense in mountains, one will of course do so with a concentrated force; the whole position cannot possibly be outflanked. If one is aiming at a major victory it will have to be accomplished by piercing the enemy's lines and forcing his wings apart, rather than by surrounding the force and cutting it off."⁶¹

In executing the attack plan, the 168th Regiment was given the mission to seize four knobs that would give U. S. Forces the high ground on the northern anchor of the German defensive line. Again, CPT Butler's A Company, 1st Battalion, was chosen to be the lead company and their objective was to attack and secure Knob 1 (Monte Pantano). By this time, Butler was the most experienced commander in the Battalion. His troops had recently gone through some training during a rest and refit period. Their physical conditioning and morale were good. Even so the troops knew the going was going to be tough as they were facing a peak 1600 feet tall that was occupied by well-trained and well-equipped German soldiers. Low clouds and thick fog would ensure no air support for the attack.⁶² There was only one major trail

traversing up the steep eastern slope of Monte Pantano. The Germans, realizing any attacking forces would be channelized, heavily mined this approach and covered it with artillery and mortar fires.⁶³

On November 29, 1943, the battle for Monte Pantano began what one author called "one of the most dramatic episodes of the war."⁶⁴ A Company followed a rolling artillery barrage up slopes so steep that, near the top, mules could not even climb farther. Again, Butler had chosen this route rather than the easiest route that was heavily mined.⁶⁵ By selecting this tactic, Butler used a form of maneuver described by Sun Tzu centuries before: "The expert approaches his objective indirectly. By selection of a devious and distant route he may march a thousand li without opposition and take his enemy unaware. Such a commander prizes above all freedom of action."⁶⁶ For "he who knows the art of direct and the indirect approach will be victorious. Such is the art of maneuvering."⁶⁷

At one point A Company had outdistanced the rest of the Battalion and was directed to wait for them to close the gap. After deliberation with the Regimental Operations Officer, CPT Butler pressed on with the attack knowing the importance of seizing and retaining the initiative.⁶⁸ As described in *Sun Tzu: The Art Of War*, Butler conducted "a war of movement." He marched "with divine swiftness" creating conditions that were "certain to

produce a quick decision."⁶⁹ Surprise would be key to the Americans eventual success in securing Knob 1.⁷⁰

At 0900 the artillery barrage lifted. A Company fixed bayonets and engaged in battle with the Germans. A Company was successful in taking Knob 1 but much fighting lay ahead. For three days they faced unending counterattacks with point blank firing, bayonets, grenades along with artillery and mortar barrages. The Americans had problems keeping ammunition supplied, evacuating the wounded and preventing the Germans from over-running their position.⁷¹ At one point A Company ran out of ammunition and soldiers threw rocks and tin cans at the Germans. In one instance, one night the Germans broke through the flank and CPT Butler took his 16-17 man reserve, fixed bayonets, told them to yell to the top of their voice and make it sound like there were 100 Americans counterattacking. As a result, they repulsed the German breakthrough. Butler led by example and instilled in his troops a fighting spirit. His philosophy was "if we fight like demons we can repulse the devil."⁷²

Besides the lack of ammunition, grenades and litter bearers, there were still other problems that jeopardized mission accomplishment at Monte Pantano:⁷³

- There was no air support.
- Lack of communications with the artillery support units.

- Need for lighter machine guns in mountainous terrain. In this operation, the heavy weapons company did not have the sufficient means to transport their weapons. When in a situation where weapons must be carried, there should have been a changeover from the water-cooled guns to lighter machine guns such as used in the rifle companies.
- Lack of proper reconnaissance and need for better, larger scale maps.
- Need for medical supplies.
- Lack of water.

After three days of successful fighting A Company, having borne the brunt of fighting, was relieved. "Of the seven officers and 173 enlisted men who had first attacked Knob 1, only two officers and fewer than 60 enlisted men walked off Pantano; many were wounded. Capt. Butler, wounded three times, was one of them."⁷⁴ Butler had led his troops in the assault, rallied them in defense of the knob, led elements in bayonet charges, and directed defenses even though wounded. For his extraordinary heroism in this action, CPT Butler was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross.⁷⁵

Again, CPT Butler's drive (energy, tenacity, initiative) on the battlefield inspired his soldiers to overcome their fears and risk their lives to carry out the mission directed. Despite the great stress he and his soldiers were experiencing on the

battlefield, CPT Butler was still capable of inspiring his troops because of his understanding of human nature.⁷⁶ As stated in FM 22-100:

"Understanding the human element will help us win in situations where we may be outnumbered or face an enemy with excellent weapons and equipment."⁷⁷

The efforts of A Company and the 1st Battalion resulted in the German Winter Line being unhinged, but at a great price. Fighting for the knobs cost the 168th Regiment 511 casualties many of which were out of the 1st Battalion.⁷⁸ Monte Pantano was described as being an "unforgettable scene of carnage."⁷⁹ Forty years later, shortly before his death in 1984, General Mark Clark (Fifth Army Commander during World War II) met with then retired Major General Benjamin J. Butler. During this meeting "General Clark told Butler that Pantano was the most intensely fought battle he knew of in the three wars of his experience--World War I, World War II and the Korean War."⁸⁰

The battle for Monte Pantano is a great example of leadership in action. Due to CPT Butler's philosophy on troop readiness, his unit had gone through tough, realistic training that developed the discipline and cohesion necessary to be a combat effective unit. When it was time for battle, the soldiers in A Company, 168th Regiment had confidence in the competence of their leader and themselves. This gave them the physical and moral

courage to fight and win in fulfilling their commitment and serving the values of our nation.⁸¹

"The true attributes of leadership can be boiled down to character, decision and action..." History proves that when a crisis occurs our nation needs leaders who will "get on with the job and do something, taking risks if necessary..." Benjamin J. Butler was such a leader. He was prepared to take full control in emergency situations. Butler also had the courage and determination to achieve success on the battlefield and in life.⁸²

Before continuing the fight in December 1943, CPT Butler's company got two weeks rest and refit time. As mentioned previously, Butler believed in keeping his troops active even during rest halts. This was especially important to build cohesion and confidence since the unit was continuously receiving new replacements. Even under the most arduous field conditions, Butler insisted on realistic training and physical conditioning.⁸³

The importance of this cannot be overstated. II Corps Generals Patton and Bradley both signed a letter, dated March 1943, which stated: "There is far too little emphasis placed on the hardening of men. When soldiers are in actual contact with the enemy, it is almost impossible to maintain physical condition but if the physical condition is high before they gain contact,

it will not fall off sufficiently during contact to be detrimental."⁸⁴

This training and conditioning were important because the unit's next significant action was near Cassino in February 1944. Cassino was Field Marshall Kesselring's western anchor to the Winter Defense Line. The Germans knew that "if Cassino was lost to the Allies the road to Rome would be open." The mission of the 168th Regiment was to execute an encircling movement to the north; then curl southward and seize the hills north of Cassino.⁸⁵ The German defense included reinforced artillery using Nebelwerfers. The rockets fired from these multiple rocket launchers gave off an eerie noise that earned them the name "screaming meemies."⁸⁶

During the attack CPT Butler and his men actually reached the vicinity of the Monastery. They were behind the Abbey by dark and looking down on the German Headquarters. Elements of the 135th Regiment were on their right. Highway 6 was only 1,000 yards away. Butler wanted to cut the highway but was ordered to hold in place pending a coordinated attack scheduled two days later. Because of the Regimental Commander's failure to exercise boldness and seize this important objective, the Germans were able to commit their main reserve that arrived just hours before the coordinated attack began. Attempts to cut the highway failed. The weather worsened and the divisional units began to experience supply problems. Failure to take the risk and seize the

initiative resulted in the 34th Division's failure to take its objective.⁸⁷ Elements of the 168th Regiment had made it to Monastery Hill but were ordered to withdraw.⁸⁸ Incessant rains, snow, fierce fighting with bayonets and hand grenades had taken their toll. "The Division had sustained so many losses that its effectiveness was compromised." Ironically, the 34th Division was "replaced by five Allied Divisions."⁸⁹ The division was then given a rest halt that allowed units to regroup, train and begin preparing for their next mission. During this halt, the 1st Battalion Commander was transferred to another regiment. Butler was given command of 1st Battalion.⁹⁰

The next major commitment of the 34th Division was the amphibious end-run to Anzio. In March 1944, CPT Butler's battalion was sent to the Anzio Beachhead. The beachhead was described as a coastal strip, approximately 19 miles in length and 10 miles inland, upon which 70,000 men and 18,000 vehicles were crammed. The troops were subjected to enemy fire and artillery attacks both day and night. One description of the situation stated, "so great was the Allied concentration on the beach that the enemy couldn't miss even if he were firing blind." For the next two weeks the 34th Division was subjected to this shelling.⁹¹ Butler's unit conducted frequent patrols during this period. As a result, Butler knew the terrain in front of the lines like the back of his hand. One night he and his patrol

discovered an unreported intensive minefield that would have to be breached when the breakout from the beachhead began.⁹²

There were far too many unknowns and poor decisions at Anzio. For example, when orders arrived in May 1944 to conduct the breakout, the 1st Armored Division was on the 34th Division's right. Butler explained to higher headquarters that it would only be a short distance until the armored division would be facing the mountains and would be unable to maneuver. This would leave the infantry in open terrain. However, the plan was not changed and, as a result, the armor had to criss-cross the infantry on the battlefield.⁹³

A couple of days before the Anzio breakout occurred, Butler was replaced as the 1st Battalion Commander by a Major, who had been the Regimental S-2. Butler was reassigned as the Assistant Regimental S-3. However, this reassignment was short-lived. During the breakout the 2nd Battalion Commander was wounded in action. In addition, two of the companies in the battalion were pinned down by machine gun fire on Gennaro Ridge. "No one would take command" of the battalion so they asked CPT Butler if he would. Butler proceeded to police up troops separated from their units and to rescue the two companies that were pinned down on the ridge. A few days later, a Lieutenant Colonel was assigned to the Regiment and given command of 2nd Battalion. Butler remained as Battalion Executive Officer.⁹⁴

As the 34th Division continued its drive towards Rome, the 168th Regiment was in hot pursuit of the Germans who were occupying hastily prepared defenses along the way. As the regiment approached the village of Villa Crocetta it encountered fierce resistance. They soon discovered the village "had been turned into a fortress containing over a battalion of infantry reinforced with tanks and self-propelled guns."⁹⁵

On May 29, 1944, the 168th Regiment was conducting its third attack in two days on Villa Crocetta. Four more attempts were made to storm the enemy but all failed. Under the intense fire, troops became disoriented and units were separated. The Regiment had taken many casualties. The records of the 168th Regiment show that "the troops were no longer confident in the eventual success of the operation." It was during this fighting that the 1st Battalion Commander was wounded and evacuated. CPT Butler assumed command of 1st Battalion.⁹⁶ By now it had become obvious to the Regimental Commander that Butler had the "capacity and the will to rally men to a common purpose, and the character which will inspire confidence."⁹⁷ Still, he retained this position only a few days before a new Battalion Commander was assigned.

By June 1944, the Germans were in full retreat. The 34th Division was advancing day and night in pursuit of the fleeing enemy. The 168th Regiment passed through the 133rd Regiment enroute to the southern outskirts of Rome. However, the 34th

Division did not pause there and continued their pursuit of the Germans.⁹⁸ CPT Butler was placed in charge of a Task Force initially sent 18 miles north of Rome. Their mission was to ensure the enemy could not launch an attack as Fifth Army Commander, General Clark, entered Rome. The remaining elements of the 168th Regiment moved on to capture the port at Civitavecchia, 40 miles north of Rome.⁹⁹

Fifth Army units were now advancing rapidly up the Italian boot. After fierce, bloody fighting with the crack German 26th Panzer Grenadier Division, 1st and 3rd Battalions of the 168th Regiment captured Castellina. The Germans now withdrew to the Arno River with elements of the 34th Division pursuing them.¹⁰⁰

By this time Ben Butler had been promoted to Major and was the Regimental S-3. He was given the mission to take a reconnaissance group from Pisa to Florence. There he was to link up with British Forces, conduct an undercover assessment of the situation and report back to the Division. After successfully completing this mission, Butler returned to discover his division had been replaced by the 91st Division. The 34th Division had moved to the rear for a well-earned rest and refitting period.¹⁰¹

It was during this period of time that Prime Minister Winston Churchill addressed the soldiers of Fifth Army. Churchill spoke these words to the troops:

"You have done deeds which will long be remembered. In the earliest landings in Italy, the long fighting at Anzio beachhead, the battle of the Cassino front, and the capture

of Rome and Leghorn--all of these are episodes which have played a fruitful and invaluable part in the entire scheme and design of the Allied Armies. No operation could have been more fruitful in this theater than the work which you have done by drawing away perhaps two dozen or more divisions down into Italy where they have been torn to pieces."¹⁰²

In September 1944, after their brief rest, the 34th Division again engaged in the fighting. They soon discovered that the Germans had constructed three major defensive lines in northern Italy. The first was called the Arno Line. This line was in the mountains just north of the Arno River and it swung southward to the Adriatic Sea. In the West, about 15 miles north of Pisa, the Germans had yet another defensive line called the Gothic Line.¹⁰³ To construct this line the Germans had conscripted 50,000 Italians to clear fields of fire, build bunkers, lay barbed wire, and to emplace anti-personnel mines in the barbed wire.¹⁰⁴ The third defensive line was the Apennine Line. Located some 50 miles north of the Arno River, this line ran along the peaks of the mountains overlooking the Po Valley.¹⁰⁵

Early in September Allied Forces began their attack on the Arno Line. The 34th Division entered the attack on September 10. By nightfall, the 168th Regiment had fought its way to the slopes of Monte Frassino, some 16 miles to the north. The regiment was then relieved by the 135th Regiment. On September 12 all units continued the attack and the Arno Line was crushed.¹⁰⁶ During this action the 2nd Battalion Commander was wounded and MAJ

Butler assumed command of the Battalion for a second time.¹⁰⁷ One historical account of what happened described it this way: "Lt. Col. Joe L. Bourne, 2nd BN Commander, with his command group, were moving down the main street of Lecroci when a thunderous barrage struck. Bourne was seriously wounded and MAJ Benjamin J. Butler, of Monte Pantano and Villa Crocetta fame, now the Regiment S-3, was immediately sent forward to command the battalion. Without a moment's hesitation, Butler, who was well abreast of the situation, rallied the battalion and pressed on in the attack."¹⁰⁸

With the Arno Line breached, the next objective for the Allied Forces was to break the German Gothic Line. On September 21, 1944, 2nd Battalion was conducting its move forward when they encountered a dog that displayed hostile intentions toward the troops. MAJ Butler, who was from Kentucky, had lived in a community where there were German immigrants and he had learned some German words. Butler proceeded to call out to the dog in German, "Kommen sie hier, Fritz." Ironically, the dog's name tag indicated his name was Fritz. He then befriended the dog and fed it a biscuit from a C-ration. As the unit prepared to move on, the dog kept wanting the soldiers to follow him. By this time a heavy fog was forming. Butler decided to follow the dog so he had the artillery lifted, allowing the unit to proceed silently. The dog led the soldiers through a cut in the barb wire and along a path zigzagging through the minefield. (This was obviously a

well-used route by German patrols). The dog then continued onward going north through the thick fog.¹⁰⁹

It was obviously a risky decision to follow this dog as the terrain was "strewn with mines and covered by enemy weapons." After all, the American soldiers were now behind enemy lines. The military theorist Carl Von Clausewitz might have called it "a special kind of courage." Clausewitz went on to write: "War is the province of chance."¹¹⁰

Soon the soldiers began climbing the steep slopes of Hill 1193. Reaching the top of the hill, they stumbled upon the German Communications Control Center for the entire Gothic Line defenses. MAJ Butler immediately issued an attack order seizing the facility and the hill. Hill 1193 happened to be the highest point overlooking Po Valley.¹¹¹ Butler's boldness and the element of surprise had paid off. As Clausewitz described it, boldness "is a genuinely creative force. A soldier can possess no nobler quality as it is the very metal that gives edge and luster to the sword. Boldness governed by superior intellect is the mark of a hero."¹¹² The element of surprise allowed Butler's battalion to mask their intent. His use of secrecy and speed provided a means to gain superiority. "It confuses the enemy and multiplies the results."¹¹³ Butler had again demonstrated his maturity and intellect along with his superior leadership ability.

The Americans now controlled the key high ground of the Gothic Defense Line. In an attempt to regain control of this key terrain, the Germans launched a counterattack in the E Company sector. The attack failed when G Company rolled up and engaged them. (It should be noted here that MAJ Butler exposed himself to enemy fire to rally his troops who had become confused and disoriented from the counterattack. For his heroic actions Butler was awarded the Silver Star). Butler broke radio silence with Regiment and requested artillery support. Regiment directed Butler and his unit to hold in place. A short while later a coded message was received stating "General Clark sends his congratulations and has put 28 Artillery Battalions at your disposal."¹¹⁴ This turned out to be the longest night of fighting during the entire Gothic Line campaign. German artillery shelled Butler's positions. Butler could see Highway 65 to his right so he planned a night attack down the ridge. His forces were fired upon from all directions. Butler's unit was on the hill through the night and well into the next day. During this time they could see German units withdrawing from the Gothic Line.¹¹⁵

By the end of September, virtually nothing remained of the German defenses on the Gothic Line.¹¹⁶ One historical account summarized the situation this way: "Thus the great Gothic Line ended-without fanfare, without being planned by the Army, almost without being noticed by the world."¹¹⁷ Regrettably this

significant achievement was overshadowed by the Normandy Invasion and battles underway in France.

The Germans withdrew to the next line of ridges where they had emplaced their final defense--the Apennine Line. Besides facing a strong defense line, Fifth Army had its ranks depleted by having to send 97,000 men to support the invasion underway in southern France.¹¹⁸ Because of inclement weather and the lack of troops and supplies, units of the Fifth Army experienced a stalemate for the next 3-4 months.¹¹⁹ In addition, by constructing their defensive lines in mountainous terrain, the Germans had successfully tied down Allied troops and negated the Allies advantage in mobile equipment.¹²⁰

In March 1945, Butler was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. By this time, he had served twenty-four months overseas. His many military decorations included the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star, the Bronze Star, and the Purple Heart. The accumulated points put Butler at the top of the rotation list. Though his name had been at the top of the rotation list for some time, Butler declined returning stateside because of his dedication and commitment. In late March 1945, Butler was selected for Command and General Staff College. He then said his good-bye's and returned stateside. His battalion would continue the fight as part of the Allied Spring Offensive that was

conducted in April-May 1945 after which time Germany surrendered.¹²¹

CONCLUSION

In this paper the World War II combat experiences of now retired Major General Benjamin J. Butler was analyzed using the **BE, KNOW, DO** framework as presented in Army Field Manual 22-100. Ben Butler was a military leader who exemplified the fundamentals of **BE, KNOW, DO**. He demonstrated "the moral strength and courage to make hard decisions and to give soldiers the will to fight and the ability to win."¹²² He was a confident and competent leader who believed in the importance of building disciplined and cohesive units. Always setting the example, Ben Butler inspired his troops to achieve success on the battlefield. Operating independently and taking calculated risks were not uncommon for this great leader.¹²³ His ability to provide purpose, direction, and motivation to his troops is a historical example of leadership on the battlefield that deserves further study by our future warfighters.¹²⁴ Studying past battles and leadership on the battlefield enable us to learn about the human dimension of warfighting.¹²⁵

Clausewitz, in his writings about war, identified moral factors as the "ultimate determinants in war." "No matter how clearly we see the citizen and the soldier in the same man,...

the business of war will always be individual and distinct."¹²⁶

As a result of Benjamin J. Butler's leadership ability, soldiers under his command were trained and prepared to fight this nation's war. He demonstrated a winning spirit and instilled the same in his soldiers.

To summarize, now retired Major General Benjamin J. Butler knew the demands required for continuous land combat. To achieve success, he learned the capabilities of the individual soldiers assigned to his units. He provided leadership, fostered unit cohesion, developed his soldier's confidence, stressed training and physical fitness in meeting the rigors facing soldiers on the battlefield. Lastly, Butler developed and utilized the many leadership core competencies represented the three broad categories of knowledge, skills, and attitudes.¹²⁷

Word count 7,187

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