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TRAINING FOR HIGHER COMMAND IN WAR.

by
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FOREWORD

The following matter on the subject of "Training for Higher Command in War" has been prepared with a view to assisting student officers, on first entering the college, to

- (a) grasp a broad comprehension of the subject as a whole,
- (b) fix a proper relationship between the several elements.

The possible advisability is suggested of utilizing this matter as the first chapter of a text book, of which succeeding chapters will include the present pamphlets on Estimate of Situation and Formulation of Orders. Further chapters on other command subjects might be added.

Criticism and suggestions are invited.

TRAINING FOR HIGHER COMMAND IN WAR.

The term "Higher Command" normally embraces the command of the entire force as a whole, as well as the command of each detachment operating at a distance from the main body. Since frequently units as small as single ships must operate separately, it follows that all ranks in the chain of command down to and including ship commanders should be prepared to perform the duties of Higher Command and be trained accordingly.

It is the function of the War College to prepare officers for these duties, by education and training, in so far as its facilities permit.

GENERAL SURVEY OF THE SUBJECT.

The three principal requisites of the Higher Command in the conduct of war are the ability

- I. To reach sound decisions in time.
- II. To obtain efficient and timely coordination of effort, unity of action, of all military forces.
- III. To ensure moral driving and staying power in the personnel.

Training for Higher Command must aim at developing the capacity to meet these three principal requirements.

I. REACHING SOUND AND TIMELY DECISIONS.

(1) Estimate of the Situation.— Whenever we find ourselves confronted by a situation which calls for something to be done, we pass from recognition of the necessity for action to the action itself by mental processes which, often without deliberate consciousness on our part, follow a certain clearly defined course. We see the something to be accomplished, evaluate and balance the factors entering into its accomplishment, and decide upon the way of going about it. In many, perhaps in most, cases, the something to be done is rather vaguely seen, the evaluation of factors involved is incomplete, and the decision is hasty; but the process, however superficial,

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is inevitably logical to the extent that some sort of a decision precedes the action, some sort of an estimate precedes the decision, and some recognition of the end to be attained precedes the estimate.

In war commanders are faced constantly by situations where great issues depend upon the action taken, so that manifestly their decisions should be reached only after very careful analysis and faultless logic; after concentrated thought processes which, beginning with a clear recognition of the end to be attained, pass to a thorough consideration of the facilities and difficulties involved in the situation, and lead obviously to decision upon a course of action best fitted to attain the end.

There is nothing in this which differs materially from ordinary processes of logic, but there are certain aspects to the conduct of war, apart from the greatness of the issues involved, which normally render reasoning exceptionally difficult, and therefore require highly developed reasoning power in those charged with the responsibility for reaching decisions and taking action.

Prominent among these special aspects is the "Fog of war"; the annoying lack of complete information, and the suspicion cast upon information at hand by the possibility of the enemy having moved to deceive us or having disseminated false information. The very premises of our reasoning are therefore often mere inferences, themselves deduced by reasoning, and normally requiring frequent revision.

Conspicuous also is the aspect of never ceasing effort on the part of the enemy to nullify the effect of our actions by hostile counter measures, or to deny us a choice of action by seizing the initiative himself. Here appears the necessity not merely to reason well, but to reason so much better than another good reasoner, as to outwit him.

Furthermore the element of time is of such superlative importance in war as to impose upon a commander the urgent necessity of being able to reason and to decide quickly. A decision reached too late may be as futile as one which fails to meet adequately the conditions of the case.

Finally we should take into account the fatigue and mental tension under which during war the higher officers inevitably must labor; due to the burden of constant occupation, the greatness of their responsibilities, and often the imminence or progress of battle.

Consideration of the foregoing will lead to the conclusion that training for higher command necessarily should have as a primary aim the development of ability to reach sound decisions through logical and concentrated processes of thought; also that such training should be carried to the point where these processes will be speedy and accurate, notwithstanding conditions of fatigue, mental tension, and pressure of time.

This is the reason for the inclusion of the "Estimate of the Situation" as such a prominent feature of the War College course. The adopted form prescribes a logical process which, starting with a mission to be accomplished and taking account of all known conditions, leads up to a decision.

It is recognized, of course, that a form is an empty thing in itself, and that too much stress might easily be placed upon it. But experience has shown it to be always helpful as a guide to logical processes, and that to a beginner, at least in the field which we are now considering, it is almost indispensable. It is not to be supposed that in actual warfare every situation which arises can be dealt with in detail and in writing, but the habits of thought which are developed by the practice of this system in cases to which it is applicable -- as in the problems of the War College and in most of the strategical situations of actual war -- should result in an instinctive application of the same principles when a sudden

emergency calls for an instantaneous decision.

Our insistence upon adherence to the adopted form of the "Estimate of the Situation", then, is a means to the previously expressed aim of developing the ability to reach sound decisions; and our practice of frequently requiring solution of problems, has for its purpose the fixing of a habit of estimating the situation. Once acquired through practice during periods of tranquility, such a habit will be of great assistance in times of stress and tension, through its automatic influence towards making us reason accurately in spite of necessities pressing for an immediate decision.

(2) Judgment. - However perfect reasoning may be it cannot assure sound decisions unless supported by good judgment. Judgment enters into the formulation and evaluation of premises, and affects greatly the assumptions and deductions made in each step in the reasoning process. Owing to deficient technical judgment a lawyer, or other non-naval person, capable of employing even the most perfect logic, probably could not deduce satisfactory naval decisions. He would be unable to appreciate the capabilities of naval instruments - the effects of weather on ships, the probabilities of collision or machinery breakdown, the cumulative effect of gunfire, the difficulties of refueling at sea, the need for secure lines of communication, the facility with which land positions may be protected against attack by ships, etc. Obviously if acceptable decisions are to flow from our Estimates of the Situation, we must have good technical judgment.

By "technical" judgment is meant not only (1) judgment in relation to the maritime aspects of our profession, and (2) judgment regarding the manipulation and control of our weapons and other instruments of war; but also (3) judgment further specialized in the art of conducting war, which embraces matters of Policy, Strategy, Tactics, Logistics and Leadership. These three broad classes of technical judgment afford each other mutual support in the prac-

tice of the naval profession; all three are indispensable to the capable naval officer in the higher grades.

Judgment is a compound of many elements, prominent among which are knowledge, and experience. Technical judgment requires technical knowledge and technical experience.

The knowledge which each of us brings to the college, as the result of our previous education, is an essential preparation for the work here. The college endeavors to broaden this store of knowledge by including in its curriculum an extensive course in reading and thesis writing upon subjects pertaining especially to the art of conducting war. This latter knowledge is deemed to be an essential preparation for further work in the fleet, and elsewhere in the service; especially for officers who are to exercise high command. The knowledge acquired previous to taking the college course, and that mastered here, are both necessary, and are mutually helpful.

We should guard against the attitude which fails to link knowledge with practical experience, in developing judgment. Academic study alone, however much it may assist sound deliberative judgment, nevertheless tends to overload the intellect at the expense of the will, and thus to undermine the essential quality of judgment in action. Knowledge must be fortified by training in its application - practical experience - if competent judgment is to result. Obviously the practical experience must be of a technical nature if technical judgment is to be acquired. The development of that part of technical judgment relating to the higher branches of the naval profession is assisted by the sub-caliber strategic and tactical maneuvers held at the college. The great value of these miniature maneuvers in furnishing experience in the application of tactical and strategical knowledge, as well as in the exercise of Command, is no longer questionable. The experience in these maneuvers is enhanced in value by similar experience gained previously in the fleet; and

conversely the practical experience at the college in these higher branches cannot fail to strengthen judgment that will be demanded subsequently afloat.

The value of training according to method in order to develop judgment, also deserves attention. Many acts require the application of method modified by judgment. The gun pointer lays his gun by method, but judgment tells him where to fire. The Captain used method in handling his ship, but judgment is always in play modifying his method. These judgments result from training. They result from training according to method. Much of our training here at the college is done according to method, and this process will inevitably strengthen the judgment of those who engage in it.

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To summarize: in order to prepare officers to fulfill the first requisite of Higher Command,

"Ability to reach sound decision in time",

(a) Their reasoning power should be developed sufficiently to enable officers to overcome the difficulties of (1) "The fog of war", (2) enemy counter measures. The reasoning processes should be so fixed into subconscious habit as to further the deduction of sound decisions in spite of handicaps due to (1) Fatigue, (2) Stress of time, (3) Mental tension.

Frequent exercises in "Estimating Situations" furnishes a means for such development.

(b) Their technical judgment should be strengthened through (1) increasing technical knowledge, (2) broadening specialized experience.

These objects may be furthered by (1) special reading and thesis writing, (2) sub-caliber maneuvers, (3) training according to method.

The second great requisite of Higher Command is:

II. OBTAINING EFFICIENT AND TIMELY COORDINATION.

There is no more important object in war than to insure unity

of action among our own forces. At times it is even more essential to success that such unity be obtained, than that our decisions, plans or actions be the best from strategical and tactical points of view.

The great agencies of coordinated action are:

- (1) Organization,
- (2) Administration,
- (3) Knowledge and skill (acquired through instruction, drill and training).

These are all subjects whose principles are studied at the college, in preparation for the thesis on Command. More than this is difficult to accomplish here, except for those aspects of Administration pertaining to

- (a) The Formulation of Orders,
- (b) Dissemination of Information,

and that part of Instruction and Training relating to

- (c) Indoctrination.

These three latter subjects concern the Higher Command intimately and should receive our special attention. They derive prominence principally on account of the surpassing importance of the time factor, and the uncertainties with respect to enemy action, in the conduct of war.

In order to carry a decision into effect, after the situation has been estimated properly, a Commander would prefer to direct its execution in person at every critical point. Were this possible he could then be assured of perfect coordination between all units of his force. He could make essential modifications of plan continuously, to meet promptly unforeseen difficulties and unexpected enemy action, and to take advantage of favorable circumstances. All operations would go forward with the greatest precision and promptness, directed unswervingly toward the accomplishment of his purposes.

But manifestly, the distances separating units, as well as

other factors, would effectively prevent this method of control over operations, even though it were possible for one mind to possess the necessary capacity.

There is then, no choice, but to conduct operations through the medium of subordinate minds. If these can be so tuned as to harmonize the minor decisions they are called upon to make, with the view the higher Commander would take if his mind was acting in their place, then one essential provision for coordination will have been made. We aim to accomplish this through what is called indoctrination.

Even with perfect indoctrination, however, it would be necessary further that every subordinate commander be kept acquainted constantly of essential information in the possession of all the others -- including that known to the higher commanders. Then only could the composite mind work in unison.

However desirable perfect indoctrination may be, and however essential it may be that we strive towards that ideal, it is obviously unattainable. Obviously also a perfect interchange of information is equally impossible. Whatever degree of excellence in indoctrination, and in dissemination of information, we may reach, there will always be a compelling need for frequent direction from higher authority during the progress of operations. Orders must be formulated and issued repeatedly.

Orders must above all express clearly the general objects whose accomplishment is desired; the general plan; otherwise there will be no focus to the operations -- no beacon of first magnitude to serve for the broader requirements of cooperation. In addition some instructions in greater detail normally will be necessary to ensure united action; but these must be limited in number and length, owing to practical considerations; principally with respect to time, transmission, and incomplete information upon which to base them.

The need for the issue of orders, and for such skill in their formulation as will meet the necessities of clearness and brevity, is apparent. These necessities may best be met, not by skillful formulation alone, but by that skill in combination with indoctrination and with a free interchange of such information as is essential to coordination.

We see then that orders, doctrine, and flow of information are agencies of the greatest importance to Higher Command in providing for the second great requisite.

"Efficient and timely coordination of all forces".

Flow of information renders it possible to issue orders and to apply doctrine, orders give information and point out the goal in reaching which doctrine will be the greatest guide to our efforts; while doctrine provides an automatic flow of information of what action our neighbors will take, and facilitates order writing and order interpretation. This trinity of agencies are interdependent. They afford each other mutual support. In combination they further unity of action to a very high degree.

The third and last principal requisite of Higher Command is:

III. OBTAINING MORAL DRIVING AND STAYING POWERS IN THE PERSONNEL.

Of course this is not limited to the superior command alone. On the contrary it is one of the chief elements in the functions of leaders of all subordinate ranks. But moral powers exert such a vital influence upon military success, that they must be the intimate concern of the high ranks also.

Practical considerations prevent the college from offering opportunities for training in this important branch of Command. Such training must be obtained afloat. But the knowledge in this branch will be increased by the reading and thesis course, which includes the subjects of