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Staff
-THE HUMAN ELEMENT IN NAVAL STRENGTH-

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My object in addressing you today is to give you the benefit of certain views that I entertain on a subject that I know must be a matter of deep personal concern to each of you. Your future success or failure will depend upon your understanding of it. My views, whatever they are worth, are the accumulation of observation, experience and reading in forty-two years of active service now drawing to a close. During that time revolutionary changes have taken place both in weapons and in tactics. We have passed from the era of sails to an era of war in three dimensions. In a modern battleship, submarine or carrier the hairy old sailor of the eighties would be an Alice in Wonderland. Nothing familiar would greet his eye. But, regardless of appearances, there is one element, the most important of all, that has remained unchanged -- the man himself. Human nature in all the changing years has changed but little. It is of this element, human nature, the human element in naval strength, that I would like to speak.

Man is the decisive material in war. But in all our problems we have of necessity taken him for granted; because, unfortunately, we cannot evaluate the imponderables that determine his relative merit. But if we are to use this human element to maximum advantage we must understand it, at least understand its composition, its mechanism, its capacity and the best method of operating it. It is exactly what we would have to do with a new type of gun or a new type of engine. But the problem is complicated by the fact that we are dealing not with an individual but with

men in the mass, a mass of individuals all differing in an unknown degree depending upon heredity, previous environment, and teaching. If we were dealing with a ship that is turned over to us with a battery of the same general type but where each gun is different, due to the presence of various defects or improvements, it would certainly be a major task to weld that battery into an efficient unit for battle. How much more difficult to deal with material that we do not fully understand! It is something like learning to use electricity. We don't know exactly what it is, but we know how it acts. Our problem is simply to learn how best to utilize the known manifestations and reactions of human nature. The degree to which we succeed in solving this problem will be the measure of our success as officers of the Navy. Our business is to handle men. We all have thought more or less of this subject ever since we entered the service. We all have had practical experience in handling men, and we all have studied the thoughts of psychologists, historians and great leaders. With this experience and study you have all doubtless reached certain conclusions.

To begin with, we learn from the psychologists that the human mind is really a combination of two minds -- the subjective or subconscious mind and the objective or conscious mind. The subjective mind is made up of inherited animal instincts which so far as they directly affect our subject are the instincts of self-preservation and the gregarious or herd instinct. There are many other instincts, but I think all that are important to us can be traced to these two fundamental urges of nature. But, in addi-

tion to its instincts, the subjective mind has also all the stored up experience, training, habits and beliefs of the individual. When we say we act "naturally" it means that we do the automatic thing, the involuntary thing, and that our action is controlled entirely by the subjective or subconscious mind. It is this subconscious mind that controls men in emergency, especially masses of men in battle.

The other mind, the conscious or objective mind, is a super-structure built around our subjective mind. It is the intelligent mind, the thinking mind, built up of reflection, memory and reason. It is the part of the mind that distinguishes the human from the lower animals. The greater its development the greater its dominance over the instincts and the greater its capacity for leadership.

The mind is built fundamentally to do things and not to reason. Real thought is always in conflict with instincts that seek automatic control. It is much easier to act than to think. To most of us nothing is so painful as the intrusion of a new idea.

The most dominant instinct is the herd instinct, which creates a fear of isolation either mental or physical. Uncontrolled it develops to a dangerous degree in mobs, where it displaces all reasoned thought. Properly directed it becomes the most valuable asset of the leader in the training of men.

The nearer alike men can be made in habits, dress, drill and routine the more powerful this herd instinct becomes. It is the secret of the fighting strength of soldiers and sailors. The

real leader becomes the living embodiment of the instincts, beliefs and desires of the mass in its united subconscious mind, - the mind that he himself has built up by the standards, the training and the habits he has put into his command. The one object of repeated instruction, incessant training, daily drill and regular routine is to weld differing individuals into a single mass weapon of war. In spite of individual differences, the successful leader must build up and develop mass standards, mass opinions, mass desires, which are the ideals that he desires in his command, and thus submerge all individual eccentricities in the united mind of the mass. He molds the mass to his hand as the potter molds his clay; and what he puts into that clay will determine the strength, durability and utility of the finished utensil. Therein lies the responsibility of the leader. He has the mission and the duty to implant by example, precept and training the essential military virtues in the subconscious minds of his followers to such a degree that their practice will be instinctive. The raw material with which he starts is a prey to the instinct of fear, which, without the development of the mass or herd instinct, would seek self-preservation by individual action, rather than by the herd instinct of common action. A single wolf is a coward, the wolf pack fearless. Fear of mass opinion, the mind of the herd, sends a man into a burning magazine to almost certain death. He fears mass opinion more than he fears death. The recruit, still an outsider, would hide or run away. Courage among soldiers and sailors is purely a matter of training and discipline.

The men who ran away at Bull Run were just the same as the men who stood at Gettysburg. The militia that fled at the first fire were just the same men as the Continental soldiers who stood firm. Recruits unwelded in the mass act as individuals. Trained men in victory or in death share the fate of their comrades in arms.

But now what are these military virtues which are essential to the mass and which the leader must embody in his own person? Here at the very outset we meet difficulties.

No matter how much we study of psychology, anthropology, military history or biography, we find ourselves faced with so many exceptions in life to our list of military virtues that we are apt to despair of the subject right at the beginning and say that great leaders of history were great because they were born great, that they possessed some mysterious powers to which the ordinary man cannot aspire, and that they were alike only in that they were all successful in war. They each lacked military virtues that we list as important. Even if we combined the military virtues of all the great heroes of war it is doubtful if we could check off all the virtues on our list. Consider:- Loyalty -- Napoleon had none for his superiors in the army or in the government of France. He was loyal only to his own ambition. Obedience -- Nelson disobeyed his Commander-in-Chief at the height of the Battle at Copenhagen. Fortitude in defeat -- Ludendorf collapsed after his first great failure and clamored for an armistice. Enthusiasm, charm and magnetism, surely desirable virtues in a leader, but Wellington had none of them. Physical strength and

endurance -- Foch and Hindenburg; tired, old men. Knowledge
through study of past leaders and campaigns -- We can cite several
of Napoleon's ignorant marshals who won great victories; and
Grant, who certainly before war came was never a student.

Moreover, in the souls of the great heroes of the past we
find harshness, mistrust, jealousy, selfishness and ruthlessness;
and if we take the list of successful leaders of less fame we find
still more of the military virtues missing.

What is the conclusion? It must be that, however great, we
are all human; we all have our virtues and our failings. Never-
theless, if we go back over our check off list we still find in
these successful leaders certain military qualities they all pos-
sessed in common, or if they lacked one it was made up by exces-
sive preponderance in another. What had they in common? Cour-
age; decision of character; judgment; initiative; and, good or
bad, strong character. They had:

Courage, moral and physical, the courage that easily assumes
responsibility, the moral courage to do the right thing, however
unpopular. It may take greater moral courage to decline battle
than to fight, as in Joffre's retirement to the line of the Marne
before fighting the great battle that saved France, submitting to
great losses of men and position, results of a bad plan, to save
the army and the country. Jellicoe, at Jutland, steadfastly car-
rying out a plan for strategic victory when a great tactical vic-
tory might have made him a second Nelson. And all great leaders
without exception had physical courage to face any personal dan-

ger. Men will forget mistakes but not physical cowardice. Once show the white feather and you can pack up your bag.

Next, Decision of Character -- ability to select the essentials, weed out the non-essentials and fix the mind on the goal to be reached. This implies foresight and an imagination that can see all the advantages, all the chances, all the obstacles, in their true proportion, and can decide firmly what is to be done. One of the greatest teachings of this War College Course is the estimate of the situation, not always the long, written estimate that we practice, but the training in the method. It is the habit it implants in the subconscious mind that induces us to analyze every problem and then at the end, but most important of all, to come to an inflexible decision. If you have fully acquired this habit and apply it to every task, great and small, the whole process of thought will become instinctive; you will have trained yourself to become a man of decision of character.

I knew a Captain that was one of the best educated men in the service. He could analyze any situation that arose from A to Z; but his great knowledge led him to see one hundred reasons why a thing should be done and equally a hundred reasons why it should not be done, so he never did anything. He was a failure because he could not make a decision.

The next great military virtue is Judgment, which in its application we frequently call Common Sense -- which, by the way, is not common at all but a very rare quality, since it means sound judgment based on possession of all available facts. There is no

substitute for common sense. No orders, no instructions can cover its lack. And if I look back on all the exasperation I have suffered in getting things done I know of nothing so baffling as the failure of a good plan through the careless, unthinking, often ridiculous, mechanical performance of some task.

Suppose you are in command of a fast squadron of battle cruisers, light cruisers and destroyers stationed at a point rather remote from enemy cruiser operations, where the chief danger is from submarines that are interfering with merchant convoys for which you are responsible. You dispatch a convoy under escort of three destroyers and stand by, ready to act in the event of the unexpected appearance of enemy cruisers. The escort commander, when over the horizon, sights a division of enemy cruisers standing in to attack the convoy. What does he do? Does he instantly report their presence, keep clear and trail? He does not. He immediately sails in and attacks. All his destroyers are sunk; the convoy goes to the bottom; and you, his superior, ready with the fast protecting force that could have easily intercepted the enemy, learn nothing till it is too late. This sounds imaginary and impossible, but it occurred in the last war. There is no substitute for common sense,- sound judgment.

Next Initiative -- the ability to understand and take advantage of new situations. It is a product of imagination, vision and preparedness of mind. We all excel in hindsight. We all know just what should have been done days after the event. Any of us can make a plan that solves a set problem. But to conceive

and execute a new way of achieving our object when new conditions arise requires the exercise of this rarest and most important of qualities. Initiative makes all things possible. "It can't be done, but here it is." The only proper report when sent on a mission is "it is done". It is the spirit of "The Message to Garcia".

A story is told of Kitchener in his Egyptian campaign: An engineer officer was ordered to construct a bridge in the face of enemy fire. After several days he reported to Kitchener that it was impossible, explaining at great length the difficulties. Kitchener said "Young man, you have given me the best reasons I ever heard why something could not be done. Now go and do it." And it was done. He found a way by exercising his initiative.

Initiative of the subordinate carries the mind and will of the leader to the points where he cannot command in person. Its proper exercise is just another manifestation of good judgment. What would the old man do if he were here? To answer that question the subordinate must have the mission clearly in mind and with all available knowledge do what will best fit the situation, accomplish the object. The theory here is loyalty to the mission rather than loyalty to a leader, but he cannot get away from human nature and he will naturally turn his thoughts to the personality of the leader. Would his superior do the bold thing or the cautious thing? Would he approve (herd instinct) of what I am doing or disapprove? In spite of the German school of thought that emphasized the improvement of the average leader to bring about a

high general standard of ability, it is doubtful if Germany could have held out for four and a half years without the inspired leadership of Hindenburg and Ludendorff, or the Allies have succeeded without a Foch. We cannot think of Trafalgar without its Nelson, Lake Erie without its Perry, or Mobile Bay without its Farragut. So, no matter how highly developed the skill of the subordinate, there will always be the tendency for him to incline rather to the mind of the leader than to his own opinion of the requirements of the mission. However undesirable such a conclusion, we must recognize the limitations of human nature. Nelson and his Captains is a classical example of a leader's ability to project not only his plans but his spirit into every ship of his fleet. So, while we insist on loyalty to the mission, we can never escape from the reality of loyalty to the leader and the obvious necessity of having inspiring leadership in the superior command.

The theory of the initiative of the subordinate is based on the assumption that the subordinate is intelligent, that he clearly understands the mission, that he is in possession of the essential facts, and that he is indoctrinated in the school of his superior. What every superior fears most is not this ideal initiative of the subordinate but the initiative of the ignorant and unintelligent, or, worse still but rarer, the initiative of the insubordinate who acts on some vague "hunch" or substitutes his own objective for that of the leader because he thinks he knows better. I need not recall to you gentlemen how the fog of war sometimes descends on our peace time exercises of the Fleet. You

have all seen task commanders forget the objective or the logic of a situation and start off on a wild goose chase based on nothing more than a coding error in an enemy's position, or a force sent out to destroy a convoy mistaking its true objective to pursue an offensive screen. The initiative of the subordinate is a two-edged sword that will always be limited to the extent of the subordinate's ability and indoctrination.

Now again we find that great leaders were all men of Strong Character. They had great likes and dislikes. Their qualities, good and bad, were apt to be exaggerated. They had great enemies as well as great friends. They were dramatized in the minds of their followers, who loved their humanity, their faults as well as their virtues. Each to his men was a Rock of Gibraltar, invincible, infallible, of whose nature they partook.

I read a little story of General Grant in the two-day Battle of the Wilderness. It was his first fight against the great Lee whose very name shook the confidence of the best Union commanders. The first day had been indecisive; losses had been great; the forces were in dense woods where information was scant and anything might happen. Grant gave orders at nightfall that firing should cease and the army get a good sleep to be ready for the next day. He himself turned in and gave orders that he was not to be disturbed. In a few hours firing broke out on the Union left, increasing in volume to the roar of battle. An aide came tearing up, his horse covered with foam, and demanded to see Grant. In spite of orders, Grant was called, and the aide re-

ported that Lee had turned the Union left and was attacking the rear. Grant pulled down his map and told the aide to show him where the firing was taking place. "You are only a lieutenant" he said "but you should know that it is just as impossible for Lee to be in my left and rear as it would be for me to be in his. Go back and tell your general to stop that firing at once and have his troops turn in as I ordered." Whereupon, he calmly lay down and went to sleep with the roar of the guns in his ears. His judgment was correct. The firing had been started by nervous troops shooting at shadows. This little incident, which I read years ago, did more to establish Grant in my mind as a great leader than any one thing in his life. Its effect on his troops must have been very impressive. He had faith in his own judgment such as few men possess. He was confident of the security of his position and meant to have his troops fresh in the morning. But were he right or wrong we have here a remarkable picture of a strong character in action.

The ideal that the leader sets for himself is to be a living example of the standards he sets for his followers. In high command he sets the pace for his subordinate leaders. How easy to say set the example and how difficult to follow, yet that is our task and you can rest assured they will know and imitate your vices long before they think of your virtues.

If to Ability you can add Charm, Sympathy and Understanding you will inspire the affection that breeds real Loyalty among your followers, subordinates who will think and worry and work to

supply your omissions and repair your mistakes, instead of secretly chuckling over your errors.

In the ship the pace is set by the Captain. The ship is the largest unit of personal contact. What satisfies the Captain in the end will be the standard of all. Ambitious Executives, Gunnery Officers, Aviators, Engineers, First Lieutenants and Navigators may give him better service than he requires, but in most cases the handicap of a poor Captain cannot be overcome. It has been said: "There are no poor crews, there are some poor captains." "Better an army of sheep led by a lion than an army of lions led by a sheep." Napoleon said: "Men are nothing, a man is everything" -- the same idea. But I must say in the service today the Captains are all pretty good. What many of them seem to forget is that to go high it is necessary to be only a little better than the other fellow. If you do everything just a little better than anyone else you will be surprised at the reward of your efforts. How few there are who are really doing their utmost!

Another matter that has to do with unity of effort in the Navy. In peace time it appears necessary to stimulate effort by competition. I am in favor of it in spite of the many reasons against it, principally because I remember our dead and alive Navy before competition was introduced. But from the point of view of the high command, who is seeking to weld the fleet into a unit, the present form of competition is undesirable. No ship that has fallen down in one practice should be compelled to strug-

gle through the rest of the year with the hopeless feeling of having forfeited all chances of the "meat ball" or the gunnery trophy. Of every practice were a separate competition we would escape that deadening of ship spirit by one failure and create instead an increased enthusiasm for the next practice to retrieve the mistakes of the last. The Commander-in-Chief does not want an assortment of poor ships and good ships; he wants a uniformly high degree of excellence in the fleet. He wants no jealousy or envy between the units of his command. He is seeking the cordial cooperation of all in the attainment of one object, high fleet efficiency.

In our Navy if the Commander-in-Chief could pick out his subordinate Flag Officers and Captains his task of leadership would be simplified. But it is doubtful if he will ever get beyond the choice of a staff. Here he should use the greatest of his powers of discernment and judgment. There is a tendency to choose personal friends, - in most cases a disastrous procedure. On the contrary, he should search the list for the best man he can find in each technical branch of his staff, having regard only for their adaptability to his requirements. Another thing, they should be able men that have the qualities he himself lacks. If he hates details he must get a chief that chases every rat into its hole. If he loves details and can't keep his hands off, his chief must be a crank on organization, policy and plans. What he is seeking for is a combination of himself and staff that will round out a single ideal composite Admiral, embodying all the vir-

tues. It only remains then to give each member of the staff all the authority he needs and hold him responsible for results. The Admiral may delegate everything except responsibility to his own superiors. He stands or falls with the success or failure of his command. To him goes the responsibility of failure; to him should go the credit for success. If he can bear responsibility and still sleep nights he is in a position to fight battles and win the fame he deserves. We hear much of popularity and luck, but popularity is only a by-product that goes to the square shooter and luck is nine-tenths foresight and good judgment. They have their place, but they are only incidentals.

There is a distinction that is not always noted between leadership of men and ability as a strategist or tactician. A man may be a great leader, a natural leader, and fail in high command through lack of knowledge. Leadership is the art of inspiring, guiding and directing bodies of men so they will ardently desire to do what the leader wishes. But doing the wishes of the leader will not bring victory unless he has the strategic knowledge and tactical skill to make a good plan. On the other hand, the plans of a Nelson or a Napoleon may fail through poor execution. The Commander-in-Chief in a fleet action has a dual role. He must have the knowledge and skill to make a good plan and the leadership to execute it. The problem of the Commander-in-Chief, as you so well know, is the coordination of his forces in battle so that each weapon of his command may be applied with full force at the right time. Time is of the essence. Armies may battle for

weeks. The naval action at best will be decided in a few hours or perhaps in a few minutes. Ability to land the first salvos on the battle line, the first bombs from an air attack, or the first torpedoes from flotillas, may give an initial advantage impossible to overcome. The ability, intelligence, training and skill to bring about this coordination in battle; the high degree of initiative required of subordinate leaders to make coordination possible; and the judgment to make and execute correct decisions in naval situations envisage tasks that keep the oldest of us still humble students of the Art of War. In the case of distant task forces the Commander-in-Chief is responsible for the soundness of his strategic plan, but successful execution lies in the hands of others. It seems to be the consensus of military opinion that one man can personally direct the movements and actions of a single squad, eight men. Curiously, at the opposite end of the scale we find the Commander-in-Chief in battle personally directing but eight men, who command the battle line, the fast wing, the forces in the van, the rear and the center, the submarines, the air force, and the train. The directions of the squad leader determine the success of the squad, which in any case may be of little importance; but what vast issues, maybe the fate of nations, hang on the orders of the Commander-in-Chief. The principles of war involved are the same, but responsibility in battle for the results of their application and the importance of the units involved are magnified here to a degree that calls for qualities perhaps only to be found in a superman. Yet some of you here to-

day may one day be placed in a position where you need those qualities. When you criticise Jellicoe, think of him again as the only man who could have lost the war in a single afternoon.

There is an ever present factor in all our war games that cannot be evaluated but must not be forgotten, this same human factor -- the personnel, their training, their morale, their fortitude and their leadership. We assume of necessity equality of the human element in the contending forces, so our battles can show only the relative advantage of one position or one formation over another as determined by the destructive effect of our weapons. Historically, leadership, initiative, training, morale, refusal to accept defeat, have won victories that could never be exemplified on a maneuver board. Tsushima would be a Russian victory and Jutland the complete destruction of the German battle line if played by our rules. What we are learning on the board and which is most important is the correct utilization of the material factors.

To sum up:- The human element is a combination of instincts plus intelligence. The military virtues necessary for success can by training be made instinctive. To win in war we must have unity of effort, which implies leadership, training, loyalty and initiative. We must have continuity of effort, which calls for decision of character, perseverance and fortitude. We must have knowledge of war, which implies vision, judgment and skill. For great leadership we must have the quality that combines and coordinates the various military virtues in a strong, well balanced

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character that intuitively does the thing that best achieves the object in view.

Finally, let me advise you all to spare no pains to be successful. There is nothing so contagious as success. Whatever your plans -- succeed, and there will be no court of inquiry. From my heart I wish you all success.