

*Staff Presentation
Class of April 1951*

The United States
NAVAL WAR COLLEGE

EDUCATION FOR LEADERSHIP

Lecture
presented by
Captain E. F. McDaniel
Head of the Department of Command & Staff

to the
Command and Staff Class
12 March 1951

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMAND AND STAFF

EDUCATION FOR LEADERSHIP

Since World War II the armed services have been increasingly concerned with ways and means of improving the leadership abilities of our officers. As post war analyses have progressed it has become more and more apparent that the quality of our personal leadership, as evidenced in the last war and since, should be improved. There has come to light too many cases of poor leadership and outright failures in leadership. The mad scramble to get demobilized the minute the fighting was over in the last war indicated an almost pathological hatred of being in uniform. Since the war our ex-military personnel have indicated little or no pride in their former services, nor respect for their former officers, such as better leadership would have produced. Instead too many have delighted in abusing their former services and officers. All of these and many other indications lead to the conclusion that our leadership has left much to be desired, to say the least. When this conclusion is added to the fact that in today's world-wide contest for men's minds it is mandatory that we insure the understanding and enthusiastic loyalty of our military personnel, then it becomes evident that it is our duty to leave no stone unturned to improve our leadership abilities in keeping with the world situation today.

Judging alone from the amount of literature being turned out on the subject of leadership our armed services today are fully aware of the need for improving our leadership abilities. Many officers who have been outstanding leaders themselves have tried to help improve the situation by publishing their suggestions and advice for the benefit of their brother officers. Most of this literature has been a listing of so-called "Fundamentals of Leadership", "Principles of Leadership", or "Traits of Leadership" and in the form of Do's and Don'ts with sometimes excellent and profound reasoning for each item in the list.

This literature is all to the good and a detailed study of it and effort to profit by its advice should produce some improvement in leadership abilities. There is, however, a very definite limitation in this whole objective approach to the study of leadership. It is an effort to teach leadership as though it were an exact science based on a list of independent facts. In reality, however, human personalities, both of the leader and the led, are so infinitely complex that no such list of facts are applicable to all situations and all personalities. Thus, a list of Do's and Don'ts by one officer can do no more than explain his success as a leader with his personality

and in the leadership situations he faced. By the study of such listings and discussions by outstanding leaders we can at least to some degree improve our leadership abilities. We can do this by practice in their methods as possible with our personalities and in the situations similar to those described by the writers. This method of improving leadership is probably the only feasible method for training large numbers of reserve officers in a hurry as during a mobilization. The fact remains, however, that this is at best a makeshift method because it is learning by rote and cannot lead to a real understanding of the art of leadership. It has, therefore, such serious limitations that it is inadequate for regular officers who are making the service a lifetime career. Leadership is one of the most important, if not the most important, qualification for that career. The regular officer will, therefore, desire a broad and deep understanding of the whole leadership field and will want a more positive and subjective method of improving his leadership abilities. This paper is an attempt to do just that. It is my analysis of our whole military leadership problem and my conclusions as to what the regular career military officer can and should do to improve his leadership abilities.

First, just what was wrong with our leadership in the last war? It was much the same kind of leadership that had always been provided. There had been no significant criticism of that leadership during the previous some 150 years' existence of our military services. What happened to change the leadership problem?

The answer to that question seems to be that, although our system of producing leaders had not changed, those we had to lead had changed. Prior to World War II the services had never paid much attention to education for leadership. It had been entirely satisfactory to educate our officers in the technical phases of their profession only. Leadership ability was left for each officer to develop for himself -- as he grew more mature and as he gained more experience in living and in his military duties under the supervision and guidance of his seniors. With the men we had to lead in those days history shows that it was satisfactory to produce our leaders by giving them technical education and military authority and waiting for experience in living to produce leadership ability. With the men we have to lead today experience has shown that that system of producing leaders is not satisfactory any longer. Those we have to lead have changed and our system of producing leaders must change also.

Our American military personnel are, as always, average Americans. Thus it is the average American who has changed. Each human being is a product of his own environment. There can be no question that the environment of the average American has changed radically and with increasing acceleration in recent years, particularly in the last 25 years. The effects of that change in environment on the American people have been many. The most significant effect of this change has been toward a more mature mind. It is true that the average American has a long way to go before he will attain the mature mind possible with our present fund of human knowledge. In recent years, however, he has gone a relatively long way toward maturity and will continue to advance in the future. He has gone far enough now to make our American people more mentally mature than any national population in all history. The span of interest of the average American has moved out of his squeezed local environment into a total world. He is thinking more broadly and is more sensibly critical in his analyses of his leaders and of their judgements. No one can be a successful leader of men today by working in an ivory tower and handing down judgements to subordinates for blind acceptance. Before judgements are really accepted by the subordinate of today he must be convinced in his own mind that the judgements are sound -- either as a result of his own independent analysis of the judgements or as a result of his confidence in the leader after his independent analysis of the qualifications of that leader. The leader today must strive to inspire confidence, trust, and faith of subordinates who have been conditioned and qualified to pass judgement on their leaders more than any subordinates in history. Our average American of today is potentially the most efficient military man ever known because he is the most intelligent. That potential can be fully realized, however, only if our leadership abilities are improved to match the improvement in intelligence of those we lead.

Before proceeding to an examination of the means available to us today for improving our leadership abilities let us first, rather parenthetically, dispose of a view held by some that instead of our American people gaining in mental maturity the reverse is true. We see in current literature the thought that we are becoming a nation of morons - as judged exclusively by the mental quality of most of our radio and television programs, movies, literature, and advertising. The pessimists who hold this view fail to look at the other side of the coin. There they could see that serious and thought provoking radio and television programs, movies, and literature are also increasing in popularity -- in demand by the millions, whereas even 25 years ago they would have been

of interest only to an intellectual few. There is indeed an increasing intellectual atmosphere in the American environment today.

The pessimists are probably correct in assuming that much of our entertainment is used as an escape into phantasy by our people. It does not follow as claimed, however, that all of our people are thus seeking to escape from the boredom and staleness of their lives. It is just as logical to assume, and I believe, that millions of awakening minds are thus seeking temporary respite from almost inescapable thinking of the many weighty and serious problems of our civilization. Those problems are always with us. They are a part of the daily lives of all of our people. It is conducive to mental health and vigor to escape temporarily from time to time from those ever pressing problems -- by escape into phantasy or by any other means open to the individual. Thus, for such minds, this escape, instead of indicating that we are becoming a nation of morons, is an indication of intelligent and mature minds.

In any case, we of the military services have accepted as a fact that our military personnel of today are different and we are faced with the problem of searching out the action necessary to insure the most efficient military organizations possible with this different personnel. In spite of a school of thought to the contrary that action certainly should not be concentrated on increasing democracy in our military services. With the more intelligent personnel we have available today we can have considerably more democracy in the military services than ever before without endangering discipline. The fact remains, however, that in a military force democracy and military discipline are the very antithesis of each other and we must exercise extreme care in that direction. We can have complete democracy or discipline, one or the other, but it is impossible to have both. The very foundation of efficiency in a military situation is obedience to orders immediately and without question or reservation. It would be extreme folly to indoctrinate our men with the habit of thinking in effect that before any order is issued a committee meeting must be held. Such may be possible in most peacetime situations but facing emergencies and battle with men with such indoctrination would be inviting chaos. The way to insure enthusiastic and immediate obedience to orders by our subordinates of today is not by providing more democracy but by more enlightenment for our subordinates and by providing them with leadership that they are convinced in their own minds deserves unquestioning obedience.

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Concentrating our attention exclusively on improving morale also appears to be approaching our problem from the wrong direction. High morale is simply a feeling at least of contentment, if not of enthusiasm, with life as it exists. Many things go to make up that contentment in the military services but certainly the most important is complete confidence in, and respect for, our leaders. If our officers are highly trained and intelligent leaders we do not have to be concerned so exclusively about morale; high morale will be one of the results of such leadership.

No -- the only real solution to our problem is through education -- education of our subordinates to increase their understanding of the environment in which they live and education of our officers to make them more intelligent leaders of today. We are making great progress in increasing the enlightenment of our subordinates but there is room for much improvement in educating our officers for leadership. All of us as commissioned officers have a duty to educate ourselves by reading and study to advance our knowledge along two separate but closely related lines. The first is toward a better understanding of those we lead; the second is toward improvement of our personalities so that all of us will be capable of being intelligent leaders and of applying a fuller measure of our human potential to all of our duties, leadership included.

Undoubtedly the fund of human knowledge available today is not sufficient for us to reach the ultimate along either of these lines. It is a demonstrable fact, however, that we are not using more than a very small fraction of the knowledge that is available today for educating ourselves for leadership. Relatively speaking the total fund of knowledge about human beings is still in its infancy but that knowledge has been vastly expanded in recent years. It is expanding today with ever increasing acceleration. Even fifty years ago it would have been impossible to organize any really worthwhile course of study for leadership. Today, however, there is available in our literature sufficient knowledge to advance us toward really intelligent leadership to a degree that is completely unbelievable to those who have not studied in this field.

The military services have made a start toward our goal of better understanding of those we lead by including basic psychology in the undergraduate education of our officers. Our experiences to date in the field of psychology indicate, however, that this is not enough. Even among graduate psychologists in our society the percentage of mediocre leaders and failures as leaders is just as high as among

those educated in other fields. An analysis leads to several possible reasons for this fact. The first, and most obvious, reason may be that the education in psychology is itself at fault, either through lack of sufficient knowledge in the field, through improper or not enough study material, or improper methods of teaching. A second, and more probable reason, is that the undergraduate mind is too immature to gain sufficient benefit from such study and we must continue it in postgraduate and individual study in our more mature years. A third reason also comes to mind. Perhaps the whole field of psychology, even under the best conditions, is not enough. As has already been said, each individual is a product of his own environment. It seems evident, therefore, that before we can hope for maximum understanding of those we lead we must study the environment in which they specifically have lived, in addition to the study of the psychology of humanity in general. In analyzing these reasons for the inadequacy of psychology alone in education for leadership we must conclude that all three of the above reasons are applicable in varying degree. We cannot conclude, however, that the study material available in this field is inadequate until we take advantage of more of what is available. We know that we are far from taking advantage of the total knowledge that is now available for improving our abilities in leadership. It is certain that we can considerably improve our understanding of those we lead by increasing our study of psychology, extended into mature life, and by studies to give us greater understanding of the environment of our people and its effects upon them. Thus, in addition to psychology we need to study the history, sociology, and economics of our people.

We have learned, however, that education to improve our understanding of those we lead is only a part of the education we need for leadership. Our experiences in leadership and in life indicate that regardless of how much we may learn about those we lead our education for leadership will be incomplete until we have added education by which our officers can adjust their personalities as necessary to insure that they are capable of being intelligent leaders. A neurotic personality is not likely to become a successful leader regardless of what education he may have. Furthermore, even among so-called normal men, without sufficient mental quirks to be classified as neurotic, it is a psychological fact that a great deal of energy is wasted due to unreal values and inner conflicts and tensions. We need to undertake studies that will at least reduce this waste and release a fuller measure of our human potential for all of our duties, leadership included.

The search for the ultimate in this knowledge has been going on since the original awakening of the mind of man. That ultimate goal has been given many names but has recently been called "Peace of Mind" or "The Mature Mind". As has been said, it is not likely that humanity has enough knowledge today to reach this ultimate goal. There is, however, considerably more knowledge available than we are using in our education for leadership -- knowledge with which all of our officers can so adjust their personalities as to be capable of being successful leaders. Again the number of neurotics and various mental quirks among the graduate psychologists and psychiatrists in our society proves that our studies must go beyond their specialist fields. We must broaden our span of attention and study so that we will include material that will give us the ability not only to isolate facts but to understand realities and to think objectively and philosophically about those facts and realities.

For instance, the professional psychologists and psychiatrists appear to be largely devoted to ferreting out in the human mind the environmental origin of unreal or conflicting values and ideas. Perhaps due to Freud's influence the assumption is made that once we lay bare the origin and life history of values and ideas that are unreal or cause mental tensions those values and tensions automatically vanish. Our experiences to date seem to refute that assumption in a large number of cases. It is likely that that assumption is valid only in those individuals of relatively immature minds whose early environment built into their subconscious minds complete and unquestioning faith and confidence in a father figure. In adult life they were then able to transfer that confidence and faith to the psychologist or psychiatrist and thus react as these professionals desired. The conclusion seems to follow that for the many of us with more mature minds and without such a father figure in our background we must undertake studies that will do more than just increase our ability to identify facts in our personalities and to understand the origin and life history of our values and ideas. In addition to that we must undertake studies that will improve our ability to change by our own efforts and by our own intelligence those values not in conformance with reality and/or to adjust our values to facts which cannot be changed.

The human mind is a delicately balanced organism. Values and even methods and the manner of thinking of any individual have been deeply ingrained in his mind throughout his lifetime. They are all such deeply ingrained habits that it is rarely possible for the average person to remove one or

change it in any manner whatsoever merely by discovering it and recognizing that it is to some degree not in accordance with reality. Furthermore, those habits, as they came into being throughout life, have been interwoven and interlaced into the mind to maintain a balanced whole, whatever may be our opinion as to the quality of that balance. Deeply ingrained habits of values, ideas, and thinking not in conformance with reality and frequently in conflict with each other are present in varying degree in practically all minds completely without the conscious knowledge of such minds. Minds are normal because the individuals can expend whatever energy is necessary to keep such conflicts in balance, again without any conscious knowledge that any energy is being expended for this purpose. Thus, it is not alone the unreal and distorted values that reduce the leadership capabilities of nearly all men to some degree, but the amount of energy expended to keep conflicting values in balance is enough to seriously reduce the energy most of us can apply to any undertaking, leadership or otherwise.

Through education and our own native intelligence we can go a long way toward reducing the amount of energy thus being wasted. By study in the field of psychology we can come to a better understanding of the facts about ourselves as human beings. But that is not enough. We need education to increase our ability to think objectively and philosophically about those facts, to analyze them and to relate them to each other and to reality -- in other words, to think objectively. By study in the fields of philosophy and logic and by practice in objective thinking we can considerably improve our abilities in this direction. Thus, within the fields of psychology, philosophy, and logic, and by practice in reflective thinking, we can attain a better understanding of all of our values and habits and we can increase our wisdom toward adjusting those values and habits to the realities of our lives. Most of us will become convinced that mere exposure to the light of our intelligence is not enough; we will come to understand that a great deal of intelligent, conscientious, and persistent effort is required to change any deeply ingrained habit -- to come to a better understanding of reality and to better adjust ourselves to reality.

Liebman in his book "Peace of Mind" summarizes this thesis about improving personality for leadership by stating that "Self-understanding rather than self-condemnation is the way to inner peace and mature conscience." To that I will add as a summary of my thesis about improving our knowledge of those we lead -- similarly, understanding of our fellowman rather than condemnation of our fellowman is the way to

mature and intelligent human relations.

In conclusion let us examine the question of whether or not all of this individual study and thinking effort is really worth-while. The answer to that question is obvious from a personal point of view alone when we consider the greater peace of mind that accompanies an increasing maturity of mind. Much more is involved than this, however. As the commissioned officers of the military forces on which depends the future of our civilization we have been assigned a mission vastly more important than any personal goals. It is our duty to civilization itself to make whatever effort is necessary to prepare ourselves for that mission.

Knowledge such as is discussed in this paper cannot be acquired in a short and intensive course of study. It is a matter for accumulation over the years. Once they are initiated to studies in these fields nearly all people find them fascinatingly interesting. We hope that we will so have initiated you in this command and staff course and that your interest will lead you to continue this reading in the years ahead. We should insure that the literature is kept available in all of our officers' libraries and by our example encourage interest and study in these fields throughout our lives. It will only be after the majority of our officers are pursuing knowledge in these fields that we can hope that our abilities in the science of human beings will be on the way toward matching our abilities in the science of things.