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CARRY-OVER HABITS

By
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Presumably because the Chief of Staff of the Army has responsibility for the largest school system for young men in the United States, I have been asked to write a word in the St. Albans Bulletin. My service in the Army has been rewarding largely because it has given me the opportunity of working with hundreds of thousands of young Americans. I have emerged from this experience with no pessimism with regard to the quality of our future citizens. On the contrary, I firmly believe that our young men will reach any goal provided they are given adequate leadership by their elders.

If I were asked to generalize with regard to the American youth as I have known them in the Army, I would offer both positive and negative evaluations. The American youth of today come from the same famed

American melting pot as former generations. Today's young men continue to demonstrate most of the qualities of young America, which, through the years, we have come to take for granted: basic intelligence, alertness, enthusiasm for things which interest them, friendliness, and loyalty to their fellows and their institution.

Let us recognize, too, that the young men of today are superior in many respects to what we were a few decades ago. They seem definitely more poised and more sophisticated than their predecessors. They have a broader acquaintance of the world in which they live, but sometimes we wish that they would think more deeply and analytically about some of its problems.

On the negative side, I offer these generalizations: a lessening in sense of responsibility; a dislike for the hard job and less tenacity of purpose and perseverance in overcoming obstacles. A correspondingly fewer number seem to have learned attention and concentration, and a greater number appear satisfied with mediocrity.

Our schools bear a share of the responsibility for these negative conditions. Large classes, with their attendant difficulties for teachers in marking tests and homework; the resultant trend to objective-type tests, with true-false or multiple choice answers; the teacher shortage -- all have led to a general lessening in the assignment of tasks which the

student must perform himself, with some considerable effort. As Aristotle remarked, "Learning is accompanied by pain." The natural effect on the student of failing to make him work at something near his maximum capacity is to dull rather than to sharpen his sense of responsibility and to lessen his ability to overcome adversities.

To be more specific, and, I hope, more helpful, I would like to consider three important areas of education: the intellectual, the physical, and the moral.

In the intellectual area, I note the trend since the turn of the century to change the nation's secondary schools from the college-preparatory role to more direct vocational preparation. Two dangers are apparent in this trend: one is the danger of watering down the educational preparation of those students who are going on to college; and the second is the danger of removing any real intellectual content from the curricula of those students whose formal education is likely to end at the secondary school level. Certainly, there has been an increase on breadth of subject matter at the sacrifice of depth, and a decline in the thought-provoking and the disciplinary subjects.

Offerings in high school science and mathematics have decreased. Preparation in English grows weaker with each passing decade; many students who can even read well and rapidly fail to comprehend the meaning

of what they read. The teaching of United States history seems, on the whole, to be improving slightly, but not geography. It is something of a shock to discover that in this technical age, young Americans are not familiar with the nature and function of basic mechanical elements. It is widely presumed that most young Americans know what bearings and gears are; but that is an erroneous assumption. In sum, our young men may know a little about many things, but not very much about any one of them.

In connection with physical fitness, the draft statistics of World War II and Korea show that up to 33 percent of our American youth were unfit for military service, a grave situation from the standpoint of our preparedness for national defense. The trend in the physical ability of our youth seems to be definitely downward. Television and automobiles in our daily lives; the shortage of playgrounds and other physical-training facilities; and the shortage of trained physical education teachers contribute, no doubt, to this situation.

The third area of comment is the moral or spiritual area concerned with the development of character. Many of us in the Army feel, rightly or wrongly, that there is less appreciation, or more accurately, less reverence today among young men for the qualities of honor and integrity than in the past. Now we find -- and again, I point out that I am generalizing -- that many of our young men coming to the

Army as a whole do not bring with them this same degree of understanding of honor and integrity as an essential element of their way of life. We have thus found it necessary to devote more time to orientation and indoctrination in this area of character development. We seek to eliminate the moral drifter and develop men with serious convictions about important issues.

I am reminded of the words of the recent report by the Secretary of Defense's Advisory Committee on Prisoners of War: "It seemed that these POWs in question had lost their battle before they entered the Service . . . They couldn't answer arguments in favor of Communism with arguments in favor of Americanism, because they knew very little about their America . . . Good citizens - loyal Americans - the responsibility for their building lies with the home, the school, the church, the community."

Fortunately, I feel that when the issues are properly presented, our young men generally choose right. They still respond to the challenge of the difficult when their leaders make clear why it is important to overcome the obstacle. There is no dearth of young men in the Army who volunteer for parachute duty, ranger service, and similar hazardous work, choosing the hard life out of a sense of pride for doing something a little above the common run. It is for their leaders to cultivate this

outlook in the hope that they will carry it into civilian life as a fixed habit.

To my readers at St. Albans, I have submitted my remarks on the young men in the Army not as words of wisdom or warning but for their possible interest as indicating national trends among their contemporaries. In closing, I would venture one comment suggested by the need of fixing proper habits in young men.

At West Point, there is a great effort to teach the cadets "carry-over sports" -- those which they may carry over into their graduate life as an aid to life-long physical fitness. For example, every man is taught to play squash, handball, tennis, and golf, with the hope that he will continue at least one of these sports in subsequent life. While subscribing wholeheartedly to these carry-over sports, I would suggest that there is an equal need for young men to acquire carry-over studies. That is to say, in the same way that they are encouraged to exercise their physical muscles subsequent to graduation, they should similarly acquire mental disciplines to develop increasing mental fitness. As counterparts to squash, golf, and tennis, let them carry over interests in, say, mathematics, philosophy, and foreign languages.

My observation of successful men in the Army has led me to conclude that those who reach high positions are those who have never ceased to grow. Their minds are always expanding; their mental muscles

have never been allowed to become flabby. As Superintendent of West Point, I often tried to relate class standing with subsequent success in the Army. Did the men who stood high academically on Graduation Day become the first generals of the class? I report somewhat regretfully that I could find no close relationship between academic standing and military success. All that the record shows is that it is somewhat better to stand in the upper half of the class than in the lower half. But there was one characteristic which I think is found almost universally in the men who have been successful in the Army. They may have been slow starters, but they never ceased to grow. These men had acquired carry-over study habits of thought which served them in good stead. These were men who had achieved the Grecian balance of the sound mind in the sound body.

I do not believe that the views which I have expressed here are at variance with those which Canon Martin professes in his leadership of St. Albans. I have observed with admiration his work as a scholar and as a builder of young men. I congratulate all of you who have the opportunity to be St. Albans men, reared in the intellectual atmosphere your Headmaster has created. I urge that you, too, consider the need for carry-over studies, as well as carry-over sports, as an indispensable part of preparation for leadership in any walk of American life.

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