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The Military Profession
An address Delivered at the 13th Annual Commissioning Exercises
Army and Air Force Reserve Officers Training Corps
The University of Akron
June 6, 1966

President Auburn, Colonel Vilhauer, gentlemen of the Reserve Officers Training Corps, ladies and gentlemen.

I am honored to be allowed to deliver the commissioning address and to present the commissions to the cadets of the Reserve Officers Training Corps who today become Second Lieutenants in the Army and Air Force Reserve. It is to the recipients of these commissions that I shall direct my words this morning, on a day which should be memorable to them as the occasion of their entry into the Officers Corps of the Armed Forces of the United States.

As the world-wide responsibilities of our country have expanded, the Armed Forces have become an increasingly important part of our national society. They offer an increasingly large segment of our population career opportunities which each year attract thousands of young men and women to their ranks. These new recruits bring the new life and outlook so essential to the continued vitality of our forces and the quality of our security. To many of them, the military profession will become a life's career affording abiding satisfactions. It is about some aspects of this career that I would like to talk to you this morning.

We take our Armed Forces so much for granted that we often fail to reflect upon their basic purpose and their reason for being. If asked why we have Armed Forces, many of our citizens would reply without too much thought that we have them to fight wars. I would disagree with that definition. I would first speak of their deterrent effect in the accomplishment of their primary purpose of keeping the peace. Only if the peace is breached does

it become their responsibility to fight a war and then for the purpose of restoring peace. In whatever circumstance, the Armed Forces will be executing the will of the responsible government of our country which in turn reflects the will of the American people--a will expressed in the foreign policy of our nation for which the Armed Forces provide the military support.

We often think of the Armed Forces erroneously, I believe, as the sole contributors to our security. Security in its broadest sense depends upon total national strength which includes components other than military. As a nation, we have many forms of political, economic and moral strength which, with our military power, constitute the totality of the strength available to carry out our policies. As we have learned from our experience in the complex situation in South Viet-Nam, one of the tasks of our national leadership is to blend in proper combination all of the elements of our national strength to accomplish our objectives. Military strength without appropriate political guidance is blind just as political efforts are futile without the backing of military strength in being.

Thus in a democracy such as ours, the Armed Forces look to the responsible civilian leadership for overall direction and the assignment of overall missions. Then it becomes the task of the officer corps to provide that military leadership to assure that the Armed Forces perform their task. Thus the officer is first and foremost a military leader and effectiveness of his performance depends upon his possession of the prerequisites of leadership.

Often in my military career I have had occasion to reflect upon the prerequisites of military leadership. What are those qualities which in the course of our history have been the distinguishing traits of successful American commanders? While one may group these traits in several ways, I would

suggest three categories which have usually been found among the men most successful in leading American Armed Forces.

The first category includes those elements which in the aggregate make for professional competence. To inspire confidence, the leader must have the obvious ability to carry out his tasks effectively be it as a commander, a staff officer or a technician. Professional competence is largely the result of adequate, assimilated training and its successful application to the tasks of daily life. Today because of the vast complexity of modern warfare, those tasks are so diverse in nature that it is probably impossible in a single life time to acquire complete professional competence. Most military people must be satisfied with competence within some reasonable limitations. However, this very complexity is a challenge and an asset of the military profession because of the variety of forms of development which it offers. It must include men capable of satisfying the requirements of nuclear warfare, of non-nuclear conventional warfare and of the resistance to subversive insurgency such as we are encountering in Viet-Nam. There is room for virtually all attributes and skills in meeting the requirements of this broadened spectrum.

But, as you enter the Armed Forces, you have no reason to recoil at the seeming difficulty of the profession that lies ahead of you. Fortunately, the requirements placed upon a man take into account his age, experience, and past training. A man is not tested beyond the reasonable

expectancy of his performance. In the Armed Forces there is a vast schooling system which prepares officers to meet the increasing demands of their duties. In contrast to the civil professions where a lawyer, a doctor or an engineer usually receives most of his formal instruction in one continuous period, in the Armed Forces, one has the great advantage of being called back from time to time to return to school in preparation for assuming ~~advancing~~ increased responsibilities. Thus, it is not unusual for a career officer to receive five to ten years of post graduate instruction after entering the service. The cost is paid by the taxpayer but in the expectation that the officer will repay this investment in terms of higher performance in more important tasks.

After professional competence, the second prerequisite of leadership is the possession of what we call broad character. Character includes many virtues such as courage, determination, veracity and reliability. Professional competence is no substitute for these virtues, because ~~the~~ a competent man may also be an unreliable man when exposed to ~~under~~ the stresses and strains of war. Some of these virtues are of particular importance in the military life. ~~Take the simple~~ Certain virtue of truthfulness. We respect it in all walks of life, but in the military profession it has a special meaning well expressed by Secretary of War Newton D. Baker shortly after World War I. He wrote

with regard to the Honor Code at West Point: "Men may be inexact or even untruthful in ordinary matters, and suffer as a consequence only the disesteem of their associates, or even the inconvenience of unfavorable litigation, but the inexact or untruthful soldier trifles with the lives of his fellowmen, and the honor of his government. It is, therefore, no matter of idle pride but rather of stern disciplinary necessity that makes the Army require of its officers a character for trustworthiness which knows no evasion. In the final analysis, character is the most precious component."

I have read many studies which undertake to answer the question why some units fight better than others. After analyzing the behavior of many units in my own division, the 101st Airborne, in World War II, I concluded that generally speaking, my men performed well not because of any deep ideological commitment, not because of any deep allegiance to the Army, or even to the Division of which we were all proud. Their basic loyalties were to the small groups of their comrades, the company and the platoon and the men who composed them. They fought well because they were being watched by their friends and they could not afford to sacrifice their reputations as reliable comrades. It was the character of individual soldiers and their reaction to the opinion of other men of character (~~about them~~) that made the difference between the units which succeeded and those which failed.

But an officer may be competent and well may be a man of character and still fail to get the most from the men whom he commands.-- and thus fail in his mission. It is a vastly intriguing study to analyze the methods of command of successful American leaders and note the widely differing patterns of behavior. Although exposed to the same environmental influences from West Point to the command of a field army, no two men could have been more different as Commanders than Generals Bradley and Patton. A similar contrast existed between Generals Lee and Grant, Jackson and Lee. Yet all left their names deeply etched in American military history.

The quality of leadership which we are considering I would call the gift of human understanding, the instinctive ability of the commander to sense the viewpoint of the commanded, to anticipate their hopes, fears and aspirations, and thus to establish a bond between the leader and the led, based on mutual loyalty and respect. Some leaders have achieved this end through iron discipline, influencing their men more by fear than by affection, but always inspiring respect. Others have won the affection of their men by the clear evidence of their devotion to their interests and the willingness to share their hardships. But whether a stern or a compassionate leader, all successful commanders have been just and considerate of their men, have recognized that rank is not a privilege but a responsibility and have viewed their men as individuals, not as faceless serial numbers. They have known

how to take their men into their confidence and make ~~each feel one~~ them feel a band of brothers working on a common purpose of great moment.

The American fighting man has always wanted to know the why of things. Baron Von Steuben who helped in the training of Washington's Army wrote back to a friend in Europe the following words which should always be in your minds as you perform your duties as officers. "The genius of this nation is not in the least to be compared with that of the Prussians, Austrians or French. You say to your European soldier 'do this' and he doeth it, but I am obliged to say 'this is the reason why you ought to do that' and then he does it." The success of our landings in Normandy, 22 years ago today, on June 6, 1944 was due in a large degree to the fact that every man engaged in that landing understood the task, why it was necessary, how it was to be accomplished and

the importance of the part he would play. This understanding was a result of weeks of careful briefings by officers of all ranks, explaining the tasks which confronted the greatest military expedition of recorded history. Thus when my parachutists were scattered in the night landing and ~~seldom~~ often found themselves in ~~the area of Normandy~~ places far from where their primary mission lay, they fell together in little bands and moved to accomplish the nearest job to be done, all because they understood the ~~reason why.~~ entire plan and the reason for it.

These prerequisites of leadership which I have been describing are all attributes of the spirit. While I would agree with Napoleon that in war the moral is to physical as three is to one, I would not suggest to you young gentlemen that you can forget the physical in developing your qualities of leadership. Napoleon himself lost much of his effectiveness when he was no longer physically able to ride a horse and had to be drawn to the battlefield in a four-horse carriage. Physical condition in the military profession is of vast importance, even more so in most walks of civil life. Physical condition is necessary for the sustained performance of most military tasks. It is necessary to survive the pressures of war. Furthermore, there is a psychological aspect to the matter. ~~None~~ Few of our citizens who pay the bills of the Armed Forces believe that a fat man in uniform can do his task. Our public will never take too seriously a fat policeman or a fat soldier. There are engraved on the weighing scales in the officers' gymnasium at West Point the slogan "This scale is to remind you that a potbelly can not lead the Corps of Cadets." I would suggest that it can not lead effectively any military element of the Army or the Air Force and hence I would urge that you carry away from Akron today not only your commission but also your tennis racket, your golf club, your squash racket, your walking shoes--whatever other symbol you may have of an intention to lead a

vigorous, physical life throughout your military service and beyond.

I have probably taken more time than I should this morning with these informal remarks. But it does an old soldier's heart good to see the quality of the young men here entering the military profession. I hope many of you will find in this profession more than temporary employment. I would like to think that many of you will decide to make the military profession a permanent career. For me, it represented almost 44 years of happiness and satisfaction. I am sure that it would hold equal rewards for many of you. But whatever your future decision,this morning let me ~~xxxxx~~ simply extend my hearty congratulation to each one of you and welcome you to the profession of arms.