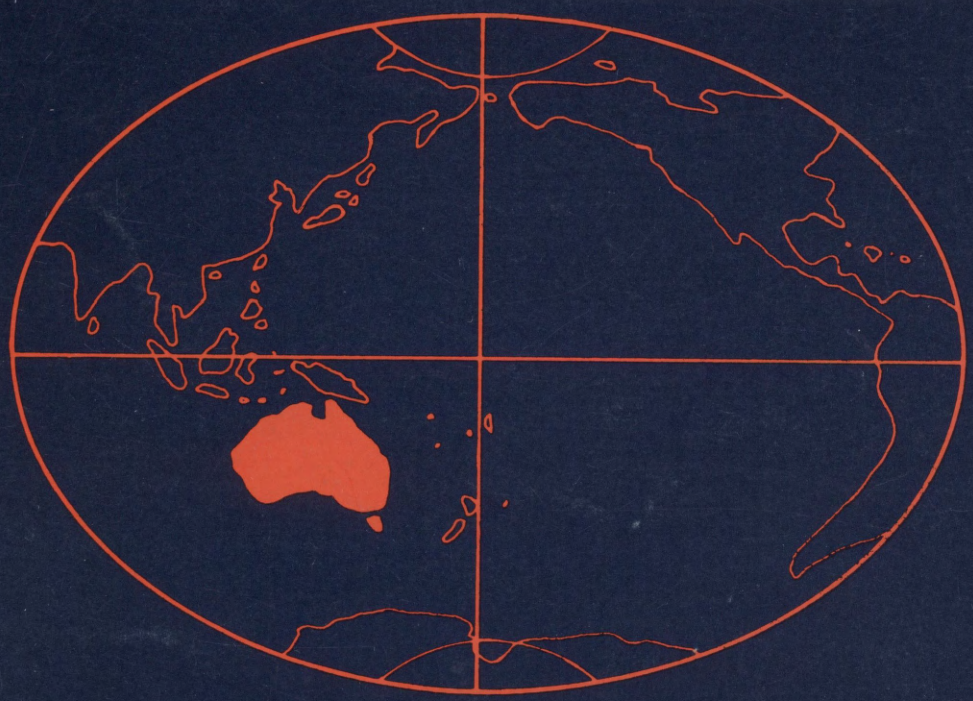
The Strategic and Defence Studies Centre

WORKING PAPER NO. 63

ASPECTS OF LEADERSHIP IN A MODERN ARMY

by

J.O.Langtry



The Research School of Pacific Studies
The Australian National University, Canberra

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ABSTRACT

The author discusses some physiological and psychological aspects of leadership training in the Australian army. He argues that human performance is the crux of a military leader's profession and that it should be studied formally within the profession.

ASPECTS OF LEADERSHIP IN A MODERN ARMY*

One cannot discuss leadership in the military context without distinguishing between command and leadership. An American staff college manual puts it thus:

a. Command is the authority an individual in the military service lawfully exercises over subordinates by virtue of his rank and assignment. It carries with it responsibility for planning, organising, training, directing, coordinating, and controlling military forces to accomplish assigned, implied, or inherent missions together with administrative responsibility for supply and for the health, welfare, morale, discipline, assignment and relief of personnel.

b. Leadership is the art and exercise of influence to direct men in such a way as to obtain their willing obedience, confidence, respect and loyal cooperation. Proper leadership accomplishes the mission with minimum expenditure of means and time and a maximum harmony of group or unit objectives with individual needs and goals.

c. Good leadership motivates men to respond favorably to command. Command is exercised by virtue of office; leadership causes others to carry out the desire of the leader to achieve a goal willingly and enthusiastically. One can command without being a leader, but the commander is more effective if he is also a good leader.[1]

The same source concludes that, although many believed that leadership could be acquired and that certain qualities or characteristics were invariably associated with leadership, 'no study has resulted in conclusive proof as to the probable success, or lack of success, of a potential leader. So much depends on the situation ... no two situations are the same ...'.

The intention here is not to engage in an analysis of the leadership qualities of the great captains of war. Rather the concern is to discuss some specific aspects of leadership training, particularly at junior officer and non-commissioned officer (NCO) levels, which are only rarely, if at all, adequately dealt with at Army colleges and

* This working paper is based on a lecture given to the RAAF Staff College on 17 June 1982 and subsequently published under the title 'We Must Train Junior Leaders for the Brutal Reality of War' in Pacific Defence Reporter, (Vol.9, No.4), October 1982, pp.41-42,44-46,72.

The advice received from Major General W.B. James, MBE, MC, QHP, Director General of Army Health Services, especially concerning the physiological aspects of this article, is greatly appreciated.

schools.** The most neglected aspect of military training is the training of junior leaders - leaders of small groups - leaders who, to be successful, must be able to perceive 'the basic needs and wants of the group, set goals or objectives which appear to satisfy these needs, but which in fact contribute to the accomplishment of the unit mission'.[2]

What is the fundamental nature of the profession of arms? It is the employment of human resources (some would say more concisely and simply - 'the exploitation of man') in war. Hence, it is human performance which is the crux of a military leader's profession. To the best of my knowledge, the scope and facilities for regular study of 'man-the-weapon' are almost non-existent in Australia. Occasionally, a burst of energy is directed to the subject, only to become dissipated with the passage of time or the removal of active sponsorship. It seems that 'man-the-weapon' is a phrase, a cliche, readily accepted as being apt in the jargon of the profession, but there the matter ends. I am not aware of there being a prescribed text in the Australian Army, let alone formal courses, dealing with, for example, combat stress, the physiology and psychology of surprise as a tactical factor, human performance under climatic stress and the like. The one exception, perhaps, was the consideration of morale, motivation, training and leadership in the context of combat power at the Chief of General Staff's (CGS) Exercise, 1979. Much of the substance of those aspects of combat power has found expression in an inspired lecture entitled 'Man the Measure of Most Things' by Brigadier W.B. James (now Major General, Director General, Army Health Services) and Lieutenant Colonel R.J.G. Hall.[3] This lecture is taken 'on tour' from time to time, but it is not a prescribed text.

Brigadier General S.L.A. Marshall, a noted authority on human performance in combat, maintains:

> Human nature is the one constant not transformable through the reiteration of 'doctrine'. We may find a better way to use men's powers through heavier ordeal. But we will not change cockroaches into butterflies. Our basic subject is man. All advance depends on knowing him better as a fighting animal, in the mass and under pressure, a highly sensitive, tough, yet fragile vessel, with definable limits.[4]

General Marshall was not implying that a particular individual's limits can be defined exactly. Elsewhere he makes the points that 'courage is inherent ... but remains ... unknown until the chips are down'; and 'there is no feature of training which enables determination, prior to combat ... [as to] which men will carry the fight'.[5] Marshall also goes on to say that there is no such person as the soldier who is 'dauntless under all conditions of combat'.

The nature of warfare is changing in many dimensions. First, I will draw extensively on the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre's monograph 'The Development of Australian Army Officers for the 1980s'[6]

** Although I will be drawing largely on my Army experience to support my contentions, I believe that the general arguments and observations may have relevance as well to the Navy and Air Force. J.O. Langtry.

to illustrate the value of placing much more emphasis in future on the training of leaders in techniques for better employment of their human resources.

In the coming decades, the increasingly widespread use of both active and passive night vision devices will greatly reduce the traditional usefulness of night for concealment purposes and for rest. These devices can provide a greatly enhanced detection and target acquisition capability, not only through bad weather, rain, snow and fog but even dust. A proliferation of these systems will also severely degrade the degree of security hitherto provided by vegetation and artificial netting. Further, chemical smoke as a form of visual protection will lose much of its effectiveness.

With much of the security hitherto derived from darkness, bad weather and light camouflage being removed, it can be anticipated that tactical war in all its phases and theatres will become more intense and an almost nonstop round-the-clock operation. This has different implications for different people in different situations, but on the general level it has obvious significance in purely human endurance terms. Patterns of sleeping, eating and general human activity are likely to be far more subject to modification to fit the new military requirements. It is possible that various forms of drugs may be dispensed to improve peak efficiency, extend human endurance or to assist personnel to sleep and rest even in noisy and uncomfortable environments. However, it is likely to be a long time before such drugs could be administered on a mass scale with predictably uniform results. The same drug may work well for some people but in others the effects could be bizarre. In the short term we should be looking at other ways of achieving the same aims.

In any event much will need to be done in educating all officers (and NCOs) in the employment of their human resources in war with a sound understanding of the implications of both the physiological and psychological stresses involved. This is a requirement above and beyond the teaching of health, hygiene and 'man-management'. Since a unit's combat efficiency depends upon cohesion and teamwork, even a comparatively slight drop in the soldiers' psychological and physiological status will often lead to a greatly exaggerated loss of efficiency in the unit. Conversely, a slight improvement in their performance can give a marked boost to the unit's overall performance - perhaps the difference between victory and defeat, especially in fast-moving, round-the-clock operations.

The Strategic and Defence Studies Centre's monograph referred to above addresses many other aspects of the changing nature of war which highlight the need to emphasise the training of leaders in the professional management of their human resources. In particular the trend in armies towards smaller combat units operating without a concentrated support infrastructure, with greater mobility in a more dispersed manner, will put a heavier burden on leadership, especially at lower levels of command.

The same monograph also points to a number of general socio-political factors which will impact increasingly on leadership techniques. For example, there will be an increasing tendency amongst subordinates to make their own judgements and to challenge articulately

any exression of 'theirs not to reason why' form of authoritarianism. They will want to play a part in the formulation of military education and training programmes, and to contribute to the development of tactics, strategy and defence policy.

There will need to be a more realistic and intelligent attitude towards the giving of and obedience to orders. Wherever practicable, this development should be coupled with more informality (rather than less discipline) in work situations and the structuring of small group team work activities with a view to improving productivity.

In the future it is likely that there will be a heightened sense of political awareness amongst soldiers. These soldiers will tend to be more sceptical about traditional military 'indoctrination'. There will be a continuing need to assess social changes and their relevance to training and leadership, especially in light of the fact that, for the foreseeable future, the Australian Defence Force will have relatively small regular and reserve force components in its standing forces and that, therefore, in a major conflict they will be dependent on the mobilised citizen-soldier. He will be predominantly influenced and conditioned by his civilian social environment.

It is important to accept that the emerging world is one in which young persons see the present world in different ways from those who are older. The old and the young may be looking at the same things, but the young do so with reference to a different set of experiences from the old. For example, the younger generations of today have known no other world than one in which mankind has the undoubted potential to destroy itself. The young are also aware that mankind has the ability to alter profoundly the physical environment, either for good or for ill. They are probably the first generations to be so broadly educated as to be aware, to a greater or lesser exent, of the full range of socio-political and socio-economic problems besetting the world, and to experience the implications of accepting uncertainties and probabilities as a general principle. Many of them reject absoluteness in judgements and opinions, or 'black and white' values.[7] Leaders at all levels should become increasingly sensitive to these fundamental pressures for change and no longer feel that they can remain aloof from them.

Let us now turn to some more specific aspects of leadership - the requirement for at least an insight into the psychology and physiology of the soldier in combat. Of course, there is a very close interaction between the two in terms of human performance. However, it is as well to examine each separately in the first instance. The psychological aspects are the more neglected of the two. Of particular interest is the suppression in combat of undesirable psychological manifestations in our own troops and the exploitation of the same weaknesses in the enemy. The illustrations, impressions, assertions and statistics used are drawn from a wide range of sources (see the selected bibliography attached), notably from the works of S.L.A. Marshall, but many are supported by personal experience, observations and study.[8(a) and (b)]

Approximately 15 to 25 per cent of people confronted with sudden danger can be expected to respond purposefully, quite rapidly developing sustained effective activity. These are those best adjusted psychologically and the best trained (pre-conditioned) to develop some form of immediate action. They are usually too busy to remember feeling

subjective fear during the period of danger, but they may have a typical let-down later. The remainder and the majority of the group confronted with the same immediate danger tend to be stunned and bewildered. They will need an appreciable time to evaluate the situation.

To put it another way - approximately 75 per cent of people confronted with sudden danger can be expected to be ineffective for an appreciable time. Inaction is likely to intensify the fear reaction, thus extending the period of non-effective behaviour. Experience, training, the design of tactics and the quality of leadership can shorten the period of ineffectiveness for most but it cannot be eliminated altogether.

An important factor emerges. In situations where the impact of danger is sudden and of personal concern (e.g., when caught in an ambush), the rapidly executed immediate action drill (IA) is preferable to the development and implementation of a more carefully considered tactical plan. It may even reverse the situation by shocking the opposition into a state of non-effectiveness.

The extent of non-firing and deliberate failure to fire effectively is a facet of human performance in combat which has been swept under the carpet for too long in Australian training curricula. American research teams in World War II came to the conclusion that as many as 75 per cent of US infantrymen failed to make effective use of their weapons in battle. In the Korean war it appears that there was a marked improvement in that more than 50 per cent fired effectively. Nevertheless the incidence of non-firing by troops, especially in ambush at night, was alarmingly high on occasions.

German troops during World War II and Commonwealth troops in the Korean war also displayed this characteristically human failing. It was not unusual to find that up to 40-50 per cent of the individuals in night ambushes in Korea failed to fire at all, or deliberately produced ineffective fire because they were reluctant to betray their positions by the muzzle flash of their personal weapon. The underlying reason for this apparent dereliction in duty was simply active expression of the desire for self-preservation in the more psychologically inadequate individuals. It was probably more prevalent at night because, under cover of darkness, there was a better chance of getting away with it.

Realising the incidence of 'non-shooters' liable to be present in any group, particularly the inexperienced group, it is to the leader's advantage to compromise the individual in such a way that his reaction is to produce effective fire if only as a means of self-preservation. The case of assaulting from ambush as an IA drill demonstrates a method of compromising the individual, because it is unlikely that the potential non-shooter will elect to stay behind; and, once committed to the assault, he must fight for his life. In so doing his tension will be released and his fire will probably become effective.

It was assessed by S.L.A. Marshall that revised training techniques played a major role in the improved performance of the US infantryman in Korea, particularly with regard to the junior leader's role in combat. Marshall observed that the NCOs in Korea moved about more than in World War II and got their men firing before involving themselves in the fire-fight. This was not so prevalent in World War II when it was

assumed that the inexperinced soldiers would be self-starters. Usually it is only the 'old sweats' who can be relied on, and then not always, to initiate effective firing of their own accord; and it can take a considerable time in action before one can qualify as an 'old sweat' - as a seasoned, efficient combat soldier.

Depending on his subjective make-up, the individual who is overcome by terror becomes either incapable of any action, or gives himself over to purely instinctive action, the objective being solely the preservation of his life. This group of people is of special concern to the leader. His responsibility is to suppress these undesirable reactions to battle stress. The study of leadership techniques must take account of this human frailty. Minor tactics should be designed to channel human behavioural characteristics into acceptable directions which at the same time lead towards attainment of the tactical objective in the stress of battle. Two men sharing one weapon pit are less prone to fear than one on his own. In ambush, individuals should be paired off. Intimate interdependence in the form of teamwork is invaluable. A sense of inherent domination and power is important - a machine-gun team tends to be less susceptible to inaction than a pair of riflemen. Personal contact with the leader is valuable - to encourage, to coerce, to 'check-on', to supply orientation and renewed motivation, to restore dynamic action. Shouting in attack and defence can do much to overcome the sense of 'battlefield loneliness' common amongst the less than professionally trained or 'blooded' soldiers ... Shock action, stealth and surprise can be used as immensely powerful weapons against ill-trained and poorly led forces. But one needs to know and accept the reasons for the above to have confidence in them and be able to exploit them fully.

Generally speaking, with the exception of our 'special forces' such as our Special Air Service (SAS) forces and commandos, relatively little considertion has been given to the application of psychology to military minor tactics and training. In World War II both the German and British armies developed or encouraged quite a wide range of special forces to exploit predictable human behaviour in combat. Skorzeny (Germany) and Stirling (Great Britain) and others [9] based many of their tactical plans for individual raids on the principle that once real disorder is created almost anyone can get away with anything. Skorzeny went so far as to study in detail the extent and duration of shock effects in relation to the nature of the cause and the size and complexity of organisation of the group affected. For example, in one instance Skorzeny with a handful of troops crash-landed by glider into Mussolini's mountain top prison in northern Italy and 'snatched' Mussolini from under the nose of Marshall Badoglio's troops. Skorzeny found that troops confronted with such a reverse do not recover their senses for quite a time; like an anaesthetist he tried to estimate when his patient would come round. For the Mussolini operation he counted on three minutes of chaos after the glider landed - long enough to reach the prisoner's side - and was not disappointed. After the event, Skorzeny reckoned it nearer to four minutes than three.

Much of Skorzeny's amazing success was based on his appreciation, in some cases intuitive, of the human frailties of the opposition and a clear understanding of the quality and capacity of his own troops. One of his axioms was 'Ask for volunteers for dangerous work. Pick out the best, train them in fellowship. Then they will develop qualities that

no one has ever suspected them to possess...'. Skorzeny also gave special attention to his training methods and the selection of weapons most suited to the troops in the execution of their special task. The real truth in his axiom for the purpose of this discussion is that man has qualities that 'no one has ever suspected...'. These qualities are not restricted completely to special groups of men. To some extent they are inherent in all men. Special units are remarkable more for the achievements of the group as a whole than for extraordinary qualities inherent in the individual members. Perhaps Field-Marshal Slim had this in mind when he remarked: 'The level of initiative, individual training and weapon skill required in, say, a commando is admirable; what is not admirable is that it should be confined to a few small units. Any well-trained infantry battalion should be able to do what a commando unit can do; in the Fourteenth Army they could and did.'[10] It is the unsuspected good qualities as well as the hitherto concealed frailties of the common infantryman which must be brought into open forum discussion so that tactics, training methods and weapon selection can be reviewed realistically.

I have no doubt that there is a host of documented parallels to the above illustrations to be found in later wars and, I suspect, the exploits of the British SAS, paratroopers and Royal Marines in the Falkland Islands mini-war will show up further examples.

The design of weapons should take account of the user's psychological and physiological condition in the stress of battle. The old Lee-Enfield rifle was an excellent weapon for use on an application range, but many were less than enchanted with it in the stress of combat. It was fiendishly difficult to reload its magazine with sweaty, trembling hands in the best of circumstances, let alone on the move, in the assault!

Emotional fatigue and recuperation cannot be separated from physiological stress. The more heavily men are loaded and the further they have to go, the more susceptible they become to fear. The more intense becomes their fear, the more their physical endurance and power may be impaired. It is almost axiomatic that the physically fit and properly acclimatised are less susceptible to fear. Fear and fatigue are interdependent and reciprocal in their effects.

The subject of recuperation is of great importance. It can have a direct bearing on the selection of tactics. Where emotional stress has been the main contributing factor in fatigue and has been of short duration, only a quite brief period of rest is needed for recuperation. A 20 minute spell at the end of an attack, should the tactical situation permit it, will work wonders in restoring confidence and physical capacity. As a general rule one group should be required to tackle but one combat task in a battle sequence.

All that can be achieved in this short space is the illustration of types of combat-psychology subjects which should be included in the training of leaders. The field is not anywhere near exhausted - panic, discipline, esprit de corps, personal and group responsibilites, the techniques of small group command (the corporal's command), the handling of battle fatigue and self-inflicted wounding in forward areas, and many others warrant close attention.

must, if high performance is to be sustained. The informed leader can assist greatly.

It may seem pedantic to suggest that commanders and leaders should be taught how to evaluate the level of climatic stress. But it can be done with very little effort. Gunners are obliged to take into account the meteorological conditions when planning the fall of shot. Why should not the same critical consideration be given to the climatic conditions surrounding the toops themselves?

For regimental commanders and leaders, a formal, although specialized and limited education in man's physiology and psychology under climatic and battle stress should lead to:

a. improvement in the quality of their leadership;
b. improved management of their human resources in terms of their ability to obtain the optimum from their forces with less risk of under- or over-estimating their absolute capacity; and
c. improvement of unit and individual efficiency.

Conversely, leaders with such skills are best able to appreciate the effects of physiological and psychological stresses on an enemy in an adverse situation and take advantage of it. For example, should the enemy force be tired and off-guard, it can be shocked at close quarters into a state of demoralisation by an opponent markedly inferior in numbers exploiting the principle, mentioned earlier, that 'once real disorder is created, almost anyone can get away with anything'.

However, the underlying purpose of this all too sketchy, highly subjective perspective on leadership is to make one main point - i.e. unless care is taken to incorporate, in the training of our leaders, education as to the realities of human performance on the battlefield, we run the grave risk of producing leaders who will not be buffered against untutored reaction to the brutality of war.

There is no genuine reconciliation between war and morality. Military leaders, if they are to remain aggressive and competent in battle, must develop or have developed for them a rationale to sustain themselves and those they lead through the crises of battle. This does not mean that they must deny their humanitarian sensibilities - but rather that they must come to accept early that the ability to sublimate their compassion on the battlefield (not an inherent capability in all!) is an essential qualification in effective combat leaders. We should ensure that the emphasis on academic and cultural aspects of their eduction does not prejudice their training to the extent that it may be discovered, too late, that they do not have the stomach for combat. The likely reaction of potential combat leaders should be tested as far as possible before they are given command in battle.

There is no room for amateurism when preparing regimental officers, NCOs and soldiers for battle. Nor is there room for skimping on funds for training in times of peace or times of economic stringency. There is no substitute for excellence in professional leadership and sound training: neither can be developed at short notice. The combination of the two is a powerful 'force multiplier' [11] which can often more than compensate for deficiencies in equipment and force structure.

NOTES

1. US Army Command and General Staff College, Leadership, (RB22.1), 1 July 1963, chap.1, p.1.

2. Ibid, chap.1, p.4.

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7. For further elucidation see also Langtry, J.O., 'The Impact of Socio-political and Socio-economic Trends on the Environemnt of the 1989s', Australian Army Journal, No.292, September 1973.

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   (a) Langtry, J.O., 'Tactical Implications of the Human Factors in Warfare', Australian Army Journal No.107, April 1958; and
   (b) 'Man Management in Hot, Humid Climates', Australian Army Journal, No.110, July 1958 - a condensation by Major E.M. Griff, MC, of 'Human Performance in Hot, Humid Climates' (unpublished) prepared for the Directorate of Military Training, Australian Military Forces, 1957, based on research by Major J.O. Langtry when he was Deputy Assistant Director Scientific Research (Australian Army Opertional Research Group) with the Australian Army Component of Far East Land Forces.

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