

A legacy of esprit and leadership

by MGen John A. Lejeune

† "Combat leader, scholar, thinker, educator, innovator — all these describe the man who became the thirteenth Commandant of the Marine Corps and served as such for nine years during the 1920's." With these words Gen Lemuel C. Shepherd Jr., 20th Commandant describes MGen John A. Lejeune in the preface to the new edition of *Reminiscences of a Marine*, Lejeune's memoirs, republished this month by the Marine Corps Association.

Over the years John A. Lejeune has become almost a legend in the Marine Corps. "Besides the many 'firsts' of his distinguished thirty-nine year career," Gen Shepherd goes on to say, "Lejeune can perhaps best be described as the man who charted the course of the Corps in the 20th century." And indeed he did, when he directed a study of amphibious warfare at Marine Corps Schools, Quantico from which the Corps' modern amphibious doctrine evolved. But above all else Gen Lejeune's legacy comes down strongest for his model of leadership. He set forth the "teacher-pupil" approach in the relationship between officer and enlisted which still provides the hallmark for Marine Corps leadership.

On 18 January 1921 he spoke to the Army General Staff College (forerunner of the Army War College), Washington, D.C. about esprit and leadership. He found the two inseparable. His message is timeless and proves that in leading men, leadership doesn't change much, only men do. On the 59th anniversary of Gen Lejeune's appointment as Commandant of the Marine Corps, we publish his talk on leadership as he gave it 58 years ago.



When General Smith wrote to me and asked me to come down to the General Staff College and make a talk on the subject of esprit and leadership, I was very loathe to accept. In the first place, I had been at the school here for 14 months and I felt like a fleet officer going back to the Naval Academy, getting up on the platform and talking to the staff and students of the school. In the second place, I have been very busy. I could see ahead that I would be busy with that kind of work which is very distracting; there are so many questions coming up all the time that it is very hard to concentrate on any one subject. In the third place, I did not think, and I do not think now, that I have any very important message which would be of great value to the persons who were going to hear it. However, I wrote out a talk. Ordinarily I talk without notes, but I put them down because I might get a case of buck-fever.

Esprit de corps and morale are kindred subjects; in fact, some writers consider them as synonymous. This, however, is not the case, as esprit de corps is only one of the factors which goes to constitute morale.

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Morale is three-fold — physical, mental or professional, and spiritual. The physical condition of troops has a great influence on their morale. Men whose bodies are untrained physically, who are soft from leading sedentary lives, are unable to stand the strain and stress of long marches and active campaigning. Their morale is rapidly lowered, and they soon become demoralized.

The effect of physical training is exemplified in the case of Stonewall Jackson's division. In the fall campaign of '62, they made such long marches with so few stragglers that they were called the "Foot Cavalry." General Dick Taylor, who commanded one of the brigades, writes very interestingly in his book entitled "Destruction and Reconstruction," telling how he trained his brigade to march. He said in '61 Jackson's division marched very poorly. It was composed largely of men who were brought up in the country and who were accustomed to ride

on horse-back, or were city men who were accustomed to riding in carriages. Taylor took his brigade and practiced it in marching during the winter of '61 and '62, so in the spring of '63 his brigade marched so well that it was adopted by Jackson as an example for the whole division. The whole division was practiced in marching with the wonderful results that history tells us about. The morale of that division as we know was very high; perhaps the physical condition of the men had a great effect on it.

Similarly, troops whose professional or military training has been neglected, and who are unskilled in the profession of arms, finding themselves unable to cope on equal terms with a highly trained enemy force of equal numbers, have their morale lowered, and it becomes increasingly difficult to obtain results with such troops until and unless they shall have received the careful training and instruction which all troops should have before being thrown into battle.

There are many instances in history of the failure of untrained troops. They are particularly liable to panic. I think in our own history the most notable example is the Battle of Bull Run, where the Union Army became panic-stricken in the afternoon of the battle and broke and fled to Washington. General Grant tells us in his memoirs of a regiment in Illinois which was badly officered. Reports came into the governor's office of the depredations of the troops. They seem to have committed atrocities all around southern Illinois, murders, robberies, drunkenness, everything of that kind. The governor turned to General Grant, then Captain Grant, and said, "What are we going to do?" Grant said, "Give me command of the regiment and I can train them." He was appointed colonel and took command of this regiment, instructed the officers, trained the men, worked them about eight hours a day, and in a few months it was the best regiment of the Illinois troops.

Esprit de corps is the third factor in morale, affecting, as it does, the spirit of the troops. Like everything pertaining to the spirit, it is intangible, imponderable, and invisible. Esprit itself cannot be perceived by any of the five senses, but nevertheless, every leader of men knows that it does exist and that it is the most potent of the forces which it is necessary to utilize in order to achieve victory.



Physical condition has great effect on morale.

Napoleon has said that, of all the elements that go to make up battle efficiency, morale constitutes 75 per cent, or that morale is to the material as three to one. Marshal Foch, I have read, has increased the value of morale over the material to four to one.

When we consider the meaning of these statements, we are at first amazed to find that these great masters of the art of war have apparently gone on record as believing that the element of morale in any organization or army is three or four times greater than the combination of all the material factors, such as the weapons of the infantry, artillery, and cavalry, and, in the case of Marshal Foch, of the air service as well. It is beyond the power of the average man's comprehension to fully visualize this. This version of their statements is, of course, an exaggeration, in that unarmed troops, no matter how high their spirit, could not overcome troops fully armed and equipped with modern weapons, unless they were absolutely lacking in morale, which is practically inconceivable, as even the most inferior troops have some spark of martial spirit, and are not altogether cowards.

What I think was intended to be conveyed by the statement of Napoleon was, that an army with high morale, and necessarily high spirit, could defeat an army of low morale, and necessarily low spirit, which was three times as strong in numbers. A study of history shows that this has happened over and over again. In fact, small forces have defeated armies much greater than three times their size. The battles of the Greeks with the Asiatic armies alone are sufficient to establish the truth of this statement. For instance, Alexander's conquest of Asia; Xenophon's successful retreat with 10,000 men through the heart of Asia Minor although surrounded by hundreds of thousands of the enemy; the battles of Marathon, Thermopalae; and many others.

The Roman armies also overcame forces many times greater than they in numbers through their superiority in morale. A handful of Roman citizens ruled the world until the Roman Empire broke down through the loss of morale on the part of its people, when it then became an easy prey to the hordes of barbarians who had continually pressed against its outer circumference for centuries.

Napoleon verified the truth of his belief by winning many battles with forces inferior in numbers to those of his opponents.

If it be accepted then as true that the esprit de corps of any body of troops is of such tremen-



The author and Gen Butler with SecNav Denby — "some way to 'put it over' the Navy."

dous value, evidently it is a most important subject for a military officer to study. To be able to create and maintain this living thing which we call "esprit" in the hearts of his troops is to be a great leader. Whether he be a platoon, a company, battalion, regimental, division, or army commander, the subject is worthy of his careful attention, and no officer should rest satisfied until he feels that he possesses that greatest of all assets — the ability to play upon the emotions of his men in such a manner as to produce that most wonderful of all harmonies — the music of the human heart attuned to great deeds and great achievements.

To be practical, then, how can we produce and cultivate morale, and particularly that important element of morale — esprit — in our troops? The physical and mental, or professional phases of morale are well known to all of us. To acquire them it is simply a matter of applying practically and intelligently the rules laid down for physical training and military instruction. No proper excuse can be made for failure on the part of officers to bring their troops to the very finest physical condition and to so instruct them as to make them as skillful as the best in the profession of arms. These things are the manifest duty of every officer, including the subaltern, and any officer who fails in the performance of his duty in these respects is un-

worthy to hold a commission. They are the very "ABC" of his profession.

The third factor — the spirit — is a more or less unknown field to all of us and a field which it is very difficult for us to comprehend by the exercise of our mental faculties. Logic and reasoning play but a small part of it. Education assists but little. It is a matter of dealing with the emotions, the spirit, the souls of the troops. A man successful in this realm is a great leader, and the qualities necessary to make him successful are known as the qualities of leadership. How, then, shall we inculcate and cultivate these qualities and become creators of esprit and, therefore, successful leaders of men?

Perhaps we can learn more on this subject, as on all military subjects, by a study of history than by any other method. By consulting history, let us determine who were some of the great leaders and then ascertain, if possible, the methods used by them.

All of us are familiar with the great Hebrew leader called Moses. All of us know, in a general way, that he reorganized his people and gave them a system of government, a body of laws, and a religion, but I do not believe that the average person quite comprehends the tremendous power of his leadership and the causes of his success.

Let us recall to our minds the old Bible story describing the history of the Jews in Egypt, their wanderings in the desert, and their entry into the Promised Land. These people, after several centuries devoted to carrying out the decree of Heaven to be fruitful and multiply, had become a numerous people, so numerous, in fact, as to make their masters, the Egyptians, fear that they might rise and overthrow them. In consequence, the ruler of the Egyptians enslaved them. He forced them to live in crowded ghettos, deprived them of the use of weapons, compelled them to do treadmill work, make bricks without straw, and did everything else in his power to abuse them physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually. In spite of this, the ruler of the Egyptians still feared these people, and in order to prevent their rapid increase in numbers, he issued an edict that the first born male of each family must be slain at birth. The mother of Moses, in order to save his life, hid him in the bullrushes, and he was found and adopted by the daughter of Pharaoh. He was given the high degree of physical and mental training reserved for the ruling classes of Egypt.

Moses, upon attaining manhood, brooded over the condition of his people, and finally left

the court of Egypt and went out into the desert, where he spent several years preparing himself for the great mission which he had personally assumed — that of freeing his people and leading them into Palestine. During this time, he had opportunity to study the lore of the desert, to train himself in the profession of arms, and to sanctify his spirit to the unselfish service of his people and of his God.

This great leader, upon his return to Egypt, finally, after many vicissitudes, secured the permission of Pharaoh to remove the Hebrews and their belongings from Egypt, and actually succeeded in doing so. We know, at the present time, that the march from Egypt to Palestine is one of only a few weeks, although the Bible tells us that the Israelites were lost in the wilderness and wandered about, apparently in an aimless manner, for 40 years.

It is inconceivable that Moses could have allowed this to be done without purpose. He had lived in the desert for several years; he knew where guides could be found; and he knew the routes across the desert himself. A careful study of the Biblical account shows clearly that the wanderings of the Israelites in the desert were carefully planned by Moses himself, and that he took advantage of this opportunity and of the time to build up the morale of his people. These poor and feeble ghetto dwellers either died from exposure or became hardy by their continued wanderings, their open-air life, and by the very difficulties which they had to surmount. They were compelled to learn the use of weapons and the lore of the desert in order to live. Moses taught them how to get food by the chase, how to find water springs, and how to utilize the fruits of the ground which they found from time to time. All of these things were so marvelous to them that they were called miracles.

Moses combined with this perfection of the physical instruction and training, the cultivation of the spirit of his people. He did everything in his power to cause them to lead virtuous and clean lives; he gave them the Ten Commandments, under circumstances which powerfully impressed the imagination of the ignorant Israelites, and these Commandments have come down to us unchanged and still constitute guides in the lives of all civilized people. He drew up and enforced a body of wise and salutary laws. He organized them by tribes into 12 fighting units. He insisted upon their adoption of the worship of the only true God.

Finally, after they had lived for 40 years in the wilderness, during which time every man, woman, and child who had left Egypt — with

the exception of Moses, the civil ruler, and Joshua, the military leader — had died, Moses was able to look upon his people and see, in place of the weak and feeble race he had led from Egypt, a warlike host of 600,000, every member of which had been born, raised and developed in the desert, who were inured to hardship, were vigorous physically and alert mentally, trained in the use of warlike weapons,



organized into a fighting force, filled with a religious enthusiasm which amounted to controlled fanaticism, and determined to reconquer the land which they had been constantly taught had been promised their forefather Abraham by God himself. Moses and Joshua therefore concluded that the time to enter Palestine had come. Moses himself, having completed his work, turned over the control of this warlike host to Joshua, and climbing to the top of a mountain, saw the Promised Land in the distance and was gathered to his Fathers.

Joshua led the troops into the Promised Land, easily overran the country, conquered and destroyed the tribes occupying it, and his people took it for their own.

This constitutes, I believe, the greatest example in history of the upbuilding of the morale of a whole people, and the changing of a race of slaves into a nation of mighty warriors.

There are other similar examples in history, although not quite so striking. Hannibal after the First Punic War prepared himself and the Carthaginians, a commercial trades-people, for the great war with Rome which he saw could not

be avoided. The history of the early years of the Second Punic War tells us of his marvelous success. Cromwell led a religious rebellion against the king, carrying the Puritans to victory. George Washington for eight years led the revolutionary armies of our own country and kept up the spirit of his faltering compatriots. Napoleon seized the opportunity of a regenerated France, whose people were fired with an enthusiasm for liberty and freedom, to lead her armies into the path of military glory and conquest. Finally, in the World War [I] we have the example of our own country — a peaceful nation — suddenly becoming filled with military ardor and the fighting spirit.

In nearly all of these great historical examples, we find a great leader who, in his own character, was the incarnation of the aspirations of his people and who, in his turn, built up their morale and esprit and led them to their goal.

Human nature is much the same as it has always been, although it has evolved with its environment, and the first essential of a successful military leader is to be able to understand and comprehend the emotions and the spirit which lives in the hearts and souls of the men he commands.

The study of leadership involves, therefore, first of all a study of human nature. One must put himself in the place of those whom he would lead; he must have a full understanding of their thoughts, their attitude, their emotions, their aspirations, and their ideals; and he must embody in his own character the virtues which he would instill into the hearts of his followers. True esprit de corps is founded on the great military virtues such as unselfishness, self-control, energy, honor and courage.

In time of peace, the cultivation of esprit is much more difficult than in time of war. The men have no great mission before them and it is hard to convince them that it is necessary to train arduously and to prepare themselves for an eventuality which does not appear to be imminent. Careful instruction in the history and traditions of their organization is very helpful in peace times, and the stirring up of a spirit of competition between organizations is of the utmost importance.

The United States Marine Corps has always been noted for its esprit de corps. This has been largely due to the fact that it has always been in competition with some other arm of the service. It habitually serves side by side with the Navy, and every officer who is worth his salt feels im-



Cemetery at Belleau Wood — even after victory, the many losses caused a depression in spirit.

peled to have his detachment, company, or other organization, win out in every competition, whether it be baseball, football, or other athletic activities, target practice, drills, discipline, appearance, conduct, military etiquette, or any of the other many things which go to make for efficiency. This competitive spirit is constantly drilled into the men, and as a result, every good Marine is ever on the *qui vive* to find some way to "put it over" the Navy. The same spirit exists when the Marines are detached for service with the Army, and an appeal to it always receives a response. The esprit of the Marines is that of the Corps, and while there is always a regimental and company esprit, the esprit of the Corps predominates.

In peace times too, creature comforts have a great effect in keeping up the morale of the men. The officers must see to it that the men are properly housed, clothed, and fed and that their time is taken up in useful and interesting instruction and entertainment. Idleness is the curse of the military life, but any treadmill instruction is a poor substitute. Officers must use ingenuity and initiative and must have their own minds trained and developed so that they can properly train their men. Discipline, in its true sense, should never be neglected. The men should be made to realize its great importance, but in enforcing it, officers should never be harsh or arrogant in their dealings with their men, but al-

ways kind, humane, and just.

In time of war, the leader must keep in touch with the current of thought of his men. He must find out what their grievances are, if any, and not only endeavor to correct the faulty conditions, but also to eradicate any feeling of discontent from their minds. He should mingle freely with his men and let them understand that he takes a personal interest in the welfare of every one of them. It is not necessary for him to isolate himself in order to retain their respect. On the contrary, he should go among them frequently so that every man in his organization may know him and feel that he knows them. This should be especially the case before battle.

He should watch carefully the training and instruction of the troops, and let them see that he is determined that they shall be fully prepared for battle. And if there be no liability of the information reaching the enemy, he should take his entire organization into his confidence and inform them of the great events that are taking place in other theatres of operations, the part being played by other units, and by their allies, if any; and give them full information on the eve of battle as to the plan of operations and the part to be played by each unit of the organization. Of course, that depends entirely whether or not the information can be kept from the enemy, if you are in reserve position, for instance.

It is especially advisable, whenever it can be done, for the commander to assemble his troops by battalions and address them, telling them of the great traditions and history of their organization and appealing to their patriotism and their esprit de corps. No stone should be left unturned to fill their hearts and minds with a determination to conquer, no matter what difficulties are to be overcome, and what losses they may be called on to suffer. The commander himself should be the symbol of the fighting spirit which he endeavors to foster and should show in himself a good example of patriotism, honor, and courage.

The first words of the Articles of Government of the Navy, which correspond to the Articles of War, require that the commander of every vessel should show in himself an example of virtue, honor, patriotism, and subordination. That is the preamble for the Articles of Government of the Navy.

In the larger units, it is frequently impossible for the commander to address all of the men or to come in personal contact with them. In this case, battle orders should be issued. These orders should be based on a careful study of the problems involved and an intimate knowledge of the thoughts of his men. Following the battle, it is well, too, to issue an order recounting the exploits of the troops and telling them of the effects of their efforts. At this time the men are exhausted in mind and body, and even though they may have been victorious, they are depressed in spirit on account of the many losses they have suffered; their comrades have been killed and wounded, they have witnessed many terrible scenes, and every effort should be made to cheer and raise their spirits. Praise and commendation should be given freely; decorations should be promptly awarded and delivered immediately after withdrawal from the front lines. Addresses to organizations which have distinguished themselves should be made. Replacements should be furnished promptly, if practicable, and the thoughts of the men immediately turned to building up their shattered organizations and preparing again to strike the enemy. Skulkers and cowards should be promptly and publicly punished so that all may see the great gulf which separates them from the gallant men who have served faithfully and courageously.

One is just as important as the other. The way it appealed to me overseas is that there were three classes of men. The first class, [were] the gallant, courageous fellows who did not require any urging or any leadership practically, but who from a sense of duty, loyalty, and

patriotism would stay up in the front lines and fight until all hell froze over. And the third class, [were] the skulkers, the white-livered fellows whom you could not expect anything of at all. Then there was a great middle class who could be swayed either way, and that was the class you had to deal with. If the services of the men who fought bravely were not promptly and properly recognized on the one hand, and if the skulkers and cowards were not punished on the other, the sentiment might grow that it was just as well to skulk. You got nothing for doing your duty and you got nothing for not doing your duty. The two go hand in hand, and punishments should be prompt and merciless to a real coward. On the other hand, praise, commendation, and rewards should be freely given and promptly given. The French, I think, understood the psychology of their people from the way they lined up their troops and decorated them immediately after they came out of the fight.

Finally, the most vital thing is to make the men feel that they are invincible, that no power can defeat them, and that the success of their country's cause depends on the victory of their organization.

I mentioned in reading this about informing the men beforehand what they were going to do. That policy was exemplified before the Second Division went into the battle of the Meuse-Argonne. We moved up in the reserve of the Fifth Corps. We had the general officers and the chief of staff, who was Colonel Ray, at several conferences at Fifth Corps headquarters, in which General Summerall explained in the greatest detail just what each division of the corps and the whole army was to do on November 1st. I took this back to division headquarters and had the senior officers of the division together, and Colonel Ray and myself explained everything to them. We were then in reserve with no opportunity for information to seep through the lines. It was directed that every officer and every man in the division be informed of the part we were going to play and what the object of the battle was, and what would be accomplished if victory was achieved. A map was drawn and given to every platoon, and each platoon leader had his men up and instructed every one down to and including the privates of just what his platoon was going to do in the battle. There was plenty of time and opportunity to have it all worked out in advance and the consequence was that the whole division felt absolutely certain what it was going through on that day and it did go through.

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