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# FREE MEN AND SOLDIERS

by

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US ARMY

*The following is the 31st Annual Kermit Roosevelt Lecture presented at the 5 senior United Kingdom military colleges in May 1977 by the Commandant, US Army War College.*

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**T**o come again to the British Isles is at once a special personal pleasure, and an honor to lecture in the name of Kermit Roosevelt. He was a man who served both our armies with distinction. In these exchanges, our purpose is to celebrate the enduring friendship which links the United Kingdom and the United States together, the mutual respect in which we of our armed and public services hold each other, and the commitments we share to both peace and freedom.

In a literal sense, I cannot say that I have "come home again." Nor can I say, as Sir Thomas Browne did, that "All places, all airs, make unto me one country; I am in England, everywhere and under any meridian." But I understand that sentiment, and I do return with warm memory and affection to a land where once I served when I was young, and where I have come back on other occasions to visit, work, and study.

I know, as Vincent Starrett wrote, that "Time colors history as it does a meerschaum pipe." Still, I remember Britain with indelible clarity as a place where Churchill once stood and rallied people all over to visions of "the broad sunlit uplands of tomorrow." And I remember equally the brave men and women, young and old, in and out of uniform, who marched and worked together towards that vision. For those times, and for many others, we in the United States know the debt that is

owed—for human courage, almost alone; for traditions of civility, order, self-discipline, common law, and equal justice; for a language; and for a concept of constitutional democracy.

I have come from another military institution, the United States Army War College. Its underlying philosophy, as set forth by its founder, then-Secretary of War Elihu Root, is, I suspect, much the same as yours: "Not to promote war, but to preserve peace by intelligent and adequate preparation...."

We, as you, study war. We, as you, are concerned with enhancing both the personal and professional excellence of our students and the members of our profession. Regrettably we, as you, understand something General De Gaulle once said: "Peace remains the hope of the wise, but war the history of men." So while we set the preservation of peace as our earnest hope and first purpose—indeed, the top line in our concept of modern strategy, the very reason for military readiness—history tells us to study hard, and keep our powder dry.

But in our armed forces and schools, in contrast to some others, we are dedicated to the wise, sensitive, and responsible discharge of military duties within a long-cherished constitutional framework. In America, we see our role, above all, as protecting the home which liberty has found in our land and assuring that the freedoms of our people can continue to grow. We know, as do you, that these purposes are best served by a nation and world at peace.

John Adams, the first US Minister to the Court of Saint James, and later our second President, once expressed both the irony and the eternal hopefulness of those who must

study war in a letter to his wife, Abigail: "I must study Politicks and War," he said, "that my sons may have liberty to study Mathematicks and Philosophy, Geography, Natural History, Naval Architecture, Navigation, Commerce and Agriculture; in order to give their children a right to study Painting, Poetry, Musick, Architecture, Statuary, Tapestry and Porcelaine."

What he described, of course, were some of the higher and longer-term aspirations of civilized people in free societies. And the civilized, first-focus of our and your military colleges on deterrence, peace, and the broad-gauged education of future military leaders relates directly to these aspirations. In societies such as ours, the military share the values and hopes of all the people, and there is a direct and important relationship between free men and soldiers.

**T**oday, I want to speak of some aspects of this relationship, a relationship which is fundamental not only to the security of our nations but particularly to the special quality and worth of our societies. In so doing, I shall refer often to "soldiers," using the term in a shorthand, generic sense, but you will understand that I mean to encompass all men and women who wear the several military uniforms of our countries, and oftentimes their civilian public servants as well. Also, for the most part I shall speak of American experience in these matters, leaving you to draw the parallels where they exist in your own experience.

In the simplest sense, the relationship between freedom and soldiery is easy to establish. In the United States from the very beginning, soldiers, sailors, marines, and now airmen have stood guard, worked, and fought for the land, its people, and its freedoms. They gave substance to the independent philosophy of our forefathers. They protected our commerce and gave us freedom of action in world intercourse. They cleared rivers and harbors, blazed trails, explored new frontiers, and protected new settlers. In times of natural disaster they have been first on the scene, and this healing use of military power has, in more recent times, extended to other lands as well.

In our alliances, we have testified to our faith that an ounce of readiness is worth a pound of fighting, and that peace is a goal worth soldiering for. Given the old history of Europe, certainly NATO is a classical example of the relationship between responsible military strength, peace, and freedom.

But there has been a more profound relationship between the freedom of American people and the nature of American soldiers. I call this experience a democratic success story, a success which I doubt that our founders fully expected, and one which some of our latter-day American critics will not concede even today. It is the story of a military which, for more than 200 years now, has remained effectively and faithfully under proper civilian authority, operating always within the constitutional framework which was devised for it by skeptical forefathers. For all that time there has been no "man on horseback," no substantial involvement in political affairs, and no lack of the institutional discipline which is especially important in a free society. Despite occasional aberrations, ours, too, has been a military committed to safeguard the internal liberties of the citizens as well as to provide security against external threat.

You will appreciate this, I know, because here in your nation has been written a similar record of power and responsibility and liberty, all together.

At the beginning, both the philosophers of our revolution and its military leader, General Washington, inveighed against a standing army as a threat to the liberties of the people. This

Major General DeWitt C. Smith, Jr., has been the Commandant of the US Army War College since July 1974. He was selected by the Chief of Staff of the Army to be the 1977 Kermit Roosevelt Lecturer, representing the United States Army in an exchange program with the British Army which began in 1947 and which is dedicated to furthering British-American friendship and understanding. On 1 August of this year, General Smith will be promoted to Lieutenant General and become the Army's Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel.



stemmed in part from Old World experiences and fears, and in part, perhaps, from the liberal tradition which has marked much of American political theory and some of its political behavior. Certainly there were grounds for early concern about the military in our society, and certainly our enduring native skepticism of things military is one of the strongest threads in the fabric of our freedom. But if skepticism is not held to the lines of reason and logic, it can soon descend to the levels of emotional bias and simplistic stereotyping.

As Allen Guttman wrote, "Liberalism, like an only child, has its inadequacies. Among them," he said, "is its inability to understand the uses of power in general, and of military power in particular." But concern about, or suspicion of the military have extended beyond the liberals to Americans of many persuasions over the years.

In part, this concern has derived from our historical distaste for standing armies. But, in addition, it has derived from puzzling, often paradoxical issues and dilemmas which arise when free men consider the presence of other, armed men in their midst.

For instance: freedom is a primary human value, but individuals differ, conflict results, and organized and legitimate force ultimately is needed to resolve conflict. But effective organized force—in other words, a good army—requires some individuals to give up a degree of their freedom (we call this "discipline") so that many more individuals may have freedom. This dilemma goes on. Who, for instance, guards the guardians? What constraints on soldiers are needed to maximize or insure freedom for society?

**T**he questions I have raised so far lessen if we face outward to the rest of the world rather than inward toward our own society; pointed in that direction, it is clear to most of us that the defense of the nation justifies the existence of soldiers, but pointed inward, the questions continue.

Another dilemma is that, while democracy tries to maximize freedom, military values are often regarded as contrary to democratic values and a hallmark instead of the

authoritarian military regimes which exist in many countries. Indeed, military values do and must differ from democratic values in some instances. In free lands, harmonizing them to achieve shared objectives is a major challenge to citizens and leaders alike, in and out of uniform.

I found it interesting to read in *The Soldier in Modern Society*, by your Lieutenant Colonel J. C. M. Baynes, that "one of [the] primary assertions" of the British Manual of Military Law is that "the British soldier is a citizen before he is a military man: the latter role," he said, "demands of him certain sacrifices, but bestows on him no special rights." I think this can be said of Americans, too. Thus both the British and we face the delicate question of how to develop military men and women who are thoroughly professional at arms, and yet remain effective citizens above all.

Other questions and dilemmas have remained with us, too. For example, does the fact that British and American soldiers are also free men impose some potential constraints on the uses of military power? Or again, in war, soldiers passively awaiting orders, or automatons, don't achieve victory. Freedom and initiative are needed for this; so, is a certain amount of democratic *indiscipline* required? If so, how much, and how to keep it within effective limits at various levels of authority and command?

And last among these complexities, there is the fact that modern warfare distributes both the risk and the responsibility for action to the whole population. The "front lines" are everywhere, the economy is engaged, civil defense must be maintained, and crucial decisions must be made by civilians as well as soldiers. To a degree, then, all citizens are soldiers, and a basic question exists as to the extent to which each person is a soldier (i.e., under discipline), or a free man or woman.

**I** have stretched out, perhaps labored, all these puzzling concerns to emphasize not only the skepticism but also the truly philosophical questions which properly are raised about military forces in our kinds of countries. I have done so, also, to stress the

need for military leaders to understand the currents of thought which run through their societies with respect to them. In addition to historical skepticism and philosophical debate, the armies in free societies have also been subject to long periods of apathy, unwarranted fears, emotional attack, and even on occasion to indiscriminate praise.

In my country, at least, many of us in earlier years were the objects of "our boys, right or wrong" adulation. Even today we have sometimes been the recipients of too much praise and too few questions by well-meaning friends in Congress and society at large. Corelli Barnett has written that "the history of the British Army . . . is of recurrent need rending aside the anti-military illusions of the nation . . . the history of an institution alternatively neglected by the nation, or trustingly looked to in moments of fright." Someone has called this "the Tommy Atkins syndrome," and Kipling could have written it for the United States just as well.

In more recent times, some of us who wear uniforms in America have, on occasion, literally been spat upon. More often we have heard our armed services described with fear as if they were hostile and alien forces determined to militarize and dominate our people. Less than two decades ago, repeated alarms were being sounded about the "military-industrial complex," the "garrison state," and "the warfare state," all evidences in varying degree, it was said, of what one might call the "Army-Greening" of our society and the decline of democratic values.

Still more recently there were those who predicted that the American military, as a result of the Vietnam trauma, would develop a stab-in-the-back theory and turn inward in bitterness at our society. And perhaps Bertrand Russell provided the capstone for this special genre of soldier-hating when, after reading Fred Cook's book, *The Warfare State*, he proclaimed that the military-industrial complex dominated the American government and was, at the same time, "so insane that it is quite ready to advocate . . . 'preemptive war' against the Soviet State." Twenty years have passed since that faithless and biased prophecy.

So it has gone throughout our existence and, in my view, minus the warped and bitter invective of extremists, so it should go! For there is ample evidence that skepticism of the military and other institutions of "the establishment" goes hand in hand with civil liberty, and that critical silence in other lands is often a precursor to loss of freedom or a symptom of tyranny already installed. What we soldiers and free men must do is "grin and bear it," understand the deep democratic values of criticism, and search objectively among all the questions and criticisms for some truths which may be there and which we should heed if we would serve our nations well. With respect to criticism, our late, peppery President Harry Truman put it this way: "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen!"

We must not be too sensitive, and certainly we have less reason than most to be apologetic. As I have said, our story, and those of other armies in other free societies, have been democratic success stories. They are not tales of perfection, but stories of faith and loyalty and achievement which all our citizens should tell, and in which we soldiers especially should find abiding assurance and pride of profession.

More to the point, I believe it incumbent upon us—and by "us" I mean not only the military but all our citizenry—to husband this successful experience, to appreciate its value, to understand its causes, and then, each in his or her own role, to determine what needs to be done to perpetuate the success story.

**G**eneral Sir John Hackett once said that "what a society gets in its armed services is exactly what it asks for, no more and no less." I would add that what a society gets in its armed forces is exactly what it deserves. So the first people to whom we must turn are our citizens-at-large, and our civilian leadership.

From our citizens-at-large, we seek interest, knowledge, and faith in what we are doing, fair judgments, and support and affection when they are merited. We ask, also, that they meet us halfway in maintaining the ties of value, understanding, communication, and

aspiration which must exist between free men and soldiers in their society.

With our civilian leadership, especially those who bear responsibility for military people and affairs, we want to share integrity, human concern, clearly determined and expressed purposes and objectives, objective judgments rather than doctrinaire preconceptions, and the extension of mutual dignity and respect. They must understand that, in a free society, they are the actual leaders of the military. This imposes a burden upon them to be as self-disciplined, selfless, and loyal as those they lead, to be aware that loyalty must be given downward, first of all.

We and our leaders together must agree that there is no truth in the old Chinese proverb that "you don't use good iron to make nails, nor good men, soldiers." We seek a common and mutual understanding that people are the indispensable element in military forces, and the quality of armies is largely determined by the quality of their men and women. There is a price for this, but it is a more important price than that paid for hardware or computer time.

In our civil-military relations, we need balance, not imbalance; proportion, not distortion; civility instead of incivility; reason rather than emotion; mutual respect, not mutual suspicion; today's facts, not yesterday's fears; and individual regard rather than stereotyped disregard. We military must remember that these prescriptions run both ways—they fit the shoe and the boot alike.

**A**s for us, we military have some obligations, too! Some are professional, some are to ourselves, some are to those whom we lead or follow, and all, in a sense, are obligations to our nations and our societies of free peoples.

We must forever hone the techniques and the skills of military men and women. We are paid for that! The people have the right to expect us to be professional and fully ready.

We must remain physically and mentally fit.

We must demand the foregoing qualities of those whom we lead, in their interest and that of their units as well.

Especially must we be men and women of principle and integrity, and remember something Cicero said: "The short period of life is long enough for living well and honorably."

We must be self-disciplined. As Montaigne wrote long ago, "To be disciplined from within, where all is permissible, where all is concealed—that is the point." And we must understand the essentiality of discipline in military forces, and the danger which undisciplined forces pose to free societies.

We must be selfless and outward looking—not focused on our own images and careers but rather upon our professional responsibilities, our personal obligations, our people, our units, and our national purposes.

We must be able to "stand the heat in the kitchen" and remember that, in free societies, public criticism is a price of public service.

We must be rational and analytical, and yet, more than that, we must have blood in our veins and human warmth in our hearts.

A sense of humor will help greatly—it eases the tension, deflates the ego, and it is the mark of a secure human being to be able to laugh at one's self.

Allied with that, we should remember that those who must rely upon the insignia on their sleeves or shoulders give proof that they have little else to rely upon.

We must combine decisiveness and strength with compassion and gentleness, for our nations entrust to us their most precious resource—their young people. It will help, in this, if occasionally we dash our faces with the cold water of some words Ernest Hemingway once wrote: "Never think that war," he wrote, "no matter how necessary nor how justified, is not a crime. Ask the infantry, and ask the dead."

Still, we must remember, too, that freedom is even more precious than life to most free men.

We must be candid and speak the truth as we see it. To accept today's "school solution" or "service line" unthinkingly is to be responsible for tomorrow's Maginot Line. No one has all the answers; no one knows what "the next war," God forbid, will be like, or where it will be fought; no one nation or

armed service is always right; and no one who really cares about the worth of his profession and the future of his nation will risk curtailing dissent in the interest of total uniformity. As John Milton wrote long ago, "Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion, in good men, is but knowledge in the making."

**A**s military men and women in free societies, we must understand as much about our societies as we do about our profession. Narrow-gauged soldiers serve their people poorly. To understand our people, we must remain in touch with them—share their values, their concerns, and their aspirations. As part of this, we must remember always that we are the servants and they the masters.

Especially as we grow more senior in our professions, we take on special obligations to the institutions and officials we serve, as well as to the people of our nations.

Perhaps first, knowing war up close—its pain, waste, and tragedy—we must make the costs of battle clear and insist that those making ultimate decisions weigh them thoughtfully, with conscience, and with attention to the hard-earned experience of men who have known war.

Along with that, we must never forget that our role is to advise on the use of military power, but not to advocate its use.

Still more, we must remember that the potential dimensions of war and the utility or purposes of military forces themselves were radically altered, forever, in the blinding white nuclear light which first flashed over Alamogordo, New Mexico, 32 years ago.

It was then that the modern strategy of civilized nations began to put deterrence of war as the first article of national and military strategy, and to think of warfighting in limited terms, relegated to important but secondary strategic place.

In making recommendations and judgments, it must be as clear to us as it is to other citizens that military force is only one form of national power—viewed by many as a "necessary evil"—and that there are many other legitimate and deserving claimants on

the public purse and national resources. Still, as professional military men, we must be certain that our nations give equal emphasis to both words, "necessary" and "evil," when considering military courses and expenditures. And we must advise them that the evidence of history is that responsible strength is a greater bulwark of peace than decent intentions, a vacuum, or unilateral disarmament.

All this underlines something that John Garnett wrote: "Strategy is more about peace than it is about war."

Lastly, we must all take solemnly and faithfully the oaths of service and fidelity we have sworn. In them, in the truest sense, we are bearing witness to our profound understanding of the relationship between freedom and responsible military power, between people remaining free and soldiers committed to that noble purpose.

Perhaps all of us—those in the military leadership and those on whom the people have bestowed civil leadership—should remember what it was that Wordsworth had to say about soldiers in command. He really had us all in mind when he wrote:

Who, if he rises to station of command,  
Rises by open means; and there will stand  
On honorable terms, or else retire,  
And in himself possess his own desire;  
Who comprehends his trust and to the same  
Keeps faithful with a singleness of aim . . .  
This is the happy warrior: this is he  
That every man in arms should wish to be.

And I would add, what every civilian leader also "should wish to be."

**W**hat I have tried to say today, above all, is that soldiering, in and for a free society, is a unique, important, complex, and proud profession. Leo Tolstoy said that "The vocation of every man and woman is to serve other people." That is the ideal, but it is too seldom realized. In our profession, though, the opportunity is there every day, for our commitment is to others, not ourselves, and to military values only as they serve to protect the values of free people.

Voltaire once said that "He who serves his country well has no need of ancestors." We seek that kind of "illegitimacy" because, when achieved, it means that we have been able to stand on our own merits and, joined in uniform with fellow soldiers, to serve the true interests of free nations and societies.

The cost can be very high. We all must be very sure that it is worth it, and that we draw the proper conclusions from the sacrifices made and examples set. On the wall of Oxford's Cathedral, I read the following on a memorial plaque:

Anthony Francis MacLeod Paget  
DSO, Croix de Guerre  
Lieutenant, 1st Oxfordshire and  
Buckinghamshire Light Infantry  
Born 5th November 1924  
Died of wounds received in  
action, 5th March 1945  
Aged 20 years.  
Who hating war and loving life,  
Gave his life that others  
might live.

Leaving to his comrades the memory  
Of his invincible gaiety,  
courage and gentleness.

Old fashioned? Maybe. Sentimental? Maybe. Begging the deeper issues of cause and effect, right and wrong, and the perspectives of men killing each other? Maybe, but I think not.

But what a tragedy and what a tribute! Note the qualities of the soldier: "courage," yes; but the other two words were "gaiety" and "gentleness." In a very real sense, those words, those qualities sum up much of what we soldiers who serve free men should be like. They remind us that our kind of soldiering, above all, is a matter of heart and spirit, and that both the internal and external freedoms of our societies depend even more upon our personal worth than upon our professional excellence. They remind us, too, of the relationship which all citizens share, and the burdens we all bear, differently but equally, so that our freedoms will remain secure and our nations prosper in the days of our children.

