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Generalship: Qualities, Instincts, and Character

MONTGOMERY C. MEIGS

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"Great military ideas are actually extremely simple. . . . Greatness lies in the freedom of the intellect and spirit at moments of pressure and crisis, and in the willingness to take risks." -- Hans Delbrück, *History and the Art of War*, 1900[1]

"Battle is the ultimate to which the whole life's labor of an officer should be directed. He may live to the age of retirement without seeing battle; still he must always be getting ready for it exactly as if he knew the hour of the day it is to break upon him. And then, whenever it comes later or early, he must be willing to fight--he must fight." -- Major General C. F. Smith[2]

This article was developed from a presentation given by the author to the Brigadier General Training Course at Fort Leavenworth in late November 2000. -- Editor

Successful senior leadership in any institution, including the military, depends on attributes that differ markedly from the skills needed in middle management. "Generalship" is perhaps the most important thing about military leaders, the aspect of our leadership which should make us uniquely valuable to our institution and to the nation. Duty as a general is different from what goes before. Flag officers are more visible; subordinates can defer and waffle because of one's rank and not necessarily stand on the quality of one's ideas. The elements of decisions made at the senior level are more abstract. One often receives conflicting guidance. One usually has less personal control over events. And in spite of all that, senior leaders are more fully accountable and more personally so for results than they were in their duties as more junior officers.

There seems to be no real conclusive body of thought on what makes a good general. So as a start point, study of the leadership attributes of generals, past and present, should be useful. Historians and commentators alike usually cite character as the essential ingredient of enlightened senior leadership, especially of military leaders. When one attempts to break character down into its essence, one finds it defined as a set of qualities, "the complex of accustomed mental and moral characteristics and habitual ethical traits marking a person." But what is the essence of the person that compels him or her to exhibit those traits? And how do aspiring military leaders develop that kind of character?

From reading history, from walking many battlefields with scholars to recreate the dilemmas of command of those bloody grounds, and from watching a number of flag officers good and bad, some common characteristics emerge that define successful generalship. One of the most important things a soldier does is to prepare himself for the time when the nation calls, when he is thrown into a situation in which his decisions and his ability to drive execution affect national interests. Soldiers as a group are interested in advancing their own professional development. If one agrees that self-development is one of the essential aspects of the personal growth of military leaders, we must get the characteristics of generalship right. These characteristics are the windows to the warrior's soul, the traits one must develop in oneself in order to know, to be, and to do as a general. When the crucial test comes for a senior military leader, whether in peacetime or in war, it is too late then for preparation. Flag officers face decisions that risk careers, if not lives, and national treasure along with national interests. A better understanding of the link between what historians term as character and instincts honed over years of service should highlight the qualities that will help senior leaders to prevail in "the hour of the day," to paraphrase C. F. Smith's words, "that the fight breaks upon you."

The list of essential characteristics of generalship starts with force of *intellect*, from which derive the elements of decision and execution--competence, intuition, and will. In addition to force of intellect, good generals have *energy*.

They get around. They influence the battle with their presence. The best ones have that uncanny knack of being at the critical point at just the right time. *Selflessness* also lies at the core of what is essential in a general, for both moral and physical courage derive from self-abnegation. Finally, no general is worth his salt unless he has the basic *humanity* that gives him a feel for the troops that engenders the bond between leader and led which is so fundamental to the personal sacrifices that bring victory. These four characteristics--intellect, energy, selflessness, and humanity--are worth our study. What are some examples of how these characteristics have counted in our past?

Intellect

General Ulysses S. Grant comes immediately to mind as an example of the force of intellect. Grant was no scholar. He graduated at the halfway mark in his West Point class. His distinguishing characteristic as a cadet, and later as a young officer, was a startling aptitude for horsemanship. After promising regimental service in the Mexican War followed by the boredom of the frontier army and resulting depression, Grant left the Army as a captain, went home to Illinois, and tried his hand in the civilian economy. He failed in business and farming--several times. It took the subsequent challenges of the Civil War to uncover the character that made him a great captain. Two examples of Grant's generalship stand out, one at Shiloh, one before Vicksburg.

By the Battle of Shiloh, Grant had moved from regimental command to command of an army. His experiences in the Mexican War and the fighting at Belmont and Forts Henry and Donelson had given him the basic tactical competence and confidence that served as the foundation of his operational decisions.

At Shiloh, Grant arrived on the battlefield with the situation in doubt. Albert Sidney Johnson had attacked and driven into the unsuspecting and unprepared camps of the Union divisions, who fell back attempting to regroup. Many Union soldiers had abandoned their regiments and covered under the cover of the bluff above the river's edge upon which the Union right was hinged. Grant arrived well into a fight going badly, and late in the day. He had a sprained ankle and was helped onto his horse and propped there by a crutch lashed to his saddle. He rode from division commander to division commander, giving orders to restore the line, reissue ammunition, defend in place. Halfway up the line of divisions, Grant stopped and from the saddle wrote to Buell, who controlled reinforcements on their way down river:

The attack on my forces has been very spirited since early this morning. The appearance of fresh troops in the field now would have a powerful effect both by inspiring our men and disheartening the enemy. If you can get upon the field, leaving all your baggage on the east bank of the river, it will be a move to our advantage and possibly save the day to us. The rebel force is estimated at over 100,000 men. My headquarters will be in the log building on top of the hill, where you will be furnished a staff officer to guide you to your place on the field.[3]

In the midst of the fight, Grant had the mental discipline to give Buell a clear commander's intent that laid out exactly what he needed to do to intervene successfully in the battle: "spirited attack . . . 100,000 men . . . appearance of fresh troops . . . powerful effect . . . get on the field without tarrying with the baggage . . . save the day to us . . . my headquarters is on the hill above the landing--go there for final orders." Written in haste under the greatest stress, this fragmentary order shows mental clarity and discipline.

Throughout the day, Grant rode through his command rallying the force in spite of the lateness of reinforcements. As matters reached the culminating point, Grant supervised the placement of artillery batteries hub-to-hub to defend the point where his left flank hooked into the high ground above the landing. The Confederate attack began to weaken. That night, after Grant's divisions had stabilized the situation and the Confederate momentum had stalled, Sherman met Grant under a tree near the Union headquarters. Grant was not able to sleep. The cabin in which he had placed his headquarters became a hospital. Unable to stand the gore and agony of the ongoing surgery, he left the cabin. It was raining. Grant was wet and tired, in pain from his ankle; he had been shot at all day; a cigar was clamped between his teeth. Running on pure nervous energy, he was caught in the temporary lethargy that comes after great effort:

Sherman: "We've had the Devil's own day, haven't we?"

Grant: "Yes. . . . Yes, lick'em tomorrow though." He later issues the order to "advance and recapture our original camps." [4]

Later in the Western campaign, Grant was stymied before Vicksburg. He had attacked the city six times. He had failed at places like Chickasaw Bluff, Yazoo Pass, Lake Providence. The Ole Miss had risen unexpectedly and spoiled his attempt to build a canal west of the city to provide a route for his flotilla to pass south out of the range of the batteries at Vicksburg. In addition, McClelland, a subordinate and a political general, was lobbying with friends in Washington to secure Grant's removal. His efforts caused Lincoln to remark that he remained Grant's only supporter. Grant had a mess on his hands.

He responded by closeting himself in the former ladies' cabin of the steamer *Magnolia* while he pored over maps pondering the situation. Refusing the company of his more amiable subordinates, he studied the alternatives. The plan that resulted was to have the navy run the batteries at Vicksburg and the army simultaneously march to the west and south to a point south of the city where Admiral Porter's ships could ferry them across the river, allowing Grant to cut his opponent's lines of communication and take Vicksburg from the rear. Grant was willing to take the risk of putting his army across the river separated from its own lines of communication and between the two opposing forces of Pemberton, the defender of Vicksburg, and J. E. Johnston, the district commander. He did this based on a detailed study of the realities of the situation, the risks, and a sense of the abilities of his opponents.

This type of behavior is not unique to 19th-century generals. Omar Bradley, a general noted more for his human qualities and toughness than for his operational brilliance, showed a similar trait. In July 1944 his army was held up between the beaches and the bocage in Normandy. The British VIII Corps was slow to arrive. Bradley's divisions had consolidated but were caught up in the interlacing hedgerows held by veteran German units. There was great pressure to break out of the beachhead, but the US divisions experienced extreme difficulty against the German defenses. Imagine the consternation of Bradley's staff when he called for a big blacked-out tent, and then for duckboards for flooring, and then for a big table. Remember, Bradley had a reputation as the "soldier's soldier." Why in a time of trial would he be building himself a tent palace?

Bradley's next demand would cut through the confusion. He asked for a large map oriented in the way the terrain lay. Then he summoned all his subordinate commanders to study the map, assess the possibilities, and develop a new concept of operations. The result was the plan for the breakout, Operation Cobra. While divisions and brigades developed entirely new tactics for breaking through the serial ambushes the German veterans conducted in the system of hedgerows in Normandy, Bradley and his corps commanders derived the concept of a breakout that combined the maneuver of corps enabled by carpet bombing. Again faced with adversity and possible reverse, like Grant, Bradley went back to basics, put his mind to work, and overmatched physical reality through the use of intellect and will.

Again and again, we have seen American generals do this: Washington at Trenton, MacArthur at Inchon, Ridgway in Eighth Army, Abrams in reorienting US military strategy in Vietnam. Under the greatest pressures, successful flag officers have shown the ability to think their way through problems to derive innovative solutions. They calculated and accepted the risks inherent in those solutions and through force of personality disciplined their organizations to execute their intent. Remember, the great military ideas are really very simple. However, this ability does not require only intellect and will, it also takes a fair amount of energy and drive.

Energy

Influencing the battle with one's presence remains a crucial aspect of generalship to this day. Being at the place where things are about to happen takes stamina and great effort. I've walked the Gettysburg battlefield a number of times. More than any other part of the battle, the events of the afternoon of the second day stand out.

On the first day, the Army of the Potomac fought a delaying battle and managed to hold on to the key terrain, the ridge above the town. The second day consisted of a seesaw battle in which Lee sought a flank or a breakthrough. On the afternoon of the second day, through the incompetence of Sickles, who moved his corps forward into the Peach Orchard opening a gap in the Union line, the Confederates gained an unrecognized advantage. But George Gordon Meade was a very good tactical commander. Remember, it was his corps that made the greatest advance at bloody Fredricksburg. Meade knew how to fight a corps. Meade rode the line during the battle and visited Sickles. He recognized the mistake immediately, reprimanded Sickles, and, realizing there was no time to move the troops back, gave orders to hold and rode back to get reinforcements to close the gap. Regiments and brigades literally ran to arrive

just in time. Barksdale's Missisippians could not break through. Longstreet's brigades were stopped, but barely. The battle flowed to the right up onto Little Round Top. Again commander presence won the day, this time by Gouverneur Warren who put a brigade onto the dominant hill just in time.

If you dissect the events of the second day at Gettysburg, you find similar patterns all over the Army of the Potomac. Hancock, Meade, Schofield, Warren--all were more aggressive and active than their Confederate counterparts. They controlled the tactical tempo of the battlefield. Precisely because of their energy and being at the right place at the right time and the quality of their tactical decisions, they fought a better battle than their gray-clad opponents. Their actions established the conditions for the fateful events of the third day.

We can find similar examples in European military history. Take, for instance the Duke of Marlborough. At Ramillies, at a critical point in the battle he led a cavalry charge into the French Maison du Roi, the equivalent of the household cavalry, which was involved in a seesaw battle for control of the center of the line. In the words of one of his generals, "Milord Marlborough was rid over, but got other squadrons which he led up. Major Bingfield holding his stirrup to give him another horse was shot with a cannonball which went through Marlborough's legs; in truth there was no scarcity of 'em." [5]

Two months later at Oudenarde, Marlborough was once again mixed in the melee:

Marlborough, himself in the height of action only a few hundred yards behind the swaying, quivering infantry fighting line, [deprived] himself first of Lottum and then of Lumley [subordinate English units Marlborough sent from his point on the battlefield to other parts of the field to reinforce allies] for the sake of the general battle. It is these traits of serene comprehensive judgment, serene in disappointment or stress, unbiased by the local event in which he was himself involved, this fixing with untiring eye and absolute selflessness the problem as a whole. . . . [6]

In these battles, as at Blenheim, Marlborough was in the thick of the fight while his French opponents hung back, out of touch with events at the point of the spear. Marlborough fought his battles from the saddle at whatever place on the field became the critical point from which to seize the initiative.

In today's campaigns we do not have the ability to see the battle from one or two vantage points. Campaigns cover huge expanses of territory. But we do have good examples of energy and standing up before the troops in our history of the past century. Before he made the decision to launch the D-Day invasion, Eisenhower made sure he understood the temper of his units. In his diary in May 1944 he wrote,

Recent inspections of troops have shown them to be tough, well trained, and in good fettle. I have visited approximately 20 airfields, some 20 divisions, and four units of the American Navy. I believe that all these units are ready to operate effectively. . . . This coming week is crowded with more inspections. [7]

Ike was influencing the morale of the troops to the extent he could and assessing whether the troops were ready.

Matthew Ridgway played a similar role when he assumed command in Korea. Eighth Army reeled from the Chinese army's attack south. Again like Grant, Meade, and Marlborough, Ridgway was a tactically competent officer, as illuminated by his record in World War II. Within 48 hours of taking command, Ridgway moved his headquarters north, closer to the fighting, and visited every corps and division commander. Through personal presence, he demanded proper tactics be used. He walked the ground with commanders, schooling them on how to fight, instilling confidence, looking for leaders who were no longer capable of offensive action. He improved logistical procedures, ensuring hot food for the troops. He demanded standards be maintained, and through personal knowledge based on visits to units he removed weak, exhausted leaders. In the words of one of his subordinates:

He breathed humanity into that operation. He got their spirits up, he saw the soldiers were warm, properly fed, properly led. Sure, a few people had to go. They were good people, most of them, but they were tired, they had been in that war too long, they were worn out. . . . He kept the spirit of the offensive, spirit of the bayonet, call it what you will. [8]

But the critical aspect of Ridgway's generalship lay in the standards enforced by his own presence all over the Army. In his words, "A basic element in troop leadership is the responsibility of the commander to be where the crisis of action *is going to happen*." [9] That kind of command presence day after day takes tremendous stamina and energy. And more than in times past, it is the only way a modern commander can impose his will on events across a large organization.

This practice is not unique to wartime or to the military. After retirement Lucius Clay assumed duties as CEO of Continental Can Corporation. During his early months in the firm, he visited every factory in the company, ensuring he understood the realities of the shop floor and the people at the cutting edge of operations. In today's management literature one reads about "management by walking around." Gaining a fingertip feel for what is going on in the core of a business or on the battlefield comes only through being at the point of the spear enough times to develop an accurate, relevant, situational awareness. That kind of presence takes a tremendous investment of time, energy, and sweat. It also requires that one get out from under the pressure of the calendar and focus on the human element of the organization.

Selflessness

Force of intellect, and energy expressed in the ability to be at the place where the critical events are going to take place, underlie the decision and execution needed to bring campaigns to a successful conclusion. But there is another trait crucial to good generalship: selflessness. Marlborough certainly was not worrying about his own skin when he placed himself in danger at Ramillies and Oudenarde, nor was Meade while sitting astride his horse at the Peach Orchard. Both were focused mentally and physically on controlling events. Selflessness underlies physical courage, but equally important, it is the basis for the moral courage so critical on the political-military stage where the events of the day play out. Good generals are not worried about themselves when they make the tough decisions.

Think of Eisenhower on 5 June 1944. He had irrevocably unleashed the D-Day assault in what would be--along with the Battle of Britain, Midway, Stalingrad, and the events in the Battle of the Atlantic in Spring 1943--one of the significant turning points of the war. But that night, the outcome was not certain. The weather looked promising for only a short time. No one knew how deeply the hook of Allied strategic deception had sunk into the German High Command's strategic appreciations. No one could have known how much Hitler's personal interference would hamstring the Wehrmacht's ability to counterattack the landings. Knowing the outcome was in doubt and that in case of failure an accounting would be made, Ike wrote this short message to have on hand in case of a reverse:

Our landings in the Cherbourg-Havre area have failed to gain a satisfactory foothold and I have withdrawn the troops. My decision to attack at this time and place was based upon the best information available. The troops, the Army and the Navy did all that bravery and devotion to duty could do. If any blame or fault attaches to the attempt it is mine alone.--July 5[10]

Ike was not worrying about himself. He was preparing for the eventuality that, if defeat came, he would have to leave command taking responsibility for it.

Ike's diary is very useful for understanding the powerful, self-effacing nature of his generalship. In February 1944 Ike was newly assigned as Supreme Allied Commander. He mused about the events of 1942 in Northern Africa and the assessment the British press made of his contribution to the campaign--mere "friendliness in welding an Allied team," not boldness or initiative. Ike wrote privately to himself:

The truth is that the bold British commanders in the Med were [Admiral Cunningham] and Tedder. (Not the English ground commanders.) I had peremptorily to order the holding of the forward air fields in the bitter days of January 1943. I had to order the integration of an American corps and its use on the battlelines. I had to order the attack on Pantelleria. And finally the British ground commanders (but not Sir Andrew and Tedder) wanted to put all our ground forces into the toe of Italy. They didn't like Salerno--but after days of work I got them to accept. On the other hand, no British commander ever held back when once an operation was ordered. We had a happy family--and to all the C-in-C's must go the great share of the operational credit. But it wearies me to be thought of as timid, when I've had to do things that were so risky as to be almost crazy.--Oh hum--." [11]

Ike's reaction, "Oh hum," gives an understanding of his unique contribution as Supreme Allied Commander. He could forge consensus and order reluctant generals with large followings in their own country to take risky action precisely because his absence of self-interest was a given. Ike could manage the precarious balance between American and British strategic points of view and the personalities that represented them, and he could bring together dissenting American and British generals simply because he advocated on the merits and without animus or personal bent what was right operationally and what would work, and he had the patience to see the issue through.

This dynamic works so often in our affairs. Read General Bruce Palmer Jr.'s *The 25-Year War*. He gives one a strong sense of Creighton Abrams' leadership. Abrams and Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker routinely received conflicting guidance in parallel from the White House and the Secretary of Defense. The White House came to accept the military assessments of General Al Haig, then Henry Kissinger's deputy on the National Security Council staff and at the time a very junior general officer, over those of Abrams and Bunker. In the extremely challenging operational and diplomatic situation in Vietnam, these complications created tremendous difficulty. Palmer describes Abrams' frustration with "the inevitable urgent and sometimes contradictory messages that daily arrived from Washington." Years later, Palmer urged General Abrams to consider writing his memoirs, "however brief":

His reply was vehement, "Never." And when I asked why, he gave two reasons--because memoirs become larded with the "vertical pronoun" and because he would never reveal certain aspects of his service in Vietnam.[12]

Abrams' response reveals a total absence of self-interest. In the toughest times the best decisions are made by men and women who focus on the realities, the opportunities, and the risks inherent in a given situation, with no thought to themselves. One will never shoulder the tremendous risks involved in the critical operational and strategic decisions if he is worried about how he will look if things go poorly.

Finally, generals often must execute a course of action with which they do not completely agree. One may know a better way. One may have even offered that alternative to the boss, and may have even argued for it strongly. Or, as with General Abrams, one may find oneself constrained by guidance from political leadership that mitigates military effectiveness and increases risk. In these moments it is always a good thing to attempt to put yourself in the boss's shoes. What are the constraints with which he must deal? Is there something he has factored into the decision that you have missed or underrated? Is there a way to meet his intent with an innovative course of action not yet proposed but within your own latitude for initiative? It also never hurts to accept that none of us is right all the time.

In the final analysis, if an order is illegal or negligent or totally inimical to success, one may have to object even to the point of requesting relief. But remember you owe to your commander the same faith given to you by your soldiers simply because you are their commander. Even when faced with a less than optimum decision, and perhaps especially when your commander does not have the human touch to engender confidence, once any discussion is over and the decision is made we each must execute loyally and with enthusiasm. Sherman's relationship with Grant comes to mind, most specifically the letter he wrote to Grant after Vicksburg.

When Grant was deciding to move south around Vicksburg, Sherman wrote to him arguing for another course of action, begging for a council of war but pledging, "Whatever plan of action [you] may adopt will receive from me the same zealous cooperation and energetic support as though conceived by myself." [13] When the order was given, Sherman did execute with total loyalty to his commander. After the operation, he admitted his concern that Grant's plan was too risky and gave him full credit for the result: "Until this moment, I never thought your expedition a success. I never could see the end clearly, until now. But this is a campaign, this is a success, if we never take the town." [14] You don't have to always agree completely with the boss to support him.

Even in peacetime, when in the eye of a storm of national events in which decisions about policy and resourcing are being made--let alone in wartime when decisions affecting the fate of the nation are at hand--the pressures are tremendous. Only those who have trained themselves to remove any self-interest from the equation will be able to successfully face the dilemmas, abstractions, and uncertainty, and handle the stress, to apply their intellect to frame the best possible decision or to render the best advice. Only those who can put away their own self-interest to face with

equanimity the risk to reputation in peacetime and the physical risk in combat will be able to do what is right.

Humanity

Because generalship concerns leading people in the most demanding circumstances, it involves motivation and consensus and the ability to elicit personal sacrifice. In short it requires a basic humanity from which stems the loyalty of subordinate to leader that underlies the spirit of great units. Combat and peacekeeping operations always involve risk of failure. Despite the best plans and the best training, the outcome is always subject to random factors and to error and is in doubt. The difference between winning and not winning lies often in the faith of the unit in their leader and in their ability together to persevere through that last final push that breaks the enemy's will. To engender that faith, generals must have a human touch and a feel for the troops.

I remember in my early days as a company-grade officer a division commander whom everyone disliked and feared. Those were the dog days of the Army in the post-Vietnam mid-seventies. The Army was more than hollow; parts of it were very rotten. We had a great deal of rebuilding to do. Many in company command in our division were combat veterans in our second or third company command. When our commanding general would visit, we never knew how things would turn out. To his credit, that officer had well-stated priorities and clear standards. But his untrusting and adversarial approach to officers, NCOs, and soldiers alike and his emotional outbursts in front of the troops did nothing to create the energy and confidence units needed. He would arrive, check those things he had mandated, and if any small thing was out of order, launch into a tantrum that sometimes involved throwing things around the motor pool or yelling at soldiers and sergeants. None of us thought that officer could lead us in combat.

I also remember the day our corps commander visited our outfit. He had great military bearing and exuded quiet confidence. He stressed standards but spoke to us in a way that recognized our standing as soldiers. I'll never forget my motor sergeant coming up to me when the corps commander departed. Looking at the party leaving the area, he said quietly though tellingly, "Now there's a general." I think he was advising me that if you ever get to be a general, which in those days was certainly doubtful, that's the way we want you to be. Later, in another job, I escorted the same general to a dining-in. He carried his own bags. I liked that. It taught me that as a general, one should occasionally think about how others see you as opposed to how you feel about yourself.

A general respected by his soldiers for being at the right place at the right time also exerts tremendous power on the battlefield and in peacetime. At the Battle of the Wilderness on the second day, Confederate General Longstreet's corps was about to be penetrated. Wilcox's line went to pieces. The way to the rear of the Army of Northern Virginia was open. General Lee at the critical point ordered the wagon trains to be withdrawn and then he moved forward into the smoke of battle. A trickle of new troops began to arrive and hastily formed to counterattack. Lee spurred himself past the line of gun pits with the troops, the leading units of Hood's Texans. "Go back General Lee, go back," they shouted. "We won't go on unless you go back."^[15] It is not completely clear what happened, whether Lee's aide brought him out of danger or whether some of the Texans grabbed his horse's reins and held him in place. What is clear is that the image of "ole Marse Robert" in danger at the key point in the battle had a galvanizing effect on Hood's men, who attacked and repelled the Union advance and stabilized the situation.

Not only does this kind of emotion matter in combat. It matters in peacetime as well. In one of the most poignant moments of our republic's history, George Washington's standing with the officers of the Continental Army secured for us Americans what is unique about our revolution, the willing submission of the military arm of the revolution to political will. Recall March of 1783. The American War of Revolution was over. The officers of the Continental Army made up perhaps the most cohesive and most national of institutions. The new states were now independent. There existed no system for taxation, no federal government to speak of. There was great concern that the revolutionary experiment was doomed even as it was being born. There was no historical example of a successful democracy that our founding fathers could follow. Nationalists argued for a military coup. Many of a more republican mind argued for restraint.

Washington was caught in the middle of this debate and pressured from both sides. He decided not to intervene. The Army's officers became restive, seditious, and called a secret meeting. Washington at first refused to attend, but then did so unannounced, surprising those in the hall. He addressed the officers, endorsing moderation. But the officers

remained angry, unsettled, and ill-disposed toward his message. Remember, these were men who had served with Washington, many since Brooklyn and the reverses that led to Trenton. They had weathered Valley Forge and a number of defeats and near-victories that finally had culminated at Yorktown. They had risked the hangman's noose. They had followed Washington through seven years of tough soldiering during which the outcome remained always in doubt.

Finally, Washington remembered a letter he was carrying from a representative in the Congress and decided to read it to the audience to buttress his argument. He pulled out the letter and stared at it for a moment, seemingly uncomprehendingly. Then he took from his pocket a pair of eyeglasses most of the officers had never seen him use. He said simply, "Gentlemen, you will permit me to put on my spectacles, for I have not only grown gray but almost blind in the service of my country." [16] This simple human gesture carried the day and shifted the mood of the officers present. The Continental Army disbanded and went home, no longer a threat to the evolution of a republican government it had fought so hard to foster. There is no question that Washington's Newburgh Address and his stand against any usurpation of the government by the officers of the Continental Army was a crucial moment in our history, as well as a founding precept of our citizen Army. It was Washington's human touch and the hard-won emotional loyalty of his officers that made his intervention effective.

The Complete Package

In all of these examples the four qualities seem to overlap. Under the tremendous pressures of national decision, selflessness helps to ensure that a powerful force of intellect focuses solely on the causal aspects of the decision at hand and the risks that must be borne to achieve success. Ferreting out the best course of action, assessing and minimizing the risk and then accepting it require intellect and an absence of self-interest. Forcing execution to a successful conclusion by being with the troops when they need us most demands tremendous energy and drive. In addition, creating consensus among men and women of great emotion, talent, and ego requires that one's own ego be under control. Creating consensus also requires the intellectual and emotional stamina to keep advancing convincing arguments in ways that do not offend and that always offer an aspect of logic unanticipated by the dissenter. Stamina and energy make possible the ability to see the battle by being where, in the words of Ridgway, things are going to happen, not just where they are happening or, worse yet, where they just happened. Force of intellect, energy, selflessness, and a human touch--how does one develop those traits?

These traits are innate in all of us to some degree. Perhaps the path to generalship begins with an understanding of what it takes to be a successful commander. Perhaps the understanding that one will probably be thrown into difficult decisions while a flag officer serves as a motivator. Perhaps it helps to understand that generals, like athletes, are made not born, despite the fact that some are born with a natural ability that gives them more promise than the rest of us. But all of us need development to progress to the level of competence and character our potential allows. Knowing what is required and, in the aftermath of our own decisions and actions, introspectively demanding of ourselves why we did not do better can help us to develop our own measures of character and to hone our instincts. Those instincts are the crucial balancing link between behavior and that inner-self that drives behavior. I am always struck when someone I have known for years in the service, when faced with a confusing, tough decision, goes to his gut, to his instincts, and comes down on balance oriented toward the right course. One cannot change one's inner motivations, but one can surely discipline and refine one's instincts and the way one approaches objective reality and leads others in achieving results.

That idea leads to the premise that it is incumbent on each of us to develop these characteristics in ourselves. By personal study of history and the art and science of leadership, one understands what worked and what did not. In a letter to his son on the eve of D-Day, George S. Patton wrote: "To be a successful soldier you must know history. Read it objectively. . . . What you must know is how man reacts. Weapons change, but the men who use them change not at all." [17]

General J. Lawton Collins served as head of the machine-gun committee at Ft. Benning when George Marshall was Commandant of the Infantry School. Daily, he would supervise set-up of the training, ensure all was going well, and then retire to the bleachers to read and study professional matters. Don't for a minute think, however, that Collins was a dilettante. The officers of the machine-gun committee, as a professional standard, were required to be able to operate

the machine-guns taught in their courses at least as well as the NCO instructors. In Collins's words, "As an instructor there, I always prided myself that I could mount a machine-gun just as fast as Sergeant Wolf could, which was something, I can assure you. . . . We wanted to know as much about it as Wolf did, and McNerny and McGony, and if we could do that, then we knew our business." [18] Impressed with Collins, Marshall noted his reading habit and invited him to weekly gatherings at his quarters for "conversation, reading, and recitation." Marshall's group trained many of the generals who fought World War II. Throughout the history of our profession, intense professional study has been one of the essential tools soldiers have used to advance their military art, and their generalship. As with Collins and his sergeants, moreover, intellectual development has walked hand-in-hand with technical mastery.

Seeking the tough jobs provides another means of self-development. As a general, it is understood that when offered an assignment by the Chief of Staff, the officer without question enthusiastically and willingly accepts it. But there are times when one is given the opportunity to express a preference before the offer is made officially. Some choices are more comfortable than others. In my opinion, the officer who accepts the challenge of the difficult, independent assignment is far ahead of the one who leans toward assignments where he or she is usually a subordinate. One learns more from the greater challenge of the independent role and takes on the case-hardening it provides. When the opportunity presents itself, seek independent command or directive authority. When the more risky job is offered, grab it. And along the way, don't be afraid to ask your own commander as well as your peers how you could do the job better.

Finally, one last piece of advice. Assuming one can enhance one's force of intellect, sustain the elemental energy needed to compel execution, maintain control of one's ego, and develop a human touch, there are two more things to remember. Officers are selected for duties as a general officer because they have already exhibited these four characteristics to some degree. Don't forget what brought you to the dance--don't change the way you play the game, just resolve to get better. And last, as you perform your duties at the hectic pace at which we work in the military, remember, the fun is in the getting there, not in the arriving.

NOTES

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2. Bruce Catton, *This Hallowed Ground: The Story of the Union Side of the Civil War* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), p. 72. General Smith made these remarks to then-Colonel Lew Wallace, who in finding he was about to be promoted to brigadier general came to Smith to ask his advice on whether to accept the commission.
3. John Keegan, *The Mask of Command* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1987), p. 226.
4. Brooks D. Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant: Triumph Over Adversity, 1822-1865* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), p. 134.
5. Winston S. Churchill, *Marlborough: His Life and Times* (New York: Scribner and Sons, 1968), p. 520.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 615.
7. Robert H. Ferrell, ed., *The Eisenhower Diaries* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1981), p. 117.
8. Matthew B. Ridgway and Walter F. Winton, Jr., "Troop Leadership at the Operational Level: The Eighth Army in Korea," *Military Review*, 70 (April 1990), 68.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 60 (emphasis added).
10. Steven Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander: The War Years of General Dwight D. Eisenhower* (New York:

Doubleday, 1968), p. 418.

11. Ferrell, p. 111.

12. Bruce Palmer, Jr., *The 25-Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), p. 133.

13. Simpson, p. 183.

14. Ibid., p. 202.

15. Douglass Southall Freeman, *Lee at the Wilderness* (New York: Scribner and Sons, 1961), pp. 375-76.

16. Dave R. Palmer, *1794: America, Its Army, and The Birth of a Nation* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1994), p. 19.

17. Edgar F. Puryear, Jr., *American Generalship: Character is Everything: The Art of Command* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 2000), pp. 158-59.

18. J. Lawton Collins, *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography* (Baton Rouge, La.: LSU Press, 1979), p. 51.

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