

MY PHILOSOPHY OF COMMAND

by

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I'm not sure that I'm the proper person to be your speaker this evening. Thus far, most of what I have heard today has dealt with successfully meeting the challenge of ethical behavior in units today and in the future. As some of you know I failed to get a handle on the subject of ethics and values in my last command.

Early in 1979 as VII Corps Commander, I published VII Corps objectives -- in which I identified seven objectives to be accomplished in priority.

My letter to the command read in part as follows:

1. VII Corps exists for only one reason: To be prepared at all times to go to war, to fight; and to win. This is VII Corps' reason for being and its single goal. It is the goal of the entire VII Corps family and it applies across the spectrum of the tactical units, communities, and individual members of the corps. To accomplish our goal, we must all do many things and do them all well. However, to provide some direction for the commanders of the units and activities in the VII Corps area, I consider the following objectives to be critical to our ability to accomplish our goal and, as such, they are to be considered the highest priority by all subordinate commanders.

My first priority dealt with training to execute our general defense plan. It read "Develop and maintain the ability to execute the general defense plan and contingency plans by maintaining a high degree of combat readiness through effective and dynamic unit and individual training, equipment maintenance, personnel and supply accountability, and the allocation of adequate resources to insure the maintenance of REDCON equal to or higher than ALO."

The next three objectives, I believe, are closer to our subject because they clearly highlight the commander's involvement in the leadership role and demand that the commander be responsible for the ethical and leadership climate.

The second objective was to develop and maintain a positive, enthusiastic lifestyle in our military communities, focusing on spiritual, physical, and professional excellence, to include functional and relevant equal opportunity programs.

The third objective was to develop an aggressive, professional officer corps and NCO corps through expanded leadership and management training and practice.

Fourth, our target was to develop and maintain unit cohesion by focusing on those activities which create in the individual a sense of team membership, with emphasis at the squad, platoon, and company level.

The last three objectives dealt with our allies, drug and alcohol, and conservation.

Fifth, our goal was to expand our capability to work and live with our NATO allies and our German hosts by:

1. Developing a greater sense of interoperability through new or existing programs, i.e., unit exchanges, NATO schools, etc.
2. Developing effective relations within our military/US civilian/Local national civilian team and between the German and American communities.

Sixth, we sought to develop and maintain an active drug and alcohol abuse suppression and rehabilitation program. Finally, our objective was to develop and maintain a personal commitment to the conservation and management of all resources with special emphasis on the energy conservation program and on those programs which affect our ability to accept, fund, and support new systems as they are fielded.

In order that you may be able to appreciate the enormity of the challenge, we had within the corps area of operation; I offer the following data. We were responsible for:

88,000 soldiers

21,000 civilian employees

+/- 76,000 family members

As I said, those objectives were first published in 1979. In 1980, I became concerned about the ethics of the officers within the corps. This was brought about by the number of officers involved in questionable areas of misconduct, such as: adultery, conduct unbecoming, drug abuse, driving while intoxicated, indecent liberties and acts, larceny, sexual abuse (to include rape and sodomy), and many less serious incidents. To be more specific, in 1980 there were 212 offenses investigated involving 133 officers -- from LTC to WO1. Needless to say, I felt that I had failed. In March 1981, I published the following letter, subject: "Officer Conduct" with distribution of one copy to each officer residing in VII corps.

1. During the calendar year 1980, VII Corps officers and warrant officers were the subjects of too many reports and allegations of misconduct, including fraud, larceny, indecent assault, adultery, dereliction of duty,

and abuse and misuse of authority, alcohol, and prohibited drugs. I do not know whether this is the "tip of the iceberg" or some isolated aberration; however, it is a matter of very grave concern. I have discussed this situation with the Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Army Europe, the Chief of Staff of the Army, and others and I believe that it is imperative that every officer in this command be made aware of what is occurring. Immediate corrective action must be taken.

2. These incidents of officer misconduct suggest widespread adoption of ideas and attitudes which are contrary to the fundamental precepts of military leadership. Specifically, they indicate an increasing acceptance of the idea that an individual's own life and desires are more important than is commitment to others--fellow citizens, subordinates, and nation. More and more frequently one hears that if you want to do something that may be wrong or improper, it is OK just as long as you don't get caught at it. This attitude and philosophy of promoting one's self-interest is expressed in a variety of ways. We hear that "if it feels good, do it", or "you only go around once so grab all you can", or "look out for number one because no one else will", etc. Such ideas and attitudes lead to a destructive end. Unless our officers and leaders personally place the welfare of others ahead of themselves, we will not be able to maintain an effective fighting force. An undue focus on one's self-interest can, if unchecked, destroy the very moral fiber of our armed force.

3. Each case of misconduct will continue to be dealt with individually and while each individual who engages in such misconduct should be aware that it can lead to serious personal consequences, we must not lose sight of the potential gravity of the situation. The fundamental principles of ethics and values required of our officers and leaders cannot be compromised. As officers and leaders, we cannot place our personal interests, desires, or concerns ahead of all other considerations. If our officer corps abandons the principles of selfless dedication, moral integrity, and personal and professional honesty, we compromise the very basis for the special trust and confidence placed in us at the time we accepted our commissions and appointments, and which we continue to enjoy as officers. Our soldiers cannot be expected to obey orders that require great personal sacrifice unless they have the utmost trust, respect, and confidence in those who lead them. The leader who is motivated by selfishness, who has little concern for the welfare of others, and who is not guided by the highest standards of moral and professional integrity cannot command the unquestioned obedience that will be required in today's combat environment.

4. Honesty, integrity, moral courage, selfless dedication, and personal self-discipline are absolute requirements for every officer and leader in our armed force. These requirements are non-negotiable. Their compromise destroys the individual's ability to lead. I expect each officer in this command to engage in personal conduct that is beyond reproach. Not only is every leader expected to set the example, but each of us must insure that even the appearance of a personal compromise is avoided. Honesty and integrity are personal responsibilities to which each of us must be sensitive. We must seek every opportunity to exercise and strengthen

these traits. Deviations from these principles and standards cannot be tolerated or condoned in ourselves or in our fellow officers.

5. I urgently request your personal effort to avert any actual or perceived decline in the moral standard of our officer corps. I expect every officer to live up to the special trust and confidence that they have received from our nation. Our oath of office must have personal meaning to each of us. Those who are required to look to us for leadership have a right to know that their trust and confidence is not misplaced. Any officer who is either unwilling or incapable of meeting these standards and requirements must be identified and removed from this position of trust, responsibility, and leadership.

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Here are two examples of the voluminous feedback I received. A senior officer said: "That is less than 2% of the officers in the corps, which is much better than society, so why all the fuss?" A LT said: "If one officer smudges him/herself, it rubs off on me!"

I was convinced then, and I am just as convinced today, that we have a problem. And we can no longer ignore it. What is the answer?

I am convinced that we must demand that the commander establish the ethical climate of his/her command. It is certainly far more effective to establish an ethical climate early-on than it is to take corrective action later.

Therefore, for the next few minutes I intend to talk about some of those things I believe we can do to improve our climate.

Every leader must become intimately involved in creating the climate and setting the example. Words are no longer adequate as both Pete Todd and Dick Lawrence said today about setting the example. The words, I know, have been said before. Almost every study I have seen clearly indicates a great deal of cynicism. The Army War College studies in the 70's, the various advance course surveys over the last five years, what I have heard today, and what you have said from your own personal experiences, all attest to the importance of setting a positive ethical climate.

Here I would like to resort to a philosophy of command I've used for quite some time to highlight my personal views on how we can come to grips with this challenge. This is not a code, this is something that Becton has used for 10 or 12 years.

My first point is - be professional. You must realize that I am a soldier. My approach is that of a grunt. My definition of being professional is that of a soldier who does his or her job to the best of his ability all of the time.

There are three variables in my equation for being a professional soldier.

First, know your job. If you don't know it, learn it.

Second, do what you're told to do, or what we call obedience. Now, I am not saying that we don't have soldiers who don't: we do! We have commanders who don't. We rationalize away why we can't do something, or why we have modified it. As a company commander, I could get the things done that I needed to get done. But in 32 months as a Corps Commander, I have no idea how many of the things I said get done got done, because people rationalize and shift blame.

Third, use initiative. In the absence of being told exactly what to do, use that God-given grey matter, use some common sense and some initiative.

Again, job knowledge, obedience, and initiative make up the potential soldiers.

In our training base we have begun a systemic training program in professional values in which we have attempted to standardize our training. It will be progressive. It identifies army values. It links these values to professional ethics. And it presents an ethical decision-making model.

Training in this program began in ROTC in the school year '81-82. The training in officer basic course began in FY 82, to be fully implemented by the end of the fiscal year. Implementation will take place in the advanced courses for our captains during FY '83, along with our courses for senior NCO's and WO's. I believe we are on the right track. LTC Ed Anderson and the Ethics Task Force here at Soldier Support Center are to be commended for their part in making our ethics instruction a reality.

My second point deals with integrity. It is non-negotiable. This gets to the heart of our ethics problem. It is fundamental to everything we do. Yet, it's fraught with the perception of dual standards.

General Maxwell Taylor wrote in the December 1980 edition of the Army War College journal, Parameters, an article entitled, "A Do-it-yourself Professional Code for the Military." I suspect that some of you read that article. Some of us have a problem with what General Taylor did not say.

Jack Faith, a former Division Commander in VII Corps, said it best in his reply to Gen Taylor's article.

"There is no question that we need to address the problem of a behavioral, moral, or professional code for the Army officer. The problem was highlighted in the 1970 and 1971 studies done at the US Army War College; it was highlighted in the book, Crisis in Command, by Gabriel and Savage, which made extensive use of the War College studies, and in a number of recent articles in Military Review, Army, and other publications.

I agree with much of Gen Taylor's analysis and advice. His treatment of the obligation we all have "to restore the tarnished reputation of the officer corps for truthfulness and integrity" is especially cogent and clear. The problem I have with the article is that it does not address the overall problem in a way that is meaningful to the young Lieutenant, Captain or even Major or Lieutenant Colonel. The moral dilemmas faced by these officers do not involve the just or unjust war, the "impossible or prohibitively costly mission," the use of tactical nuclear weapons, nor even their possible objections to a policy such as the all-volunteer recruitment program. Their problem involves such mundane questions as the following: Do I scrounge spare parts in excess of my authorized stockage in preparation for the upcoming field program? Do I apply some local rationale to reduce the number of operationally unready days reported on the back of the unit status report? Do I reenlist PFC Smedlap to make my goal, even though he is a less-than-adequate soldier? Do I modify my training schedule or round up some additional people to attend class when I know a visitor is coming? Do I have a double standard about enforcing "No Smoking" in the motorpool, enforcing military courtesy, etc. (i.e., Do I sometimes let people get away with behavior that I correct when "higher is around"?) Do I falsely report that I have expended training ammunition, which I know to be in short supply, in order to hold it to insure availability for our next exercise? Do I max my officers on the rater portion of the new officer efficiency report, leaving it to the senior rater to make the appropriate distinctions among my officers?

If oversimplified, Gen Taylor's article could be construed as saying "The end justifies the means," and if it is so construed, it will be lending moral authority to one of the more damaging and widespread practices in the Army today--from DA staff level. Where reputations are made by many eager officers is on their ability to manipulate facts and data to support conclusions they perceive their bosses to favor, down to the Lieutenant faced with an order from his commander to "get rid of that stuff and don't tell me how you did it."

I believe that Jack was on target.

Several weeks ago, while participating in a leadership seminar at St. Augustine's college in Raleigh, NC, one of the students asked me for my advice on how to handle a hypothetical situation. He painted a picture of a LT being told to do something by a battle-wise veteran subordinate, with the footnote that the "old man" wants it. The LT knows that it is wrong and improper. His question was--"What should I do?" My only comment to you is our youngsters are thinking, and I am delighted. And I would only hope that those of us who are older are thinking.

My next point is--loyalty is a two-way street. Most of us project loyalty to our bosses, but too many of us have a problem when we turn that around. We don't fare as well with our subordinates. I have often said that our soldiers understand who we are being loyal to, and when we are being loyal to them as well as supervisors, they will reciprocate that loyalty. But they have a very deadly way of taking care of you in combat if you are not loyal to them.

General Meyer, the Army Chief of Staff, identified two loyalties--to the institution, and to the unit. The first implies the recognition of values that the Army exists solely to serve and defend the nation. The second value, loyalty to the unit, implies the two-way obligation between those who lead and those who are led. It is an obligation to not waste lives, to be considerate of the welfare of one's comrades, and the cohesiveness and loyalty that meld individuals into an effective fighting organization.

There is another aspect of loyalty which also bothers me. Today we hear repeated attacks on the Army and the so-called quality of our soldiers.

Some of these attacks are by civilians and the press, some by retirees and some by fellow military commanders. It's the latter group that causes me a great deal of problem. I can't help but wonder about their sense of loyalty, when these military commanders serving on active duty say that the volunteer Army - is a failure, is unskilled, undisciplined, and not tough enough, and probably cannot win on the battlefield. I wonder how many of these attacks are inspired by a true sense of patriotism and a desire to have an armed forces truly representative of our society, as opposed to how many of the attackers are merely concerned about the number of minorities in uniform. I consider this perception to be just as much an ethical issue as any other.

The fourth point deals with the chain of command. I believe that the chain of command works, if you use it. Lieutenants can't establish the ethical climate, but they frequently are blamed for its failure. We must watch to make sure it doesn't happen, we certainly don't want them "set-up"! This leadership behavior is crucial in ethics--as in all things, yet, leadership and ethics are inseparable.

The fifth point is innovate, seek a better way. I'm convinced that there is a better way to do every job, but I'm equally convinced that in some cases today we are doing certain things because George Washington did it that way 205 years ago.

What does it take to innovate? The luxury to dream, to reflect, not on the way things used to be, but on the way they should be. It takes a supportive climate. An environment where they don't shoot the messenger, and a climate in which we can admit to making mistakes, which is my sixth point. Very difficult for a professional to do.

I would like to try something. I want you to answer a question for me that will not be reflected on your efficiency rating. How many of you haven't made a mistake in the last 24 hours? Here is something I borrowed from the Readers' Digest. I like it and think it fits well.

THIRTEEN MISTAKES

IT IS A MISTAKE:

1. To attempt to set up your own standard of right and wrong.
2. To try to measure the enjoyment of others by your own.
3. To expect uniformity of opinions in the world.

4. To fail to make allowance for inexperience.
5. To endeavor to mold all dispositions alike.
6. Not to yield on unimportant trifles.
7. To look for perfection in our own actions.
8. To worry ourselves and others about what can't be remedied.
9. Not to help everybody wherever, however, whenever we can.
10. To consider impossible what we cannot perform ourselves.
11. To believe only what our finite minds can grasp.
12. Not to make allowances for the weakness of others.
13. To estimate by some quality, when it is that within which makes the man.

I would add for the purpose of this discussion that it's a mistake, to develop or tolerate "can do" mentality, to resort to eye wash, to glibly pronounce-- "no problem," to permit zero defects, ticket punching, or careerism.

We must temper our "can-do" spirit because some things may not be "do-able." We must de-emphasize eye wash. Rather than no problems, we must acknowledge problems, and then encourage innovative ethical solutions. Zero defects is required in handling nukes, I presume, but little else. We ought to learn from failure and mistakes. Longer tours for commanders have tended to discourage ticket punching; it makes commanders accountable for the long term consequences of their actions. Lastly, we must treat careerism as the manipulative selfish behavior it is. As I see it, the major challenge to our leadership is striking the right balance in all the things we have been talking about.

My seventh point is also difficult for the professional soldier to handle. Disagreement is not disrespect. We often decry the presence of "yes people," but all too frequently become intolerant of disagreement.

The third most difficult thing to do is my eighth point, challenge assertions. When I told the troops of the First Cavalry Division to challenge assertions, I put a heavy load on sergeants major and commanders because they found they had to get their act together.

I'm convinced that once the commander has established the ethical climate and the troops know that he or she is for real, there will be no requirement to assert anything. We do that by demonstrating ethical thinking and behavior. How? By requiring ourselves and others to ask (and answer) the question "Is it right?" or more generally, "what is right?" Often times, I tell my commanders and staff officers, and my 16 year old son, that if what they are about to do, say and become involved in will cause them problems if it appeared on the front page of the Washington Post, then they may want to reconsider their actions.

We also demonstrate ethical thinking and behavior by accepting bad news and not shooting the messenger. And yet, most of us have been in places where we hate to go in and tell the "old man" something because he is going to hang us first and some others second. As General Abrams said: "Bad news doesn't improve with age," which sort of goes back to my reference to the chain of command.

We must avoid creating ethical binds. By that, I mean don't ask for things which may compromise others' ethical behavior. We must behave ethically and reward ethical behavior. We must punish unethical behavior and prosecute illegal behavior.

My ninth point is to be sensitive to (and intolerant of) abuse and misuse of our troopers. I could talk to this point by addressing sex, religion, race, operations, maintenance, training, or almost anything. But simply stated, I expect and demand a higher standard of sensitivity and a higher standard of ethics from higher ranking people.

I intend to skip the next two points--

- (10) Conservation is everybody's business.
- (11) Maintain your sense of humor.

Not that they aren't important, but frankly, I've talked longer than I intended.

My twelfth point is to keep things in perspective. This is critical to everything we do. We too often can't see the trees for the forest. We get so busy in our own little sand boxes, that we ignore all else. With reference to perspective, I would like to read you a letter which I suspect many of you have heard, but I think it is appropriate at this point dealing with perspective. It was written by a young lady to her parents while she was off at college.

Dear Mom and Dad,

Since I left for college, I have been remiss in writing and I am sorry for my thoughtlessness in not having written before. I will bring you up to date now, but before you read on, please sit down; you are not to read any further unless you are sitting down. Okay? Well then, I am getting along pretty well. The skull fracture and concussion I got when I jumped out of my dormitory window when the dorm caught fire shortly after my arrival here is pretty well healed now. I only spent two weeks in the hospital and I can now see normally and I only get two sick headaches a day now. Fortunately, the fire in my dormitory and my jump were witnessed by an attendant at the gas station near the dorm and he was the one who called the fire department and the ambulance. He also visited me in the hospital and since I had nowhere to live because of the fire, he was kind enough to invite me to share the apartment with him. It is really a basement room but kind of cute. He's a very fine boy and we have fallen deeply in love and are planning to get married. We have not set the exact date yet but it will be before my pregnancy begins to show. Yes Mom and Dad, I am pregnant. I know how much you are looking forward to being grandparents and I know you will welcome the baby and give it the same love and devotion that you gave me when I was a child. The reason for delaying our marriage is that my boyfriend has a minor infection which prevents us from passing our premarital blood test, and I think I have caught it from him. I know that you will welcome him into our family with open arms. He is

kind and, although not well-educated, he is ambitious. Although he is of a different race and religion than ours, I know your often expressed tolerance will prevent you from being bothered by that. Now that I have brought you up to date, I want to tell you that there was no dormitory fire. I did not have a concussion or skull-fracture. I was not in the hospital. I am not pregnant. I am not engaged. I am not infected and there is no boyfriend in my life. However, I am getting a C in history and an F in science, but I wanted you to see the point.

Your Loving Daughter,
Suzy

P.S. I am getting an A in psychology.

How often do we lose our perspective? We simply can't afford to lose our sense of perspective in this critical area of ethics.

My bottom line is plural. As commanders we have no choice but to establish the ethical climate. We must demand "living up to the trust" our government has placed in us; whether it is between the nation and the military, between the leader and the led, or among each other. Promoting an ethical climate is a challenge to us all.