

**THE
NONCOMMISSIONED
OFFICER:
BEDROCK
OF
MOBILIZATION**

REMARKS BY
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My responsibilities within the organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the statutory mission of the United States Army, and the larger purposes of this Association of the United States Army--all encompass a direct concern for the ability of the United States to mobilize military forces for the purpose of waging war. I am pleased to report to you that significantly more time and attention is being given within the higher councils of government to the problem of mobilizing.

You have heard, I am certain, of the extensive 1978 exercise of war plans which carried the somewhat unfortunate moniker of NIFTY NUGGET. This past fall a second such exercise, entitled PROUD SPIRIT, was conducted as a contribution to which the Army invited groups of chief executive officers of industrial firms, large and small, to Washington for briefings and discussions. I spent some time with those chief executives, and those I talked to reported that the experience was the first time in their careers that they had seriously considered what they or their company would do should this nation seriously go to war.

I think it is important for us all to remind ourselves that World War II is 35-40 years behind us. The mobilization experience which began in 1939 is now clouded over with myth, and the spirit and urgencies of those times are visible to the present generation only through the dark looking-glass of Hollywood. But I do not propose this evening to discuss the crucial role of the civil sector in a general mobilization; that is a subject which should best be addressed by a civil leader. What I want to talk about is preparing the Army itself for mobilization, and for fighting and winning should war once again be thrust upon us.

Let no one here present report that I came here to predict war, or to suggest that the signs and portents of international politics were in this year at the start of the decade of the 1980s as foreboding as those at the beginning of the 1940s. I make no such prediction. I simply would have you know that Jimmy "The Greek" Snyder, who is commonly acknowledged as the world's foremost handicapper, quotes odds of ten to one that the United States Army will become involved in military action somewhere in the world in the next ten years. I will also tell you that I wouldn't wager a dollar, even at those odds, on the "no war" side of that bet. My main message is that the United States Army needs to re-examine carefully its readiness for mobilization.

Let me ask the military professionals here, especially those who are thinking to themselves, "Oh, but we are doing that," to list mentally the three most important steps they would have the Chief of Staff of the Army take in order to prepare for imminent war. I am sure that operators among you would urge large maneuvers, more frequent, more realistic, probably with more live fire and other combat verisimilitude, such as electronic and chemical warfare. The logisticians would probably list looking to stock levels overall, and to war reserve stocks prepositioned against need overseas. Those would be on my list, too, but not as one of the first three actions that I am persuaded the Army must take against the prospects of having to go to war in the next decade. My list is as follows:

1. Train the noncommissioned officer
2. Train the noncommissioned officer
3. Train the noncommissioned officer

Let me be very clear that my action list does not mean that I believe our noncommissioned officers are now untrained, inept, or unmotivated. They are not. I happen to believe personally that the noncommissioned officer corps of the United States Army is in the best shape that it has been since the early 1960s. But I also believe that there are not enough professionals--officers or noncommissioned officers--who truly understand how essential the well-trained noncommissioned officer is for prosecuting the next war with any prospect of success, or how and for what to train him.

I don't suppose there is anybody here tonight who would argue with the proposition that the noncommissioned officer is the "backbone of the Army." But consider with me for a moment the mental images which that phrase evokes. For most of us, I guess, it calls to mind a drill sergeant in front of a formation, or leaning over a soldier behind a weapon, the campaign hat symbolizing his role as coach and disciplinarian. For others of us, Mort Walker's less charitable characterization of the noncommissioned officer in his comic strip, "Beetle Bailey," may leap to mind. For others, conceivably Sergeant Bilko or some other movie or TV hero. I suspect he or she is rare among us whose mind-picture portrays a noncommissioned officer in combat. And yet, fighting is what noncommissioned officers are for, even as that is what officers are for, and why we have soldiers at all. Unfortunately, those among us who have the best understanding of these matters--noncommissioned officers themselves--are seldom in a position to do much about their training. And those among us who have the most defective notions concerning the roles and mission of noncommissioned officers are very frequently the more senior officers who can and should act to help NCOs to function and to grow in their jobs, but who fail to do so.

As an aid for the latter, let me suggest that the noncommissioned officer is the principal instrument through which the Army provides for its modernization in peace, its dispersion on the battlefield, and its unit cohesion in war. By modernization, I mean nothing less than the Army's key mechanism for updating the force so that it will be ready for the next war. By dispersion, I mean precisely its modality for fighting on the modern battlefield. And by cohesion, I mean exactly how units sustain themselves in protracted combat.

Modernization

The word modernization has come to mean, even for very well informed members of the Association of the United States Army, the procurement of new weapon systems and related materiel. To be sure, procurement is long overdue. One of the more devastating impacts of the war in Southeast Asia was the long deferment of research and development on new equipment. Beginning in the early 1970s, a new surge of research and development was undertaken, which has now culminated in the availability for procurement of large numbers of new and expensive items of equipment. It is significant that while Secretary Weinberger's budget for FY 82, as compared with Secretary Brown's budget for the same year, calls for outlays of some 26 additional billions of dollars, 75 percent of that plus-up will go for procurement: hardware. The annual "Green Book" issue of Army magazine, which reports to members of the Association on the activities of the force, contained mention this year of staggering new weapon systems, each described with some scattering of letters from the alphabet, each promising great new capabilities. What is often forgotten is that each of these systems poses unique new

training problems, and, in their aggregate, create interactive problems which can readily overwhelm the units which are the recipients of all this largess.

A few weeks ago, I visited a brigade in Germany, one familiar to me from my recent service there. Since I departed in the spring of 1979, that brigade has been almost completely re-equipped. In the motor pool I saw M60A3 tanks, the Improved TOW Vehicle, viscous-damped mounts for DRAGON on the APCs, and new communication and encryption gear.

Consider for a moment what that equipment entails. The new tanks and the Improved TOW Vehicles are equipped with thermal-imaging sights. The sight on the ITV is particularly impressive, providing a capability to see the battlefield better by far than any of the optical instruments heretofore available. The brigade has worked out a concept of employing pairs of ITVs with each tank platoon so that the ITVs in overwatch, with their long-range ability to see through darkness or mist or smoke, can warn the tanks of a threat, or engage same so that the tanks can advance unimpeded. The brigade has discovered that the sergeant with his eye to the ITV sight is pivotal to the fire and movement of that whole team. Moreover, since he can see the battlefield far better than can the artillery men with the fire-support team, he must be able to function as the prime observer for indirect as well as direct fire support. And how about the sergeant in the turret of the APC? He must be trained to be not only vehicle commander and rifle squad leader, but DRAGON gunner as well.

And consider the implications of the Vinson cryptologic equipment. It turns out that this new family of encryption devices is far more demanding than the old Nestor equipment. Whereas the latter would tolerate inexpert and imprecise alignment, Vinson simply will not work unless the radio and antenna are precisely attuned. And that, in turn, dictates that signal noncommissioned officers, operations sergeants or shift NCOs are going to have to be much more precise in supervising mechanics and radio operators than has been our wont in the past.

The great new capabilities of all of those new systems cannot be realized without our meeting new demands for expertise among the men who actually man the equipment. And since the burden for providing that expertise rests squarely on the shoulders of our noncommissioned officers, the Army has no recourse but to train the noncommissioned officer to be able to train the soldier to accept, to operate, to maintain, and to repair its new equipment.

As always in the Army's past, confronted with a problem of training, the leadership of the Army has called for more schooling for sergeants. And I agree wholeheartedly that the Noncommissioned Officer Education System--our formal schooling for equipping the noncommissioned officer corps for their job--should be augmented, upgraded, and emphasized coincident with modernization. But I also know full well, as does every other experienced professional in this room, that NCOES is no answer to the problem of modernizing that brigade that I visited in Germany on my recent trip. For the fact of the matter is, that brigade had no prospect of getting even a small percentage of its noncommissioned officers into NCOES in advance of the arrival of that materiel. It had to take on the equipment when it came in with the NCOs in hand. The unit trained its own NCOs on the equipment. To be sure, it had the assistance of New Equipment Training Teams, but these soon departed, leaving the equipment and the future in the hands of the unit's NCOs.

of area that a battalion is expected to control suggest, we have endowed our units with the mobility, the sensors, and the weaponry to permit them to operate while spread out, and the very process of spreading out has reduced their vulnerability to the firepower. In short, we have reduced manpower density on the battlefield apace with the growth in firepower. In 1918, a US infantry division had about 60 percent of its personnel forward fighting on foot, and would normally have disposed about 6,000 men per kilometer of front. Such a division would have been capable of hurling at the enemy, with all guns firing, about a hundred pounds of projectiles per man per hour. By 1945, a US infantry division might have had forward only about 30 percent of its strength fighting on foot, but the density would have been cut by two-thirds, so that it would have had only about 2,200 men per kilometer of front; yet its firepower would have been tripled, with a capability of propelling 330 pounds per man per hour at the enemy. By 1980, in that mechanized division just referred to, only 15 percent of the division would be forward as infantry prepared to fight on foot, and the density would have been reduced to 550 men per kilometer of front, about one-fourth of the World War II density. At the same time, firepower has been increased, as I have said, by a factor of ten, with some 3,300 pounds of projectiles per man per hour within the capability of the division.

None of us who have contemplated impending developments in ordnance would hesitate to predict that the trends that I have just sketched will continue in future warfare. The next war is likely to be a war fought with devastating firepower on both sides, and it will be a war fought therefore with great urgency to keep manpower densities low. I am sure every veteran here tonight can remember sergeants shouting, "Spread out! Spread out! Don't bunch up!" That will be good advice to future leaders in the macrocosm as well as the microcosm. So the issue devolves to how to make more dispersion possible.

The solution will be what it has been: better use of the noncommissioned officer. An Army force fighting dispersed can only succeed if its chain of command is capable of thorough decentralization. Noncommissioned officers leading patrols, in command of fighting vehicles, survey parties, observation posts, supply or maintenance detachments--NCOs scouting, quartering, positioning communication, doing all of the myriad tasks which have to be performed with precision and on time if the force is to function efficiently--are the principal means by which the will of the commander reaches down through the echelons to be ultimately expressed to the soldier trigger-pullers, or other soldiers who work his will. The battlefield has always been a lonely place. It has become lonelier and more deserted over time under the impact of modern firepower. NCOs tie the dispersed parts of the whole force together, linking them into a team. The force will function, then, as well as its noncommissioned officers function, and any unit in the Army is only as ready for modern battle as its noncommissioned officers are ready to act knowledgeably and responsibly, to execute their orders.

Cohesion

Important as the noncommissioned officer leader is for coping with dispersion, he makes an even more important contribution to sustainability. For most soldiers in battle, leadership, advice, counsel, and firm and reassuring direction will come principally from the noncommissioned officer in charge of his squad, or crew, or team, or detachment. In short, the NCO provides the key interpersonal

linkages for each unit. And his principal role in that respect is the same as it is in a soundly modernizing unit: training. One training task will be to train up privates to fill gaps in the NCO ranks. Another will be to train replacements. In combat units, at least, replacements will be the central problem, and, for those who are likely to reach a unit after combat begins, will require much coaching before they are able to take their place as a functioning member of any team. The training of incoming replacements will be an even more acute problem than it has been in wars past because of the bewildering variety of equipment that is in issue in our modernizing Army, and the very different tactics and techniques occasioned by these different equipments, as well as the differences in terrain among theaters.

There has been a lot of loose talk about measures to increase the Individual Ready Reserve, or other actions which would make available larger amounts of manpower to feed into the replacement stream. But even if the Army had on its rolls all of the hundreds of thousands of individual reservists which we need, unit training problems would be scarcely diminished. To be sure, all of those reservists would be duly MOSed and categorized by the training that they had received, but by and large they would be soldiers who had received their training some years ago. And those of you on active duty have only to think of the changes in the Army over the past two years to appreciate the gap that would be almost bound to exist between the training they once received, and the practices and equipment that they would likely encounter in the unit to which they were sent in combat. The modernizing Army is moving through a profound technological revolution. In the maintenance field, there are whole new technologies to be mastered by direct support and general support technicians. No mechanic trained before that revolution is adequate today. And even if the replacement stream is successful in delivering the right kind of replacement mechanics, or replacement tankers trained on the right tank, to units that need the mechanic replacement, or the tanker replacement, the odds are therefore that that mechanic, or that tanker, will require training in order to permit him to perform effectively with his new unit.

Well then, how in the world can a unit take such replacements in the midst of battle and provide for them the requisite training? The answer is simple: The soldier replacement will come in, his sergeant will take him in hand, and show him both how to survive, and what he is supposed to do with his equipment for the unit. Now some sergeants will do this much better than others. But this facet of future battle makes it imperative that officers and senior non-commissioned officers insist that junior noncommissioned officers now learn how to be a trainer as a matter of first priority, for the effectiveness of a non-commissioned officer as a trainer is a measure of his ability to discharge his responsibility in war. Units which are successful in battle will be built around noncommissioned officers who are trainers. Such units will be able to sustain themselves in battle after battle. Such units have that quality we call cohesion.

All of the emphasis that the Army has placed in recent years on training is, then, well placed. Soldier's Manuals--we are the only army in the world that has gone to the trouble and expense of providing manuals defining each soldier's job in express terms for him, so that the noncommissioned officer-trainer knows precisely what to expect of him--Job Books, Training Proficiency Tests, the Training Extension Course, the Skill Qualification Test, and other

means of supporting individual training in units conducted by sergeants--all that emphasis is designed to build sergeant-trainers for wartime unit cohesion.

There are those who have criticized this emphasis as a usurpation of the prerogatives of unit officers. But it is hardly that, ladies and gentlemen. This is no fobbing off of officer responsibilities, no diminution of officer role. It is a very functional attempt to train the Army in peace as the Army will have to operate in war. There is no way that unit officers, lieutenants or captains in wartime can take the time and effort to train individual replacements for their duties. On the battlefield, officers must deal with tactics, and with the larger aspects of command, and the management of violence on the battlefield. Conversely, sergeants must deal with individual proficiency--tasks which will be equally important and pressing. Therefore, the sergeant-trainer of peace prefigures the sergeant-trainer-fighter in war--he who will assure survivable, sustainable, disciplined, cohesive units. And here again I have used the word "discipline" in the sense of taught, discipline in the sense of teaching. The sergeant who looks in peacetime to soldier proficiency in Soldier Manual skills, to appearance, to mode of address, to individual clothing and equipment, to work habits, to management of tools, to care of individual weapons--that sergeant in peacetime is learning rudiments of how to train and is disciplining soldiers as he will have to discipline them in wartime.

Any unit commander in the Army today--a unit of whatever kind--who fosters close and continuous professional association between his sergeants and his soldiers, by that fact has provided each soldier a sense of identity with his unit--a feeling of belonging and support. The soldier who can look upon his sergeant with professional respect as the source of information on how to do the job, how to handle the machinery, how to perform tactically, how to cope with the Army's supply or administrative system--is far more likely to seek the sergeant's counsel on matters that are more stressful and personal in nature. It is upon such close soldier-sergeant relationships, resting fundamentally on that professional interaction, that cohesive units are built in peacetime. And from those very interactions, those relationships, flow unit cohesion in battle. Units that are built upon such soldier-sergeant relationships are resilient in combat. They will hang together in battle.

I do not deny that there have been good organizations, good fighting units, that were officer-dominated and officer-led. I have seen such organizations, and maybe even commanded one. A good lieutenant can pull a platoon together by the force of his own personality and take it to the top of the hill. But altogether too often I have personally witnessed a lieutenant reaching the top of the hill with no one else along. And there you are. A captain is told to get a rifle platoon up on top of the hill, and he ends up projecting a total force of one gold bar and a carbine. The trick of command is always to cherish and support and preserve such officer leadership, but at the same time to generate the underpinnings for that leadership which the sergeants can assure. The commander that does so has a unit which can take an enormous amount of battle stress and strain and survive.

In the first brigade of the 101st Airborne Division that I commanded for one year in Vietnam, half of the rifle platoons that I sent into the jungle against the North Vietnamese infantry--the finest light infantry in the world,

and certainly one of the most capable forces that the American Army has ever tangled with--half of those platoons that went into the jungle were commanded by recent OCS graduates and had for noncommissioned officers young soldiers who had just received their stripes from an NCO school, after they had been pulled out of the stream of draftees. So, by and large, the men in such a platoon had all entered the Army the same year, were all the same age group. These platoons were unleavened by any experience with the Army. There was little or no communication into those groups from any of the training in the Army in peacetime. There was little capability to take the new replacement in hand and teach him self-preservation, the art of surviving in the jungle, or how to fight well against the North Vietnamese army. There was little institutional memory in those platoons--maybe 90 days or six months at the outside.

Now, when you have to put such organizations into the field, you do so with your heart in your mouth. Some will fight well. There were assuredly some superb leaders among those lieutenants and those young sergeants. But I can tell you from personal experience what a desperately bad situation, what an enormous strain on company commanders and first sergeants, on battalion commanders and sergeants major, those sorts of circumstances produced. And so I say to you officers, treasure your sergeants, teach them to be good sergeants. Demand that of them. Discipline them for that. Never, never believe, for even one moment, that you are thereby surrendering any of the prerogatives, privileges, or satisfactions of officership. To the contrary, you are doing the work that the Army hired you to do, work of which you can be proud.

Let me, in closing, state again the first three steps I would recommend to the Chief of Staff of the United States Army to prepare his force for mobilization:

1. Train the noncommissioned officer so that the Army can modernize efficiently.
2. Train the noncommissioned officer so that the Army can fight dispersed as it must on any future battlefield.
3. Train the noncommissioned officer so that the Army's units will have the cohesion requisite for victory.