

ON YOUR FEET, SOLDIER!

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Remember those magic words —duty, honour, country

Dear Soldier

You will remember my addressing you in 1984 on the same subject. At that time I pointed out to you that we men of the armed services had been trained and moulded in the style and system of conventional warfare. I reminded you how our basic training had been based, more or less, on British War Office Codes and other British services pamphlets.

You will also remember my recalling to you how we thumped the parade grounds where discipline was drilled into us until the sergeant majors were satisfied that we would always obey our superiors' orders promptly and without question, irrespective of whether they came from a Brigadier or a Corporal, amidst the barrage of enemy bombs and fire.

I also said that all that training and discipline had been imparted to us to make us efficient combatants, whether we were part of a section, company, battalion or brigade.

Thereafter soldier, I examined the enemy we had been trained to fight, and said that although we had been trained to expect him to fight in the same style and system of conventional warfare, the enemy you really faced then - the same one you face today - did not follow such a pattern at all.

You will recall that I pointed out to you that the style of this enemy was not that of a regular soldier. He fought in the fashion of the irregular guerrilla - the one whose tactics are essentially 'hit and run'; ambushed; widespread use of mines, I.E. Ds and booby traps; and such like.

I told you then, soldier, that you would see for yourself that what you faced was something totally different from what you were trained to face; something that lacked the honour and dignity of conventional warfare; something that could even be thought of as mean and cowardly. I then posed the question, "what does this irregular style of fighting do to us?" I explained that it could make us angry; and that our automatic impulse would be to hit back and destroy him.

"But he does not wait to be hit or destroyed, for he has been trained to strike hard and disappear," I wrote to you then, and followed up observing that his running away only makes us even more angry - with the result that we want to hit back at anyone and everyone around; to smash anything and everything around.

You will also remember soldier, that I cautioned you saying that this kind of attitude would be very bad because it was exactly what our irregular enemy wanted us to do, so that he could justify his fight, convert more people to his cause, and win over and maintain the sympathy of foreign countries.

Dear soldier, you will recall that I began to think aloud and asked what must we do then. I replied in caution that we had to restrain ourselves and control our impulses as that indeed was the time for us to make full use of the discipline that had been instilled into us.

And today soldier, you have gone through much of that type of war, and others as well, and you stand tall and straight, stonger through experience. You have learnt better the ways and style of the irregular fighter. Therefore, you should not now react as you did in those callow inexperienced days.

Yet soldier, long hours at the front (an undefined front at that!), restricted rations, unusually high-intensity combat and fatigue may try to tilt that discipline in us. Then soldier, we must find a way to build in us a discipline even greater than what has been instilled into us.

Irregular warfare

Dear soldier, there would be amongst us, young soldiers straight from basic training, who are likely to react to irregular tactics the way we reacted, the first time. Therefore it is important that we build in them, too, a discipline even greater than what has already been instilled into them.

And how can we achieve it? What we need, soldier, is something to rally round; something that will bring out the best in us; something that will help us control our impulses when it is necessary to do so; something that will save us from spoiling the good name of our service and our country.

Before we get on to how we could do it, let us first examine again the so-called irregular warfare. Guerilla warfare in Spanish means "Small War". The object of irregular warfare may be to overthrow government or seek independent statehood.

Irregular warfare is sometimes described as an intermediate state between tranquility and conventional war. In other words irregulars plan to build themselves, often in locations outside their operational areas, into regular and conventional troops who will engage us in combat with the aim of defeating us, and thus achieving their separate State. Till then, they will, using irregular tactics, attempt to wear us down, to demoralise us and to snuff the fight out of us. And that, soldier, is why we must continue to train in the style and system of conventional warfare, so that eventually when the decisive battles are fought, we will prevail.

The irregulars of Greece - after the Second World War - operated from Albania, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia, to which they fell back whenever hardpressed, only to repress at some other place.

To irregulars it is a warfare with no defined lines, and irregularity is their trademark. They need broad expanses of terrain, sufficiently broken and difficult - to give security to their bases; to cloak their operations; and to discourage continued pursuit.

Irregulars must have at least the passive support of the people. They are compared to fish, with the people constituting the water. Without the people's support or without the water the fish will surely die. But with support from the people, even passive support, the fish will survive. And that is why we must not do anything to antagonise the people.

Irregular attacks are generally carried out by tough, independent fighters, quite accustomed to hardship. They do have some degree of organisation and discipline, and they do need logistic support. They seek professional leadership and advice - even from regulars which are in fact quite important to them. With experience irregulars add refinements to their methods while their basic tactics remain the same. Being irregulars, they are, of course, too loosely knit and widespread for concentrated effort. The effectiveness of irregulars depends on their inherent talent, speed, their mobility, their obdurance, independent arteries of supplies and their familiarity with the terrain they operate in.

Generally, soldier, irregulars carry on a war of detachment. They seek to contain us; they try to modulate our action; they endeavour to force us to spread out; they try to interrupt our lines of communication; they destroy government buildings, equipment and materials; and try to turn the people against us.

So there we are, soldier, facing tough, crafty, trained and efficient irregulars who continuously seek to knock us off balance, make us antagonise the people and make us lose the will to fight. However we must not let ourselves be tilted over. We must find a way to build in us a discipline even greater than that which has been instilled into us. Yes, soldier, how do we get about doing this?

What better way than, DUTY, HONOUR, COUNTRY? And what more effective than the way in which that great soldier General Douglas MacArthur described it at the West Point Academy, U.S.A.

Yes, soldier, let us extract those parts of it, which best suits us today, and then repeat them over and over until we can confidently, unemotionally, calmly and objectively take on these irregular fighters and subdue them systematically, correctly and completely.

"Duty, Honour, Country: Those hallowed words reverently dictate what you ought to be, what you can

be, what you will be. They are your rallying point to build courage when courage seems to fail, to regain faith when there seems little cause for faith, to create hope when hope becomes forlorn.

"They teach you to be proud and unbending in honest failure but humble and gentle in success; not to substitute words for actions, not to seek the path of comfort, but to face the stress and spur difficulty and challenge; to learn to stand up in the storm, but to have compassion on those who fall; to master yourself before you can seek to master others; to have a heart that is clean, a goal that is high; to learn to laugh yet never forget how to weep; to reach into the future, yet never neglect the past; to be serious, yet never to take yourself too seriously; to be modest so that you will remember the simplicity of true greatness, the open mind of the true wisdom, the meekness of strength."

"They give you a temperate will, a quality of imagination a vigour of emotions, a freshness of the deep springs of life, a temperamental predominance of courage over timidity, of an appetite for adventure over love of ease.

"They create in your heart a sense of wonder, the unfailing hope of what next, and the joy and inspiration of life.

Religious training

"The code which those words perpetuate embraces the highest moral code and will stand the test of any ethics or philosophies ever promulgated for the uplift of mankind. Its requirements are for the things that are right and its restraints are from the things that are wrong. The soldier, above all other men, is required to practise the greatest act of religious training - sacrifice. In battle and in the face of danger and death, he discloses those attributes. However hard the incidents of war may be, the soldier who is called upon to offer and give his life for his country, is the noblest development of mankind.

"You now face a new world - a world of change. And through all this welter of change and development your mission remains fixed, determined, inviolable. It is to win our wars. Everything else in your professional career is but corollary to this vital dedication. All other public purposes, all other public projects, all other public needs, great or small, will find others for their accomplishment; but you are the ones who are trained to fight.

"Yours is the profession of arms, the will to win, the sure knowledge that in war there is no substitute for victory, that if you lose, the nation will be destroyed. The very obsession of your public service must be 'Duty, honour, country'."

"Others will debate controversial issues, national and international, which divides men's minds. But serene, calm, aloof, you stand as the nation's war guardian, as its lifeguard from the raging tides of international conflict, as its gladiator in the arena of battle.

"Let civilian voices argue the merits or demerits of our processes of government; Whether our strength is being sapped by deficit financing indulged in too long, by power groups grown too arrogant, by politics grown too corrupt, by crime grown too rampant, by morale grown too low, by taxes grown too high, by extremists grown too violent; whether our personal liberties are as thorough and complete as they should be."

"These great national problems are not for your professional participation or military solution. Your guidepost stand out like a tenfold beacon in the night - Duty, honour, country.

"You are the heaven that binds together the entire fabric of our national system of defence. From your ranks come the great captains who hold the nation's destiny in their hands the moment the war tocsin sounds.

"The long grey line has never failed us. Were you to do so, a million ghosts in olive drab, in brown khaki, in blue and grey, would rise from their white crosses, thundering those magic words - DUTY, HONOUR, COUNTRY."

I have the honour to be another soldier, another time.

—Wing. Cmdr. Mark Seneviratne