

Canadian Army Ethos (August 2010)

Based in part upon the seminal manuscript “The Canadian Army Ethos”, January 1981, updated by LGen (Ret) R. Crabbe. The document used as the basis for the update was produced from a meeting of army generals, other officers and scholars at the Citadelle. LGen J.J. Paradis, the Commander of the Army chaired this meeting, with the Commander designate LGen C.H. Belzile at his side. This document can be found at URL <<http://www.rusiviccda.org/opinion/opin-10.html>>.

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"I realize that in the final analysis we will be judged on military grounds; that is, the extent to which we have effectively contributed to the security of Canada, to the deterrence of war and to the support of our allies."

The Honourable G. Lamontagne
Minister of National Defence
Canadian Defence Association
January 1981

Introduction

Canada gives the Army the right to kill the enemy to achieve a victory for her. Thereby making the profession of arms for Canada's Army vastly different from any other.

Consequently, the characteristic spirit of community within which the professional soldier lives is considerably different from all other professions for three fundamental reasons: firstly, the soldier has an unlimited liability for service to the nation, secondly, he has an obligation to obey all lawful commands and thirdly, he is subordinated to those in authority. The ethos of the Army is therefore worthy of expression and it is the purpose of this discourse to affirm the professional ethos of citizens who would be servants of Canada in her Army. The definition of the word “ethos”, is from the Dictionary of the Social Sciences, Oxford University Press, 2002 Oxford References On Line, and is cited below.

From the ancient Greek, signifying the character, way of life, or moral purpose of an individual or group. The broad sense of the original term, “ethos” which encompassed habits, predispositions, values and sentiments – persisted well into the eighteenth century, when it suggested to Charles-Louis Montesquieu the irreconcilable plurality of morals and ways of life. The terms modern derivation – ethics - is usually restricted to general theories of right or moral conduct. The older term is retained to demonstrate how these are rooted on social practices and values.”

Specifically, the Army is required by the Government of Canada to assert authority and force over others and territory through a loyal chain of military command and Leadership. This unbroken military chain of command links the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and Minister of National Defence through the Governor General as Commander in Chief, to the Chief of the Defence Staff, thence successively down the chain to loyally bond all members of the Army together.

Ultimately, the *raison d'être* of the Army is to assert authority for Canada through the delivery of disciplined force and firepower in a unit under Military Command. It is the responsibility of the Army to engage the enemy anywhere, anytime, as directed and as authorized by the government of Canada through the chain of command. The Army is therefore obliged --- during peace --- to prepare for war. But as is now known, peace is not always that peaceful, witness the Canadian Army experience in Cyprus during the summer of 1974, in the former Yugoslavia, Kosovo, Rwanda, and lately full combat operations in Afghanistan. Consequently the Army leader, regardless of rank, is always responsible for his men to:

- (a) train them for battle,
- (b) equip them for battle, and
- (c) supply them physical and mental support before, during and after battle, so that they can engage the enemy with intent to destroy, and succeed for Canada.
- (d) motivate and influence them to willingly achieve the assigned mission (Lead)
- (e) direct them through lawful orders and presence on the battlefield (Command)

Peace and the Soldier's Dilemma

The soldiers' dilemma, like the airman's and sailors, is a "people" dilemma. In the first instance, all people are extremely protective of their own lives and will always fight to stay alive; however, in battle they struggle to stay alive while at the same time they strive to take opposing peoples lives. This is the essential psychological contradiction with which all armed forces must deal; said another way, an individual does not naturally want to die, or to be wounded, yet they must deliberately place themselves in situations where they might be killed or wounded - and they must be prepared to kill or wound in order to subdue the enemy.

During peace, the reality of this essential fact fades away and is remembered by few. This "people" dilemma is made more acute in land combat than sea or air because the physical distance between the soldier and the enemy is, or can be, so close that the enemy becomes a "flesh and blood" person, rather than an object. And for people of our culture it is far easier to shoot with intent to destroy at an object than a person. The sailor and the airman, in combat, is in every bit as dangerous a situation as the soldier; however, sailors and airmen are not often faced with the fact that they must shoot people, albeit the enemy - in a face to face encounter, or be shot in a face to face encounter.

The soldiers dilemma is, therefore, rooted in the age old question of how individuals and groups learn how, during peace, to conquer the loneliness of battle, cope with the stress and fear caused by combat, thence enabling them to engage the enemy and win.

War and the Soldier's Dilemma

In our culture, the natural "organization" which evolved to enable soldiers to cope with the human loneliness and the natural fear of death while at the same time offering the basis for aggressive battlefield action is the "Regiment". The notion of the Regiment was not derived artificially as an organization to solve a particular problem, then put in place, rather - its structure was pieced, webbed and woven together through time as a functioning cohesive unit by human beings out of the horror of battle. Through long and

painful experience, and by trial and error in war our people evolved the "Regiment", a group of human beings engaged in common cause - the defeat of the enemy. More deeply, in very small groups during combat against an enemy, soldiers can bond such that whatever the regimental affiliations of the soldiers in the group, the bonding that occurs is immediate and of long term duration. What counts in these ad hoc groupings is a soldier's capabilities and willingness to fight. While the attributes and skills brought to the ad hoc combat grouping were more than likely developed in soldier's home regiments, what is important here is the knowledge that these ad hoc groupings enable combat entities to be rapidly reformed in the face of enemy operations to Canada's battlefield success.

Briefly, the soldier must want his Regiment, the men and women of it, and those around him to survive; it is his family where he is not alone. It provides a situation wherein his human needs can be met, and it is therefore very dear to him.

As a consequence, the threat to the Regiment's survival by an attacking enemy becomes so enraging that his natural fear of loneliness and death, as well as his disinclination to take life, is less than his fear of losing those who provide him safety, security, a firm sense of belonging, affection, status and prestige, order, system and structure, and opportunity to become the best soldier in the world; he fights for something more than himself: - the Regiment, his home and his family.

Within the Regiment, combat leadership and therefore combat effectiveness, depends almost entirely on the formation of the fighting team through the treatment of the led by the leader **BEFORE** combat. During peace, the leader will have demonstrated his technical competence at all phases of his responsibility, his men will know that he is loyal, both to them and the mission, he will have trained them, lived with them, disciplined them, laughed and cried with them, until they know him like an older brother or "father". It is crucial that this phenomenon of team, and team spirit be developed and found beginning at the section level, which is the foundation group in all Regiments, and permeates all levels of command.

As a result of long and sound training and good team spirit, any leader can complete the mission with his men because his men will go where he goes, fight where - and when - he fights, since they have confidence and trust in him, and through him to the rest of the Regiment.

It is also clear that successful human relationships and bonds between the leader and the led on land are no different than those of the sailor on the sea, or the airman in the air. If the ambiance and leadership of the Regiment (or the Ship or the Squadron) is such that its members prize belonging to it, and if the men prize the lives of their comrades, then they will be motivated to fight. Moreover, the men of any Regiment will be motivated to fight and exist against all odds if, in peace, the social and cultural values of Canada support the belief that what they are doing in the Regiment is needed and is legitimate. Soldiers must feel that their society supports their "Regiment", and further, that their way of life is essential to the molding of an Army. In sum, during war the performance of the Regiment, thus the Army, is directly dependent upon a healthy, vital and cohesive Regiment during peace.

Foundations of the Ethos

The professional ethos of the soldier is founded on the principle of **mission before self**, as guided through military:

- (a) service (duty and responsibility)
- (b) discipline (obedience and loyalty)
- (c) integrity (honesty and justice)

Service

Fundamentally the soldier is not working for himself, to advance his own fortunes, or to promote his own comfort and safety at the expense of his comrades. Especially as applied to each leader, the duty of the soldier is to apply his knowledge and skills to achieve the mission assigned by his superior (a subordinate does not accomplish his superior's mission, but assists him/her in it. For example a company commander does not achieve the battle group mission), to work for the improvement of his unit, and the welfare of his peers. Most crucially, he is at the service of - as well as responsible for - the development and well being of his subordinates.

Discipline

Discipline serves three purposes; control force so it is not abused, ensures mission accomplishment despite dangers and assists in assimilating a new recruit to the institutional values of the military. Discipline depends on both collective (applied to groups of soldiers) and self discipline (individual acceptance of the requirement to obey lawful orders). Principally, the habitual obedience of each soldier to the direction of properly established authority is the essential foundation of Army combat effectiveness. The quick and accurate reaction of soldiers to the word of Command is instilled through the incessant and repetitive practice of battle drills and routines. This disciplined training assures that the fundamental links of loyalty between the leader and the led are always visible; and this training also ensures that the led generate and maintain a mutual confidence among each other and towards their leader. Army discipline serves to win battles and save soldiers' lives and must never be allowed to lapse; else the Regiment is at peril.

But rationalized and disciplined obedience is also thoughtful and discriminating, it is not blind or unreasoning. Loyal support to superior, peer and subordinate requires the intelligent application of critical thought to the principles, consistency and utility of policies, rules, plans, and practices used to achieve the unit mission, **before the battle is joined.**

Should the soldier believe the mission to be jeopardized by current action, then he is obliged to call his superiors attention to the flaws as he sees them in the consistency of policies, rules, plans, and practices. After the results of the soldiers thoughtful appraisal has had the attention of his superiors - and a decision rendered - then that decision is accepted and shown by deed to be the soldiers own. Else the soldier must leave the Regiment, one way or another.

Integrity

The soldier's honesty and the consistency between his word and deed are the benchmarks upon which his superiors, peers and subordinates measure him as reliable and trustworthy. Soldiers in battle are dependent upon their own skills and knowledge as well as their leaders and comrades for life; consequently, their will to win and deliver firepower rests upon the trust they have in their leader and the confidence they have that their comrades will come to their aid in time of need. The soldier knows that a leader or a comrade proved unreliable and inconsistent before the battle will not suddenly become so during battle. More fundamentally, a leader whose application of discipline and reward is seen to be unfair or inequitable breeds a soldier's distrust. It is imperative to dispense reward and punishment impartially and without favour. Signs of inequity and injustice will assure, more than any other act, a self before mission, rather than mission-before-self orientation in a military unit.

Leadership in Support of the Military Ethos

The military leader is judged not only by an inventory of his virtues, but also by the accomplishments of his men. This judgment will depend not only on what was accomplished, but also on how the mission was accomplished. And in the end, the methods of leadership are good to the extent that they encourage human devotion, co-operative response, and the willingness to fight especially on the battlefield. Recognizing the many human imperfections of a soldier as he strives to become better than he was, and using the guidelines of the ethos, it is the prime responsibility of any Army leader to:

Firstly;

- (a) know, discipline and develop himself,
- (b) know, discipline and develop his subordinates,
- (c) know his objectives and be able to state them in terms his men can understand,
- (d) know of, and know how, to deploy his resources, and
- (e) know the area and nature of conflict; then

Secondly;

- (a) know the enemies leaders, their men, resources, tactics and goals; then

Thirdly;

- (a) motivate and influence soldiers to defeat the enemy.