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MORALE AS THE 10<sup>TH</sup> PRINCIPLE OF WAR

By

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A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Joint Military Operations Department.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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## ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to clarify the definition of morale, identify elements which create morale, and provide a foundation to organize the elements of morale. Using this foundation, morale can be better developed within an organization and its members to enhance the efficiency of the unit. With greater understanding of morale and its effects on an organization, it can be developed more efficiently and its effects better applied to warfighting. Its addition to the Principles of War is warranted due to its overall effects on combat operations.

## THESIS

Truly effective morale cannot be measured in terms of personal satisfaction regarding compensation, possessions, and services. Success in today's military operations demands morale be addressed at its most basic psychological and philosophic foundations so that service members understand organizational foundations, rules and motivations and thereby willingly sacrifice their most rudimentary personal needs and safety in those ventures they are asked to complete. Morale is that commodity most necessary to establish this condition of sacrifice and therefore should be added to the list of principles of war.

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the principles of war are to provide a small number of fundamental elements or factors intended as "...an aid to us in grasping the essentials of a difficult art."<sup>1</sup> However, the principles of war<sup>i</sup> as we study them today tend to focus more toward the rational and scientific management of war rather than the artful design of operational concepts orchestrated to achieve our goals. Review of the principles quickly demonstrates this predilection in military education, training and exercises.

The foremost principle of Objective represents the essence of what we seek; the remaining principles, how we intend to achieve that essence. We contrive to Move and Mass our forces

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<sup>i</sup> Objective, Offensive, Mass, Economy of Force, Maneuver, Unity of Command, Security, Surprise, Simplicity

and effects, while Cooperating in the design of a Simple Surprising Offensive plan, and accomplishing everything in a Secure and Economic fashion. In any given plan, the risks and costs of each principle are assessed, weighted for, and a decision made. The primary intent of the principles of War are to provide a systematic framework to measure how effectively and efficiently an operation is planned and executed.

One can readily understand why this risk and cost analysis occurs, given our current focus on business and industrial management practices. We express and measure the principles through tangible terms, information, and methods that are easily grasped, understood and ultimately comforting to the individual psyche. It is further complicated by the military's current focus on technology based force multipliers. Yet, our desire for the latest systems, equipment, materials and services tends to obscure both the value and necessity for effective morale in our military forces. This materialistic approach for military dominance tends to influence our perspective and direct the creation of morale from a notion it is based on individual comfort and security.

Nevertheless, history is replete with examples of battles, campaigns and wars won not through rote adherence to a list of principles, nor through application of superior military forces, but rather through the presence of something much less material though no less discernable. That element is morale.

For example, during the amphibious assault of Tarawa in November of 1943, First Lieutenant Hawkins led his scout-sniper platoon ashore to neutralize Japanese emplacements on the Betio Pier. This position afforded enfilading fires on the primary assault elements landing on the main beach. Despite the continuous and deadly fire produced by the Japanese emplacements, this group was able to destroy numerous enemy bunkers and was ultimately credited with winning the battle by enabling the assault elements to successfully secure the beachhead. Telling in this example is the fact that Lieutenant Hawkins was killed less than halfway through the assault. Hawkins' scout-snipers had been well-trained and inspired by his leadership. Their high morale served to transcend the loss of their leader at a critical juncture.<sup>2</sup> Morale was also a fundamental element, which enabled this unit to succeed in accomplishing their mission, and stands as a force apart from the other principles of war. Without the confidence in their ability to perform their assigned tasks and the belief that their success was vital to the success of the assault, this platoon might not have been able to successfully achieve their purpose.

However, to fully understand the potential of morale as a principle of war, it must first be defined.

#### WHAT IS MORALE?

"What men will fight for seems to be worth looking into"

H. L. Mencken<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps the reason morale is not accounted for among the principles of war is due to its intangible nature. It is certainly difficult to measure in real terms and its presence and effect are often determined only at the conclusion of a battle. In determining the nature of morale and its value as a principle of war, the place to start is with its formal definition. The Oxford Dictionary of Current English defines morale as "confidence, determination, etc. of a person or group."

However, the definition of morale refers to the related word; moral, which concerns itself with the right or wrong of human character or behavior based on accepted codes and standards. Additionally, moral behavior is based on psychological rules rather than actual law. What is key to the definition of moral, is the assertion that moral conduct is virtuous in nature.<sup>4</sup> It is the combination of the definitions of moral and morale which provides the basis for morale as a principle of war. Mere confidence in an individual's or organization's ability to accomplish a task is senseless, if the goal is criminal in nature. Legitimacy of the individual's activity is important to building morale.

Given these descriptions, it is fair to say then that superior morale will be reflected through individual and group belief and confidence in the overall goodness and value of the rules, standards and behavior with which they are expected to comply.<sup>5</sup> This belief and confidence then manifests itself by enhancing performance efficiency in the accomplishment of

assigned duties and tasks. It is this overall effect which demonstrates the clear potential for building and maintaining morale. Well developed morale in a military organization will serve to foster, sustain and enhance the effective application of and adherence to the principles of war throughout any endeavor in both success and adversity.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, its addition to the list of principles of war would reflect recognition of its value and effect on warfighting science.

#### ELEMENTS OF MORALE

Before Morale can be considered for addition to the list of principles of war, it should be broken down into elements or rules, which will enable its study and application. Although morale is expressed in simple terms, confidence and determination based on a virtuous set of rules, achieving this condition is a singularly complex task. Few sources agree on the common elements or rules that shape morale, which leads to a long list of factors that potentially provide impetus to its development. Among the most common on this list are tradition, loyalty, pride, leadership, discipline, training, cohesion, motivation, and idealism.<sup>7</sup>

Terms such as these begin to provide some tangible attributes of morale. At least some, if not all, of the elements named above can be measured in real terms by comparing individual behavior and performance against established organizational rules and standards. However, most of these elements serve as measures of morale which, in and of themselves, do not create morale within an organization.

Morale is the end-state of these elements and therefore, these factors need to be separated to identify those which create morale and those which measure it.

#### STRUCTURE FOR MORALE

Although elements that potentially indicate or measure morale are identified above, they do not really identify the essential material that produces morale. As defined earlier, morale consists of confidence in one's ability to complete a task as well as a legitimate or virtuous reason for doing so. The combination of confidence and legitimacy create a psychological feeling of superiority, which enables the individual and organization to complete its mission despite the most unfavorable circumstances.

Perhaps one of the most poignant examples of this type of morale is the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division's withdrawal from the Chosin Reservoir during the winter of 1950. This well-known feat was successfully carried out due to the camaraderie, motivation, pride, and reputation felt by each Marine involved in the action.<sup>8</sup> But, where did this morale come from? More importantly, can it be created in similar fashion by other military organizations? It is also the answer to these questions which provides the reason for adding morale as a principle of war.

Using the example of the 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division's withdrawal from Chosin Reservoir, three elements suggest themselves as a basis for the morale, which enabled the successful completion of this action. First, the Marines had a clear understanding

of their organizational goals. Second, they had established standards by which to achieve those goals. Third, they were provided understandable guidance concerning the actions they needed to accomplish in order to succeed. These three elements offer a foundation for the development of morale within any military organization and can assist in establishing morale as a principle of war.

The first step in creating morale is to establish organizational goals, values and ideals that the individual will understand and identify with. As a social animal, man requires legitimacy in his associations.<sup>9</sup> The individual's identification with any organization begins with his confidence in, and expectations of, the organization and that its existence is legitimate in the eyes of society as a whole.<sup>10</sup> What the organization has accomplished in the past, what it does presently, and what it will do in the future are important elements in defining organizational goals, values, and ideals. These elements define the basic organizational expectations for the member and serve to establish his identification within.<sup>11</sup>

Service customs, courtesies, and traditions form the bedrock of these organizational goals, values and ideals and serve to provide continuity and long term survival or immortality for the organization and the individual. Identification with an object or ideal that is larger than the individual and that will survive after that individual's service is complete, promotes loyalty and pride in the

organization.<sup>12</sup> It also provides a "higher calling" or ideological basis for professionalism. Leland P. Lovette expressed the value of service traditions, ceremonies and customs in this way.

"Traditions, ceremonies and customs exert a profound influence upon human behavior throughout life. The effect is particularly marked in such professions as the military and naval, organizations that lend themselves to passing on and perpetuating the more venerated customs, heroic traditions, and dignified ceremonies. Such stimuli when understood and properly directed effect a discipline, a distinction, and a service *esprit de corps* of incalculable value."<sup>13</sup>

The second step in building morale is to establish the organizational rules, standards, and conduct that establish professionalism within the organization. Professionalism is not the mere belief in an ideal or goal but also includes the daily demonstration of that belief through individual behavior. Labor designed to hone the competence of the organization and its members provides the framework to build upon the historical foundation provided by the customs, courtesies and traditions of the organization. These elements represent the physical and psychological manifestation of the organizational goals, values and ideals. Even though the individual is a member of a well-established organization, he still needs to know his position and role within. Merely being a member serves no purpose if he can not properly function and contribute to its long-term success. Additionally, the professionalism of the organization must continually be reevaluated to ensure it is effective.

To accomplish this, the individual must be well grounded in how the organization achieves its goals, values and ideals. The process must also focus on the individual's technical expertise in executing his responsibilities. The individual's overall confidence in his ability to contribute to the organization is paramount in building morale. In addition, individual confidence in his compatriots' abilities to function within the organization and in completing their duties will contribute to the overall morale of the organization.<sup>14</sup> Overall, the efficiency of the organization and its members will serve to create and strengthen morale and cohesion within the group.<sup>15</sup>

The first two steps in creating a structure for building morale also provide tangible methods for measuring its growth. These elements are well within the capacity of the organization to mold and foster among its members. Adherence to organizational goals, standards, and values will instill discipline, bearing, and courtesy in its members. Training will manifest itself through efficiency in performance and professional conduct. The final piece in creating an atmosphere for morale is much more difficult to establish and much more fragile in nature. This piece of the framework involves the more intangible inputs from the leadership of the organization and lends itself to a spiritual and psychological nature.

This step of the framework involves the guidance and motivation provided to the organization regarding the

immediate relevance and importance of the mission it is tasked to accomplish. Mission relevance and importance must be provided to the organization to promote continued growth in morale and more importantly, to prevent its erosion.<sup>16</sup> John A. Lejeune provided an effective example of how powerful guidance and motivation can be in achieving assigned objectives in battle in describing the performance of the Second Division during the Meuse-Argonne Offensive in 1918.

"It was directed that every officer and every man in the division be informed of the part we were going to play and what the object of the battle was, and what would be accomplished if victory was achieved. A map was drawn and given to every platoon, and each platoon leader had his men up and instructed every one down to and including the privates of just what his platoon was going to do in the battle. There was plenty of time... and the consequence was that the whole division felt absolutely certain what it was going through on that day and it did go through."<sup>17</sup>

It often appears as though military organizations are expected to rely on their historical foundations and professionalism alone to execute their assigned missions without regard to the motivations for doing so. No matter how well ingrained the goals, values, and ideals of the organization or how high the level of professionalism, any organization will suffer loss in morale when it perceives its mission to be irrelevant, confused or unimportant.<sup>18</sup>

In sum, the fundamentals of morale begin with the organizational goals, values and ideals that provide a social foundation for its members to identify with. Organizational rules, standards, and conduct that provide the professional base for confidence in achieving its goals further develop

these fundamentals. The guidance and motivation provided ensures the relevancy of the immediate activities that they are assigned to accomplish. It is important to provide this framework to better understand the nature and origin of morale so that it can be applied as a principle of war.

#### MORALE AND ITS EFFECTS

"Morale is to the material as three is to one"

Napoleon

Morale has long been recognized as a catalyst for success in many situations where adherence to established principles of war has not been possible. During World War II, the 82d Airborne Division was well known for its morale as reflected in its overall record of achievement. In comparison with two other standard infantry divisions, the 79<sup>th</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup>, under similar fighting conditions in the hedgerows at Normandy, the 82d was able to gain considerably more ground with significantly fewer casualties. Notably, in this achievement, the 82d Airborne was manned at half the strength, armed with three quarters as many heavy weapons, supported by half the artillery, and without tanks assigned as its sister units.<sup>19</sup> Clearly, 82d had something the other divisions did not; morale.

However, to say morale was the deciding factor is too simplistic. Morale does not just appear, nor is it distributed at random. It is created from the foundation and structure outlined above. Clearly, all three divisions shared the same overall goals, values, and ideals - defeat of the

Axis. They also received similar initial infantry training although additional airborne training was significant. Notionally, their guidance and motivation regarding immediate objectives would also have been similar: secure the force beach head and defeat the enemy forces in their respective zones.

The difference in level of morale between these units can be found in all three elements of the morale structure. The 82d had participated in combat in North Africa and Italy prior to the Normandy landing which served to strengthen their organizational bonds. Having survived previous combat experiences helped to shape their attitude toward their goals, values and ideals. This provided the loyalty, pride, bearing, etc. that created unit cohesiveness. These elements, shared by the individuals of the division laid the foundations for effective morale.

Secondly, organizational rules, standards and conduct were more strictly enforced within the 82d. This was true, particularly in regard to training. 82d training was significantly more intense and prolonged than the other divisions.<sup>20</sup> This served to build confidence in the members and the group as a whole creating a high level of confidence in their ability to carry out their assigned tasks.

Even though guidance and motivation in each division could have been similar, the 82d was able to achieve significantly greater results with much less material and manpower. In regard to the individual principles, the apparent motivation

of this division clearly impacted the larger corps. The 82d was able to economize the overall effort by using fewer forces and taking less casualties. Combat effect was more efficiently massed through the use of superior morale. Offensive action and initiative was also achieved to a greater extent. Finally, superior maneuver was accomplished despite the absence of those combat support elements (artillery, tanks, heavy weapons) specifically designed to facilitate it.

Clearly, morale served to enhance this division's application of the principles of war to achieve greater accomplishments with far less loss and cost. Additionally, morale was developed in relatively short period, in as much as, prior to WWII, the 82d Division was not an active organization. Morale can be developed and firmly incorporated at the organizational level. It also indicates that morale as a quantifiable element can be established as a principle of war.

#### FUTURE IMPACTS

"The officer corps, heart of our armed forces, is riddled by resignations, and enlisted men quit as fast as they are trained."<sup>21</sup>

Hanson W. Baldwin

The observation above could have been made over the last several years during which all the services endured the loss of well trained and experienced personnel of all ranks. However, this comment was made shortly after hostilities ceased in Korea, 1953. Similar observations were made by General Leonard Wood in 1915<sup>22</sup> and General John A. Lejeune in 1921.<sup>23</sup> All three individuals noted that morale in the armed

forces was particularly wanting and increasingly difficult to generate and maintain. Competition with prosperous commercial enterprises and lack of motivation to serve when nebulous guidance or motivation predominates military organizational priorities has been experienced before.<sup>24</sup>

Circumstances today are very similar to previous inter-war periods. During those periods, the armed forces had been reduced because they were not needed for a singular great mission. Our forty year buildup of military forces was predicated on the specter of Soviet Communism. Today, that threat has diminished and force structure once again has fallen accordingly.

Many of these missions, do not easily fit in with the accepted goals, values, and ideals of present military organizations. Consequently, individuals have difficulty in understanding what they doing, or why, and therefore do not effectively participate. Further, when goals, values, and ideals of current operations are unclear, difficulty in establishing effective rules, standards and conduct to achieve them results. It is precisely the failure to establish mission importance and relevance, as well as to enact clear rules and achievable standards which degrades morale.<sup>25</sup> Perhaps Lejeune best summed up the problem in this way.

"In time of peace, the cultivation of esprit is much more difficult than in time of war. The men have no great mission and it is hard to convince them that it is necessary to train arduously for an eventuality which does not appear imminent."<sup>26</sup>

In view of the fact that there is no singular competitor or threat to use as a foundation to build morale, the operational commander will, of necessity, have to ensure the importance of any assigned missions is clearly understood by all members of the command and how its accomplishment is relevant to the organization.

#### CONCLUSION

Clearly, the potential impact of morale on the accepted principles of war is significant. Morale has an overarching effect and can intensify the effect of all individual principles as indicated in the case of the 82d Airborne Division in the Normandy hedgerows. Morale should be looked in regard to its effect on the principles rather than the effect of the principles on morale.

This is clearly an element of the art of warfare, which should be more closely studied and applied in future military endeavors. Reduced force structure and materiel, increased operational tempo, and ambiguous missions of indeterminate length will all contribute to reduced confidence in organizational and individual ability to provide legitimate service to national goals and ideals.

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- <sup>1</sup> C.R. Brown, "The Principles Of War." Proceedings, June 1949, p. 623.
- <sup>2</sup> FMFM 1-0. Leading Marines. Washington, D.C., 1995. P. 43-44.
- <sup>3</sup> Leland P. Lovette, Naval Customs Traditions and Usage (Annapolis: United States Naval Institute 1934), p. 3.
- <sup>4</sup> Della Thompson, The Oxford Dictionary of Current English, (Oxford: Oxford university Press 1998), p. 577.
- <sup>5</sup> J.T. MacCurdy, The Structure of Morale, (New York: The McMillan Company 1944), p. 141.
- <sup>6</sup> Neil Sibbit, Survey Comments
- <sup>7</sup> MCRP 6-11B, Marine Corps Values: A User's Guide For Discussion Leaders (Washington, D.C., 1998), p. 16-12 - 16-17.
- <sup>8</sup> FMFM 1-0. Leading Marines. Washington, D.C., 1995. P. 49-51.
- <sup>9</sup> J.T. MacCurdy, p. 50.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 72.
- <sup>11</sup> Thomas C. Wyatt and Peuvan Gal, p. 203.
- <sup>12</sup> J.T. MacCurdy, p. 78.
- <sup>13</sup> Leland P. Lovette, p. 3.
- <sup>14</sup> F. M. Richardson, Fighting Spirit, A Study of Psychological Factors In War (New York: Crane, Russak and Company, Inc. 1978), 171.
- <sup>15</sup> U.S. Army Medical Research Unit Europe, Responsibility, Morale, and Commitment During Military Operations, Washington D.C. Army Institute of Research, 30 April 1996), p. 1.
- <sup>16</sup> Hanson W. Baldwin, "What's Wrong with the Regulars?", Saturday Evening Post, 31 October, 1953, 19-21.
- <sup>17</sup> MCRP 6-11B, Marine Corps Values: A User's Guide For Discussion Leaders. (Washington, D.C. 1998), p. 21-82

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- <sup>18</sup> U.S. Army Medical Research Unit Europe, p. 1.
- <sup>19</sup> Stephen Biddle, et al., "kill and Technology In Modern Warfare" Joint Force Quarterly, August 1999, p. 21-22.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> Hanson W. Baldwin, p. 1.
- <sup>22</sup> Leonard Wood, The Military Obligation of Citizenship. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1915), p. 82.
- <sup>23</sup> MCRP 6-11B, p.21-75.
- <sup>24</sup> Hanson W. Baldwin, p. 3.
- <sup>25</sup> U.S. Army Medical Research Unit Europe, p. 2.
- <sup>26</sup> MCRP 6-11B, p. 21-79-80.

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