

THE OBLIGATION OF BEING AN OFFICER by Colonel George S. Patton, Jr.,

Tank Corps

October 1, 1919

(Directions to CACC Cadets: Read the following text of a speech given by General (then COL) Patton to his officers. Answer the two questions at the end of the speech on your own sheet of paper.)

Does it not occur to you gentlemen that we, as officers of the Army, are not only members of the oldest of honorable professions, but are also the modern representatives of the demigods and heroes of antiquity?

Back of us stretches a line of men whose acts of valor, of self sacrifice, and of service have been the theme of song and story since long before recorded history began. Our professional ancestors were sung of by the blind poet Homer a thousand years before Christ. The exploits of these ancestors were chanted by him and other exploits of like nature were handed down by word of mouth or in everlasting marble to the time when they might be recorded in writing for the eternal inspiration of the race.

In the days of chivalry, the golden age of our profession, knights(officers) were noted as well for courtesy and being gentle benefactors of the weak and oppressed. From their acts of courtesy and benevolence was derived the word, now pronounced as one, "gentle man." We, too, are officers and gentlemen. Let us strive to live up to the high ideals of our military forbears. Let us be gentle. That is courteous and considerate for the rights of others. Let us be men. That is fearless and untiring in doing our duty as we see it.

In calling this matter to your attention I am not actuated by a spirit of criticism; so far as I know you are all officers and gentlemen. I simply desire to make articulate our obligations and duties in the above connection as they appear to me.

As I have pointed out, our calling is most ancient and like all other old things it has amassed through the ages certain customs and traditions which decorate and ennoble it; which render beautiful the otherwise prosaic occupation of being professional men-at-arms; Killers.

For ease of remembering them, these traditions may be subdivided into two parts. By dissecting the qualifying word "gentleman" which is ever associated with the word "officer."

Under the first half of the word "gentle" are collected a number of usages generally called "social customs of the service." These have to do with our social relations with our brother officers and also with our civilian friends. Some of the common and most frequently neglected are the following.

Calls: Officers arriving at a new post should call within twenty four hours on the commanding officer. In doing this they should consult the adjutant and call on him either in his office or at his quarters as the adjutant advises. They should also call on their Regimental, Battalion, and Company Commanders. If the latter have families living on the post, the officers should call socially on them in the evening and if he is married should bring his wife with him when calling on officers also married.

All officers should call on newly arrived officers as soon as convenient.

Officers receiving calls should return them within one week. Officers who have been invited to dinners, receptions, or card parties should call on the officer so inviting them; whether they accept the invitation or not.

All officers of a battalion should call in a body on the Commanding Officer of the regiment and of the post on New Year's Day.

Invitations: Officers should answer invitations promptly and state definitely whether they will accept or not. In answering invitations, they should use the same "person" as that in which the invitation is written.

Messes: Officers should behave in as polite a manner at mess as they would if dining at home with the ladies of their family. They should not tell smutty stories, or swear, or pick their teeth. Above all, it is the height of bad manners to refer to any lady by name at mess. They should go to some trouble and reasonable expense to make the mess table and mess room neat and attractive. The neglect of this is a great fault in our service and lays us open to constant criticism by foreign officers and by civilians in our own country.

Quarters: Officers should live in a neat way. Their rooms should be attractive and not look like the cells in an insane asylum. By the purchase of a chair or two, a couple of pictures or prints, a rug and some pretty covering for their beds they can for a few dollars vastly improve the appearance of even the worst quarters. The assembly room in the quarters here should be fixed up far better than is at present the case; a slight subscript on the part of all would make this easy. Officers should no more come into such a room half clad and untidy than they should enter a civilian club in the same costume. Attention to the above details will add greatly to the comfort and self respect of all.

Gossip: Gentlemen do not gossip. It never does any good and is unfair. Many men who would never think of hitting a man from behind will nevertheless strike a deadly blow at his character from behind his back. This is not usually the result of vice, but simply through a desire to tell a good story. It is the lowest form of sin no matter what cause prompts it.

Growling and Criticism: The man who always whines about what he has to do usually is incapable of doing anything. The man who criticizes his superior in the presence of soldiers or junior officers is disloyal to his oath as an officer and is doing more than a Bolshevik to destroy discipline.

Drinking: The "old army" had many vices, but among its virtues there is not one more worthy to be copied than the custom of never taking a drink when on duty, or when about to enter any duty. Officers of different grades should not drink in company. There is nothing like drink to produce familiarity. Familiarity breeds contempt. Do not drink at all or if you do, do it among your equals in rank.

Money Matters: Too much emphasis cannot be laid on the sacred nature of Government Money. Regard as inviolate the physical money. If you have to carry pay for a man, or company, or other funds, keep it in a sealed envelope in a separate pocket. Never use it with the idea of replacing it "as soon as you cash a check." That is the direct road to a General Courts Martial.

Do not contract debts. If you must borrow money go to a bank; that is the bank's business and it will see that you pay. If by any change you have borrowed money from an officer, don't forget all about it. He won't. To go on leave or to spend money unnecessarily in any other way while you are in debt to a friend is another sin. Pay cash and you will keep out of debt. Nearly all General Courts Martials come from fooling with credit and government money.

Military Courtesy: It is as necessary that officers salute each other as it is that soldiers salute them; or that they return the salute of soldiers. Never salute with the hands in the pocket, or with a pipe in the mouth, or as is a habit, with a toothpick in the mouth. Toothpicks, like toothbrushes, are for private use. To sport one in the mouth in public smacks very much of the idea that the officer so doing is proud of being able to have bought a meal.

If a superior enters a room where you are, offer him a chair. He will not accept it, but the act is one of courtesy showing respect for his rank. When talking to a superior no matter how friendly you are with him, stand at attention. And when you leave, salute. Also require the same of soldiers who are talking to you. Such acts show that you are a soldier, not simply a uniformed person.

Promptness: This is always referred to as a military virtue. But, like the buffalo, it appears to be heading toward extinction. Cultivate it; it will get you ahead in peace and may save your life or the lives of your men in war.

Example: Follow the "Golden Rule." Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Good Knights were an example to all time. So it is with a good officer. You have no idea how men watch you. If you stand up, so will they. If you curse, so will they. If you are habitually late, how can you in honor try men for following your example? You are a model, whether you like it or not, hence; be a good model.

Dress: You are paid to dress well at all times. This does not necessitate expense out of reason. The clothes brush, a little cleaning fluid, and the flat iron will make any uniform look good. The brush and polish will do the same for the boots and leggings. No one respects a tramp and soldiers will not respect a dirty officer. The rougher the work, especially in the field, the more inspiring to the men is the sight of a clean, well shaven officer.

Education: The British and American services at one time had an unenviable reputation in the realm of military information. This has been corrected of late but there is still room for improvement. Do you imagine that the successful broker spends his evenings studying the progress of the National League? Hardly. He studies the market. The man who only works during working hours is apt to keep right on at the same job or get a worse one. Few are born Napoleons, but any of us can be good company commanders if we study. When we are that, try for the battalion and so on; ultimately for four stars. Hence, read military history and books on tactics. I am making out a list of such which I will give to you and some of which we will study together. But I earnestly advise you all to read military subjects three and a half hours a week. How little that is; and the lack of the knowledge may cause the death of your men and the defeat of your outfit.

Don'ts: I will close this lecture with a few "don'ts" from Colonel J. A. Mosse's book, Officers Manual, which I recommend to all of you to read.

Don't tell what a "Heller" you are. Let people find it out.

Don't pretend to know too much or too little. A prig or a fool are alike unpopular.

Don't tell people what you paid for things and don't ask what they paid. It is not according to our customs as officers.

Don't speak ill of any man. If there is nothing good to say of him, keep still.

Don't just sit and think, or just sit. There is always something to do. For example, read about war.

Don't try to gain success by "pull" or accuse others of doing so. The man with the alleged pull usually has the goods, too.

So far as I know, the above remarks do not apply to anyone here, but we are none of us perfect. If the coat fits, put it on and try to correct the situation.

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QUESTIONS FOR CACC CADETS (answer on your own sheet of paper using COMPLETE SENTENCES):

1. What is the **main idea** of this speech?
2. What are **seven details** from the speech that support that main idea?