

ARMED FORCES AND IDEALS

SQUADRON LEADER K.N. PARIK

FROM times immemorial, the kings, elderly statesmen, and army commanders have laid down ideals and causes for which nations have waged wars. Since wars begin in the minds of men, channelisation of minds towards laid down ideals is as important as possession of equipment and sophisticated weapons for waging wars. Without ideals, a nation may be compared to a ship without sheet anchor, a rudderless boat on high seas, without any chartered course.

Importance of well defined ideals and goals and laying down code of conduct for servicemen was realised soon after the Korean war, when it was proved beyond doubt that the communists could subvert the loyalties of the American prisoners of war, captured by them, through subtle and insidious propaganda methods. Enemy should be fought not only with guns and bullets but also with well-forged ideological weapons. It is also to be noted that the fighting man today is different from his counterpart in the past. He has an intelligent and enquiring mind, and as a citizen and soldier he desires to understand the ideals he is called upon to defend and also what stakes are involved if the hostile nation is able to impose its will on his country.

In order to understand importance of ideals, their impact and methods of inculcating them in servicemen, it is necessary to appreciate the working of group-mind, its varying reactions according to situations and circumstances.

GROUP AND ITS CHARACTERISTICS

Paradoxical though it may seem, the sum total of individuals in a group is greater than the group itself under a good leader whereas the standard of a group falls to the level of the lowest individual in the group, especially when it is badly led or it is under ineffective leadership. This is a peculiar fact of group—psychology. Says McDougall, "It is a notorious fact that when a number of men think and feel together, the mental operations and actions of each member of the group are apt to be very different from those he would achieve if he faced the situation as an isolated individual." Impact of group on individuals, sometimes raises the standard of individual and lowers it considerably at other times. The group standard declines in the following ways :—

- (a) Very often there is a fall in the level of intelligence, as the group mind tends to be guided by the level of least intelligent mind or level of least intelligent man in it. This is often seen in the illogical, absurd decisions taken by the group acting concertedly.

- (b) There is a fall in standards of behaviour and morality of the group. Few individuals in the group may cause bad habits like theft, dishonesty, smoking, drinking, sexual-intemperance to spread, among the other members. Here the well-known saying 'one fish, spoils the tank', holds good.
- (c) In war, fighting spirit and bravery of the group very often receives a set-back or suffers decline, when panic caused by an individual spreads like wild fire or contagious disease to all others in the group. This results in lowering the morale of the group as a whole.

METHODS OF COUNTER-ACTING UNDESIRABLE GROUP INFLUENCES

Evil influences manifested in the group as mentioned above, can be counter-acted in the following ways :—

- (a) Leader is selected for the qualities of head and heart and has a higher level of intelligence. He may seek advice of some intelligent members, in order to arrive at certain decisions. This avoids a fall in the standard of group intelligence, or in other words saves group, from taking unintelligent or impulsive decisions.
- (b) Ideals of patriotism, high standard of behaviour as enshrined in the code of conduct, self-sacrifice etc raise the morale of the group, which, does not succumb to lower standards of morality or cowardice when it is confronted with sudden threats or dangers from the enemy. Oliver Cromwell gave a divine purpose to his troops and made them realise that the most powerful common purpose that an army could have was to regard itself as a divine instrument, specially appointed and called forth to execute divine judgement. Inspired by such ideals, his soldiers won a series of engagements in a number of places, even against well trained and properly equipped royal troops, e.g. Marston Moor, Gloucester, New-bury, Alsford. They had better fighting spirit and moral fervour, which carried them through in all battles.

This clearly proves the fact that when troops are competently led, inspired by high purposes, the standard of achievement, valour, intelligence etc., reaches to new heights, never attained before.

NATIONAL AND MILITARY IDEALS

Modern wars are total wars, which involve participation of all sections of nation—civil as well as military. Morale of the nation and the army are closely inter-linked and cannot be treated as two different things. Both fall and rise together. National ideals should be provided by those at the helm of national affairs. The soldier, as a citizen shares national ideals alongwith other citizens. Says Copeland, "An army's most powerful weapons are its ideals. But these weapons, like all others must be forged by the nation".

Military ideals are set forth within the framework of national ideals and such are quite consistent with them.

Military ideals however cannot be confined to vague and abstract virtues like 'patriotism' and 'courage'. It was Dr. Johnson who pointed out that patriotism was the 'last refuge of the scoundrel'. He however did not intend to decry patriotism as such but wanted to ridicule those whose practice did not match with their proclamation. General S.L.A. Marshall in order to provide firm foundation to patriotism, would like to add few more fundamentals as guidance for the fighting men. According to him the soldier must have honour, and should be ready to sacrifice for general interest and should have veracity, justice, graciousness and integrity. These fundamental virtues will have ennobling effect and raise the individuals above selfish motives, petty bickering etc. The leaders of the army should not however be star-gazing visionaries or arm-chair philosophers. They must be guided by practical idealism.

In U.S.A., the code of conduct for the armed forces was prepared in 1956 and was subsequently adopted by the three services. This does not mean that no code of conduct existed in the past. The conventional code was however set forth in clear and compact statements. The Chinese communists were able to subvert the loyalties of the American prisoners of war captured in the Korean war (1950-53). The communists broke the American prisoners of war ideologically by using third degree methods, harsh treatment and constant indoctrination. The American P.Ws could not stand up to their cherished national and military ideals. General S.L.A. Marshall sums up the essence of six articles of code of conduct in the following words—"In spirit, it hardly goes beyond what citizen swears in pledging allegiance to the flag. The essence of the six articles is that the American fighter will hold his honour high and inviolate, how-so-ever he be assailed. He will not quit the fight he will never say or do what might hurt the United States or demean its uniform in the worst circumstances, he will join with other loyal Americans to help them and himself and to strengthen resistance by the whole. In short, come hell or high water, he will behave like a man."

RATIONALE FOR IDEALS

Why should a country have ideals for the nation as a whole and also for the armed forces? The reasons are not far to seek. The democratic countries have strong faith in individual freedom of action, voluntary co-operation of masses. In order to defend the values and causes for which the country fights for, it is imperative to have ideals, as they create call to action, bring a measure of unity and coherence in thoughts and conduct of millions of people composing the nation. Military ideals support the national aims. Says General S.L.A. Marshall "Military ideals are therefore related to this purpose, mainly as instruments of national survival".

During wars, there is almost a crisis of character, high ideals and standards of behaviour especially dealing with the enemies are thrown to winds.

It is true that all is fair in war and ethics and war cannot be mixed, yet keeping up of certain traditions is necessary. In U.S.A., Massacre at My Lai was taken seriously as it showed 'brutalisation of character'. There were loud protests against the brutality from the nation and as a result an enquiry was promptly made. The military traditions and ideals were not allowed to go by default.

It is military ideas which give fortitude to face the difficult circumstances, hard life to which an ordinary civilian is not accustomed. The military life makes strong demands in peace and war. The soldiers have to endure long separation from their families, face monotony and boredom in performing observation and guard duties, work in climates ranging from arctic to tropical. The source of inner strength is provided through military ideals. Says General S.L.A. Marshall "It is out of the importance of ideals that men develop the strength to face situations from which it would be normal to run away."

Ideals provide purpose, sense of direction and inner strength, not only to individuals but to the entire group. The ideal strengthens the group, brings out co-operation of all individuals in it, and thus makes the group greater than the sum-total of individuals in it. Men without ideals are creatures of impulses. With ideals and causes to guide them before men go ahead to attain them with all fire and determination.

VALUE AND METHODS AND INCULCATING IDEALS

It was Oliver Cromwell who first realised the value of inculcating ideals in his troops. His troops were taught from the 'Soldier's Catechism' which were published in 1644. His magic formula, which won his troops many victories against Parliament's soldiers was 'Divine force, to the physical is as infinity to one'. The value of code of conduct formulated in U.A.R. in 1956 was put to crucial test in Vietnam. Majority of American prisoners of war, held by Communists could withstand the onslaught of the communist propaganda and indoctrination, as they had the prestige of the country and armed forces firmly embedded in their hearts.

It is imperative that programme of inculcating military ideals should also concentrate on teaching of national ideals also. Both types fit in a common pattern and are linked closely. A fighting man has to play a double role—as a citizen and as a soldier. He should be able to form a broad outlook of his obligations and responsibilities as a citizen of the country.

Inculcation of military ideals should not be left to orientation specialists or psychologists. A good leader by his personal example carries more weight and conviction with his men. In order to feel the pulse and identify himself with his troops, the leaders should participate in all forms of activities of the unit—games, sports, entertainment etc. He should often talk to the troops on national as well as military ideals.

It is not necessary to run a course of instruction on ideals. Men should be encouraged to study and imbibe them. Impression should be created by direct as well as indirect means. National as well as military ideal should be displayed on boards and charts in information rooms and libraries. We should not forget that they are powerful weapons of great importance in waging war against our enemies.

Over Hundred Years Ago

(USI JOURNAL — 1871—Page No. 97)

ON THE SALE OF SPIRITS IN REGIMENTAL CANTEENS

AT HOME, spirits are not sold in regimental canteens. In India they are. At home the soldier in order to get spirits must dress himself, and walk at least half a mile, on the average, to get the dram. In India it is brought to him; he can get it without the trouble of going out of barracks, and without the trouble of dressing himself. To sum up all in a few words, in India he can learn to drink spirits, and may in due time become a confirmed dram-drinker, without trouble to himself. At home this undue facility is not thrust on him.

2. Now, what effect has this difference in facility on the soldier? At home the soldier may occasionally go and have a carouse, and perhaps may come back drunk; but I do not think that under the home system, soldiers, certainly not the recruits, will learn to be habitual spirit-drinkers; whilst under the India system they are led to it, they are taught it by the undue facility given them. I will quote my own experience on this point. When the regiment, to which I belong, came to India a year and a half ago, the average number of drams of spirits sold in the canteen daily was under 23. It has now increased to 200 per day, and in another year or two the number will, I fear, under this vicious system have increased to 400.

3. When the soldier has once acquired a craving for spirits, I do not suppose that he will stop, after a time at least, at one dram. After a time he will get what he can in the canteen, and go elsewhere for the remainder. But why teach the soldier to drink spirits? It is pretty certain, that if at the commencement of our service in India, there were not more than 20 men, who cared enough about spirits to go to the canteen for them, there must have been still fewer, who would have taken the trouble to dress and walk into the bazaar to get them.