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USAFA Harmon Memorial Lecture #5
John J. Pershing and the Anatomy of Leadership
Frank E. Vandiver, 1963

It is a pleasure to be at the Air Force Academy and an honor to participate in the distinguished series of Harmon Memorial Lectures. And it is a privilege to address you gentlemen of the Cadet Wing, future military leaders of the United States.

Particularly is it a pleasure to talk to you about a former American military leader who deserves the rank of soldier's soldier, a man much maligned and mostly misunderstood, whose active career spanned sixty years and bridged two epochs in the evolution of the United States Army- General of the Armies John J. Pershing.

Pershing seems to me a particularly fitting subject for certain obvious reasons: first, I'm especially concerned with his biography and have been for several years; second, he looms from history as the AEF's Commander who stepped coolly into various Allied crises in World War I and saved the Great Crusade for Our Side. There are other more legitimate reasons for talking to you about this forceful and effective leader. For instance, his career shows him a professional soldier who avoided becoming either a fool or a fascist. He is uncommon, too, in that he put to good practice the theory he learned at West Point and became a sensitive man of culture who found appreciation of life and history most valuable to a modern officer.

Unusual is the word which perhaps best describes him-unusual in background, in personal ambition and drive, in perception, in zest, most unusual in experience. And it may well be that his career best illustrates the change from the Old to the New Army.

The New Army, the one we know and have known since 1917, demands of its leaders much not expected in simpler times, much not taught in service academies, and much that the public never notes. I suspect that most people have cherished a nineteenth-century image of military leaders, especially generals, as tough, Shermanesque types, forceful, skilled in engineering, tactics, and sometimes in strategy. Mostly they think of generals as personal leaders whose Hell for Leather bravery inspires audacity but whose professional skill counts for little beyond dress parades. (Scientists are replacing everybody!)

History has a way of changing things, even public images. Gradually, during the last years of the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth centuries, the world grew more complex, more organized and impersonal. So did the army. And so, too, and perhaps remarkably, did the United States. Imperialism represented a phase of this world urge toward Leviathan. And this country caught the spirit. By the end of the last century Americans began to assume the burdens of the world. Expansion, the glittering rewards of empire in Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, cost us some political innocence and with sophistication came myriad complexities.

Complex societies brought complex wars. True, the "little wars" in South Africa, India, Egypt, Cuba, the Philippines seemed almost dainty compared with Napoleon's efforts, with the American Civil War, with the hellish Crimea. But in point of fact, these little wars claimed more lives, wasted more treasure, eroded more humanity than the

great conflicts. Dirty, grim combats they were, replete with piteous patriotism, with shining heroism, with hard dying, with cruelty spilling finally into the bestiality of Calcutta's Black Hole and our own Filipino concentration camps. Small conflicts tend to be nastier than big ones, to get down to refinements in inhumanity.

Mean wars of this type work lasting scars on the nations that fight them- and the United States proved no exception. Americans had to learn to fight dirty and to keep what they won. Harsh as it seemed to many, this appeared the way of modern times. If America would be a world power, she had to have the stomach for the task.

American soldiers had to do the winning of empire and for a time the keeping. These were strange and uncharted duties for the United States Army; they demanded traits and skills unanticipated and, in fact, abhorred by most military men. Essentially the problem faced by the army at the turn of the century was this: how could the traditions of "honor, duty, country" be reconciled with wars against weak nations and plucky natives?

To the lasting credit of the army a type of reconciliation came-and largely through the efforts of American officers of a new breed.

There is no need to draw the obvious parallel between America's problems in Cuba and the Philippines sixty-five years ago and America's problems in Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam today. Certainly there are differences in the two situations, for history does not truly repeat itself. Still, the similarities are striking and it may be that lessons learned in the earlier troubles can be useful in the present ones. American military men pitted against the Viet Cong, against Chinese "volunteers," or missile-waving Castroites may well need the same special qualities which stood their bygone counterparts in such good stead. For it seems to me that today's fundamental problem is much like yesterday's: how can American ideals be reconciled with "brushfire" wars in remote outposts of the globe?

General Pershing's career, I think, has much importance in light of present circumstances. He represents the finest of the "new breed" of officers developed in response to imperialism. A "new breed" is doubtless needed now.

Biography is a quicksilver art. Setting the task to know men from the past, it forces its practitioners to find their subjects from a cold trail, to revive ideas from documents, to bring life from shadows. Whether this proves easy or hard depends on the subject. Great men, men who bestride their times and shape them by their presence, appear easy to portray- but appearances are often deceiving. Great men usually create copious records, leave many trails, and generate a personal mythology. And in that very bulk of evidence lies a pitfall of plenty to trap the biographer.

Pershing is one of these mystifying greats of history. Massive amounts of material exist to trace him in detail. He kept diaries, wrote memoirs, penned thousands of letters and documents. Many contemporaries wrote to him and about him. And yet he comes to the present more a myth than a man.

The mythical Pershing is hardly appealing: a spit and polish horse soldier, he tolerated no nonsense, brooked opposition never, dealt discipline with relish, and was, obviously, a majestic martinet. This picture is reinforced by photographs showing a stony faced, grim man in immaculate tunic and by many subordinates who remember his searing displeasure. According to mythology, Pershing may have been efficient but at too high a cost in spirit.

Generals probably cannot avoid this sort of afterimage. They tend to become so exalted, perhaps even in their own minds, that they spawn envy, resentment, hatred even.

Mortality is easily forgotten amid a galaxy of stars. Yet generals, to use the Roman figure, "are but mortal," and have their human sides. Pershing did, myth to the contrary notwithstanding.

Along with humanness, earthy humor, cultivated thirst, Pershing had the professionalism of a dedicated soldier. This professionalism found expression in his affection for the army but especially in careful training of himself for leadership.

West Point taught the elements of leadership and made them part of Pershing's life. But he expanded on these elements, shaped them with experience and used them as a basis for a philosophy of command which he developed slowly and with great care. To a degree, of course, this philosophy was the sum of his life.

He was not born a leader; he was born a farmer in Missouri the year before the Civil War began. And although exciting Confederate raids occurred near his native Laclède he remembered none of them with martial zest- only that they scared him! Early years passed in learning the ways of land and mules, in running his father's farm, in harsh poverty, and in a ceaseless struggle for education. From an early age, John set himself to learn. He had to read, to learn, to ponder, and he wanted to be a school teacher- in those halcyon days an honored calling.

Chance took him to West Point, chance in the form of a news item announcing entrance examinations not far from the normal school he attended. He passed the exams and entered the Military Academy- older than most at 21. But age worked for him, apparently, since he became a non com officer of his class, was later elevated to First Captain and finally became class president- a lifetime distinction.

Cadets at the Academy in the 1880's and 1890's enjoyed something of army tradition which later generations missed- direct contact with Civil War greats. Pershing appreciated this association and remembered always that General Wesley Merritt had been Superintendent of the Academy in his time, that General William S. Rosecrans served on the Board of Visitors his senior year, and that General Sherman gave the commencement address. Once Pershing saw Grant, his personal hero, the man he ranked as America's greatest general. He never admitted consciously copying Grant, probably didn't, but the two had much in common.

After graduation from the Point in 1886 Pershing chose the cavalry as his arm of the service- in those days it had the glamor later reserved for the Air Force! He soon found himself posted to the Sixth Regiment on the Indian frontier. So began a military life which would see him travel farther than Marco Polo, meet more world figures than Henry M. Stanley, fight more of his country's enemies than Kitchener of Khartoum.

From the beginning of active service he had several advantages working for him. Tall, straight, well-built, he had a square-jawed, striking face accented by piercing eyes, tight lips and cropped moustache- almost every woman he met remembered him as the "handsomest man I've ever seen." Combine with these winning looks a friendly manner, smooth talk, personal charm, and Pershing's possibilities are obvious. They might have been wasted, though, had he been nothing more than a dashing Adonis. Fortunately he had character along with the saving graces of wit, open mind, sympathetic eye, and careful tongue.

Because he had character and human understanding, Pershing learned from every experience and turned knowledge to good purpose. Service in the west taught him the tedium of frontier duty but taught him, too, the lasting romance of army life, the trust of

comrades, the excitement of combat- and also, because he was John Pershing, the virtues of the American Indian. A brief stint in command of a company of Indian Scouts shattered any prejudice lingering from Southern birth and opened his eyes to the power of other races.

Understanding people seemed to Pershing the essence of leadership; the essence of understanding, education. Early yearning for ideas and books left a lasting impression on him and when he had a chance to become Professor of Military Science and Tactics at the University of Nebraska in 1891 he quickly accepted.

Pershing's years in Lincoln may have been among the most influential in his life. In retrospect Lincoln seems an unlikely place to mould a Great Captain. Prairie-locked, stuck off at the tail end of nowhere, the town and the university stood as lonely outposts of culture on the fringes of civilization. But what outposts! Chancellor James Canfield, who presided over the university, proved an "unusually able, far-seeing, vigorous man, with a delightful personality;" one of the local attorneys, William Jennings Bryan, boasted fame beyond the prairies; and one of Lt. Pershing's particular friends was a struggling young lawyer named Charles G. Dawes.

In the company of stimulating friends the new Professor of Military Science made radical changes in the cadet corps of the university. Receiving the full support of Chancellor Canfield and the faculty, Pershing bore down with West Point discipline and worked to build an esprit to replace inertia. Out of all this hard work came a crack drill team- one that set records and took trophies and would be known thereafter as the famed Pershing Rifles. Working with these boys added another chapter in the education for leadership. Later Pershing remembered his problems and cast the value of what he learned:

The psychology of the citizen as a cadet was that of the citizen soldier. Under training by one who understands him he can be quickly developed into a loyal and efficient fighting man. It would be an excellent thing if every officer in the army could have contact in this way with the youth which forms our citizenship in peace and our armies in war. It would broaden the officer's outlook and better fit him for his duties....

Surrounded by faculty, students, intellectual curiosity, the young officer gave in to temptation, studied law, was graduated with the class of 1893 and was admitted to the bar. But that still did not quench his urge toward academic affairs, and he managed to teach regular college mathematics two hours a day.

Good years in Lincoln had to end. When they finally did in 1895, Pershing went back to frontier duty and to the beginning of a long and happy association with the Negro 10th Cavalry- one of the best colored outfits in the Army. A short stay in Montana and the northwest gave just enough time to take part in the roundup of Cree Indians and to see the fighting qualities of the American Negro.

Negroes made good soldiers, contrary to army mythology. Pershing looked behind the myth at the men and remembered what he saw. "It was a radical change," he said, "to go from the command of a corps of cadets of the caliber from which are drawn the leaders of the nation to a company of regulars composed of citizens who have always had only limited advantages and restricted ambitions." But he worked at making the

switch. "My attitude toward the Negro," he would write in later years, "was that of one brought up among them. I had always felt kindly and sympathetic toward them and knew that fairness, justice, and due consideration of their welfare would make the same appeal to them as to any other body of men. Most men, of whatever race, creed, or color, want to do the proper thing and they respect the man above them whose motive is the same. I therefore had no more trouble with the negroes [sic] than with any other troops I ever commanded." As this philosophy was applied in subsequent campaigns at different times and distant places it proved sound and won loyalty.

An unexpected dividend came from service on the northwestern frontier. The Commanding General of the Army, Nelson A. Miles, made a hunting tour through country patrolled by Pershing's command and the two officers became acquainted. As a result, Miles called the young Cavalryman to duty in Washington as his aide in December 1896.

Aides do all sorts of chores, mostly social ones. Pershing's appearance, graceful manners, bachelorhood, made him an especially likely aide for a general with an unmarried daughter! And although Pershing loved dancing, found beautiful girls almost fatally fascinating, he finally grew bored with the constant round of parties and state dinners. In fact he became so bored and so discouraged over slow promotion in the army that he seriously considered resigning his commission.

Friends talked him out of this aberration, happily, and he talked himself into an appointment as Assistant Instructor of Tactics at the Military Academy, beginning in June 1897. Some things had changed at the Academy in the eleven years since he left. But all schools are loathe to change. So a good deal he found wrong with the curriculum during his cadet days, he still found wrong.

Displaying commendable initiative and no little intestinal fortitude, Pershing sought to modify some of the tactical training. "After my experience in the army," he said, "I felt that practical instruction should begin early to include simple exercises in minor tactics in order better to prepare young graduates for active field service. It seemed to me that graduates of West Point should be given a course both theoretical and practical in the kind of service they would have as commanders of platoons and companies and even higher units in battle." Suggestions along these lines, a few tentative lessons, a firm argument, brought stony hostility from the Commandant of Cadets. Pershing got the message- avoid original ideas and above all do not interrupt the even flow of lethargy.

Years later, when writing his memoirs, he could not avoid a thrust at the lazy commandant: "Tactical officers under him had little encouragement to extend the scope of their instruction, which continued to remain somewhat monotonous for officers and cadets alike instead of being, as it should be, a stimulus for thought and study of the basic principles of combat and the development of leadership in their application."

Stifling under the ossified idiocy of his narrow superior, Pershing sought a way out. It came in the unexpected and exciting form of war with Spain. This first major conflict since the Civil War dwarfed the fierce but small operations against the Indians, posed gigantic problems of mass organization, mass logistics, army and navy coordination, overseas combat and tropical tactics, and would test every lesson every soldier had learned. Especially would it test young line officers. It might also offer boundless opportunities for distinction, recognition, and advancement.

But a man shunted off up the Hudson, doing daily drudgery, lost to his command, hardly could hope for much from the war. Pershing had to get back to the 10th Cavalry. Nobody seemed willing to help. His application to be relieved of duty at the Point and assigned to his regiment went to Washington with a disapproving note from the Superintendent and was rejected by the Adjutant General. Adding insult to injury, and incidentally costing himself the man he wanted to keep, the Superintendent published the rejection in orders for the moral instruction of all officers at the Academy.

People could push him pretty hard without making Pershing mad, but once he got mad, he stayed mad. Public ridicule of the kind indulged by the Superintendent started a smoldering resentment in the Instructor of Tactics. He planned his personal tactics with care. Somehow, somehow, he was leaving West Point.

By great good fortune, and with what might even seem malice aforethought, he had helped Assistant Secretary of War G. D. Meiklejohn get his job. Conceivably he could ask a favor of his friend. But would this be right? From the standpoint of channels the answer was obvious: No. But the country was at war and so was he. This brought his problem down to an age-old question: At what point does worship of regulations cease being a virtue and become a vice? Many soldiers answer this by almost Calvinistic adherence to rules and so are protected whatever happens; others risk official displeasure, bend the rules, make opportunities and sometimes become generals.

Pershing decided to do a little bending, took leave, went down to Washington and put his case to Meiklejohn. The Assistant Secretary offered to aid in finding a staff assignment for his impetuous friend-but nothing less than line duty would satisfy. Failing that, warned Pershing, he would resign the regular army and take a volunteer appointment at the head of troops. Meiklejohn conceded, waited for his chance, and when a day came during which he functioned as Acting Secretary of War he ordered Pershing to rejoin the 10th Cavalry near Chickamauga, Georgia.

Things actually worked out to be a little less tidy than the eager lieutenant hoped. Although back with his command, he found himself detailed as regimental quartermaster. Housekeeping duties, essential as may be, bored Pershing. But at least he would be with a unit in whatever fighting developed- and personal chances always lurked in action.

Supply service at least proved educational, particularly after the regiment reached Tampa, Florida, port of embarkation for Cuba. Normally a lazy little town basking in sun and retirement, Tampa suddenly burgeoned with masses of troops, wandering animals, martial equipment of all sorts- and the town simply was not ready. Such rapid expansion, despite the brave proclamations of entrepreneur Morton F. Plant, overtaxed everything in the city. First confusion, then incipient disorganization followed by chaos and virtual anarchy wracked the town.

The expeditionary force, commanded by nimbly corpulent Gen. William R. Shafter, required ample harbor and loading facilities and abundant trackage- all were inadequate. Army officers seem to have taken the expansive Mr. Plant at his word; nobody bothered to examine Tampa's conveniences. An unbelievable bottleneck developed. The jam of men, horses, mules, guns, wagons, all crowding the single track feeding the paltry dock area made a lasting impression on Quartermaster Pershing and made him acutely conscious of logistical planning.

Matters hardly improved when the army reached Cuba, and had the Spaniards offered resistance to the American landing an extremely sticky situation would surely

have resulted. As it was, American troops spilled ashore poorly equipped, many armed but without ammunition. Only the hardy dedication to war displayed by ex-Confederate Gen. Joseph Wheeler saved the initial landing from utter disgrace.

Wheeler, who commanded the division to which the 10th Cavalry belonged, pressed forward to attack as soon as possible and won the first victory at the Battle of Las Guasimas. And Wheeler taught an invaluable lesson in personal leadership and devotion to duty- a lesson to stay with Pershing in the Philippines, in Mexico and in France.

During the bloody crossing of the Aguadores River just before the attack on Kettle and San Juan Hills, Pershing found himself searching the battle area for the absent 2nd Squadron of the 10th Cavalry. As he retraced the route to the river, he came on a lone horseman calmly watching the fighting from a vantage point in midstream. Spanish bullets flicked the trees around him, an occasional splashing geyser marked enemy shells, but the man sat quietly, gaze fixed to the front. The watcher was none other than "Little Joe" Wheeler, a fact which amazed Pershing since the general had been on sick call earlier in the day and unable to mount his horse. Wheeler spoke pleasantly to the young lieutenant and noted that the shelling "seemed quite lively." Pershing's protestations for the general's safety brought reassuring comment and the observations that he could not stay behind the lines when his division faced the enemy. Pershing remembered.

After fighting ended in Cuba, Pershing received orders to report for duty in the office of the Assistant Secretary of War. Victory in Cuba and the acquisition of the Philippines brought problems unexpected by the government. The toughest questions centered around administering new colonial possessions. Since resistance continued in the Philippines, where rebels led by Emilio Aguinaldo fought for independence, the army had to devise a system of military government. Within the War Department a Bureau of Customs and Insular Affairs appeared in March 1899, with Major (temporary) Pershing as Chief. His description of the task facing him has a curiously modern ring:

The problems that arose involved readjustments in government and the determination of policies to be followed in the complicated business of ruling peoples as distant from each other geographically as Porto [sic] Rico and Mindanao and as different in character as West Indian Negroes [sic] are from Mohammedan Asiatics. Over the original code of laws of these peoples Spanish laws and customs had been superimposed. Our application of the rules of military occupation to the different alien groups frequently brought up questions which only the War Department could decide.

Though he could act like one on occasion, Pershing was no bureaucrat. Doing his desk jobs efficiently became a good soldier, but it also became a good soldier to get away from the desk and back to the field. Over loud protests from friend Meiklejohn, Pershing wormed an assignment to the Philippines in September 1899.

Desk duty served him well, though, for few officers had comparable legal and administrative understanding of insular problems. True, initial tasks as adjutant general of the District of Zamboanga and later of the District of Mindanao hardly gave him a chance to display his knowledge. But when he could he offered careful advice, showed interest in the Moro natives, and slowly impressed the brass. A man of his obvious talents could be

useful in command capacity and in October 1901 Capt. Pershing (he finally made it in February 1901) took charge of Camp Vicars, an important Mindanao outpost.

For the first time he had a chance to practice some of his ideas of leadership and military government. The main task of Camp Vicars' commander focused on the Moro population. Few American soldiers either knew or cared much about these strange Mohammedan folk who decked themselves in turbans, wildly colorful clothes, practiced polygamy, took slaves, and brandished razor-edged kris, campilans, and barongs. About all known of them was their warlike nature, their unending desire to kill Christians, and their resistance to all forms of law and order.

Many Americans felt about Moros as they did about Indians: the good ones were dead. Standard operating procedure seemed to be shoot first and chat later. Obviously this sort of treatment bred equal enmity, and by the time Pershing took command at Camp Vicars relations between Americans and Moros were about as bad as they had been between Spaniards and Moros- which is to say impossible.

The new Yankee leader acted like none before him. Instead of sending out patrols to round up hostiles, he sent out letters written in Arabic, letters which talked of friendship and mutual assistance. A few Moro dattos and sultans tried the novel ways of peace and grew to trust Pershing. Working with this small nucleus, he tried to win over all the barrios of Mindanao. But this attempt failed. Fierce, proud people, the Moros tended to see weakness in peace talk and most could not forget the Mohammedan duty to rid the world of infidels.

Lake Lanao, landlocked deep in the interior of the Island of Mindanao, served several barrios as fishery, avenue of commerce, route of retreat. Two especially fearless bands of Moros hugged the shores of the lake and made it their own sea-the Lake Lanao and Maciu Moros. Their dattos treated every friendly overture with contempt, and Pershing finally knew he must fight them or lose the respect of the Moros who had accepted him.

By the time he led his first expedition into Mindanao's interior he knew much Moro lore. Hard fighting, he understood, conferred religious virtue; those Moros who died well, especially when warring against Christians, went immediately to Mohammedan paradise- noble death, then, formed the threshold of bliss. To an old Indian fighter this warrior philosophy had chilling similarity to the Ghost Dance frenzy which drove the red men to their desperate last stands.

Pershing understood a soldier's desire to die well- this ambition was not, after all, the exclusive property of Moros or Indians. And he respected those who achieved this goal. But he knew that somehow he must soil death for the Moros, somehow rob it of its hallow. This achieved, and discretion might have a chance over valor. Knowledge of the Koran and its teachings offered a simple, if repelling solution: bury dead Moros with dead pigs. This practice, which guaranteed perdition to Mohammedans, reduced the power of the war dattos and fighting slowly subsided.

But Pershing knew that he must give something valuable in return for such shabby guile: what he gave was mettle for mettle. He treated the Moro soldier as a worthy foe whose strength demanded both strength and artifice in response. When he fought Moros he stormed their cottas with fury and when he carried their forts he spared the survivors the weakness of mercy.

Slowly but inexorably the Lake Lanao and Maciu Moros, then the fearsome Job and Sulu bands, yielded to this strange Yankee- this noble warrior who talked so softly. When at last they came to know he meant to help rather than humiliate them they, too, trusted. And when they did, they gave him their hearts. He became the first American soldier admitted to the exalted station of Moro datto in a mystic ceremony reminiscent of the Arabian Nights. Other Americans less sensitive to humanity, less understanding, less learned, might have spurned the strange rites and ridiculed the honor. Not Pershing. And the important thing is that none of the Moros expected he would.

Tenure in the Philippines was interrupted in 1903 by a call to duty with the nascent general staff. While in Washington tending this important desk job, the captain met and married Frances Warren, daughter of Senator Warren of Wyoming. Their marriage glittered as the capital's social event of 1905- everybody came, including President and Mrs. Roosevelt and members of the Senate.

No sooner was Pershing married than he was shipped-this time to Tokyo as U.S. Attache with the special assignment of observing the Mikado's armies in the Russo-Japanese War. And so began Pershing's first acquaintance with Japan. He fell in love with the country, took his family there often, and developed an admiration for the formal determination of the people. He also came to appreciate the efficiency of the army, an appreciation which grew as he followed Japanese operations at Dalny, Liaoyang, and Mukden. A keen professional eye caught the strength of Russian positions at Mukden, laced with wire, entrenched, supported by concentrations of artillery and machine guns. That same cold eye, like it or not, recognized the terrible power of the machine gun against masses of cavalry. And again war taught logistical lessons. Even the efficient Japanese could not solve the problems of masses of men, animals, guns, refugees, and prisoners. Disciplined trains broke into herds of vehicles, people, guns, equipment, all hopelessly stalled in chaotic masses to dwarf memories of Tampa. Again modern armies ran afoul of war's ancient enemy-disorganization.

The large corps of foreign observers, with the Japanese, all friends of Pershing, rejoiced at his spectacular promotion in mid-September 1906. The lowly captain of heroic duration in grade had been elevated by President Roosevelt to the rank of brigadier general! A reward for Moro service, the promotion put Pershing ahead of 862 senior officers and posed endless problems in jealousy and protocol.

But training and observation steadied him for increased responsibility, prepared him for wider opportunities, and tempered him for high command.

The new brigadier at last received the assignment he most wanted: back to the Philippines as Commander of the Department of Mindanao and Governor of the Moro Province. This dual military and civil role had all kinds of possibilities. As military commander of the Department of Mindanao, he had charge of U.S. forces in the area and responsibility for operations- this meant, of course, he had power to enforce his decisions as civil governor of the province.

Had he been less experienced, less sympathetic with the Moros, power might have corrupted his administration into the petty tyranny known in other parts of the Philippines. But power he used to dignify his friends and chastise his foes; so justly did he use it that the Moro Province became a model of American military government. Civic advances could be glimpsed from Zamboanga to Iligan, from Tawi Tawi throughout the

Sulu Archipelago. And at last leave-taking in 1914 both Pershings and Moros mourned the parting.

Still, long tropical service takes its toll, and the entire Pershing clan- grown to six by 1914- needed a change. Assignment to San Francisco promised a pleasant post, and the family settled comfortably in the Presidio. None realized it, of course, but the brief months of happy life at the Presidio were to be the last. While Pershing was away on the Mexican border in August 1915 his quarters burned. Frances and the three girls were killed; only son Warren survived.

Something died in Pershing himself. He still could be good company at parties, still played rugged polo, still enjoyed ribald jokes- but the richness went from life and left a parching void. If later he seemed cold and stern to many, he had reasons.

Sorrow sometimes brings a type of discipline. It did to Pershing. Retired within himself, he became increasingly the aloof, dedicated soldier. Desperate devotion to work seemed to ease the loneliness, and he lavished attention on his post in Texas.

Things might have been impossible for a bereaved general lost at a remote outpost with nothing but routine to drain his suffering. But Fort Bliss had close contact with people of El Paso and also had special problems to relieve the monotony. Throughout 1915 trouble along the Mexican border flared with increasing violence; roving packs of banditos raided on either side of the Rio Grande and mounting loss of life and property brought alarm in Washington.

By the end of 1915 the border crisis threatened war between the United States and Mexico. And suddenly on this chancy scene burst the hulking figure of Pancho Villa, villain extraordinary. On March 9, 1916, his bandits hit Columbus, New Mexico, in a lightning raid, killed a good many people, and almost started the war.

President Wilson directed a large United States force to enter the State of Chihuahua in pursuit of the "Wraith of the Desert." Pershing was picked to lead the Punitive Expedition.

In some ways this looked to be his toughest assignment. Orders stood his first problem, orders which were complicated by the world situation. Wilson urgently wanted to avoid war with Mexico because it seemed certain that the European conflict would soon involve the United States. Whatever was done about Villa must be done in such a way as to keep peace with President Carranza's government. Consequently a delicate kind of deal resulted: Carranza agreed to permit a Yankee expedition in northern Mexico but placed harsh restrictions on its activities. Pershing could use only north-south routes, railroads were off limits, no Mexican town could be entered without Carranzista permission, scrupulous care must be taken of private property.

Pershing's second problem he could see around him- terrain. North Chihuahua spread below New Mexico and Texas a vast alkali waste, dotted here and there with cactus, agave, arroyos~ poor villages. Water was scarce, roads few, fodder non-existent.

Opposition constituted another problem. Pancho Villa rode this country cloaked in a hero's mantle. Every hovel offered refuge, every peon offered help. His banditos, excellent light cavalry, roamed the countryside at will and when chased, broke into small bands and melted away until time to pillage once again. The myth of Villa the Benevolent brought cold hostility to pursuers, and the Punitive Expedition felt the chill everywhere.

All these problems Pershing understood well enough, but he appreciated the dual importance of his mission. Not only must he break up Villa's brigands and restore order

to the border but also carry out a field test of United States arms and equipment under modern campaign conditions. Modern tactics, new weapons, communications, transportation all remained untried in a war of massive proportions. Mexico might serve as a proving ground for the American army.

Once again Pershing had to train himself for unique responsibility. His own experience in mass war was limited. Lessons in small unit action so well learned in the Indian campaigns, in Cuba and the Philippines, would have only limited value in the new style warfare evolving abroad. In Mexico Pershing might still rely on semi-guerilla tactics, but he must try out the new army.

He had a good deal of unfamiliar equipment to learn and control. His 15,000-man force, which crossed into Mexico on March 15, 1916, consisted of the usual arms but with interesting additions. A motorized truck company aided the ancient mule trains in carrying supplies; a field radio unit attempted to keep track of the ranging cavalry scouts; machine gun companies were sprinkled through the infantry to increase firepower; eight JN-4 aeroplanes, the famed Flying Jennies, hovered above the American columns to provide reconnaissance and courier service. Pershing had charge of the most modern expedition ever put in the field by the United States.

The Punitive Expedition fought several battles, countless skirmishes, missed Villa but broke up his force, and emerged from Mexico in February 1917, tattered and tested.

Invaluable lessons were learned in the Villa venture. Coordination of the innovations in communication, observation, and firepower came hard, but came-and proved highly valuable. The militia system, called into operation when reinforcements went to the border in case full-scale war erupted, failed and showed clearly that new mobilization methods must be found. Mexico helped convince Congress of the need to expand and modernize the entire United States military structure. The vital National Defense Act of 1916 was passed largely because of Pershing's experiences south of the border.

What of the new major general himself? What did Pershing learn in Mexico? First, of course, he gained practice in handling a large number of troops in expeditionary action; then, too, he learned something of the way to combine old and new weapons and equipment in modern war; something more of the qualities of those citizen soldiers he met first in Nebraska; and finally he learned the wisdom of civilian control of military affairs. This last lesson came the hard way- by direct conflict with the Secretary of War and the President. A good soldier, schooled in the principles of war and bloodied in hard combat, Pershing wanted no mincing around in Mexico. Nothing less than general invasion and all out pursuit of Villa made sense; partial wars, "police actions" fought under wraps, denied logic by forfeiting victory. But since being a good soldier also usually involved sticking to orders, Pershing did as he was told. And in later time he came to see reasons for Wilson's quasi-war with Mexico.

Despite his personal feelings Pershing did a splendid job of avoiding war through nimble diplomacy and careful use of force-and by keeping strictly to his orders. Such unwavering discipline marked him an officer to watch, and did much to win him command of the American Expeditionary Force in May 1917.

Who else had his experience in modern warfare, with combined arms, with protracted operations of all kinds; who else showed his loyalty, wisdom, patience, character? These questions Wilson and Secretary of War Newton Baker pondered, and

both concluded none other than Pershing could be trusted with the greatest assignment ever given an American commander.

Along with this unprecedented honor went awesome responsibility. Although fighting had raged in France since 1914 and America drifted inexorably toward involvement, pitifully little had been done to ready the United States for total war. The National Defense Act, the "Plattsburg Movement," Teddy Roosevelt's loud calls for mobilization—all these resulted in a few more militiamen and general public concern. But what of the army? Beyond the regular and volunteer units which served on the Mexican border and the few garrisons scattered around the country, the army existed only on paper. And the paper legions looked woefully outdated. American ideas of war had a distance to go to catch up with the scope of conflict abroad. Not only were plans inadequate, supplies and equipment simply did not exist. The United States could put only one military plane in the air and boasted almost no aircraft factories. Although the fantastic artillery barrages on the Western Front were recounted daily in the news, virtually no preparations had been made to produce guns or shells. And while British, French, and German armies relied on machine guns by the thousands to cover their lines, American ordnance officers struggled in 1917 to decide on a gun for official adoption.

Clearly Pershing led a phantom force which could have no impact on the war for some time. And something else loomed clearly to the AEF's commander: again he would have to train himself for the job, alter his attitudes and ideas to meet changed conditions. Obviously his major task would be one of organization and supply. Like his hero General Grant, he must become an executive, a general presiding over a gigantic business enterprise. War had burst the bounds of armies and now consumed nations and peoples. Divisions and corps still were commanded, but armies were managed. In this enlarged role Pershing's legal training and experience as Governor of the Moro Province would serve him well.

History pretty much recalls Pershing the Chaumont bureaucrat, the stubborn member of the Supreme Allied War Council, the remote dictator. He became a model of administrative efficiency, the prototype of modern military leaders, the best of the "new breed." Administrative and operational details he handled with the practiced ease of years, but he kept a keen perspective on life and death through frequent looks at the Western Front.

And by 1917 the Western Front was a sight to make cynics of saints. From the Swiss border to the English channel, over four hundred miles of trenches twisted across France. Some parts of the line were marked "quiet sectors," where only an occasional artillery duel churned the Augean mud and casualties were few. On active parts of the line the story could be told only in lights and darks, in flashes, in terrible cacophonies, in the pulsing chatter of machine guns, in screams of men and shells, in the looming silence of a waiting field.

The worst mistake of the war, to Pershing's mind, was the acceptance of a trench stalemate. Convinced that getting out of the trenches gave the only chance for victory, he drilled his men in Mexico in open tactics, kept them marching to build stamina and confidence—just in case they got to France. And these men came at last as part of the American First Army to form the core of Pershing's striking force. He knew, of course, that he could not change allied strategy or tactics, but he clung to his own.

When Pershing and his staff first arrived in Europe in June 1917, the Allied cause was all but lost. Wastage of men and treasure sapped the vitality of Britain and France, mutiny smouldered in over fifty French divisions, and across the grim ditches fresh German armies were mustering. Marshal Foch put it plainly- one million Americans must come quickly or the game was up.

Where were these Americans coming from, and when? Pershing kept his usual tight-lipped counsel but pondered these questions with alarm. American combat troops would arrive late in 1917, but when they came, they would be short of machine guns and would have to borrow artillery from the French. The thing that most bothered him, though, was Allied insistence on filtering American units into spent Allied divisions. Pershing rejected the idea and in this rejection received the vital assistance of President Wilson. Wilson gave him specific instructions before he left for Europe: the American Army must remain the American Army- under no circumstances, save utter disaster, would doughboys be abandoned to British and French control.

Not only would this practice fritter away American strength and prevent the building of an army, it would also impose on Pershing's men the defeatist philosophy of the Allies and squander training in open warfare. Pershing kept to the idea of open attack through all of 1917-and it so happened that the same tactical notion occurred to Field Marshall Ludendorff as he plotted a German offensive for the summer of the next year.

Most Allied generals had little regard for Pershing-one described him as "very commonplace, without real war experience, and already overwhelmed by the initial difficulties of a job too big for him"- or for his tactical ideas. But when Ludendorff's divisions specially trained in open maneuver cracked the Western Front wide open in the summer of 1918 and Allied divisions were driven from their trenches to wander helplessly without cover, it looked as though the tough Yankee had something.

Doughboys proved their general right at Cantigny, Belleau Wood St Mihiel, and in the Argonne. Pershing's dedication to his own ideas of organization and operations got the best out of the citizen soldiers he so admired

In the last analysis, American strength-physical and material turned the tide of war in 1918. But the "Stillness at Compiègne" came at an awkward time- it caught the Allies almost in mid-stride and brought a serious letdown. And it frustrated Pershing.

After hard beginnings, his Argonne offensive had picked up momentum and he wanted to drive into Germany, destroy its armies, reduce its economy-he wanted, in other words, proper victory for a grim and dirty war. But Versailles satisfied no one, and Pershing noted with distaste the hatred and feuds bequeathed by the peacemakers. He agreed with the principle of limited peace after limited war, but could never accept armistice as an end to a crusade.

Victory brought unprecedented fame to the leader of the AEF and decorations from all Allied countries. In September 1919 Pershing received the coveted rank of General of the Armies- a rank held by only one other American, George Washington. Finally in 1921, after the shouting and adulation faded, the highest general of them all took up another desk job, this time as Chief of Staff. He stayed at that post until retirement in 1924. During these years Pershing laid the groundwork for the reorganization and modernization of the army which would prepare it for World War II.

After leaving the Army Pershing languished on the shelf. He dabbled in South American peacemaking, served on various commissions, shunned the spotlight as usual.

His health finally failed and he was admitted to Walter Reed Hospital in May 1941, where he lived in a special suite until his death in 1948.

But the hospital years were not all dull. Battalions of visitors paraded to his rooms, he broke cover now and then for an official function or secret gourmandising, and during the Second World War he kept an active eye on the activities of General George C. Marshall, his former aide.

What meaning does Pershing's long career have in the Atomic Age? How does he stack up as a modern general? Was he a great man?

Taking the questions in reverse order: Yes, I think he was a great man- great, if character, if devotion, if self-discipline and self-development are elements of greatness. Stonewall Jackson's personal motto was "You may be whatever you resolve to be," and it might have been Pershing's. He rose to every responsibility because he had the capacity to learn from experience and to practice what he learned. There seems no limit to his ability to grow- suffice it to say that he grew beyond the demands of colonialism to shape an army of democracy.

As a modern general Pershing deserves high praise. Though he sometimes botched tactics, he rarely erred strategically: witness his sense of objective in the Argonne offensive- aimed at the most sensitive point in the German positions along the Western Front. And most important in modern times, he always understood the relation of politics to war: witness his success politically and militarily in Moroland, his triumph over red tape in France. As a military businessman he displayed remarkable talent; I wonder if anyone else could have managed the total effort of the AEF with equal success?

Does his career still have importance today? Is the career of any Great Captain ever irrelevant? Pershing's self-discipline, his sensitive humanity, honesty, his example of rising to every challenge, are hallmarks of a superb leader and are as inspiring in this time as in his own.

He patterned his life according to the finest traditions of the service, and he helped make those traditions. Can any soldier do more?

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