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USAFA Harmon Memorial Lecture #39
Shaping Junior Officer Values In The Twentieth Century: A Foundation For A Comparative Perspective
Dave R. Palmer, 1996

General Stein, ladies and gentlemen, what an awesome feeling to be up here in front of friends, colleagues, mentors, such as Bill Holley, people I have worked with and have admired for decades, three occupants of this particular podium, people whose works I have read but have not met until now, and the magnificent group of young people wearing the uniform of cadets here at the Air Force Academy. And also it gives me a chance to pause right now and tell you, and this particular audience especially, how proud West Pointers are of the Air Force Academy. West Point graduates had a role, a key role, early in the founding of this institution. Some in this audience are West Point graduates who wore blue- General McDermott and others had so much to do with creating this Academy. Being here gives me a chance to say something we don't say often enough: as the Air Force Academy has come to maturity, West Pointers have enjoyed being a part of the process.

I'm putting these wings on now for you cadets. These are Academy soaring wings, your sailing wings. You may think it a bit strange that I got these when I was superintendent at West Point. The story is, I came to the Air Force Academy shortly after I was appointed to visit Skip Scott, the Superintendent, to find out what "supes" did. He was very gracious to open up your Academy to let me see everything that was going on, to brief me, and to answer all my questions. And he asked a cadet, who was one of your flight instructors, to take me up in a glider.

As we were being towed up to altitude, he was describing all the maneuvers that he was able and qualified to do. He ran through a long list- a very talented young man. And he said, "Sir, which one would you like to do?" And I said, "All of them." He said, "All of them? Oh boy." So we stayed up for probably an hour and did everything. I don't even know what we did. Flying upside down, I remember that, and all sorts of other maneuvers. When we came back down, they were either so impressed or so pleased that I hadn't thrown up that they gave me a set of wings. I have been waiting for the right occasion to wear them, and I thought tonight was it.

I have had the good fortune of being able to come to the Air Force Academy, this magnificent national treasure, three times to speak. Once in the 70's, once in the 80's, once now in the 90's. I don't know why I am asked back only once every decade. Maybe it takes that long for people to forget why they never wanted to invite that character back again. But it is good to return.

My wife, each time I have left, has given me advice. The first time she said, "Say something meaningful." The second it was, "Keep it short." And this time, when I left for the airport yesterday, she said, "Remember to hold your stomach in." Tonight I will try to adhere to all three of her admonitions.

Actually, the first one will be very easy because the topic of this symposium is so central to our profession, to the country, to developing our military leadership- the young people who will be the leaders of the future. It is so central that it would be difficult for anyone to speak in the next two or three days and not have something meaningful to say. I have to admit, though, that my wife's second admonition gave me a little trouble. The topic, when I got it months ago, asked for a "comparative perspective" on shaping junior officer values in the twentieth century. Well, I began to think about the scope- a comparative perspective, global, the world, the entire century, values from left to right. How in the world could I do that in forty minutes?

So I called back and asked the Symposium planners if I might add two words to the title: "Foundation for." What I hope to do tonight is to be able to provide for all of us a foundation for that perspective, a foundation that will help us in our discussions, in our panels for the next couple of days, to come to grips with a comparative perspective. They did that. They changed it, and I felt pretty good. And then a month passed and I got seriously into preparing the talk, and I realized that it was still beyond my ability, so I have narrowed it even more. Let me tell you how.

First of all, I decided that I would confine my remarks to the preparation of United States officers, for a very simple reason. For a good part of this century, the United States, in the preparation of officers, has been dominant. Not dominant in the sense that everyone has done what we have done, but since World War II in particular, every country in the world has patterned itself after the United States or has looked at what we were doing and said, "Well, that's fine for you but it won't fit for us," or "This piece is all right but the rest isn't." So if you try to find a common denominator in officer preparation in this century, and especially since World War II, it has to be how the United States has done it. Successfully or unsuccessfully, that was sort of the model everyone started with.

Next I narrowed my topic to the federal service academies. I will not branch out into Officer Candidate School, direct commissions, or the Reserve Officer Training Corps because for most of this century, the academies were somewhat stable, while the others were not.

The other sources were up and down. They didn't even exist at some points, and at certain times the outlet valves were turned and there were floods of officers from them. If you want continuity, you almost have to look at what happened in the service academies. And of course, they are federal, and that means that they have been the standard setters, in that whatever we as a nation wanted, it came through Congress, “This is what we want in our officers," and that's how it gets cranked in. I'll tell a story a little later about that.

And finally, I'll confine my remarks tonight mostly to West Point. Very simply, I am probably more credible talking about West Point than Annapolis.

Now how does a federal service academy- West Point, the Air Force Academy, the Naval Academy- differ from ROTC or OTS in how they go about commissioning young men and women? What is their essence that makes them different fundamentally from other sources, or is there one? One that you may not think much about, but I believe is very important- at the federal academies, and only at the federal academies, every single student has a mandate to serve in uniform. That uniquely flavors the environment at the academies.

In other commissioning programs, many cadets enter the active ranks. In some, perhaps most do. But they have a choice, to serve or not. Even at the all-military institutions, such as Virginia Military lnstitute, the majority of students do not go on active duty. If you want to know what values are paramount in the nation, what values we as a people believe our military leaders ought to have, look inside the military academies. Go to Air Force, go to West Point, go to Annapolis and you'll see, because that's where the services insert values into the system. Cadets and midshipmen are fully immersed in a four-year program. They don't go to military training for a brief period in a summer camp, or wear a uniform one day a week. The environment is total.

And I think it's probably true for all of the academies- it certainly is true for West Point- that the developmental experience exists in four areas: academic-intellectual development, certainly; physical development-fitness, that's a big element; military training-developing habits, discipline, developing leadership early on; and the fourth area is character. Now, you can argue, and I have argued both ways, that character could be separate. It could also be a part of the other three. It could be so intertwined in the other three that it's not really a separate area. But for our purposes tonight, let's say there are four. And of those four, only character is unique.

There are educational institutions in this country that can teach calculus better than it can be taught at the Air Force Academy. There are educational institutions that can teach the English language better than the Naval Academy can. There are institutions that can teach engineering better than West

Point. There are institutions that have outstanding physical programs. (I noticed a few weeks back that Notre Dame came up short when they thought their football team was better than the Air Force's, but they at least played you a good game.)

There are also other ways to do military training. We heard an address earlier in the day about the great debate early on when this Academy was being founded: Should we teach people to fly while they are here or not? And the answer was no, because the people in charge realized at that time that the Air Training Command can teach people how to fly, and they do so quite effectively.

But what about character? Character. Where in America does any institution say it can handle the development of character on a par with the academies, much less better than the academies? One doesn't exist. So the inculcation of character is a distinct role of the service academies.

That's the essence of what makes the academies especially different. All cadets and midshipmen go on to serve their country in uniform, all graduates. They are immersed in a total program. And character development is at the nexus of everything that is done.

Talking about character begs a question- what is character? How do you define character? Secondly, is it really important? I have indicated that I think it is, but is it in the sense of history? Then, if you can define it and if it is important, the third question is, how do you go about inculcating it? How do you develop it in young people? So let me try to work through those three questions.

Almost everyone who is anyone at some time in his or her life has taken a shot at defining character. But, in a newspaper column, not too long ago, Ronald Clark wrote: "Character is one of those terms that sounds good, until you try to define it." I happened to read that while I was trying to find a definition of character. That made me feel uneasy. Still, many have tried their hand at defining character. Abraham Lincoln: "Character is like a tree, reputation like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it, but the tree is the real thing:' I liked his metaphor, but it didn't help me a lot for this lecture. Secretary of War Newton Baker: 'The character of a military officer is trustworthiness that knows no evasions." Okay, that got a little closer for me.

Well, I decided to quit looking at quotations from historical figures and go to a very recent study. A group of scholars, in this past year, got together at a conference in Austin, Texas, at the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. With the upcoming Presidential election on their minds, they decided to define character. I thought, "Ah-ha, why didn't I go there first and get their report?" Unfortunately, they couldn't define character. Instead, they came up with a laundry list that had some interesting entries. I'll quote a few: "Telling the truth always." "Having a generosity of spirit." "Respecting others." "Having the courage of your convictions." And I like this one: "Having a sense of humor."

Character? Character described as a laundry list of values? Well, there's got to be more to it than that. How could it be so important and yet we have such a small grasp of what it is? So I did what any good historian does when the sources don't offer support, I made up my own definition. This is Dave Palmer's definition, but it will be the working definition for tonight:

> Character is an intangible, an intangible comprised of knowledge on the one hand and action on the other. Knowing and doing. Knowing what is right and doing what is right. Taking the harder right instead of the easier wrong.

So as we talk about character tonight, that's what we'll say it is. It's that combination of intellect, of knowing, and having the moral courage to do what you know you ought to do, even when someone is not looking.

How important is character? According to Teddy Roosevelt: “To educate a person in mind but not in morals is to create a menace to society." Sir James Glover: "A man of character in peace is a man of courage in war." The Army's Field Manual 22-100 is the premiere statement of doctrine on leadership. A new version is coming out shortly and I had a chance to review it. It says, "Officers in our Army”- but certainly that would apply to officers in our entire military establishment "must be

leaders of character." Not just leaders... Leaders of character. The very starting point for leadership, the manual says, is character. Everything else, every other value, emanates from the moral sphere.

Let me now turn back to history; this is, after all, a history symposium. Let me look way back for a couple of vignettes that have to do with character. Go back to the founding of our country. Go to West Point. How many of you in here have been to West Point and know where the parade ground is? Well, you will recall that there is a huge statue there right in the center, the geographical and the emotional center of West Point, a statue of a man on horseback, greater than life size by far. It dominates West Point. It dominates the parade ground. That statue honors a special person.

There is another person for us to ponder. To find where he's honored, though, you have to go down to the old cemetery, into the old church, walk in about halfway and look to the wall on the right. There you will see a series of black granite plaques with the names of all of the generals in the American Revolution. The plaques are very simple, very stark. Each has a date of birth, a rank, a name, and a date of death. The plaques start with George Washington, and run along the wall. Every one is exactly alike until you reach the last one.

Way back up there, nearly hidden-you have to look carefully to find it. It is the last one in the row, almost out of sight behind the choir loft. It doesn't look quite like the others. There is a rank, Major General. There is a date of birth, 1741. There is no name and no date of death. Where those two entries would be, the granite is scored as if they were chipped off. They are not there.

As you might guess, the first person honored, the horseman on the parade ground, is George Washington. The other, honored with a plaque without a name, is Benedict Arnold. George Washington and Benedict Arnold.

You see, they couldn't use Arnold's name. When he became a traitor, Washington decreed that the name of Benedict Arnold would never again be written, would never be honored in this country. But, the fact is, he was a general in the Revolution. Not only was he a general, he was a very good one. He and Washington, as a pair, carried the Revolution in its early years. It is awfully hard to see how, without either of those two men in 1775, '76, or '77, we could have continued fighting long enough to let the French have a chance to join us in '78.

Those two men carried the Revolution. They were the two most outstanding warriors. There were others, of course, but those two stood head and shoulder above all of the rest. They both had victories. They both suffered defeat. They both had people praising them. They both had enemies intent on tearing them down. They both had groups trying to remove them from office and replace them with someone else. They both suffered emotional highs and lows. Both faced adversity.

However, one, under adversity, grew stronger and stronger. The other, under adversity, grew weaker and weaker. One went on to become the father of his country; the other a man without a country. One became the man of monuments; the other has only that little half hidden plaque in the old church in the cemetery at West Point.

Why? What were the differences in the values they had? They were both intelligent. They were both courageous on the battlefield. They both had an innate ability to feel what was happening in a fight. Both were charismatic and could cause men to go charging into an enemy position. But one had character and one didn't.

A second vignette from history, same period, just a little later. George Washington, at the end of the Revolution, wanted to establish a military academy. He thought, "Never again shall we let our country be in the position of going to war without a professional group of leaders. We can't again try to develop them during the war. We need a military academy."

At the end of the war he tried and failed to create one. He tried every year of his presidency. He failed because there was a clique of American leaders who were afraid of the military, afraid of the Army, really. They were afraid of a coup, of a military dictatorship. They didn't want professional officers. Washington knew we needed them, however, so he kept trying.

The last letter he wrote in his life on public business, just before he died, was a letter to Alexander Hamilton laying out the reasons again why we needed a military academy. Interestingly enough, just a little over two years after his death, a law was passed establishing the Military Academy. The bill was signed into law by Thomas Jefferson- the very man who had led the effort that had thwarted Washington every step of the way for so many years.

Why? Well, whatever you may think about Jefferson, he was not dumb. When he took the oath that only the President in this country takes- to preserve, to protect and to defend the Constitution- he realized that Washington had been right all along. The country did indeed need a professional military. Although he recognized the necessity, Jefferson was still terribly afraid of the Army. He was determined that it would be kept under control.

How to do that? The best way, he reasoned, was to set up a federal military academy so the federal government would control who went, what they studied, and which ones got commissioned. That way we would have the best possible chance of getting trustworthy officers, military leaders who would remain servants of the republic. So character was essential, yes. West Point was established, and then, of course, the Naval Academy and the Air Force Academy, all built on the very importance of this essential intangible we call character.

Well, that brings us to the third question. We now know what character is. And we agree that it is very important. Now comes the hard part. How do you develop character? How do you mold young people to make sure they become leaders of character, especially in changing times? Especially in changing times! How do you do that? Times change, society changes. Do the verities change? Do duty, honor, country mean something different now than they did fifty years ago or that they will fifty years from now?

No, the verities don't change. But people do, and in a democracy we get our potential leaders from the people, from our society, and they serve that society. Can we expect them to be, when they come to us out of the society, very different from that society itself? Shouldn't we expect that they are going to reflect the values pertaining at that time in the nation? Well, certainly they are. Another question that I think is intriguing- and this is rhetorical- in a democracy, dare we try to make them really different from the people they serve, from the society they serve?

Let me share three vignettes about three superintendents of West Point in this century, each of whom did something I think fundamentally important toward the development of character. Each, interestingly, went to the superintendency in a post-war period, in fact, right after the three major wars of this century.

After World War I, Douglas MacArthur institutionalized the honor system. He formalized it, not only the code, but the system. There had been an honor code before, but it was very informal. It did not have a structure, and it was run by cadets who called themselves "The Vigilantes" (that gives you an idea of how it might have been run). MacArthur realized that the honor code and the honor system was so important to the development of character that they had to be brought above the surface and formalized.

Maxwell Taylor, right after World War II, at the insistence of Eisenhower, who was Army Chief of Staff, decided on and implemented a leadership development system. One had been there before, but never really formal. And from that sprang the leadership development system that we have in the United States Army today. It began with a directive from Eisenhower to Maxwell Taylor in 1946. Not by coincidence does that leadership system have at its core, ethics and morality.

My successor, Howard Graves, came to the Academy in 1991, immediately after the end of the Cold War, the third major war we have fought this century. He took a look at the youth of America, and realized that young people coming to West Point were coming out of a society in which the core ethics were very different than those existing thirty years before when he had entered as a cadet.

It's not my job now to go into all those differences, but there definitely were differences. General Graves realized that cadets had to deal with the diversity that characterizes both West Point

and our Army today- diversity of gender, of race, of ethnic background. When West Point cadets became officers, he knew, not only were they going to be in a multicultural Army, they were going to be working closely with people from different cultures all over the world.

And he did something brilliant. When I heard of it, I found myself saying, "Why didn't I think of that?" I had five years to think of it, but I didn't. He created a phrase that those of you from West Point now will recognize, a phrase marvelous in its simplicity, and that is: "At West Point there are two bedrock values." "Two bedrock values." The first is honor, as it always has been, and the second is consideration of others.

So elevating to a par with honor the value of treating others properly- saying that there are two bedrock values, honor and consideration of others- has significantly advanced the system for the development of character.

Finally, I recently called one of my faculty members in Walden. Walden, you may know, is only for Ph.D. students. You have to have a Master's to get in the university, so this is a man who deals with doctoral students entirely. He's a psychologist. He has great practical experience in human development, and he has intimate knowledge of the service academies. He is someone I know very well, and I felt sure that he would be straight with me.

So I called and asked him what he thought one ought to say about the process of developing character. He sent back an "e-mail" message with several points. I thought his words were quite powerful. I have condensed his message a little, and am paraphrasing, but these are essentially his words:

> It's not any specific program that makes the difference. It is the entire fabric of values- the entire fabric of values and the action taken in support of those values. Our academies create an environment where integrity and high character are valued. The academies strive to present sustained reinforcement of the importance of character, daily reminders of the importance of character. Those daily actions over time cement the perceptions by which cadets, and then officers, live. Character development is an everyday thing. Character isn't something the soldier straps on on the day of battle. It must consistently flow across all situations over his or her entire life. It cannot be gained, character cannot be gained from an orientation or a course. It grows from living it over time.

Well, we have talked about the sense of values that we may want to provide to people in their development as they become officers in the armed services. We have talked about character and what it is, how important it is, and some thoughts about how one develops it.

I end by saying that the challenges to all of those charged with developing the next generation of leaders are similar to the challenges in every era, this one and all the past eras of this century. But they are also quite different.

As I personally look across the thirty years between my own days as a cadet at West Point and my time there as superintendent, I know for a fact that the developmental models were different. The model used on me in the 1950s and the one in place in the 1980s -those were very different models of character development. And they had to be different.

I would also have to say that the challenges today- in the age of Oprah and with the long shadow of moral bankruptcy so evident across land- the challenges in developing young people just seem to me to be more daunting now than ever before in this century. I sincerely would wish all of those charged with commissioning the next generation of military leaders all the best of luck in the world. They are going to need it.

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