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TITLE: A PROBLEM IN MORALE

SCOPE: An example in applied psychology of leadership to a
problem of troop morale in a post-combat situation.

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Prepared by: Robert L. Dudley

1st Lieut. Cavalry

A PROBLEM IN MORALE

Armored soldiers of our army in World War II were characterized by their high morale. In many cases, the esprit de corps of the armored units was responsible for the decisive actions of our army. Success in battle was, in turn, the greatest creator of good morale among our tankers.

American soldiers in tanks led the way through Africa and from Normandy to the Elbe. At any one time enroute on that odyssey, there may have been a minor problem of morale, due to a momentary difficulty. In the main, however, due to the continued advances, the armored soldiers' morale was ever high and reborn of its own successes.

The accomplishment of victory over the Germans on 8 May 1945 culminated in a period of superhigh morale. During this time, all soldiers were happy and thankful. There was no problem of morale.

The time which I wish to treat is that time following the celebration of victory. A problem of morale did come into existence then very definitely. The reasons for the decline in morale were several. But, in general, the great reason was that the job was done; and as far as the veteran American soldier was concerned, he was ready to go home. The war was over. Each man's own desires began to be no longer subordinated to the

objectives or motives of the group. The individual began to worry about his postwar job and many other things. Since frustration ensued immediately because transportation facilities could not deliver all to America at once, the morale of the individual began to suffer. Therefore, my reason for discussing this problem at all is to show that leadership can instill and maintain morale under somewhat difficult circumstances. In a possible future war, the morale of the individual and the esprit de corps of the unit can bring us victory over a vast enemy superiority of men. The disciplined Roman legions with morale inspired by Caesar's leadership defeated barbarians whose strength in numbers amounted to ten to one at times.¹ We can fight and win against superior manpower, too, by inspiring the morale of our troops.

I wish to show a problem of morale and some corrective measures by using as an example a small unit in the European Theatre. This problem was current in all theatres of war and the European Theatre is used only because the author's experience was there. Here is one problem and solution as I observed it.

Picture, if you please, a veteran tank company. It was landed in Normandy on D-day at H-hour minus thirty minutes and was given a Presidential Citation for its actions.² Baker Company

1 - S. G. Brady, Caesar's Gallic Campaigns, P. 174

2 - After Action Report, 741st Tank Bn., 6 June 1944 through May 1945.

fought through the hedgerows of Normandy. It fought across France into the Siegfried Line. The company won a second Presidential Citation for its defense in front of the Elsenborn Ridge in the Ardennes against the savage German counterattack. The campaigns of the Rhineland and central Germany were taken in stride by this tank company. The end of the war found B Company in Czechoslovakia. When the first full flush of victory began to wear off about a month after V-E Day, the armored soldiers of B Company awoke to find themselves out in a rural area, thirty-five miles from a city, living in newly erected tents. That might have been considered alright had not the company spent the preceding month living in modern apartments in the city of Pilzen. Some unexplainable reason had dictated the move from the city with everything, to the country with nothing. However that might have been, B Company felt it was stuck.

The mission given to the company was one of training. Where the company would have taken some pleasure in doing a practical job, such as guarding prisoners or evacuating refugees, the company could not take to a mission of training with good faith. Most of the men felt competent as soldiers since they had proven themselves. How was the mission reconciled to reality? The battalion commander specified the training as a minimum of thirty-five hours per week to include ten hours of maintenance of vehicles and weapons, ten hours of physical training and then anything else

we wanted to do. That was a rather general directive and might well have been sloughed off with a minimum of observance. The company was fortunate in still having an experienced, energetic commander. He recognized that the men would be deep in despair in no time with inactivity. He knew they must be kept interested and well-occupied until they could go home.

The first thing considered was maintenance of vehicles. A complete rehabilitation could be made or ordinary preventive maintenance could be carried on. All of the tanks were combat serviceable but there was no question but what a thorough cleaning and painting would add something to their war weary looks. So it was decided to give the tanks a complete going over in preparation for battalion inspection.

A week was devoted to washing and painting tanks. To insure sufficient incentive and to promote competition between platoons, a goal was set for the best platoon, as proven by battalion inspection. The reward was to be a special trip of about one hundred and fifty miles to a resort area where a rest camp had been set up. This was quite enough to set up a competitive spirit between platoons. The men worked exceedingly hard. Enthusiasm and interest was displayed to a very marked degree. The commander was afraid the losers might well be depressed. However, this was not found to be true. Upon the inspection and selection of the best platoon, it was found that all accepted

the verdict in good grace. This, of course, had been hoped for by insuring impartial and thorough inspection. The important idea discovered though was that competition was the thing. The contest made the interest. Thereafter, the commander decided to base the company's activities upon competition between platoons or between tank crews.

One valuable idea gained from the maintenance contest was the suggestion box. A number of men had such ingenious ideas on how to more efficiently accomplish the job of rehabilitation that the commander decided to ask for suggestions on other problems. So a box and notice was set up asking for suggestions on other problems, such as training, the mess, and recreation. This proved to be valuable, though a facetious suggestion or two did find its way into the box.

Baker Company, as mentioned before, was a tank company made up of veterans. A majority of the men were qualified for the trip home under the famous point system. As in any combat unit though, there were quite a number of replacements. These men were to be redeployed to the Pacific or placed on occupation duty in Germany, according to the existing criteria. As such, this group made somewhat of a separate morale problem. Notwithstanding, as things progressed, the commander found that all the men responded to about the same degree to skillfully contrived projects.

One project that the company commander started as soon as the morale problem arose was the daily one hour conference with all the men. During this period the commander started discussing current problems. By careful management, he was able to bring into the discussion publications and news in such a way as to explain to the men the reasons for army policies affecting them. The commander led the discussion discreetly away from such questions as, "Why don't we go home now?" He emphasized the limitations of transportation and the magnitude of the job of carrying millions of tons of freight and thousands of troops to the Pacific Theatre for the attack on Japan. For the benefit of replacements especially, he explained the necessity for redeployment. The men accepted the explanations and adjusted themselves to the circumstances. The commander's hour covered many subjects as time passed but the subject of policy as it affected the men was never slighted.

Another project that consumed energy and created interest from the beginning of the situation was work on improving living conditions. The company was equipped with squad tents of the type used by division clearing stations. About twenty men could be quartered in one of these tents. There were no available cots. The first job was to make beds. Lumber was obtained. And, fortunately, mattress covers were issued to the company. A substantial platform cot was devised for each man. The mattress

cover was then filled with straw and laid on the boards. A man would then lay his bedroll and blankets on top of the straw mattress. It was satisfactory to the degree that the men were off the damp ground. Clothes racks were constructed for use as well.

All of the men were involved in these improvements. Uniformity was obtained in the internal arrangement of the tents; but the men were allowed free run of their imagination in the decoration of the company area. Wooden sidewalks, flower beds, and well-cut grass improved the appearance in a short time. None of this work was suggested openly. As the men became interested in improving the area their enthusiasm suggested new activities. However, the area may have remained very plain had not the commander discreetly injected the thought into one platoon sergeant's mind. This worthy soldier set to work to show up the others. Competition took care of the problem.

Living conditions gradually improved. Electric lights were obtained by using a captured German antiaircraft generator. Tables and benches were built and placed in one tent to be used as a mess hall. The kitchen facilities were improved by building lockers to store food and work tables for the cooks. Shower facilities were made in a captured German truck trailer. A small gasoline engine pumped the water from a stream into a large tank which was set over a fire. The hot water was then

piped through showerheads inside the trailer. It was an efficient shower; and the men were able to keep clean.

The important thing was that the men had become interested in improving living conditions. That interest made them work hard and left them satisfied with their area. They knew their living conditions were as good as circumstances allowed. Knowing that, they no longer thought about it and were better satisfied.

The recreational and athletic program did a great deal to enliven and maintain the morale of the men. As it was summertime, there were a number of aids to relaxation. Swimming facilities were available. The schedule was arranged so that the maintenance and necessary details were taken care of in the mornings. In the afternoons, all men were out for some type of athletic activity. They had their choice of swimming, volley ball, soft ball, and so on. During the warmest weather, many of the men chose swimming. That was fine. More competitive spirit was aroused over the other games. Platoon volley ball teams vied with each other in a continuous tournament. A company soft ball team played on a battalion league. The athletic program produced more results in good morale and spirit than any other one thing.

Other recreational ideas in the company area was the card and game room in one of the tents. Here the men congregated and found reading material, writing material, and games.

The tent was used for movies whenever the roving projectionist showed up in the area. Movies were always welcomed. Some of Hollywood's worst productions were received with eager attention by soldiers far from home and country. As is easily understood, soldiers do not like movies about war. In any future war, movies should be produced specifically to encourage good morale for soldiers. Comedy and music get the best responses.

One recreational idea that some men of the company developed themselves was music. One man played the accordion, another a guitar, another a mouth organ, and so on. Together, they made an effective little orchestra. They not only amused themselves but entertained the company many an evening. All the men enjoyed singing. Music was a very valuable aid to morale.

Another recreational project that interested some of the men was the weekly Czech dance held in a village about ten miles distant. It was an excellent place to make friends with the Czech villagers. Transportation was provided for this purpose. However, a number of the men were not interested in social intercourse with Czechs due to the language difficulties.

The most liked recreational projects were, first, the trips on pass to Paris and London, and, second, the specially arranged trips made by groups of the men from the company. The quota for the trips to Paris was three men every ten days.

Over a period of a few months, quite a number of the men were able to take advantage of trips to Paris and London. The specially arranged trips for platoons or similar groups were most rewarding. The men enjoyed traveling in a group. On several occasions, excursions were made to historic or recreational areas. These trips seemed to be enjoyed to a great degree and always helped morale.

The company made its way through the summer months in good shape. The men were healthy and alert. There was none of the unrest exhibited that was beginning to be felt in some other places. The men wanted to go home but they were not too impatient. They had confidence in their leader. They knew basically that their welfare was well looked after. The officer-enlisted man relationship was most natural. No one was aware that a supposed unhealthy caste system existed. As in combat, the commander had proven a capable leader in peace.

V-J Day in early August was joyfully celebrated as the end of the war. But, soon after, the men's desire to go home intensified. Early in September, 1945, orders were received to inactivate the unit. The men with sufficient points for discharge were moved to a port for shipment home. Of course, the men with too few points went to other units for occupation duty in Germany. Both groups of men left the company with regret at the ending of their comradeship.

Evaluating this period of three months from June through August, 1945, it is evident the time was ripe for a decline in morale. Dissatisfaction was not allowed to arise in this one small organization due to energetic leadership. A knowledge of men and a program for the men that fitted the situation maintained the leader's prestige and effectiveness. One thing is sure, without leadership, these same men would have been soon unmanageable.

Morale is not a secret in itself nor is it a weapon. But, in a sense, morale is a secret weapon. Morale is a secret, in the sense that it is invisible and intangible. It is the most powerful weapon known to men, more powerful than the heaviest tank. Morale can make victory for us in war.

How can we acquire morale? The answer depends on many things. But leadership is basically necessary. The future dictates that we train leaders to develop morale that will inspire American troops.

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