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SOME THOUGHTS ON SERVICE SCHOOLS

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Commanding Marine Corps Schools

THE MARINE CORPS SCHOOLS opened their doors on September 6, 1929, with fifty-four officers attending the Basic Class in Philadelphia, and seventeen taking the Company Officers' Course and seventeen the Field Officers' Course in Quantico. These circumstances give rise to some ruminations on the subject of schools, and methods of study.

There are a good many schools in the services and they instruct in a vast diversity of subjects. It is impossible for any officer to attend them all, and there is probably considerable overlap in their courses. The question here is: What schools should a Marine Officer attend? An answer seems apparent. He should attend those that instruct in subjects embraced by his profession, because he will thus round out his usefulness. Another question now thrusts itself to the front: Are there any subjects that a Marine Officer is not called upon to face during his varied career? Yet he cannot prepare for them all. Here the ruminations become confused.

It is easy to theorize, but where is the line that divides generalization from specialization? Service schools look to each other for inspiration, and maybe for some guidance. They are not in competition yet, in a way, they seem to follow each other. They seem to tumble into the same pitfalls, and for the same reasons. Perhaps we need to raise our eyes from the routine of military life, circumstance, habit, and curricula. We seem to be circumscribed, and "bound upon the wheel." Our work is important but seems to lack inspiration. In comparing one school with another there is a sameness that is monotonous, and the differences consist chiefly in minutiae and their multiplication.

All educational efforts are of two phases which, although distinct, are but indistinctly divided. One cannot draw a line and say the division is *here.* The first phase is arbitrary and not open to difference of opinion. A child is taught the alphabet in that way. He has to accept certain marks as having arbitrary names, and in the order in which they are presented, from A to Z.

There is no initiative until the construction of words begins, when the child learns to spell sounds with which he is familiar. From that point on, through language, philology, and literature, there is no limit to his creative field. The operation of a piece of machinery is arbitrary. To open or close valves, throttles, or contacts, must result in known actions of moving parts. But the *design* of that machine was original and creative. To operate calls for intelligence; to design calls for originality. The operator can imitate the actions of another, but the designer must create out of his own inventive genius. Where in the scheme of education shall we draw a line, and say to the student: Up to this place you must accept what you are told, but beyond here you must think for yourself!

There is no progress without criticism. Every improvement is born of criticism that resulted in a discard. The process seems to run in this wise: Curiosity leads to investigation, which opens discussion, which gives rise to opinion, which breeds criticism, which results in improvement. Therefore we must cultivate curiosity, encourage investigation, stimulate discussion, and inspire criticism that will result in improvement. All of this bespeaks a wide freedom in though and an acute divergence from the arbitrary. The military mind should not accept things for no better reason than that they are so stated. Military reasoning should be analytical and critical above everything, because military problems are not susceptible of academic proof; and that which has been proven by force of arms in one place has been disproven in another. There is no formula for waging war or fighting battles; to apply a rule is to invite, or demand, disaster. No matter what precedents there may be for what appears to be similar situations we always need to apply original analysis to every situation. Napoleon's Russian campaign in 1812, and his actions together with those of his opponent (Kutusoff) are a revelation of the inapplicability of rules. The campaigns of Suvoroff (1730-1800) indicate that only the violation of rules, or what we call "Principles of War," succeeds. Suvoroff was an intense individualist who possessed a mind that was filled with unbelief and caustic criticism. Apparently he was ignorant of all principles of war, but he knew how to analyze every situation for what it was worth, and to apply the winning solution thereto. Such a man had never been indoctrinated by an arbitrary school of thought.

Although some arbitrary teaching is necessary for beginners, and along certain mechanical channels, it should be increasingly weaned away from at the earliest period. As classes advance in scope and breadth, being designed for men of experience and maturity, they should become more and more open forums for discussion and dissection of special episodes. The following paragraph is borrowed from a pamphlet issued by the University of Wisconsin. After some words I have inserted others in brackets to show, by a little paraphrasing, how applicable their theory is to the study of military problems:

"The course of study will frankly rest upon the principle of a study of situations rather than a study of subjects. That is to say, instead of studying the various sciences, economics, history, literature, psychology, sociology, and the like, as if they were separate and distinct things, and then later—probably after graduation—trying to bring the separate knowledge of these separate subjects to bear upon the task of understanding and of living and working (and making war) intelligently in a complicated civilization, the students of the EXPERIMENTAL COLLEGE, with the council and cooperation of their teachers, will, figuratively speaking, put coherent episodes of civilization (war) upon the table, dissect them, see what forces animated them, what motives moved them, what factors—racial, political, social, economic, religious, philosophical, or scientific—were at work in them. In this process of dissecting various coherent episodes of civilization (war), the students, with the council and cooperation of teachers with specialized knowledge, will reach out into all the separate fields of subject matter usually taught in college (military schools and war colleges) for whatever light they need to have thrown upon the episode in question in order to understand it." "To put the matter more briefly: Instead of studying separate subjects, more or less for their own sake, in the hope that the knowledge and discipline gained in their study may be useful later in the task of understanding the situations they may face, the students of the EXPERIMENTAL COLLEGE will frankly begin at the other end, begin trying to understand typical situations and searching for and mastering subject matter in various fields if and when they need it in their adventure in understanding."

In other words, these students are not taught to learn what is handed to them, and to accept it because it is handed to them in a college, and to mold their minds upon precedent and chronology. They are taught to dissect, to analyze, and to think. They are taught how to develop their inherent intelligence and to use their minds for *original thinking*. Napoleon stopped thinking during his Russian campaign in 1812. He was applying to a new country and a new race of people the same principles of war that he had used with terrible success in western Europe. His opponent (Kutusoff) was not a man of any ability. The situation was as new to him as it was to Natpoleon, and whatever thinking he did was *backwards* even granting that it was highly original. The point is, that small as Kutusoff's reputation was, and great as Napoleon's was, Kutusoff extinguished the Grand Army, and if he had had a little less sense he would have captured Napoleon himself. Kutusoff probably knew nothing of principles of war, and little enough about precedents. He was confronted with his one great situation and he solved it with clumsy originality. Napoleon knew all about the people, country, and military adroitness of western Europe. He was supreme among those whom he knew how to conquer. But he knew nothing about, and failed to dissect and analyze, the Slav race and its board-flat country that was devoid of roads

and crossed by sluggish streams. It never entered his head that any people would refuse to fight when their land was penetrated by an enemy, or that they would destroy their greatest city rather than defend it, even if they lost and had to surrender it. Blundering originality triumphed over precedent and principles alike.

Striving for originality in thought, teaching the student to analyze a situation rather than to accept a doctrine or a platitude because it is asserted, is being tried out in the University of Wisconsin. This theory was originated by Doctor Alexander Meiklejohn when he was President of Amherst College, and it has been accepted by the University of Wisconsin to the extent of including within itself what is sometimes called "A College within a College," but is more usually referred to as the "EXPERIMENTAL COLLEGE." The subject has interested me so greatly, and I believe it is so appropriate for military students, especially in their more advanced researches, that I have been at some pains to keep abreast with its development, and I will quote from the pamphlets issued enough to give the reader a comprehensive outline of the ambitions and scope of this departure in liberal education. In order to clarify the text, or to make it more appropriate for military application, I have inserted certain words in brackets; wherever these appear they are my own and do not belong in the original.

"It has often been remarked that while our colleges and Universities (service schools and War Colleges) succeed admirably in producing men who think clearly, objectively, and creatively within the boundaries of their particular specialties, scientific or otherwise, our colleges and universities (service schools and war colleges) do not produce, with an equally consistent success, men who think clearly, objectively, and creatively outside their specialties. But men's specialties and professions must sink their roots in the whole of the social (military) order, and men must adjust themselves to the complicated whole of their civilization (military profession), if they are to practice their specialties with maximum effectiveness, to say nothing of the duty and satisfaction of being clear-minded and creative-minded citizens (officers)—citizens (officers) able to think and act without prejudice and with perspective.

"The students of the EXPERIMENTAL COLLEGE, for a large part of their time at any rate, will be actually practicing the task of thinking clearly, objectively, and creatively about the complicated whole of successive episodes of civilization (war). If this practice in the art or science of understanding a civilization (war) or a social order bears the fruit its proposers are aiming at, we may expect it to result in educated men who will not only better understand the life (military profession) of their time, but who will be better specialists as well.

"THE METHOD OF STUDY AND TEACHING."

"Here, again, as in the case of the outline of the course, no hard-and-fast

unchangeable set of methods will be imposed upon the students from the first day. (Note: It should be explained that the EXPERIMENTAL COLLEGE is now in its second year, and is, therefore, still feeling its way.)

"This much, however, may now be said with certainty—in the EXPERIMENTAL COLLEGE, it will not be so much matter of teachers teaching students as a matter of teachers and students studying together. The objective is a college in which teachers will teach less and less and students will study more and more. (Note: I do not think this means that students will apply themselves through more hours of study, but that they will research and originate with greater freedom.) The teachers will not consider the authoritative handing down of knowledge to the students as their primary function; they will look upon themselves as provokers and guides in the learning process. It will be a case of a group of intelligent men, each with a fund of specialized knowledge, joining with a group of students in a common effort to understand the problems of living and of learning (of solving military problems) as these problems may be seen in the episodes of civilization (wars and their causes.) The teacher, from the point of view of the idea animating the EXPERIMENTAL COLLEGE, must not be a crutch upon which the student may lean; he must be a challenge the student must answer. (Note: Read that sentence again. To me it means that the teacher must jolt a student out of his rut of thought, in which he complaisantly accepts what he is told, or what he reads. The student must be spurred to arrive at his own conclusions, and for his own reasons.) This is what is meant, at least part of what is meant, by the phrase 'a community of learning' that has appeared again and again as a sort of refrain through the discussions of the EXPERIMENTAL COLLEGE."

Referring to examinations we learn they ". . . will be devised to test the ability and industry of the students. Here, again, every effort will be made to improve upon existing methods of examination." This, too, seems to be an important step in advance. It means, to me, that the orthodox method of repeating what has been gleaned from a book is headed for the discard, and that ability and industry will be measured by *the depth and width* of a student's *researches;* that his ability and industry will be demonstrated by his grasp of the subject matter *irrespective* of agreement or *disagreement,* or his adroitness in repetition. The higher the military education of an officer progresses the more important this becomes. Now to quote President Glenn Frank of the University of Wisconsin.

"The Educational Aims Of The Experimental College.

"As President of the University, interested in the maximum educational effectiveness of all of its colleges, liberal and technical alike, I want to express certain purely personal expectations respecting the EXPERIMENTAL COLLEGE. I stress the personal character of this closing statement because

I do not want to commit the teachers of the EXPERIMENTAL COLLEGE or teachers elsewhere in the University to all of the implications respecting educational aims and methods that might be read into it.

"The major riddle of liberal (military) education, as I see it, grows out of the two main developments that have marked American education during the last fifty years, viz:

"First, intensive specialization.

"Second, extensive freedom of choice under the elective system.

"Both of these developments have been highly useful. Both were inevitable. The rising tide of new knowledge, flowing into our universities faster than educators could possibly turn it into the well cut channels of any coherent educational scheme or curriculum, made both intensive specialization and extensive freedom of election not only inevitable but the easiest way of handling the inrush of new knowledge.

"In these last fifty years of the era of specialization and freedom, however, we have lost or have had to struggle to keep from losing coherence and perspective out of our educational results. We have seen these two highly important principles of specialization and freedom resulting in two bad by-products, viz:

"First, suicidal specialization.

"Second, suicidal smattering.

"Suicidal specialization has given us the graduate (Officer) who knows everything about some one thing, but who knows so little about other things and about the social (military) order in which he must practice his specialism that he is unable to keep his specialism in perspective.

"Suicidal smattering has given us the graduate (officer) who has picked and chosen here and there and yonder, under the license of the elective system, until he knows a little about a great many things, but who does not know enough about any one thing to bring himself and his knowledge to effective focus.

"It is generally agreed that a man can be neither a good citizen (officer) nor a great specialist if he falls victim either to suicidal specialization or to suicidal smattering."

"I have confidence that the experience of the EXPERIMENTAL COLLEGE will shed needed light on the problem of avoiding both the perversion of specialization that makes us narrow minded and the perversion of freedom that makes us scatter-brained. The time is probably past for the organization of all knowledge into any single curriculum. Our universities cannot produce human encyclopedias. But I suspect that it is possible to bring into liberal education that breadth of knowledge and sense of the relation of things we are in definite danger of losing. And I suspect that we can do this, not by

making artificial synopsis of all (military) knowledge, but by setting students at the task of trying to unravel and to understand typical human (military) situations by searching out and bringing to bear upon such situations whatever knowledge may be needed for their understanding. The educational possibility of this method is one of the things we shall discover as the EXPERIMENTAL COLLEGE proceeds."

"But all this has to do with the end results of the work of the EXPERIMENTAL COLLEGE. And these end results will depend, not so much upon the mechanical adjustments of the subject matter, as upon *the kind of activity that gets under way in the minds of the students.* (My italics.)

"I have confidence that the methods of study and teaching to be employed in the EXPERIMENTAL COLLEGE will awaken in its students that rarest of rare things in colleges—a genuinely critical spirit, a real sense of evidence, and a sustained suspicion of false deductions."

"I have confidence that the methods of study and teaching to be employed in the EXPERIMENTAL COLLEGE will work against the passive acceptance of information and ideas by students from teachers, and will make for independence, initiative, and originality, and that with the development of perspective, the critical spirit, and initiative will come a genuine zest for thinking, a lively curiosity for human affairs (broad military affairs and their causes) that will remain with students throughout their lives, giving to them a living elasticity and effectiveness that will keep them eager learners after their college (student) days are over."

The paper from which these quotations are made has been on my desk for about a year, and I have read and pondered it all that time. It does not outline a technique for teaching and studying. The effort that it describes is still experimental. It is a philosophy of thought, a habit of, and in, thinking. It is a method of approach for any non-technical subject upon which enlightenment is desired. And it is distinctly for advanced education and use. At the same time it must infiltrate into the minds of those who might adopt it long before they reach the period of broad envisagement. The fact that it has been adopted (experimentally) by the University of Wisconsin alone is proof that it is not yet popular with mature orthodox thinking. There is the difficulty of inappreciation. Those whose minds are formed are naturally rather unsympathetic to the introduction of a doctrine with which they are unacquainted and, *because* their minds are formed, they fail to comprehend the full scope of an innovation.

Military schools conform too closely to the ritual of technique and events. The arbitrary method should be practically relinquished with the junior classes that teach the inelastic mechanics of things and subjects. Communications, ordnance, administrative paper work, the mechanics of gunnery, field engineering, elements of law, and kindred subjects all belong in the arbitrary

category, at least in their earlier stages and before a high degree of specialization ushers them into the liberal field of inventive effort that seeks for improvement. Drill regulations are practically welded in the arbitrary class. But *tactics* have little business there, and *strategy* should not even be approached until the mind is freed of the earlier details that were once so all-important. The words "Command and Staff" convey a broader meaning (or should convey it) than is usually inferred. The conception is of an endless collection of annexes composed by men who are usually specialists in certain lines, who try to justify their offices and positions (who can blame them for that?), and who add to the mass of reports, "studies," and estimates already compiled. Some of these things are necessary but for the most part they are cumbersome nonsense. They conform to a school ritual of what should be irrespective of what is needed in a particular case. Officers become adept in the ritual, and can turn out the required number of papers, but their originality, initiative, independence of thought and action and of official prerogative, have been so scholastically smothered and encroached upon that they lack perspective. Instead of measuring their work by brevity plus clarity plus decisiveness, they measure it by volume, under an impression that mass means strength.

These are conditions as they seem to be, or to have been, among the service schools in general. It is the aim of the Marine Corps Schools to avoid this situation. Our work is such that we cannot get as deeply in the rut of habit as any who have less diversity in their daily and yearly activities. Nevertheless, we need to guard against the complaisant acceptance of theories for no better reason than that they are used somewhere else, or are taught in a certain text, or were enunciated by a recognized authority. As our problems are as unique as they are unexpected their solutions cannot be inelastically anticipated. We need officers who are trained to reason briefly, clearly, decisively, and sanely. Above everything they must have complete faith in their own ability to master whatever they may be confronted with. That calls for confidence both up and down the scale of rank and responsibility. To meet these requirements, and to develop this type of officer, is the ambition of the Marine Corps Schools.

Our educational system is divided into four separate but interlocking schools. The Basic Course in Philadelphia is necessarily the most arbitrary in its teachings. The Company Officers' Course in Quantico extends the horizon of its students beyond the arbitrary limits of mechanical things and actions. And the Field Officers' Course finally removes the limits and restrictions to originality, and teaches its students to apply *themselves* and their own innate abilities to every situation that demands an analysis and a decision. This is what our officers, and only to a lesser degree our men, have to do in the practice of their profession. Then there is the Correspondence School that supplements the others, and that is surprisingly well patronized by officers (and men too) who wish to develop themselves in special ways.

Another school is contemplated and being prepared for. It will be for planning, and special staff training along executive lines. This work requires nothing but initiative and the application of original thought to the solution of every situation and condition. There will be no directives to begin with, although there will be an outline of suggestions. If every *case,* or situation, is approached as a complete whole and analyzed by men who are trained to think objectively and creatively, and without regard for ritual, precedent, or form of procedure, the resulting solution, or plan, will be an original work that is singularly appropriate for its purpose. It will also be clear, brief, and workable. It is in this work that the philosophy of the EXPERIMENTAL COLLEGE seems to be exceptionably desirable, because out of it will be evolved a *habit of thinking and analyzing* (but not of fulfilling a ritual) that will be suitable to every situation encountered in military life.

In order to epitomize all that is desirable in a military decision of high importance, I will refer to that reached by the Commanders-in-Chief of Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Bulgaria when, in anticipation of Roumania entering the World War on the side of the Allies, they met in conference at Pless on July 28, 1918. The quotation is from Field Marshal von Hindenburg's book—"Out of My Life," and is a free translation from the original German.

> "If Roumania joins the Entente the most rapid advance in the greatest possible strength, to keep the war certainly from Bulgarian soil, and as far as possible from Austria-Hungary; and invade Roumania. Therefore:
>
> "(a) Demonstrations by German and Austrian troops from the north, for the purpose of immobilizing strong Roumanian forces;
>
> "(b) Advance of Bulgarian forces from the Dobruja frontier against the Danube line from Silistra and Tutrakan, to protect the right flank of the main body.
>
> "(c) Readiness of the main body to cross the Donau at Nikopol for the purpose of threatening Bukarest."

That was all! No annexes, and no instructions about "how to do it!" General von Makensen probably had to enter into details in the allocation of troop assignments and provision therefor. But what he did, and the speed and thoroughness with which he did it, pursuant to this ideally brief decision, is ample proof that it was quite enough.