

DISCIPLINING AMERICANS

BY CAPTAIN STUART W. CRAMER, JR., U. S. A.

"*Il n'y a pas de victoire sans discipline,*" wrote Napoleon to Paris upon taking command of his first army, "*Je ramènerai la discipline dans l'armée, ou je cesserai de commander à ces brigands.*" About the same time Bouthillier expressed substantially the same thought in a more academic fashion: "Discipline is the soul of an army. Without it, without subordination, it would be without force as well as without means of execution." The most successful commanders, ancient and modern, have preached the necessity for good discipline. But what did they mean by discipline?

Helvetius, writing in the eighteenth century, defined discipline as being "the art of inspiring soldiers with more fear for their own officers than they have for the enemy"; although Gittins, an English writer, had announced a hundred years before that "a soldier ought to fear nothing but God and dishonor". For a more recent definition, take that of Murray, in his *Suggestions for Young Officers*: "Discipline is the long-continued habit by which the very muscles of the soldier instinctively obey the words of command; even if his mind is too confused to attend, yet his muscles will obey."

Judging from the above, there appears to be a noteworthy difference of opinion even among reputable authorities as to just what constitutes discipline. Let us turn to the dictionary, which tells us that the word discipline is derived from the Latin *discipulus*, meaning pupil. Combining the essential qualities of the first two definitions given, we obtain a fairly concise formula, but broad and general in its compass: "Discipline is a system of training and exercises designed to bring and keep under control the mental, physical and moral powers, and to secure their harmonious and effective action."

Military discipline is only a special kind, with a specific instead of a general object in view. Making the obvious substitutions, we obtain: "Military discipline is a system of training and exer-

cises designed to develop soldierly qualities, and to secure their harmonious, effective and coördinated action." The word coördinated is inserted because of the enormous importance of that element of action to an army: if we hold to our broad definitions it might be possible to have an undisciplined army nevertheless, composed of individuals each a well-disciplined entity.

If we accept the above definition, the next step in a discussion of the nature of discipline is to note that the greatest differences of opinion on this subject may be laid to the diverse conceptions taken of it, and that the majority of really sound attacks against it are actually due to a misconception. For example, nothing could be more illogical than the cynical definition of Helvetius quoted above. Fear is certainly not numbered among the soldierly qualities; in fact it is the last thing we would want to inculcate in a warrior. Punishment, too,—a word so often used synonymously with discipline,—is revealed by the light of our basic definition to be not discipline itself, but only one of the many instruments of discipline which we reluctantly admit to be a necessary part of the art. Morale and *esprit* are also closely associated with discipline, but neither do they quite cover the field, for they do not contain the elements of uniformity, cohesion, coördination, and coöperation that are so essential to the smooth and efficient working of a war machine. Such terms signify that the soldier is filled with a strong desire to do the right thing, but not necessarily that he has either the knowledge or ability to carry it out. For instance, at the opening of a Plattsburg camp, it might be truthfully said that the morale was unsurpassed, yet they could not be called a well-disciplined command, for they had yet to go through the system of training and exercises which was to give them the necessary technical dexterity and coördination which would enable them to function as an efficient fighting machine.

Discipline has been referred to as an art. It is an art rather than a science because the personal equation is bound to play such an important part in its application. No two commanders can get the best results from a single rigid set of rules; each must modify them according to his own personality and for his own use. Reversibly, no such set of rigid rules can be applied to any two men with uniform results and best results; each individual must be

studied and the rules modified to fit individual cases. It is well that it is so, for if it were not, instead of being the most interesting thing in the world, there would be nothing quite so dull and stagnating as the command of men.

It does not follow, however, that the art is not susceptible of standardization within reasonable limits. On the contrary, analysis and experience will enable us to pick out and enunciate certain broad and general principles, which will form the framework of any sound disciplinary structure. We may say that a certain course of action will produce such a result not invariably, but assuredly in the vast majority of cases. And if we do not devote too much time to minutiae and details at the expense of the beams and rafters, we may build up an edifice that will stand on its own foundations and weather the most violent storms.

Now, to trace the origin and development of discipline in the American Army. "The bastard issue of Prussian doctrine upon a corrupt British standard"—that is the genealogy of American Military Discipline. The British Colonial Army and the Prussian volunteer patriot von Steuben: these were the parents of our own system. As a matter of fact, there was good blood in both, as we will attempt to show; it is nevertheless quite obvious that our system has not its roots imbedded in the national character to the degree that has the French or Prussian.

While still under British sovereignty, American colonists served with British troops in the French and Indian Wars, as well as participating in the capture of Havana in 1762; these colonists were, therefore, familiar with the rules and regulations governing the English Army, and in fact knew no others.

When, therefore, the Colonies declared themselves independent, prepared to sustain their independence by force of arms, and set about organizing an army for that purpose, it became necessary to formulate laws and regulations for its government; and the most natural as well as the most expeditious way of accomplishing this was to take over those to which they were accustomed. This was accordingly done, the original American Articles of War being adopted from the British Articles and laws governing the British Army at that time, and, differing very little from the original, were recognized and continued in force under the Constitution.

In the mean time the infant American Army was to feel the profound influence of a man who came voluntarily from Prussia, where he had served on the staff of the world's foremost exponent of militarism, Frederick the Great, to espouse the cause of the struggling colonies. This was Frederick William, Baron von Steuben, a name that stands with those of Lafayette, de Kalb and Kosciusko in the love and grateful esteem of the American people. Probably to no man except to George Washington did the young colonies owe more in their struggle for freedom than to Steuben. Franklin, in Paris, had declined to make any agreement with him on the part of the Congress. Yet he came without contract or commission, to join Washington at Valley Forge in that dark winter of 1777-78. Washington, quick to see in Steuben the agent sent by Providence to fill his great need, secured for him from Congress the rank and pay of a Major-General, and appointed him Inspector-General. In this capacity, with a free rein, he set about with indefatigable zeal and energy to reorganize the army.

The magnitude and difficulties of the task confronting him may be inferred from his own words: "I found here neither rules, nor regulations, nor system, nor Minister of War, nor pardon, nor reward . . . " and of his favorite aide-de-camp and intimate friend, William North: "Certainly it was a brave attempt! Without understanding a word of the English language, to think of bringing men, born free, and joined together to preserve their freedom, into strict subjection; to obey without a word, a look, the mandates of a master! That master once their equal, or possibly beneath them, in whatever might become a man!"

The tremendous power vested in Steuben by Washington naturally excited the jealousy of other officers, who formed a cabal against his authority. This resulted in a wise curtailment of his powers, but not until he had laid a sound foundation for the work which he carried on with exceptional efficiency and unflagging devotion till the end of the war.

Now a word as to this Prussian discipline. In deference to the enormous influence exerted upon our army by our greatest teacher of discipline, it might be appropriate to give an inkling into the point of view of Baron von Steuben. This we will do in his own

words. In his *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States*, we find the following passages:

His (a captain's) first object should be to gain the love of his soldiers, by treating them with every possible kindness and humanity, enquiring into their complaints, and when finding them well-founded, seeing them redressed.

. . .

It being on the non-commissioned officers that the discipline and order of a company in a great measure depend, they cannot be too circumspect in their behavior towards the men, by treating them with mildness, and at the same time obliging everyone to do his duty. By avoiding too great familiarity with the men, they will not only gain their love and confidence, but be treated with a proper respect; whereas by a contrary conduct they forfeit all regard, and and their authority becomes despised.

. . .

In a word, the commanding officer of a regiment must preserve the strictest discipline and order in his corps, obliging every officer to a strict performance of his duty, without relaxing in the smallest point; punishing impartially the faults that are committed, without distinction of rank or service.

Now let us return to our British ancestry, from which, as has been said, spring the very roots of our own military system. The British Army of 1775 had little resemblance to her splendid fighting machine that bore so heavy a part of the brunt of the World War. British military histories tell us that the latter part of the eighteenth century marked one of the low ebbs in the condition of the British Army; thus what we inherited from England in that respect was about the worst that she could ever have given us.

The Age of Chivalry, with its knights and varlets, had left among its heritages a very pronounced line of demarcation between officer and enlisted man. Thence comes our American saying: "An officer and a gentleman, by Act of Congress." Together with the Law and the Clergy, the naval and military services constituted about the only occupations supposed to be fitting for the younger sons of the nobility, and commissions were almost exclusively confined to that class. So well recognized was this principle that rich commercial families frequently paid enormous sums for commissions for their sons, thus using them as social stepping-stones.

As might be supposed, such conditions conduced neither to

professional zeal nor democratic standards. On the contrary, the British officers of that period as a rule knew little about the military art, and cared less. Gallant they were, always, and with occasional flashes of genius, but measured by present-day standards of the duties and responsibilities of an officer, they were sadly wanting. They often would not and sometimes could not drill their commands, leaving that disagreeable routine to the sergeants-major. It was a common saying that the non-commissioned officers were the backbone of the British Army.

So much for heredity. Let us now consider the environment of our young army.

There was much virtue in the American Army as it emerged from the Revolutionary War, but it had inherited three dangerous tendencies: first, a caste system; second, consequent aloofness of officers from the men; third, a rigorous method of obtaining subordination, not it is true, entirely unmingled with appeal to the higher instincts.

The first tendency has been largely eradicated. In spite of the fact that appointments to West Point are made political patronage by law, the wise selection of the appointees, the sound democratic principles upon which that institution is based, the influence of the Civil War and of officers coming into the service from civil life and from the ranks, have prevented the officer from getting the idea that he is any better than anyone else.

So much cannot be said of the second tendency. Enlistment in the ranks offered little to the best and most ambitious type of young American manhood, and the consequent low caliber of the majority of the enlisted men did not tend to promote personal relations between officers and men. Then too, life in the old army was not generally broadening and progressive, but rather calculated to standardize and crystallize established precedents and preconceived ideas; each post—usually isolated—was a city in itself, with its own life, laws and separate existence. The young officer or soldier, joining singly or in groups such an organization, found himself at once drawn between the wheels of a machine which revolved slowly and certainly, according to well-established and immutable laws, gradually but inevitably grinding him out into a uniform and orthodox pattern.

The third tendency is the hardest to trace satisfactorily, since so many factors enter into it. In the first place, the line of demarcation referred to above inclined to impersonal and merciless administration of discipline, by lessening the human touch. Secondly, the inferior quality of the enlisted personnel necessitated coercive and repressive measures to an abnormal degree; there were so many good-for-nothing ne'er-do-wells who had to be "disciplined", compared to the generally fine material obtained under the draft. On the other hand, the results were really not so bad as one might suppose; since most officers took serious thought of the subject of discipline, carefully tried out the experience of their superiors and their own theories, and arrived at a fairly workable solution. Yet the individual views and methods as to the best way of handling men encompassed the most violent extremes. Naturally, the handling of men is so delicate and elusive an art that little can be laid down definitely by regulation, or even in text books. And there, perhaps, lay our principal trouble; the officers were left too much to work out their own individual schemes. It is significant that American military literature affords only the briefest and most meager information on the subject of discipline, the art of commanding and military custom, while the French and German bibliographies contain numerous fine studies.

To sum up the influence of heredity and environment upon American military discipline, it appears that the traits most open to attack are the line of demarcation between officers and men, lack of uniformity as to the psychology of command, and too strong a trend toward coercive measures.

We are now in a position to analyze the way discipline worked in our Army during the World War. Since dissatisfaction is one of the most important by-products of indiscipline, let us try to diagnose its undeniably wide-spread prevalence among the officers and men who served during the war in the National Army. One of the most common causes of discontent and criticism is due to the limitation of the individual point of view. An individual observes some action taken which appears to him unwise; his judgment may be good in the matter, so far as his vision goes, and he is prone to condemn that action unreservedly, and harbor resentment against whoever was responsible for what seems to him

an unnecessary hardship or sacrifice inflicted upon himself or his men, or for losing a splendid opportunity. This is a thing which is bound to happen in any great organization, and the only remedy is to try to impress upon all ranks the fact that they are only small cogs in a giant machine which must function as a team to win, regardless of individual chagrins.

Another obstacle to the contentment of troops in war time is physical discomfort. It is hard to be cheerful when you are lying in a shell-hole filled with icy water, and have missed one, two or even three consecutive meals. Yet these things happen, and always will, in war, even in the best-run armies. Such hardships, however, produce reactions which are mostly temporary, and they can hardly be said to contribute toward an enduring grouch. Invariably the men who have suffered them are boastfully recalling the same incidents very shortly after their occurrence.

Then comes that great blanket which is so often invoked to cover countless sins; the difficulties of expansion from a peace-time basis to a war footing. When any organization is expanded to twenty times its normal size, suddenly and without opportunity to work out the details of reorganization, and under such urgent pressure of haste that it must virtually take its own form as it grows, there will inevitably be confusion, lack of coördination, errors of judgment and of execution, and imperfection of design and operation of the machinery. A large reserve of trained officers is the only means of helping this. There must be pieces ready that are not only capable of fitting into their proper places in the machine, but also sufficiently indoctrinated with the Army's point of view to help assimilate the raw material into a homogeneous whole. The Army can do very little toward this end. It is for Congress to determine through legislation what is the proper balance between efficiency and militarism.

All the above applies equally to officers and men. Let us now investigate the particular problem of the officers. Their case is easier, for on the whole they had little to complain about. And such complaints as they had to make resolve themselves nearly always, through one channel or another, into the question of the clannishness of the regular officers. Certain officers of considerable business, scientific or social prestige, especially if attached to

large headquarters, were freely received into the brotherhood of regulars, and never experienced the outcast feeling that so many emergency officers felt. Taking the general run, however, as you saw them with troops, in Paris, Chaumont or Langres, there is little doubt that the regular officers inclined to flock together, when off duty. This was a perfectly natural and apparently harmless enough tendency on their part, but when thoughtfully considered it may almost be said to be the root of all evil, so far as this particular subject is concerned. Had they realized the great opportunity they missed by yielding to this natural inclination, they would have behaved differently; theirs was a sin of omission, not of intention. For no finer body of men has ever been seen, in any land at any period, than the temporary officers of the American Army. Yet the regulars, from force of habit, generally foregathered with their old friends, whom they knew; for lunch, dinner in town, to play cards occasionally in the evenings—in short their whole social intercourse took the line of least resistance; among each other it was “Bill” and “Buck”, but for the outsiders there was often a considerable formality of titles, or at best last names. This unconscious aloofness on the part of the regulars could not help militating against securing the maximum development of not only the temporary officers, but also of themselves, for they missed the broadening influence of the high-class associations they would have formed.

In the case of the enlisted men, most of their bitterness can be traced to the line of demarcation between officers and men. The ramifications of this artificial and illogical cleavage are unending. The strongest conviction of the average American is that he is as good as anybody else—or perhaps a little better. This feeling in him cannot be eradicated by any repressive measures, and is harmless if properly directed. The American does not acknowledge officially sanctioned social barriers, and never will; so we might as well work along other lines. On the other hand, he is intelligent, admires and submits to superior qualities, and is usually willing to play his part like a good sport on any team, provided only that his position on the team is limited only by his own capabilities, and not by any arbitrary conventions.

While no attempt is made in this article to cover the scope of a

treatise on the general subject of discipline or the elements of command, it is essential right here to enunciate and stress one of the most important principles, for fear that the radical suggestions made above might mislead some misguided enthusiasts who believe that an army can be run on pure brotherly love. For let it be clearly understood that an army can hardly have a discipline too rigorous for its own good, though subordination should not carry humiliation with it. Let us state it: "The utmost cordiality and sympathy should exist between all ranks, but too great intimacy of a superior with his own subordinates should be discouraged." The reason for the second clause is apparent: suppose that Captain A is a great chum of Corporal B, and they are seen constantly together; then even if Captain A is so conscientious that he leans over backward in his official treatment of Corporal B, any preferment, advancement or leniency accorded the latter will always be attributed to favoritism by the men who do not hold the same place in the captain's personal affection and esteem, with resultant loss of morale. On the other hand, the same laws hold for the relations between a colonel and his captains, except that the higher intelligence of the latter classes would to some degree diminish the harm done by violating the principle.

It is thus evident that although it is sound policy for a senior to exercise a reasonable amount of restraint and judgment in selecting intimates from among his subordinates, there is no more reason for drawing a line of social and personal cleavage between the Second-Lieutenant and the Sergeant than there is for putting it between the Lieutenant-Colonel and the Major. There are those who will say that a finer officer corps, with better *esprit*, will result from having officers come only from the "gentleman" class, and that this spirit is best fostered by preventing their intercourse with the men. While there may be a modicum of truth in that theory, its discord with democratic principles and methods is so apparent as to require no comment: Americans can get better results by means more in harmony with our national genius.

It is not intended to recommend that all officers should have to cultivate all enlisted men in a social and personal way, nor that every enlisted man should have a vested right to intrude himself into the personal intimacy of any officer; those are questions

which can and ought to take care of themselves just as they do in civil life: all people reserve the right to choose their own friends and intimates on a basis of similarity of tastes, identity of interest, appreciation of cultivation, and so on. All that is desired is to remove the enlisted man's official disability.

The following is a concrete example with many lessons: In the winter of 1917-18 a Regular Army camp was located on the outskirts of a small southern city. The people of the town wished to do everything possible to make life pleasant for the soldiers, and gave such entertainments for them as the size of the town afforded. At a dance at the local country club a Lieutenant was introduced to a Sergeant by a young lady who was a friend of both. The Sergeant, who happened to belong to one of the most prominent families in the town, was a member of the club, and as such one of the hosts of the officer, extended his hand in cordial greeting. The Lieutenant ostentatiously put his hand behind his back, with a remark to the effect that it was not the custom in the army for officers to shake hands with enlisted men. It should be remarked that this officer could not have been representative of the Regular Army point of view, for his commissioned service was limited to a matter of a few months only—few officers of longer service would have behaved in like manner.

This incident naturally created a considerable stir locally, and because of its similarity to others throughout the country was widely exploited in the press, and to some extent on the floor of the Senate, in the form of a resolution designed to ascertain whether any prohibition existed in the army forbidding officers to mingle socially with enlisted men. The General in command of the camp was besieged for his views on the issue, and confined himself to a brief reply to the press to the effect that too much such familiarity was in fact discouraged, and that he was much too busy with the main job of preparing his command to fight to be greatly concerned over such side-issues.

In opposition to the above situation is the case of the large camp at American Lake, Washington, where the Commanding General took the initiative by urging the free and friendly intercourse of all ranks when off duty. The lack of uniformity in the views of these two high officers on the same subject is striking and

illustrates the necessity for getting together on these questions. The existence of the precedent is also admitted by the one case, while the other indicates the growing trend in progressive circles to break away from it. As a matter of fact, nine-tenths of the officers of all grades and arms interviewed by the writer stated flatly that they considered the action of the Lieutenant in the incident quoted as wholly absurd, in view of the exceptional conditions resulting from a state of war; to admit the propriety of inviting enlisted men, in normal times, to dances at which officers would be present, they were more reluctant. Should we not go a step further, exterminate the prejudice root and branch, and leave only such limitations upon social intercourse as are dictated by logical psychological considerations?

“From reports reaching me, I understand that there are still numbers of Army officers who are not thoroughly imbued with the spirit of the new Army. . . . Army officers must first know what the new Army is and believe in what the new Army can do before they can be of maximum value to the new Army. Commanding officers must ‘sell’ the new Army first to themselves, then to their commands and lastly to the community in or near which they are located.” This is from a letter from the Secretary of War to the Chief of Staff, published to the Service in Circular 113, under date of March 22, 1920. By all means, let us have a house-cleaning. Slow to tamper with what has proved good, with reverence for the Spirit of ’75, let us strive to bring our fighting machine up to this model.

STUART W. CRAMER.

WORKING PEOPLE'S EDUCATION

BY ROBERT SHAFER

THE Bryn Mawr College "Summer School for Women Workers in Industry" has had a certain amount of public attention; just how much I do not know. It was started at the suggestion of President Thomas "to offer young women of character and ability a fuller special education and an opportunity to study liberal subjects." The control of the school was vested in a joint administrative committee composed of representatives of industrial workers, of the college, and of the alumnae. It was opened on June 15 of the present year, with an enrolment restricted to 82. The students were chosen from as many industries and from as many parts of the country as possible. Each had a scholarship sufficient in amount to cover actual expenses at the college. Additional expenses, railway fare and the like, were in some cases provided for by clubs of women workers. The school was so organized that the life of its members should be approximately the same as that of usual Bryn Mawr students. Similarly the work of the school was collegiate in character. Of course the subject-matter of the teaching had to be restricted with regard to the preparation of the students, but this does not mean that the courses given were elementary. It means only that a distinction had to be drawn between subjects which require previous academic work and other subjects, equally within the province of higher education, for which adequate preparation can be got from experience of life. Such subjects were taught as modern literature, political and social history, government, and law.

This, in briefest summary, is the character of the school. It is too early to ask about its success, though about that something could be said; but it is not too early to ask what the experiment means. Is it merely a new freak of restless philanthropy? Or is there real need for such a school?