

A Great Soldier Remembered

by Colonel Bruce B.G. Clarke (Retired)

It is amazing how certain things stick with one after many years and thousands of experiences. This essay captures the thoughts of a great NCO and explains how they have applied to every aspect of a military career. Hopefully, the thoughts presented here will be of great value to future officers and noncommissioned officers.

The story begins in November of 1965 when I arrived in Coleman Barracks, Sandhofen, Germany, as a brand new second lieutenant who had not attended the basic course. I reported in to my first unit, B Troop, 3d Squadron, 8th Cavalry. The first sergeant told me to sit in the corner and that the troop commander would be with me shortly. I obeyed. The troop commander quickly told me that I was going to the 3d platoon and that the platoon sergeant would be with me shortly. I returned to my corner.

In about 20 minutes, SFC Escalante came into the orderly room and helped me carry my bags to the third platoon area. He asked that I sit in the corner of the barracks, where he had an area of his own, while he took care of some business. In about 15 minutes, he joined me and we talked about the platoon. He explained the personalities and the future. But he truly got my attention when he said: "If you do what I tell you, I will make you the best cavalry lieutenant in the whole U.S. Army." He had my attention! He then went on to say that we were going to focus on five things:

- Know our jobs
- Hit what we shoot at, quickly.
- Keep ourselves and our equipment ready to go to war
- Work as a team, and
- Be disciplined

Over the six months that I was with the platoon, we did, in fact, focus on these five precepts and excelled, thanks to SFC Escalante. He would take me aside before the platoon did anything and explain to me what was going to happen and what the courses of action were. He would then coach me into the right decision based on the above. Over time, he would coach less, still mentor, but become the cheering section for what the platoon was doing. We remained focused on the five objectives.

When I was transferred to be a troop commander, I took these precepts with me and applied them to the troop. They worked there, too, as the troop excelled in everything that it did. It would have been better with First Sergeant Escalante, but he had trained me and would always jokingly tell me how his troop would beat mine. This was his way of saying that there was someone to beat. This was the ultimate compliment.

Over the years, these five precepts were also used to direct the activities of a tank battalion, as the S3 and XO (to the extent that they direct anything), the cavalry squadron, and the brigade that I commanded. In each case, the critical elements that were necessary for the success of that unit could be explained in terms of one of these precepts.

Every soldier was briefed on how these precepts applied to them immediately after they joined the unit. Unit activities were discussed in terms of these precepts and policy options were considered in light of how they contributed to these precepts. General Bruce Clarke used to say that a unit does well that which the commander checks. The point was to add an expectation of what the commander was going to check and look for, so as to provide a set of guiding principles for the unit's activities.

Some examples of how these precepts were applied at various levels may be useful.

- Know our jobs
 - SQT preparation
 - EFMB and EIB preparation

- Sergeant Common Task Training
- Spur programs for officers and NCOs
- Hit what we shoot at, quickly
 - Tank and Bradley Gunnery
 - Individual marksmanship
 - Command and control of indirect fires and their timely use
- Keep ourselves and our equipment ready to go to war
 - METL training focus
 - Maintenance by the manual
 - Physical training
 - Emergency deployment preparations (POM packets) of individuals and unit equipment
 - Emergency Deployment Readiness Exercises and other alerts
 - Anti-drug programs
 - Dependent care activities
- Work as a team
 - Squad and platoon immediate action drills
 - Staff coordination
 - Unit synchronization
 - Athletic competition
 - Maintenance of unit/crew cohesion in all activities
- Be disciplined — the glue that holds everything together
 - Self-discipline
 - Do what is right
 - Be responsive
 - Do the work — don't avoid hard work — the soldier who has self-discipline will prepare for the SQT, keep himself fit, not use drugs, and remember that "there is no I in **TEAM**." This same soldier will enroll in correspondence courses and do that which will make him a better soldier and citizen.

The imagination is the only limitation in applying these precepts to day-to-day operations and, more importantly to the goals, of any tactical unit. After more than 30 years of experience, these five precepts are still with me. As a final note, I have taught these five precepts to armor officers at the Royal Saudi Land Force Armor Institute, and they have received an enthusiastic reception.

I commend these precepts and the way they were used as organizing concepts for the leadership that future lieutenants and platoon sergeants will give to their units.

Every unit has a SFC Escalante. It is the combined efforts of all of them that is key to the development of an Army. This is dedicated to all of the SFC Escalantes that are everywhere. To him I say — thank you!.

Colonel Bruce B.G. Clarke (Retired) is the Training Manager at the Royal Saudi Land Forces Armor Institute in Tabuk, Saudi Arabia. Before retiring, he was the Director of U.S. National Security Studies at the Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pa. Before that, he commanded the 2d Brigade, 1st Infantry Division (Mechanized), Fort Riley, Kan. Colonel Clarke also commanded the 2d Squadron, 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, and A Troop (ABN/MECH), 3d Squadron, 8th Cavalry Regiment, 8th Infantry Division, both in Germany. He has served as a District Advisor in the Republic of Vietnam, a Political-Military Analyst in the Arms, Control and Disarmament Agency, Washington, DC, and as a staff officer on the Army staff. He is a 1965 graduate of West Point and taught in the Department of Social Sciences there. He has an MA in Political Science from UCLA and is a graduate of CGSC and the National War College.