

# GENERAL ORDERS

JOURNAL FOR LIVING HISTORIANS OF WORLD WAR TWO

## In This Issue:

- Bars & Stripes: so you want to be a leader?
- Leadership for NCOs
- Civilian life—what to America in the Forties
- Raising the bar for unit training: two stories
- Forming up: how to hold a formation
- Cerebrating: The Art of War

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## CONTENTS

### **BARS AND STRIPES: LEADERSHIP NOTES FOR REENACTORS**

- The NCO – Who and What He Is and Does** *Lynn Kessler* 3
- So you want to be a leader?** Tim O'Neill 6

### **PUSHING THE TRAINING ENVELOPE**

- American Edelweiss** *Jud Spangler* 8
- 29th Ranger Training** *Tim O'Neill* 12

### **THE ART OF WAR**

- Suvorov's Science of Victory** *Robert Mosher* 15

### **THE OLD ARMY**

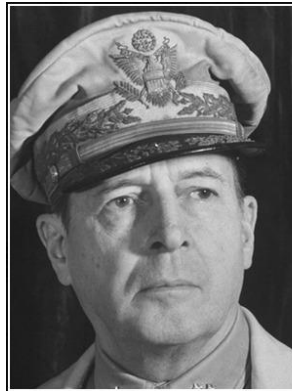
- Letters from Camp** 17

## The NCO – Who and What He Is and Does

Lynn Kessler, 29<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division (Reenacted)

In the reenacting world, too often too many units assign the duties and responsibilities of an NCO to someone who has little idea of what an NCO does, and what that position means. If he's lucky, he may stumble into the best behavior by committing so many mistakes that he finally learns by experience, but by then, it's frequently too late. He looks too incompetent, and too many of his charges disrespect him.

Experience is not necessarily the best teacher. It's better to learn by other people's mistakes. That's why you're reading this little treatise.



A true leader has the confidence to stand alone, the courage to make tough decisions, and the compassion to listen to the needs of others. He does not set out to be a leader, but becomes one by the equality of his actions and the integrity of his intent.

— Douglas MacArthur —

AZ QUOTES

Being an NCO means more than just wearing a set of corporal or sergeant stripes. In the real-life military, the NCO corps has always been the backbone of any military unit. Corporals and sergeants build and run the unit; when they're done, they let the officers play with it for a while, and then they step back in at the end to clean up the mess (that's not always true, it's just seems that way sometimes). More so than any officer, they make sure their unit runs efficiently, correctly, and professionally.

So how does a good NCO make this happen? First of all, by realizing there is a vast difference, yet also a great similarity, between the *duties*, and the *responsibilities*, of an NCO.

*Duties* are performed by virtue of the *position* an NCO holds. A supply sergeant keeps records of clothing and rations, but the First Sergeant holds formations. Neither one has greater *responsibility*, because each position is unique and important to the functioning of the unit. Likewise, neither one has greater *duties* than the other, because again, both positions are equally important to the functioning of the unit.

It is this *functioning of the unit* that is paramount, and therefore *duties* and *responsibilities* go hand in hand; neither one precedes or supersedes the other. Simply put, each NCO position must be taken seriously — meaning that if you say you're going to do something, *DO IT*, especially regarding training. That's *responsibility*. For example, a corporal is the first trainer in line, even before the sergeant squad leader. He needs to show the new boys how to shine their boots, make their bunks, strip and clean their rifles, wear their uniforms. He damned well better *DO IT*, because his sergeant and platoon sergeant are going to come along to check his work (that's *THEIR* job), and it's the corporal's *responsibility* to make sure he does his own job right.

Thus, duties are *job-related*, and specific to the position. Responsibility is *unit-related*, and critical to the functioning of the unit.

The following is a short run-down of each NCO position, with the basic duties and responsibilities illustrated:



*Corporals* (or Sergeants by 1944), as stated earlier, are the first link in the responsibility chain. They're the real backbone of the NCO corps, and responsible for individual training and appearance. *They* form the base of the small unit.

The *Sergeant* (or Staff Sergeant by 1944), particularly as Squad Leader, must set the *example* for his squad. He must be first on the field, first in formation position, first to help out, first to guide — thus he must already be a leader, as ascended from Corporal. He is *responsible* for the Corporal's efforts at individual training and appearance, and thus has the greatest impact on each individual soldier.



The *Platoon Sergeant* parallels the Squad Leader's duties somewhat. He is more experienced than the Sergeant Squad Leader, but does not really differ from him in authority so much as *sphere of influence* — he has daily contact with all soldiers in his platoon, and has more sergeants under him. He *makes* backbones and is most responsible for the success of the platoon. No matter whether he is a Staff Sergeant or Technical Sergeant, he is the key advisor for the platoon, making sure that

everyone (through their Squad Leaders) is trained, healthy, and ready for the day's duties. The Platoon Sergeant will have a great deal of experience in all areas — he knows how all weapons function, where and what his platoon leader and company commander is and does, and especially also knows what the platoon leader does, for frequently he must take over the duties of the Platoon Leader. Likewise, he makes sure that each NCO knows the duties and responsibilities of the next NCO above, because inevitably, those duties and responsibilities will have to be assumed when necessary.



The *First Sergeant*, more than any other NCO, is the lifeblood of the army. He conducts formations, instructs platoons, manages the essential paperwork and records of the company, assists in the training of all members of the company, and makes sure the company runs at its most efficient and proficient level, because, after all, it's *his company*. The "First Shirt" is a member of a unique breed — he takes special pride in his company, and wants it to outperform any other company, not because he wants it to be the first and the best, but just because it's *his company*. He gingerly allows the officers to play with it for a while, and woe to anyone under his responsibility who doesn't measure up to his standard of behavior and expertise, because they are making *his company* look bad.

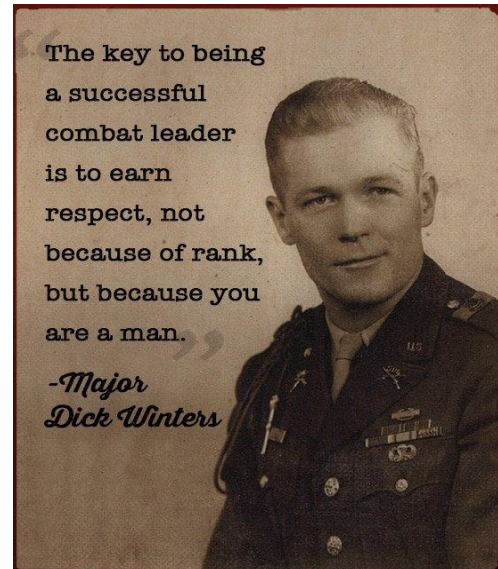
Remember that a good NCO is not going to be tough just because he can be by virtue of the stripes he wears. He will be tough because he has learned from experience (especially others' experience) and also because he understands that *responsibility*, more so than *duty*, is a rarefied element that means he must be *personally accountable* for all that happens within the unit he leads. He must make sure that all of his soldiers understand that everyone is responsible for what they do or do not do, that is, for their personal conduct. Remember what was described earlier — if you say you're going to do something, *DO IT*. The good NCO will provide guidance, resources, assistance, and supervision for anything his charges need, and if he doesn't have it immediately, he will seek it out for them. *DO IT*. It also follows, then, that the NCO must assume *command responsibility* — the unit he leads is part of a collective organizational entity, and it must function efficiently as part of that entity. His role in this cannot be delegated, and he must be responsible for his own personal conduct.

*DO IT*. Set the example. *Lead*.

All of these elements must not be taken so inflexibly that the NCO loses his sense of humanity — that after all, he was once like all of the soldiers beneath him, and once knew nothing, but was hopefully lead by a good NCO who was also aware of his own humanity, and knew that all of his soldiers can be lead and taught, since he himself once needed to be led and taught.



charges into leaders, too. They might take the opportunity to have someone skilled in a certain activity to teach others about that activity. It instills a sense of accomplishment and confidence, and will one day turn that man into a corporal, or a sergeant. Remember, much of leadership is about building *backbones* — it makes the entire unit stronger.

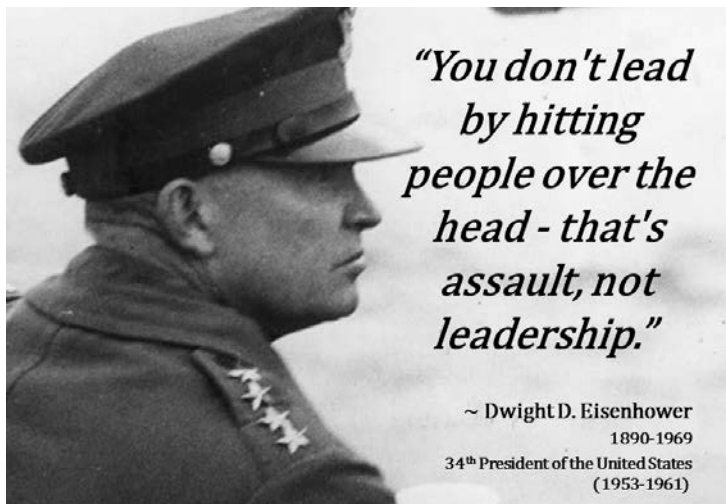


When the opportunity presents itself, leaders can showcase their own personal growth, and legitimize the growth and learning of others, by admitting to their own imperfections. They make it okay for others to be fallible, too. It's not something to be done on the parade ground, but instead over a shoe-shining or individual manual of arms session — “You know, Joe, that's something I always had a hard time with myself. But stick to it, you'll get it.” It makes a leader human, and approachable. Take the time to listen, and when you speak, choose your words carefully. Above all, be yourself — even a lowly private can sniff out a poser.

Good leaders also take the time to turn their

Lastly, a leader's ability to command — that is, his *authority* — comes not from his stripes or his name; it comes from a combination of all of the above. Authority is part of the equation in military discipline. A sergeant has the *right*, by his rank assignment, to direct soldiers assigned to him to do certain things. But that right does not extend to those not directly assigned to him. Thus, a sergeant cannot interfere in the activities of a squad not directly assigned to him. That's called *command authority*, and is specific to the immediate duties or activities. However, by virtue of his rank assignment, he does have the ability to exercise *general military authority*, and which in fact extends to all soldiers regardless of rank. For instance, in the absence of a unit leader, even a private has the authority to break up a barroom brawl. It's part of his *duty*, and *responsibility*. It's broad-based.

*Delegating authority* is somewhat more constricted. A sergeant, unless restricted by law, can delegate any and all authority to a subordinate, but that delegation must fall within that leader's scope of responsibility. He does it only within his own unit — always *down*, never up or across. The authority of an NCO is part of the equation in military discipline, and essentially, part of the *chain of command*.



Remember always that your troops are watching. They see everything you do, hear everything you say, and feel the results of everything you decide. By virtue of your position, you are their leader. *Lead* them.

*When in charge, take charge.* You're the leader. *Lead*. As Patton once said: “Lead me, follow me, or get the hell out of my way.” Good words to follow.

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# So You Want to Be a Leader?

*"The most important thing I learned is that soldiers watch what their leaders do. You can give them classes and lecture them forever, but it is your personal example they will follow."*

—General Colin Powell

You've been around the hobby for a while. You figure it's time to make your mark by wearing rank. What do you do now?

**STEP ONE:** Lie down for fifteen minutes. The idea may pass. If not, proceed to step two.

**STEP TWO:** Ask yourself "why do I want to wear rank?" If the answer is something like "I want to look cool" or "it's my turn", go back to step one.

**STEP THREE:** Ask yourself "what can I bring into my unit by getting promoted?" Okay, now we're getting somewhere.

Here are some things to consider:

**1. RANK IS NOT A STATUS. RANK IS A JOB.** If you're not ready to work harder, learn more, take responsibility, and have your performance judged by friend and foe alike—be a private. Pinning on or sewing on rank does not make you a leader—only you can do that. "Rank" is meaningless without the knowledge, skills, and leadership to do the job. Let's be clear: we are all the same rank: *reenactor*. Here's a handy rule of thumb: *one good private is worth five bad NCO's; one good NCO is worth ten bad officers*. Forget rank; it's about leadership.

**2. IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU.** It's easy to spot a good leader: Just look at the people he leads. If they're standing tall, looking proud, and doing the job, it's likely the leader is doing his job. If somebody is wearing rank but has no job, just an individual impression, he's not a leader. He's an empty suit.

Being a leader implies selflessness. A leader whose impression is over the top—silk scarf, AAF crusher cap, or a bunch of attempts to look cool—is suspect. The proof is in how the unit he leads looks and performs.

**3. IT'S ABOUT THE EXAMPLE YOU SET.** You don't have the Articles of War, the Army Regulations, or any force of law to back you up. The only powerful tool you wield is *force of personal example*. A leader is usually the first one there and the last one to



**"Leadership is the art of getting someone else to do something you want done because he wants to do it."**

—General Dwight D. Eisenhower

to leave. He takes his responsibility seriously. His impression is sound—not flashy or designed to set him apart; he represents his unit, not himself. He is cheerful, positive, and helpful. He takes responsibility for his own actions. He's there for everybody. He knows his job and his impression, he can perform as well as or better than most in the unit. Serious reenactors want to be like him.

**4. A LEADER IS ALWAYS LEARNING.** Too many nominal leaders in the hobby have decided that if they don't know something, it isn't worth knowing. A real leader is always trying to improve. Real soldiers take months or years of daily experience, training, and practice to learn a job well enough to be promoted. You're starting out 'way behind. Try to catch up.

**5. A LEADER IS ALWAYS TEACHING.** See 2, above. A leader learns and polishes his performance so he can bring his unit up to a higher level; he teaches as if any member of his team may have to take over his job. And one of them most certainly will.

**6. DON'T RETIRE IN PLACE.** Too many reenactors rise to a given rank and just . . . sit . . . there. Promotion is not social security. "Squatting" in a position for too long sets a bad example and blocks others from developing and moving up.

**7. BE A WARRIOR, NOT A WEASEL.** Don't poison the water supply by blaming others when you talk to your guys. Take it behind the barracks. Don't argue with others in front of the troops; that diminishes everyone and undermines confidence. Don't bitch and moan about what's happening at an event—help make it better. Always assume that when you're in a bad mood nobody wants to listen to your bullshit; be positive.

**8. USE YOUR IMAGINATION.** It's your job to maintain high morale. Small things can improve everybody's experience. Try singing on the march—corny, maybe,

but it works. Foster competition. Don't let things get stale. There are always moments at an event when everybody is sitting around (at the Gap, usually sitting around in the snow); have a few "hip pocket" things to do. If it's cold and you have time, show people how to use the small squad stove; make some coffee or soup. Talk to your guys about how to avoid heat or cold injuries; how to dress. If you're waiting for orders, put out security OP's. It's *something* other than sitting around bitching, and it's something Army units do. Keep people engaged.

**9. LOOK OUT FOR YOUR PEOPLE.** Being a leader means it's *not* every man for himself. Make sure everybody has his gear, complete and worn properly, before going out. Everybody has to have a canteen, and there is always some dumb ass who falls in without it. If they're supposed to have extra dry socks, verify they have them. Make sure people aren't walking on blisters. Make sure they hydrate. They may complain, but they know why you're bugging them. Better putting up with a grumble or two than having a medical fallout. *It's your job.*

**10. KEEP A SENSE OF HUMOR.** Drill sergeants understand this. People will put up with amazing amounts of necessary annoyance—fatigue, bullshit, chicken shit, and nit shit and nagging—if they can find something to laugh about.

**"Start every day with a smile and get it over with."**

**—W. C. Fields**



# PUSHING THE TRAINING ENVELOPE

*In this issue we report on two advanced training programs for reenactors: the Gebirgsjäger "Edelweiss" program and the 29th Ranger school.*

## *<American Edelweiss>*

*by Jud Spangler*

When I entered the World War II reenacting hobby in the late 1990's, the operating environment for participants was nothing like it is today—it had far more in common with the 1970's. Most information, uniforms, field gear and whatever else we needed to educate ourselves or become operational was still obtained in the "old-fashioned" way. We relied heavily on word-of-mouth, learning-by-osmosis, specialty publishers, flea-markets, antique dealers, and the just-emerging larger scale vendors who were making the leap from craftsmanship in the garage to factories and warehouses, with an eye toward selling online. We relied on our unit commander and NCOs to help us navigate all this—most were former U.S. military who served in the 1970's and/or 1980's. Their guidance was invaluable. But there was a glaring dis-connect. Our unit was a WW2 German mountain infantry regiment, the *136. Gebirgsjäger*, but nobody in the unit was even alive during that war, none of us were German and nobody—in the leadership cadre at least—had any mountaineering experience. Nor did the schedule of events afford us much opportunity to learn German mountain warfare doctrine or learn to be mountaineers. There were no events in truly mountainous areas—certainly nothing in the "Fourteeners" of the American west, nothing even in the 6,000 foot spine of the Smokies.

But those with the interest and money began collecting ice axes, piton hammers, snow shoes, mountain rucksacks—the signature items of mountaineers. It all made for an engaging display, and the intentions were to better understand and depict the original cast of players from the Bavarian and Austrian Alps. As the unit grew, it picked up more and more guys who grew up in the mid-Atlantic, often with Civil War re-enacting experience. We all had some vague idea that if the Germans had mountainous borders and were sending men into mountainous regions abroad to fight, then logically it would follow that they would require special units. Beyond that, most of us knew little of the Wehrmacht's doctrine for mountain combat, nor had any experience with the training required of its mountain divisions.

And so for years we were a bunch of guys *dressed* like mountain soldiers, but tactically in the field, we operated just

like any other regular German infantry. This of course, is nothing terribly unique in the hobby. None of the airborne units are dropping behind enemy lines during an event, some of the *Panzergrenadier* units don't own any armor, nor do they operate anywhere near any, and so forth. And there is no shame in this. Just because you can't replicate something 100% doesn't mean it can't be studied and brought to life in some fashion.

It did not take very long, however, for a lot of change to arrive all at once. I am reminded of Jack Higgins' Oberst Radl character, brought to life by Robert Duvall in "The Eagle Has Landed" recognizing the synchronicity of it all. Generational change was everywhere. Our founding CO suddenly passed away from cancer, but not before tapping me to succeed him. Other units were passing the leadership torch to men my age or younger. Younger men with an interest or experience in mountaineering began to emerge as potential new members. Large scale events like the Battle of the Bulge were evolving into a more authentic field exercise judged by an emerging cadre of umpires. And technological change seemed like it was escalating exponentially. It began to push everything—information and kit—into the world we are accustomed to now. We started to find more and more documentation online.

While all this change was in motion, Facebook's market penetration grew worldwide and we discovered the European *Gebirgsjäger* re-enactors as a result. *Project Edelweiss* is a re-enactor mountaineering event staged every other year somewhere in Alpine Europe. Men of all countries are welcome and the time period is 1939 before the war. There is no battle, no weaponry—it is held after all, in what is still post-war Europe. The photographs were stunning and inspiring. This was an interesting contrast to us Pennsylvania boys who grew up with fire-arms, shot squirrels and found no reason to climb anything except to pursue wild deer for our own venison steaks.

But we were inspired to create our own modest Edelweiss with the best elevations we had nearby: West Virginia. The elevations run in the 3,000-5,000 foot range and there are campsites that can be rented. This first "136 Edelweiss" in Spring of 2014 consisted of setting up camp Friday, hiking all

day Saturday and then drive home Sunday. Our focus was land navigation albeit in period kit and rucksacks with food, medical supplies, blanket, extra clothing. Our goal was to hike from our campsite to Spruce Knob (elevation 4,862) and back. We didn't make it to the Knob that day. Studying our USGS map at home prior to the event, we misunderstood some sort of municipal boundary as part of the trail system. Our error was not discovered until we were on the march. We worked out an alternative way back to camp and closed out the day with 12 miles under our belts. It was fun and challenging. But where was this to lead us?

Then I discovered a document that made it unthinkable *not* to lead the *Gebirgsjäger* toward some better adaptation in the field of the mountain soldier's original purpose. Ironically, the best source of information about German mountain warfare proved to be the U.S. military. The Military Intelligence Division (MID) of the then War Department (now DOD), published a *Special Series*, "for the purpose of providing officers with reasonably confirmed information from official and other reliable sources." The *Special Series* and two other categories of MID publications, *Intelligence Bulletin* and *Tactical and Technical Trends*, were intended to be distributed to the U.S. armed forces in the same manner as prescribed for field manuals, down to the regimental level of command. *German Mountain Warfare* was No. 21, published 29 February 1944. Section I of *German Mountain Warfare* is prefaced with the statement, "This section is an edited translation of *Verlässige Ausbildungsanweisung für die Gebirgstruppen* (Provisional Training Instructions for Mountain Troops). Although the manual is dated 1935, the fundamental German principles of combat in mountains have changed little in the interim."

I was stunned. Not only did we have a U.S. military analysis of the *Gebirgsjäger*, it was also written during World War II and it contained a translation of the original training document used by the Germans themselves. For me, this was the equivalent of finding Tut's tomb and the Rosetta Stone all at once. *German Mountain Warfare* (GMW), to my delight, had exactly what we needed in order to adapt the actual doctrine—at both the strategic and tactical levels—for *Gebirgsjäger* re-enactors. The next challenge was to use this information in some practical way to lead us out of the world of dressing like mountain soldiers and into "fighting" like them.

The reality is that while you have to make the original report's 90 pages available, most guys will never make time to sit down and read it. But, more of them than you might expect will. So I made it available on our website as a download, and I emailed it to everyone. However, reenactors are not full time mountain soldiers, so GMW needed to be reduced to the absolute core basics that we could remember un-aided and

execute with muscle memory. My first task was to distill for myself what was the military necessity-- other than being able to operate in alpine regions-- that required special mountain divisions?

This was quite succinctly and ably captured by GMW: "Specially trained mountain troops may decisively influence the outcome of a larger campaign even though the decision is almost always sought and achieved on the flat by the main force."

GMW has a lot of specifics that apply to an actual mountain division that is part of a campaign supporting the main force. While these are useful for education, many of them will simply never apply to re-enactors participating in an event.

So I looked at this through the prism of what actually could be applied:

- Offensive Purpose
- Defensive Purpose
- Focal Point of Mountain Combat
- Strategic Differences From The Flat
- Tactical Difference From The Flat
- Implications for Re-enactor Training

I reduced GMW down to about 20 easy to grasp slides in a power-point presentation. GMW has several pages on the Attack, but it can be boiled down to one slide in a presentation for re-enactors.

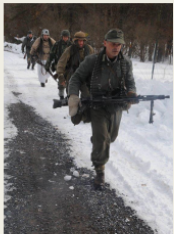
### Offensive Purpose

1. Specialized troops secure the advance of main force through the mountain passes. 
2. Main force reaches terrain of its own choice in the highest state of combat readiness 

### Implications For Re-enactor Training

Objectives:

1. Physical fitness adequate to lower Appalachians
2. Movement in steeper, densely covered terrain
3. Executing surprise
4. Securing the heights
5. Observation & FO for Artillery
6. Junior NCO decision-making



One of the things effective about this slide is that it telegraphs immediately to re-enactors in our own language:

Clearly the *Gebirgsjäger* are dressed and kitted out for mountain operations—Windjackets and mountain boots, carrying everything they will need to operate independently in their oversized mountain rucksacks. They are even supporting a sniper to pick off or spot a sentry on the surprise approach to a key point of high ground.

In contrast, the main force on the flat are represented by *Panzergrenadiers* supporting an armored vehicle, armed with *Panzerfausts* to confront enemy armor found on roads and fields. They are camouflaged and wearing the common infantry lowboots, no rucksacks because their supply column can reach them. And the illustrator depicted them in a way that they look fresh and ready as if the mountaineers had done their job by clearing the heights of enemy observers, artillery and so forth. The entire offensive mission is distilled down to two clear sentences and perfect illustrations in a pocket-sized slide.

The power-point presentation can be shown in a classroom setting, and it can be posted on our website for 24/7 access by our members. For those who attend the training, it can be reproduced in a pocket-sized booklet to take with them anywhere. But you still have to get to the point of “how do we



apply this?”

It starts with changing our training and doing more of it. The message to our NCOs was that our missions in field exercises were going to evolve as our core events evolve. Our largest event is the Battle of the Bulge at Fort Indiantown Gap. It is also the one that best affords us ample opportunity for putting those training objectives into practice. The northern half of FIG’s training areas rise from open fields with roads at 400 feet of altitude to heights of 800 feet where the roads and fields give way to wooded, steeper terrain with rocks and underbrush. The “summits” often afford an excellent view of movement on the flats. We can set up observation posts and also act as FO’s for the event’s simulated artillery.

The immediate implications for our training were put into the final slide of the presentation.

Yes, those are skills that we want any re-enactor to learn, but we want to be better at them than any other re-enactor, because that’s what the original *Gebirgsjäger* did: be the best at this part of the mission so the main force can do what it is equipped to do. Kind of like protecting your star running back.

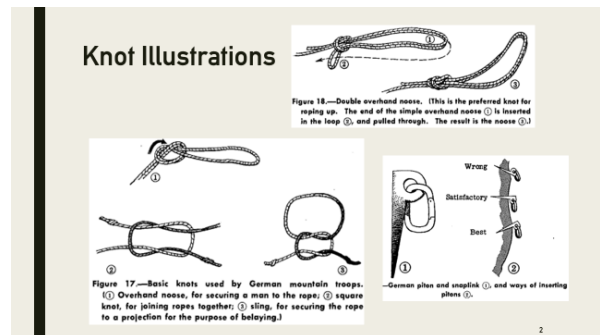
Arriving at this point, however, left something very important on the table: can we apply *any* of the special mountaineering training and equipment in Pennsylvania? Of course. As the German command at the Bulge event began assigning the *Gebirgsjäger* to the heights, it gave us opportunities to think about movement differently. One thing we all noticed was that the terrain in our assigned AO at Fort Indiantown Gap was tough, especially in the snow, and that steep terrain with trees and rocks doesn’t have to be in the Alps to beg for the use of ropes, carabiners and pitons. GMW has an entire section on mountaineering, which I also distilled into a power point for classroom and a pocket sized booklet to carry into the field. Our training events now include very basic mountaineering, including practicing the most commonly used knots, mountain marching and the use of rope teams.

Our second pocket-sized training booklet, became *Ausbildungheft #2: Der Soldat in den Bergen* (Training Booklet #2, the Soldier in the Mountains)

### Minimum Proficiency / Contents

■ Make any <i>STEIGEN</i> (ascent) on road or path free of snow.	Mountain Marching	Page	3
■ Walk on easy wooded grass and scree slopes until master fairly difficult terrain on moderately difficult climbs	Climbing		4
■ Walk with snowshoes on roads, easy and difficult terrain	Descending		5
■ Cover icy stretches on moderately hard climbs	Sleep Snow and Ice		6
■ GOAL. Move quietly, orderly and confidently under normal conditions of marching and without wasting time or taking unnecessary risks.	Special Equipment		7
	Rope		8
	Belaying		9
	Crampans		10
	Ice Axe		11
	Pitons, Snap Links		12
	Blivouacs		13
	Self-Preservation		14-16
	Rope & Knot Illustrations		17-18

And it contains pages showing easily referenced visuals for the



average *jäger* re-enactor who suddenly draws a blank on how to tie an overhand noose on the side of a hill.

Our training events are no longer occasional. They are regular—at least 2x a year solely devoted to training. We cover the standard German squad tactics

The first page of the booklet is below.

Our training events are no longer occasional. They are regular—at least 2x a year solely devoted to training. We cover the standard German squad tactics to varying degrees of emphasis, but the training is re-structured to support the unit “re-boot” to adapt and apply the *Gebirgsjäger* mission to a productive end in the field.

As a fellow reenactor in another unit said to me, “I love it when specialties actually get used the way they were intended.”



### Photos and Exhibits:

*(Left) My very first event. We did the best we could with what we had. No mountain gear. Home-made Swedish tunic conversions. No mountain boots, instead we scrounged for boots that resembled German low boots if we couldn't get the post war Swiss mountain boots. An Edelweiss sleeve patch was about as close as I got to being a mountain soldier in those days. (below) Europe's Project Edelweiss 2013 team climbing in rope teams and then glissading and descending*

*(Below) A fine example of the living history material for display. Those of us with time and money were leaning in to the impression further. (below)*





*Our 2014 West Virginia Edelweiss, focused on land navigation during a full day's hike with field gear and a packed rucksack. This photo is where we discovered our map-reading error.*

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## **29TH RANGER TRAINING**

*by Tim O'Neill*

Eight years ago, the east coast 29th Infantry Division living history group decided to take living history a step farther in the direction of *living the history*. What we did was challenge the longstanding assumptions about the limits of impression, moving beyond how we *look* to what we can *do*. Impression is often not even skin deep, but ends where the underwear touches the skin!

Our concept was to establish a voluntary program loosely based on the 29th Ranger Battalion, which trained as a battalion with the British Commandos at Achnacarry Castle in Scotland. The experience was intense and challenging, and was similar to the techniques used in forming and developing the other ranger battalions (who were also modeled on the Commandos). When the concept of the invasion hardened in late 1943 the divisional ranger battalion was broken up; some of the soldiers went to the

airborne regiments or other units; most returned to their units in the 29th to pass along their skills.

The 29th Ranger program reflects that experience, modified to meet the living history mission.

### **The course of instruction**

The training was spread over five intensive weekends. Training objectives included advanced soldier skills (for example: camouflage and concealment; tactical movement; map reading and land navigation; unarmed combat) and evolved to small unit tactics and patrolling. For additional challenge, we included obstacles and rope techniques such as suspension traverse and water crossings on the North Anna River, hasty rappelling, knotted rope climb, rigging (building an A frame and snatch block lift system to move a

mortar up a cliff). We included basic demolitions, breaching, live fire weapons familiarization, call for and adjustment of fire, and other opportunities living historians are generally not lucky enough to enjoy. We added physical conditioning: calisthenics and two obstacle course runs before breakfast. The final problem was a realistic night patrol that included breaching a minefield in the dark, evading enemy patrols, and rescue of a stranded pathfinder and his beacon radio.

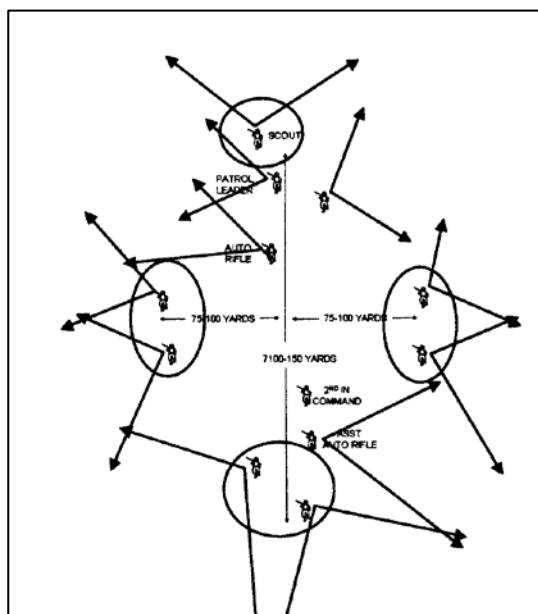
Instructors were experienced reenactors and Army veteran members with special training experience (Ranger, Airborne, Airmobile, Jungle Warfare). Training was conducted at two sites in the Virginia Tidewater: Camp Milholland on the North Anna River and Camp Les Lease on the Mattaponi near Fort A. P. Hill.

Sixteen volunteers started; eight finished.

Graduates of the course are authorized wear of the original 29th Ranger flash on the class A uniform.

### Course requirements

Completion of the course required a baseline level of fitness. Trainees were aware of the physical challenges, and decided on their own whether to

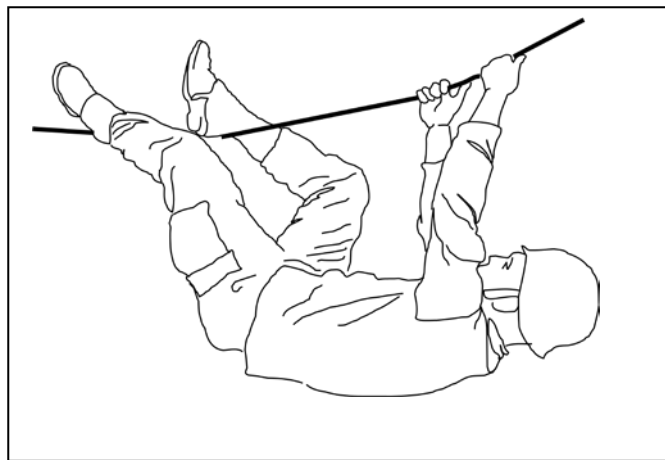


give it a try or a pass. Medical disclosure was required for any condition that could result in health or safety problems.

Trainees had to complete four of the five weekends (all were required to do the long night patrol on weekend five); makeup training for missed classes was provided before start of the formal training weekend. Training was conducted to military standard; trainees were assigned to squads and four-man teams, issued special gear, and camped in two-man shelters. There were regular inspections of weapons and equipment, field layouts, and accountability formations. Each squad was assigned a tactical NCO for mentoring and evaluation. Instructors also evaluated trainees, and on the last weekend there was a peer evaluation for leadership and practical skills. The distinguished graduate received a certificate and a commando knife.

### 29th Ranger Handbook

Trainees were issued a special pocket-size manual inspired by that Boy Scout Manual of Mayhem, the venerable and many-edited *Ranger Handbook*.



From the 29th Ranger Handbook: (left) fields of fire for patrol traveling security; (above) "monkey crawl" technique for rope crossing.

This 62-page reference included information on leadership, camouflage, land navigation and terrain analysis, ground tactics, patrolling, weapons, communications, ranger/commando skills (ropes and rigging, simulated field demolitions, breaching minefields and wire), first aid and safety.

## Results

We were pleased at the response and particularly at the hard work and dedication of the 20th Ranger students. This was more than most reenactors have the opportunity to master. Dropouts were generally due to inability to fit the training time into life and jobs. Everyone, completed or not, gave his best.

Not surprisingly, the Rangers have tended to move into NCO leadership positions, and willingly pass on the knowledge and skills they mastered in training to their soldiers—just as the original 29th Rangers did in 1943-4.



*On the range, 1943.*

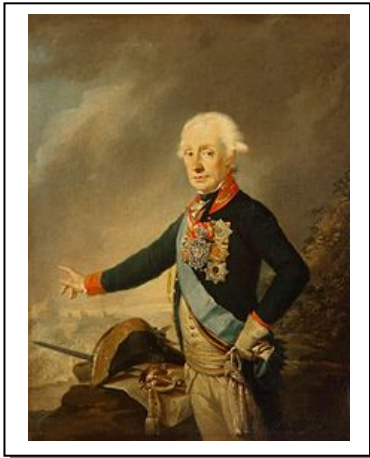


*On the range, 2008.*

# THE ART OF WAR

Quite a few things happened long ago that influences World War II and military thought. In this issue, Robert Mosher discusses the contributions of Aleksander Suvorov.

## Suvorov's Science of Victory: Discipline, Training, Speed, and Hitting Power



After the German invasion of Soviet Russia in 1941, a massive effort was launched to rebuild the Red Army and Air Force for this struggle. A part of this effort included the establishment of military academies to prepare young men for military service as potential officers while they completed their secondary school education. Some of these academies were named Suvorov Academies, invoking Russia's great 18<sup>th</sup> Century military leader Alexander Vasiliyevich Suvorov (1730-1800). An aristocrat of not very great wealth, Suvorov was also a Russian nationalist who fought and conquered its enemies on every front, from the Caucasus Mountains, to the Black Sea, to Poland, to northern Italy, and finally the Alps.

Suvorov was a military innovator who resisted the rigidity of then current Russian military practice. Given command of the Suzdal Infantry Regiment in 1765, he wrote and implemented his own training manual, *The Suzdal Regulations*, emphasizing his tactical ideas and his emphasis on realistic training. In 1776, he issued training instructions for the Crimean and Kuban corps. In 1795, he would compile his military thoughts into the book *The Science of Victory*, circulated at first only in manuscript form. It would be published after his death and reprinted eight times by 1811. In his writings and in his training of troops he emphasized mobility, flexibility, initiative and agility – and enforced strict but not brutal discipline. As late as 1918, Lenin would turn to Suvorov's book as the Soviets tried to turn their revolutionary forces into an army.

Suvorov insisted that his officers speak frequently to the soldiers in their native Russian (at a time when most Russian aristocrats spoke primarily in French). His writings included aphorisms specifically intended to be easily remembered by his generally illiterate soldiers. These were intended to inculcate with them the Marshal's ideas about how to make war. On campaign, he personally shared the life of the common soldier on campaign, doing without the extensive and even luxurious tentage of some commanders and eating the same rations. Suvorov would wrap himself in his cloak and sleep on straw just as did his soldiers.

Among his aphorisms are the following:

- Swiftens and surprise translate into numbers; one onslaught and the shock decide the battle.
- Better to go to meet the danger than to wait in place.
- One minute decides the outcome of a battle, one hour – the success of a campaign, one day – the fate of an empire.
- I operate not by hours but by minutes.
- Money is dear; human life is still dearer; but time is the dearest of all.
- It is necessary to fight with skill, not numbers.
- To surprise is to vanquish.
- It is a veritable rule of the military art to fall straight upon the enemy's weakest point.
- He who is brave and boldly falls directly upon the enemy, will have already won a complete victory.
- Although bravery, good spirits, and courage are necessary everywhere and for all cases, they are only in vain if they do not emanate from skill.



- Know how to take advantage of position.
- No battle can be won in the study, and theory without practice is death.
- Without the beacon of history - tactics grope in the dark.
- All constancy of military discipline is based on obedience.
- Never scorn your enemy, but study his troops, his methods of action, study his strong and weak sides.
- A driven back enemy – unsuccessful, isolated, surrounded, scattered – equals success.
- Every soldier should understand your maneuver.
- The secret of maneuvers lies in the legs.
- Be patient in military difficulties, do not give way to dejection from failure.
- If three Turks attack a Russia soldier, he is to bayonet the first, shoot the second, and bayonet the third.
- The bullet is a fool, the bayonet is a fine lad.
- Infantry fire leads to victory.
- A step backward is death.
- Where there are fewer troops, there is greater valor.
- Cowards are cured by danger.

And my personal favorite:

- Speed is essential, but haste harmful.

*Captain Robert A Mosher,*  
1<sup>st</sup> BN, Royal Ulster Rifles

#### **For reenactors:**

These points may seem remote to living history experience, but it pays to read them carefully. Think about the last "tactical" you suffered through, and consider some basic truths.

- *One minute decides the outcome of a battle.* We don't have time to campaign, but a battle can illustrate the idea. Nowadays, we call this principle: "getting inside the enemy's decision loop." What is a decision loop? Think about it: your enemy makes a move. You consider the move and what he is attempting to do (whether it's brilliant or dimwitted is beside the point—he's doing something and you have to respond). Once you have figured out the purpose of the move (we hope correctly), you must then consider your countermoves. Then you have to make a plan, scratch out a fragmentary order, and get things rolling. But what if the enemy can react to your countermove faster than you can execute it? When this happens, the enemy is "inside your decision loop", and you will find yourself responding to a move when he has already started doing something else.

- *It is necessary to fight with skill, not numbers.* Well, yes: I would prefer to fight with skill *and* numbers, if only so everybody can go home sooner. But Suvorov's point is finer than that. A student of military history, he was aware that the most famous victories are usually enjoyed by the side weaker in numbers: Gaugamela, Cannae, Alesia, almost any fight involving the Mongols—the list goes on. Fighting outnumbered was the basic strength of the Byzantines. Now, part of this is certainly because battles won by the smaller force make better stories, but the point is still valid: if you are materially weaker, you have to use your brain; if you outnumber the enemy, there is a tendency to get complacent.

Like any broad statement, his can be reduced to absurdity. Back in the 70's when I was reviewing research reports at the Armor Center at Fort Knox, I was handed a paper by two grad students at some college describing a study done with the support of a prairie National Guard armored cavalry unit that led them to conclude that intelligence (fighting smart" in their words) is more important than mass. Aside from a blinding flash of the obvious—it is smarter to be intelligent than to be dumb—the basic assumptions of the study were faulty. All things (including skill) being equal, it is usually better to have more mass and grind the bastards down than to have to dance around, bob and weave. But we don't always have that luxury, as Suvorov knew only too well.

- *To surprise is to vanquish.* No surprise here. How do we avoid being surprised? Start with the online course on operations in the *continuing education* section of ReenactorPro. One of the reasons we embrace that annoying

military decision making process that requires us to consider all possibilities is to avoid unpleasant surprise. Remember: *the enemy always gets a vote*. Forget that and you may be the proud recipient of the Ambrose E. Burnside Award to resolutely snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.

- *Every soldier should understand your maneuver*. Reenactor leaders, particularly when they are in charge of a collection of units with varying degrees of tactical skill, should make sure the plan trickles down to private Snuffy in the rear rank. It's your *duty* as a commander. (Ed.)

## THE OLD ARMY

*America was a different place in the 1940's, and those differences are essential to a correct impression. In each issue of General Orders we will point our historians' flashlight into the dark corners of an earlier time. In this issue, we will try to explain how different it was to be an Army officer more than seventy years ago by entertaining readers with "letters" from a new lieutenant just out of the officer basic school at Fort Benning. Over time we will keep track of Lieutenant Walker and his triumphs and challenges in a nearly-forgotten Army.*

*"I, Doughfoot Payne Walker, having been appointed a Second Lieutenant, Infantry, in the Army of the United States, do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any reservation or purpose of evasion; that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office upon which I am about to enter: SO HELP ME GOD."*

*—Oath of an officer of the Army of the United States <sup>1</sup>*

Camp Blunderbuss, Arkansas  
October 1st, 1943

My Dearest Maggie,

Well, here I am at Camp Blunderbuss, after a train ride you wouldn't believe even if I told you. That crack train I got on in Columbus, where we said so long, was fine, with nice seats and a dining car. But I had to change trains in Memphis and again in Little Rock, both to cars with only wooden seats. No dining car; we stopped everywhere, and now and then we could buy a box lunch at some station. One guy riding with me told me not to try the fried chicken without checking first to see if there were wings. I'm not sure why. [Editor's note: rats do not have wings.] I guess I'm telling you anyway, whatever I wrote before.

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<sup>1</sup> This oath really hasn't changed. I took it three times: entering the Army as a reserve on extended active duty; entering the Regular Army; and re-entering the Regular Army after a sabbatical in graduate school.

There was a problem changing locomotives in West Memphis (in Arkansas, across the river from the real one), and we were half a day late getting to the stop near Camp Blunderbuss, a tired, dusty little place called Beetlesbutt Flats, and I had to find a cab to get to camp because my orders said I had to be there before close of business that day. I had to share a ride with three other guys—one from my class at Benning and two soldiers. It wasn't a long drive, but the guy had to go back to the station to get more fares and he dropped us all off at the gate. The MP cranked the phone and ordered up a truck to get us to our units.

By that time, my uniform was a mess, and it's a warm October here and my suntans were sticking to my legs and back. Carrying my bag left dirty stains on my pants. But there was no choice: I had to report in then and there.

The adjutant at ■■■ Infantry didn't have much time to talk. He was in a bad mood because the fan in his office was making a terrible noise and looked to give up the ghost any moment, which probably wouldn't have been much of a loss since it was just moving hot air around in circles. I saluted, reported for duty, and handed him my orders. The commander was out inspecting mess halls, so I couldn't do my official call till later.

Anyway, I was assigned to G Company, which is in the 2nd Battalion. The battalion adjutant assigned me space in the officers' quarters, which are really just barracks with bunks and a bunch of jolly lieutenants. Not much better than Benning. By the way, there are no rentals worth looking at in Beetlesbutt Flats. The adjutant at regiment told me if I found a place for a wife or a girlfriend there, they would take one look and leave me forever. So we need to be patient.

I took a shower and dug a new uniform out of my bag and headed back to regimental headquarters. A new officer has to make an official office call as soon as possible on arrival, and I wasn't looking forward to it. Ours is Colonel Cross, which they say is a good name because he usually is. He turned out to be an older guy, yes no kidding, with white hair and a white mustache even though he probably isn't much over 45. That's the Army for you. I stepped into his office, saluted, and said "Sir, Lieutenant Walker, D. P., reporting for duty." He was scribbling something, hunched over his desk, didn't look at me for a bit, then, still without looking at me, said, "well that's wonderful Lieutenant, I shall sleep soundly tonight. Welcome to the ■■■ Infantry." I guessed, correctly it turned out, that this meant "thank you, now get out." But this

whole thing is to be done no matter what. Peacetime Army lingers.

A couple of days later I called on Colonel Cross at his quarters. This is another duty call. It took about three minutes, part of which was me putting calling cards in this little dish on a table next to the door. One for him, one for his wife, and one for any adult kids he might have (I didn't ask the adjutant about kids, as he would probably just have looked at me funny) so I folded the upper left corner of one card to cover everything.

The next evening I did my scheduled informal call. The colonel was a bit nicer then, but he was going through the Old Army motions. I did get to meet his wife. I won't go on about her, but you can picture her pedaling a bike like mad with Dorothy's little dog in the basket.

I did the official call on the battalion CO, who I'll see more of, and had a long talk with my company CO, Capt Rodd. He's married and managed to find a not too awful place in The Flats, as we call it, for Barbara (Babs) his wife and baby daughter Connie. He has a friend who went to the University of Alabama, but he was a year or two before me. He's a West Pointer, but doesn't put on airs. Not so far, anyway.

So, here I am. Four years of ROTC at Bama, Infantry School at Benning, and I make \$150 or so a month.<sup>2</sup> But, that's not all! I could get a rental allowance if there was anything to rent, and a subsistence allowance of seventy cents a meal--officers can eat in the mess hall, but we have to pay. Regular soldiers just sit down and eat.

I don't know how long we'll be here. Rumor is we'll [REDACTED] but rumors aren't worth much. I have second platoon, most of them draftees. My platoon sergeant isn't much older than I am and enlisted in 38. He's been from regiment to regiment, getting them ready to go overseas then being transferred to cadre another new regiment. He's praying for orders to [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] --anything, he says, to get out of Blunderbuss.

Anyway, we're always busy. We have close order drill, hikes, extended order drill (that's tactics), classes, training films, all kinds of fun and in some ways not as tough as at the Infantry School. We had to show the company a training film on "social diseases" last Wednesday, which was the most horrible thing I've ever seen. I don't think it kept any of the privates from going to the Flats on pass, though.

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<sup>2</sup> About \$1,600 a month in 2017 dollars.

So that's the life of an Infantry officer. I miss you, love you, want to see you again SOON. Say hi to everyone. Tell them there are probably places worse than Camp Blunderbuss, and I suppose I'll see them soon.

Your loving

Doof

*Some things to bear in mind:*

*An officer who entered the service before 1942 would have purchased a sword; after that, they were optional.*

*A father in law told me of his time as a new Signal Corps second lieutenant in 1941, during the prewar draft and mobilization. He was an ROTC commission from the University of Alabama, and reported to his first camp with his new wife. There were social events for officers on a regular basis; he remembered escorting his bride to dances, walking along board sidewalks by muddy company streets, he wearing his sword and she in evening dress.*

*An officer had to acquire social graces nearly forgotten in these new dark ages. Placement of flatware for a formal dinner; serving from the left and snatching plates from the right; use of calling cards (not the same as business cards); formal and informal "calls." Even in 1965 when I reported in, we still consulted Emily Post's guidebook to the social graces. [Ed.]*