

**Azimuth, Distance, and Checkpoints:
Thoughts on Leadership, Soldiering, and Professionalism for Judge Advocates (JA)**

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You must know where you are on the map and on the ground at all times. This includes knowing where you are relative to your directional orientation, the azimuth and distance to your objective, and other landmarks and features.²

Introduction

This past 20 May 2005, marks the twentieth anniversary of my commissioning as an officer in the U.S. Army. During my first six years of active duty, I served as an infantry officer, completing command and staff assignments in infantry and special operations units. Since becoming a judge advocate (JA), I have served in a number of different billets, many of them outside the Judge Advocate General's Corps (JAGC) mainstream.³

Without question, the most profound and lasting benefit of my time in uniform has been the opportunity to serve alongside a number of stellar role models. No matter where I have been assigned, there have always been officers, noncommissioned officers, and junior enlisted Soldiers who have personified the Army values of loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. The lessons I have learned from these outstanding Soldiers form the basis for this article.

Although this work appears in the pages of the *The Army Lawyer*, it is not devoted to the practice of military law, *per se*. Instead, it offers practical advice to new JAs based on my twenty years of soldiering. If you are a JA with no prior military experience, I hope the ideas presented here will help keep you on track and out of trouble, especially during your first few years as an officer. If you are a more experienced Soldier, this article may provide you with food for thought.

A Brave New World

While most JAs are well-qualified to practice military law after completing the Judge Advocate Officer Basic Course (JAOBC), many still need additional mentoring on their duties and responsibilities as officers. This is not to imply that these individuals lack motivation, self-discipline, or a genuine commitment to the Army. Instead, it is a recognition that, for the average law school graduate, military service is a brave new world distinctly different from anything he has ever known.⁴

Their inexperience notwithstanding, virtually all new JAs are eager to learn and grow as officers. They are more than ready to begin their journey, but simply need an azimuth, a distance, and some reliable checkpoints along the way. This article provides some of that direction by highlighting key concepts every officer should know.

It is essential to remember that in the contemporary operational environment, JAs can no longer view themselves as technical experts without leadership or soldiering responsibilities. Given the number of JAs deployed worldwide in support of the Global War on Terror, the transformation of the Army into a more expeditionary force, and the our senior leadership's focus on the warrior ethos, the modern-day JA must stand ready to be a Soldier, a lawyer, and a leader.

¹ I would like to thank Brigadier General Scott Black, Colonel (COL) Peter Cullen, Major Tom Bryant, Major Brad Sutera, and Captain Mark Matthews for their assistance during the preparation of this article. These officers took time to proof this work and to share their thoughts, experiences, and insights.

² U.S. DEP'T OF ARMY, FIELD MANUAL 3-25.26, MAP READING AND LAND NAVIGATION (20 July 2001).

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⁴ This is also not meant to demean the outstanding work done by the dedicated professionals who shepherd our new JAs through their first few months as officers. Indeed, the quality of the JAOBC cadre and the nature of the JAOBC curriculum have improved significantly in recent years. For example, during Phase II of the course, students conduct morning accountability formations and student-led physical training (PT) to Army standards. Those students competing for slots to airborne and Air Assault School do extra physical training, including a weekly road march for the Air Assault candidates. Plans are currently being developed that may call for JAs to attend a rigorous Basic Officer Leadership Course (BOLC) with officers from other branches following JAOBC.

Ten Basics for Every Officer

1: Time, Place, Appearance, and Bearing

Just as there are cardinal directions on a compass, there are cardinal rules for officers. Among these rules, perhaps the most important involve time, place, personal appearance, and military bearing.

First, if you do absolutely nothing else as an officer, always be on time. Remember, you will never hurt yourself by being early, but you will always hurt yourself by being late. This rule is especially critical when other people depend. If you are supposed to be somewhere at a specified time, never put other people, especially your boss or your Soldiers, in the annoying position of having to wait for you or wonder where you are. Make timeliness an absolute priority, and do not tolerate lateness in your subordinates.

The corollary to being on time is always being in the right place. Know exactly where you are supposed to be well in advance of the time you are due there. Always build enough time into your schedule to find unfamiliar locations, and don't forget to check on the small details: Do you know the building, room, or training area where you are supposed to be? Are roads, gates, or sections of the post along your route closed during certain hours of the day? Do not get caught staring at a closed gate, a blocked road, or a locked door on your way to an important meeting, briefing, or worse, when slated to join a departing convoy or board an outbound aircraft.

Regarding personal appearance, it is hard to conceive of an area that is more important to an officer's credibility. For the rest of your career, Soldiers, peers, superiors, and promotion boards alike will judge you by the way you look in uniform. For an officer, a crisp, professional military appearance should be nonnegotiable. Just as importantly, as an officer, you will be expected to set the example for your Soldiers when it comes to uniform and appearance standards. You must also be ready to correct Soldiers on a uniform or appearance issue when necessary.⁵ To fulfill these responsibilities, you must become intimately familiar with the relevant uniform and appearance regulations and stay abreast of the latest changes in these regulations.⁶

Setting the example in your military appearance embodies more than simply meeting the standard. It also involves paying attention to detail and taking the extra steps necessary to make sure you look sharp and professional at all times. In the garrison environment, keep your uniform pressed, maintain shined boots, ensure your hair conforms to Army standards, and wear and shape your beret correctly. In the field, maintaining your military appearance entails conducting personal hygiene every day, to include shaving for males, as well as keeping your individual equipment clean, wearing your equipment properly, and doing your best to keep yourself as presentable as possible. Remember, your responsibility to look and act like a professional does not end when you leave the garrison area.

Coupled with your responsibility to maintain high standards for personal appearance is the importance of maintaining a superior level of physical fitness. Make no mistake—your ability to perform physical training alongside your Soldiers is absolutely critical to your credibility. Your goal should not simply be to pass the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT). As a leader, you should strive to exceed Army standards. When it comes to organized physical training (PT), your role is to lead and motivate your soldiers by your personal example. Officers should never whine, complain, or give a half-hearted performance during PT. Organized PT is a golden opportunity for you to show Soldiers what you are made of; give them 110%, and they will be proud to call you their leader.

Like many of an officer's key responsibilities, staying in shape is not always easy. You may work in an office where there is no organized PT program or you may find yourself falling back on an excuse—too busy to do PT. Beware of these pitfalls. When there is no organized office PT program or when you are extremely busy, you must be self-disciplined enough to make time for PT. Also, do not make the mistake of avoiding PT because you are waiting for enough free time to execute a complex exercise program. Instead, do whatever you can whenever you can. When it comes to PT, a little bit of something is always better than a whole lot of nothing. The profession of arms is mentally and physically taxing, and a regular, rigorous exercise program will benefit both your body and your mind. You will be healthier, think clearer, live longer, and set a good example for your Soldiers if you exercise regularly.

⁵ Do not forget, if you are a male officer you must also take the time to learn the uniform and appearance rules that apply specifically to females. If you are a female officer, the converse is true.

⁶ U.S. DEP'T OF ARMY, REG. 670-1, WEAR AND APPEARANCE OF THE ARMY UNIFORM (3 Feb. 2005), is not always the last word. Very often, commanders will issue local uniform policies that apply to units or your installation. Local uniform policies are usually published in some form of handbook issued to Soldiers.

Finally, consider a few words of advice on military bearing and military courtesies. Just as you will never hurt yourself by being early, you will also never hurt yourself by erring on the side of formality. Learning and practicing proper military courtesies is essential for officers, and is a key component of being a military professional. This area is sometimes, however, overlooked by JAs. Never follow the lead of a peer or even a superior who is lax in their approach to the customs and courtesies of the service. Maintain your professional bearing at all times, and you will never be sorry you did so.

Superior officers are addressed as “Sir” or “Ma’am.” They are never answered with “Yeah,” “Yep,” “Nah,” or “Nope.” A group of male officers is addressed as “Gentlemen,” not “Sirs,” and a group of female officers is addressed as “Ladies,” not “Ma’am’s.” Stand when a superior officer enters your office and do not sit in a superior’s office until told to do so. When walking beside a superior officer outdoors, walk to his left. When you encounter a superior officer outside, salute smartly and render the proper greeting. Remember, a salute is an exchange of courtesy and respect between warriors. Salute proudly, and expect others to do the same.

Likewise, never forget that you are a commissioned officer deserving of proper military courtesy from your subordinates. Never tolerate insolence, disrespect, a failure to salute, or any other breach of proper military courtesy. If you ever feel uncertain about making an on the spot correction, remember what a senior noncommissioned officer (NCO) once told me: “Everyone in uniform knows the rules. Soldiers learn them in basic training; officers learn them in OBC. The maximum effective range of an excuse in this area is exactly zero meters.”

A team sergeant at the Joint Readiness Training Center (JRTC), probably said it best: “When an officer looks or acts unprofessional, his subordinates will do one of two things: they will either emulate him or lose respect for him. There is no third alternative.” As you progress through your career, keep these two choices in mind. Be an officer your Soldiers are proud to emulate and you will always stay on course.

2: Patience, Perspective, and a Positive Attitude

Life as an officer has never been easy, however, to whom much is given, much is expected. With the Army’s high operational tempo, everyone, to include newly commissioned officers, is expected to do more with less, and to get it done yesterday. Just as you would not run full speed through the woods while trying to stay on azimuth, however, you should not expect to go 100 miles an hour every day, giving every problem the same priority. In trying to find the right approach to life as an officer, try to remember the three Ps: patience, perspective, and a positive attitude.

First, when the pressure is on, remain patient, and try not to run in several directions at once. You will be more effective when you take a few extra moments to think things through before acting. Patience under pressure is a learned art, so practice patience, especially if you are impatient by nature. You may be surprised at how you can improve your ability to deal calmly with high-pressure situations with a little practice.

Second, remember that as a leader, your attitude, demeanor, and personal style will set the tone for your organization. A former regimental commander used to say: “If the Boss gets excited, he’ll spook the herd.” Excitable types rarely make good bosses. Instead, emulate leaders who are calm, steady, and resolute in the face of pressure, deadlines, and even danger. When things get stressful, keep an even keel and don’t contribute to a stampede.

Perspective is another key component of good leadership. Everything cannot be a priority, so work on your ability to determine what is critical and what is not. Start by determining what your boss’s priorities are. As a general rule, your priorities should be “nested” within those items your boss thinks are important. “If nobody’s bleeding and nobody’s dying, then it’s probably not the time to get excited.” These are good words to live by, especially with regard to daily issues. If you feel yourself becoming emotionally involved in an issue, make it a practice to take a step back and reassess the issue’s importance. Set priorities for yourself and your subordinates. People work better and are much more motivated when they understand the mission and work toward a common goal.

Finally, remember that optimism is infectious. As a commissioned officer you owe it to your subordinates, your peers, and your superiors to bring a positive, can-do attitude to your job. No one will follow a whiner or a naysayer for long so work to motivate your subordinates daily through your own personal, positive example.⁷

⁷ Historian Stephen Ambrose quotes General Dwight Eisenhower as stating: “Optimism and pessimism are infectious and they spread more rapidly from the head down than in any other direction.” STEPHEN E. AMBROSE, D-DAY, JUNE 6, 1944: THE CLIMACTIC BATTLE OF WORLD WAR II 61 (1994).

3: Anger Never Wins

Anger never wins. According to historian Stephen Ambrose, General Dwight D. Eisenhower relied on these three simple words when facing complex and frustrating situations as Supreme Allied Commander during World War II.⁸ While few of us will ever have to shoulder a burden akin to Eisenhower's, if you spend any length of time in the Army, you will inevitably encounter trying situations. When you feel yourself responding negatively to a frustrating situation, take a deep breath and remember Eisenhower's mantra. You will rarely, if ever, go wrong by keeping a cool head, but you will almost always regret things said and done in anger.⁹

Admittedly, ire can sometimes be the right answer, but the situations that call for it are few and far between.¹⁰ When you do have to assert your authority or take a subordinate to task, remember the old Army maxim: praise in public, punish in private. Unless a Soldier's behavior is blatantly insubordinate, always take the Soldier aside or go behind closed doors before you dress them down. This rule is especially critical when dealing with officers or noncommissioned officers. Absent flagrant disrespect, never undercut the authority of an officer or an NCO by scolding them in front of their peers or subordinates.

Be aware that this sanguine attitude is contrary to the way some officers, many of them very senior in rank, feel is the best way to accomplish things in the Army. While these types of individuals are few and far between in today's Army, during your military career you may encounter a boss who is what soldiers refer to as "a screamer." When you do, remember a few simple survival tips.

First, never take that person's anger personally. If you are the unfortunate target of your boss's anger, salute, move out, and do what needs to be done. If you made a mistake, do not let it happen again. If you did not make a mistake, but were nonetheless chastised, put the episode down in the "life isn't fair" column and move on.

Second, when you are the target of your boss's wrath, do not argue, explain, make excuses, or try to mitigate. This is often a very hard concept for JAs to master. As attorneys, the natural reaction under pressure is to plead your case. Just don't do it. No one cares why you dropped the ball or why you cannot get something done.¹¹ If your boss is on the warpath, the only three phrases that should ever escape your lips are: "Yes, Sir," "No, Sir," or "I will find out, Sir." Any other response will generally only create more problems.

Finally, remember that a boss who erupts over every little issue quickly loses effectiveness. If you supervise Soldiers for any length of time, you will quickly learn that they will make mistakes. Carefully debate your response to those mistakes before you react out of anger. My first company commander provided great advice on this topic: "When good people screw up, they will feel worse about their mistake than you can ever make them feel." Remember this statement, and remember the higher your rank, the less you should have to raise your voice. If a subordinate makes a mistake, before getting angry, consider the most constructive way to handle the situation. Aim for a response that helps the Soldier learn and grow versus a response that simply makes you feel good.¹²

4: Ask Questions, Admit Mistakes, and Share Credit

Many JAs come to the profession of arms with little or no knowledge of what Soldiers actually do for a living. This is understandable, especially for the direct commissionee. If you are new to the Army, there is certainly no shame in being

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ One of the many valuable lessons I learned from my first staff judge advocate was the value of staying calm and treating everyone, even obstinate people, with courtesy and kindness. This leader believed that whether it's a recalcitrant pay clerk or a mendacious witness on the stand in the courtroom, the best way to get people to do something is to make them *want* to do it.

¹⁰ By all means, before directing your anger at anyone, be 100% certain your facts are correct. You are guaranteed to look foolish if you fly off the handle based on incorrect information.

¹¹ The author learned this lesson the hard way when, as a second year ROTC cadet attending the U.S. Army Airborne course in May of 1983, he attempted to explain to a visibly impatient NCO from the Airborne School cadre why his PT shirt was not clean and ready for inspection. The Airborne instructor, much less constrained by the rules that affect the behavior of modern-day NCOs, repeatedly slapped the author's helmet, called him obscene names, and then made the author low crawl around the platoon formation.

¹² The same holds true for dealing with people via e-mail. It is very easy to get upset over an issue and send a scathing reply. Think very hard before you do so. When responding to a contentious issue, type your response then take a walk around the building and cool off. Read your e-mail again then ask yourself, is this *really* what I want to say?

initially ignorant, however, that excuse has a limited shelf life. As a professional, you have an obligation to learn the intimate details of your profession, and as a leader, you have an obligation to learn the basic skills every Soldier should know.

Just as you could not properly advise a corporate client without a working knowledge of the corporation's business, you cannot expect to be credible when advising a Soldier or a commander if you have no understanding about their unit, their mission, and the equipment they use to do their job. The easiest way to learn what Soldiers do is to ask them. Everyone enjoys talking about what he or she does for a living. If you ask a Soldier to explain his unit's mission or show a genuine interest in how a particular weapon or a piece of equipment works, you will receive a lengthy and enthusiastic block of instruction from that Soldier, one that will likely rival any presentation on the same topic that you might receive at a proponent school. Never be afraid to ask questions. Your fellow Soldiers will be your best teachers, and you will be amazed at how much you can learn when you take the time to talk to them.¹³

Inevitably, you will learn some lessons the old fashioned way. The first rule of dealing with mistakes is own up to them as soon as possible. Unlike wine, the results of mistakes do not get better with age. The sooner you admit your error, the sooner you can go to work repairing the damage. Secondly, never try to excuse a mistake. Professor Dale Carnegie once wrote, "Any fool can defend his or her mistakes and most fools do."¹⁴ Fight the urge to make excuses when you or your people have dropped the ball. Most importantly, never blame subordinates for mistakes. Per tradition of the officer corps, an officer is responsible for everything his personnel do or fail to do. Blaming a subordinate is absolutely unseemly for an officer. At the end of the day, the most constructive approach you can take to mistakes is to learn from them and move on.

Just as you will make some mistakes as a new officer, you will also have your share of successes. Success in the Army is very rarely an individual effort, so when things go well for you, remember to share credit with the people who helped you get there. Make it a practice to take every opportunity, no matter how small, to recognize your subordinates publicly for their hard work. That recognition may be as simple as a pat on the back and kudos at a morning formation or as formal as an impact award. The form your recognition takes is not as important as you, a leader, taking the time to offer your genuine, sincere appreciation for a job well done. Soldiers work hard and make substantial sacrifices so make sure you always give credit where credit is due.

5: Never Question Motives

There is an old joke among Soldiers that no matter what echelon you are assigned to, everyone above you is an idiot and everyone below you is incompetent. When you are a platoon leader, the company leadership is clueless. When you are on battalion staff, you lament the idiots at brigade. As a part of the brigade staff, you routinely wonder what division is thinking.

Every Soldier is guilty of parochialism to a certain extent. In the words of one of my former commanders, "Where you stand is where you sit." While there may be a rare occasions where a more narrow-minded attitude is justified, most of the time it is not. Likewise, it is unfair and unprofessional to assume that a tasking, order, or policy you do not agree with is based on merely on someone's stupidity.

I learned a valuable lesson about this type of attitude while assigned to the JRTC Operations Group. While discussing a seemingly arbitrary request from higher headquarters, a fellow senior observer/controller explained his philosophy for dealing with his fellow soldiers: "I try never to question anyone's motives," he told me, "it makes life a whole lot easier." As I reflected on these comments, I realized his attitude was correct. Soldiers and units all have their own unique sets of pressures and priorities and it makes little sense to immediately assign bad motives to a fellow Soldier.

As you progress through your military career, you will proceed upward through the ranks and serve at a variety of different echelons. As you make this journey, you will see that there are in fact smart, dedicated, hard-working Soldiers at every level of command. Seldom if ever will any of these individuals do anything with the express purpose of making your life more difficult, so set a good example for your Soldiers by eschewing baseless, negative characterizations. Start from the premise that most people in the Army are working toward the common good and you will get more done and expend significantly less stomach acid throughout your military career.

¹³ On an individual level, everyone—officers, NCOs, and junior enlisted soldiers alike—should be able to perform basic Soldier skills. Irrespective of branch or military occupational specialty, every Soldier should all be able to shoot, move, communicate, and apply basic first aid.

¹⁴ DALE CARNEGIE, *HOW TO WIN FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE* 131 (1936).

6: Do Not Just Complain; Offer Solutions

A few years ago during the course of a Mission Rehearsal Exercise (MRE) at Fort Polk, Louisiana, I was fully engaged in a wholesale violation of rule 5 above. Frustrated with a situation, I spent several minutes painstakingly lamenting the shortcomings of a particular higher headquarters element to a senior JA. The senior JA listened patiently to my petulant rant, then calmly retorted: “OK, that’s all well and good, now what are *you* doing to change things?” As I slithered from my soapbox, embarrassed by my unprofessionalism, I knew immediately that he was right, and I was wrong.

As leaders and professionals, it is incumbent on us to leave our units better than we found them. When in your daily duties you notice an inefficient practice or nonsensical rule, do not just complain. Be a positive force. Analyze the problem, craft a practical solution, and present your recommendations to the responsible person. You might not succeed every time, but at least you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you did your best to be part of the solution and not part of the problem.

7: Untie the Knot

As an officer, you will routinely be confronted with what seem to be unsolvable problems. When you find yourself staring at the proverbial Gordian knot,¹⁵ do not panic or lose heart. Remember, there are very few situations that are genuinely hopeless. The difference between success and failure is usually a combination of patience and hard work.

Many years ago while serving as an infantry officer in Korea, I was selected to fill the billet of executive officer (XO) for my battalion’s headquarters and headquarters company (HHC). As HHC XO for a J-series mechanized infantry battalion, I was responsible for the maintenance and readiness of sixty-four wheeled-vehicles and twenty-four armored personnel carriers, among other things. My first priority was to organize the motor pool.

Having spent my entire time as an officer leading a rifle platoon, I was exceedingly ignorant about how to tackle the monumental task of efficiently organizing a motor pool, ensuring maintenance was done on time, supervising technically-competent mechanics, and overseeing the mountains of paperwork and the litany of administrative responsibilities attendant to vehicle maintenance in the Army.

As lieutenants (LTs) are wont to do, I sought the counsel of a fellow LT—an officer for whom I had great respect. After confessing, somewhat sheepishly, that I had no idea where to start with my motor pool and maintenance nightmare, he smiled, and said four simple words that I have never forgotten, “Start at the beginning.”

Always start at the beginning. Take a step back, assess the situation, make a plan, and untie the knot. If you begin with the notion that no problem will ever get the best of you, you will be much more inclined to succeed. Someone once said that motivation arises from the desire to overcome. Cultivate that desire in yourself, and your Soldiers will follow you.

8: Never Shy Away from Difficult Missions, Tough Jobs, or Hard Schools

The only thing permanent in the Army is change. Unlike our civilian counterparts, service members routinely change jobs, assignments, bosses, and duty stations. You will have to face the prospect of being the new guy or gal on the team and eventually the new boss more than a few times during your military career. No matter how experienced you are, the prospect of a new job always comes with a certain amount of anxiety. To help assuage some of your trepidation, remember that you will never have a job in the Army that you feel completely ready for.

When you assume a new position, be patient. Do not expect to be an instant expert or an overnight success. Instead, commit yourself to learning daily about your new billet and constantly remind yourself that you can do the job just as well or better than anyone else. It is much easier to be an effective leader when you are comfortable with the details of your job, so never stop learning.

In this same vein, never let anxiety or uncertainties about your abilities dissuade you from taking on a tough mission or volunteering for a hard school. Remember, nothing worth having is easy to obtain, and you will never know the incredible

¹⁵ The term “Gordian knot” refers to an exceedingly complicated problem or deadlock. The term originated with the story of an intricate knot tied by King Gordius of Phrygia and cut by Alexander the Great with his sword after hearing an oracle promise that whoever could undo it would be the next ruler of Asia. See Northland Pioneer College, Glossary, <http://www.northland.cc.az.us/pos221/resource/definiti.htm> (last visited Aug. 15, 2005).

satisfaction of successfully completing a difficult challenge if you never try. When a seemingly intimidating opportunity presents itself, marshal your courage and step up to the plate. Whether it is a difficult job that others are reluctant to undertake or a demanding school such as Airborne, Air Assault, or Jumpmaster, always steel yourself with the notion that you are just as capable as anyone else. From a career perspective, the specialized qualifications these types of schools provide will make you eligible for a wider variety of assignments. From a leadership standpoint, you will enjoy a significant advantage in terms of credibility when your Soldiers and the commanders you advise see you wearing the same special skill badges they worked hard to earn.

While there are certainly no guarantees in the Army, you will generally find that every time you raise your hand and volunteer to take a job or attend a school, you will eventually be rewarded, both personally and professionally. If you are ever uncertain about whether to take advantage of the type of opportunity discussed in this section, remember the motto of the British Army Special Air Service: “Who Dares Wins.”¹⁶

9: Your Contribution to Mission Success Is Not Measured by Your Proximity to the Objective

As members of a combat service support branch, it is sometimes difficult for JAs to understand how they further the Army’s mission of fighting and winning the nation’s wars. There are a number of valid answers to this question, however, consider the thoughts of retired COL Keith Nightingale, a veteran of numerous special operations assignments. In a speech to the 2000 Special Operations Legal Conference, COL Nightingale gave an excellent presentation on the importance of a commander’s legal advisor. Of the many astute points that COL Nightingale made that morning, the one that has always stayed with me was his maxim: “Your contribution to mission success is not necessarily measured by your proximity to the objective.”¹⁷

The point of the spear is extremely small, and there are very few Soldiers who will ever actually fire a weapon downrange. For the rest of us, our job is to do our duty to the utmost of our ability and be secure in the notion that our work contributes in its own way to mission success. Never discount the work you do for Soldiers, commanders, the Army, and the nation. As a member of the JAGC, you represent everything that makes the American Army what it is. You symbolize order, discipline, honesty, fairness, and an Army that has enforced and adhered to the rule of law for over 200 years, no matter how tough the circumstances or how despicable the enemy’s conduct. Your efforts and the efforts of every other Soldier in our branch ultimately set the conditions for success on the battlefield, so take pride in what you do. Approach every task with the conviction that you are part of a world-class team and remember that Soldiers and commanders everywhere need your commitment and special expertise.

10: Be Bigger Than Yourself

As you proceed through your military career, you will encounter ups and downs, fairness and unfairness, efficiency and inefficiency. You will serve in assignments where you feel a genuine sense of satisfaction and others where you may feel you take two steps back for every one step forward. If you stay in uniform long enough, you will undoubtedly experience periods of physical hardship, family separation, and personal sacrifice. Never forget that as an officer, you will be expected to endure the unpleasant aspects of military life without complaint. The best way to deal with hardship as a leader is to constantly strive to be bigger than yourself.

Realize that as an officer and a leader, it is never about you; your wants, needs, and comfort are always secondary. Your Soldiers should always eat first, sleep first, wash first, go home first, and get paid first. Whenever there is a job to be done, no matter how tough or unpleasant it may be, you should be the first to raise your hand and volunteer, and you should, to the extent humanly possible, stay positive during the completion of that job. Being an officer means subordinating yourself to the unit, the mission, the Army, and the nation. At times, this may even mean paying the ultimate price.

One of the most moving and eloquent summations of an officer’s duty is found at the United States Naval Academy chapel at Annapolis, Maryland. Carved over the doors of the chapel is the Latin phrase, *Non Sibi Sed Patria*—Not Self, But Country.¹⁸ Your military rank is a reflection of the trust your country has placed in you. Your fellow citizens and the families of your Soldiers expect you to put personal desires aside and perform your duties in the best interest of the nation.

¹⁶ See United Kingdom, Special Air Service, <http://www.specwar.net/europe/sas.htm> (last visited Aug. 8, 2005).

¹⁷ Colonel (Retired) Keith Nightingale, Address at the 2000th Special Operations Legal Conference (Mar. 20-24, 2000).

¹⁸ See United States Naval Academy, A Brief History of the United States Naval Academy 1950s, <http://www.usna.edu/VirtualTour/150years/1950.htm> (last visited Aug. 15, 2005).

Conclusion

When Soldiers initially try their hand at navigating through the woods, they make short trips and look for obvious checkpoints. As they evolve into more seasoned navigators, they become comfortable under more challenging circumstances- navigating at night, reading the subtleties of the map, and developing a feel for distance. An officer's growth as a leader and a professional evolves in much the same way. Contrary to popular belief, there are few, if any, born leaders. An officer becomes a better leader and a more professional Soldier through hard work, practice, experience, and a genuine desire to learn. In your journey toward success as an officer, keep in mind the ideas and examples set forth in this article. Remember, with the right azimuth, a well-measured distance, and some reliable checkpoints, you can go anywhere.