

Leadership in a complex environment, a Belgian and European approach
Speech at the graduation ceremony of the U.S. Army Maneuver Captains Career Course

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Ladies and gentlemen, I am aware that my modest contribution to this ceremony, at your prestigious Maneuver Center of Excellence, is not enough to acquit myself of my debt to the US military, especially to the soldiers of the First army of General Courtney H. Hodges and the Third army of General George S. Patton who, during the Battle of the Bulge, in the winter 1944-1945, liberated my paternal grandparents and my hometown, 50 km north-west from Bastogne.

I am happy and proud to participate in this ceremony that ends the U.S. Army Maneuver Captains Career Course, by sharing with you my insight, advice and experiences of being a leader in a complex environment, as required by those future commanders of U.S. and allied militaries, who already know that they all will be expected to make vital decisions in a world that is characterized by a growing complexity.

Before to respond to your expectations, I want to congratulate you for your success in this course. At the head of your unit, you will soon accomplish the most basic, and often the most dangerous, tactical missions, for our security.

An older officer may still be useful, for example as a mentor. During the 'battalion phase' of the M triple C, a lot of mentorship sessions already occurred and a lot of tips for future maneuver officers were provided. In the first part of my speech, I will issue five new tips.

In the second part of my speech, I will share with you some conclusions of my doctoral research on European Defense, in order that you remember that it is the duty of the officers not to repeat this mistake reported by Colonel of U.S. Infantry Harry G. Summers, Jr. He wrote that, between World War II and 1980, « Almost all of the professional literature on military strategy was written by civilian analysts - political scientists from the academic world and systems analysts from the Defense community- »¹

¹ Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy, A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, New York, Dell, 1984, p. 22 al 2.

Thus, and this is **my first tip**, don't hesitate to be proactive, to already envisage future functions, even at strategic level, and to prepare you. Patton said: I quote: Prepare for the unknown by studying how others in the past have coped with the unforeseeable and the unpredictable.

Not every officer remains indeed in maneuverable units, at tactical level, until the end of his career. You know that, from Washington to Eisenhower, through Churchill and de Gaulle, former soldiers, with their leading experience, assumed, far from the operational field, the highest office of the State. Alongside these exceptions, every army opens a wide spread of tracks and levels to those who want to give their life the best possible sense: providing security to their country and his citizens, and to the allied nations.

My second tip is: be aware that this is not the function that honors, but the way it is filled. Do your work flawlessly, but without compromising. Primarily for your own job satisfaction, because your job is, and will remain for years, the most important, in terms of hours, part of your life. Secondly, for the well-being of your subordinates and your peers, and to satisfy your superiors. You know that one of the conditions of leadership is to be in accordance with his own conscience, what inspires confidence.

Every day and certainly the last one, at least your conscience will judge you. But it is not enough you think to be right, it is necessary that your social environment gives you reason. Try to follow leaders open to change, and run as soon as possible away from the conservative ones, because like any living being, the military must adapt to survive.

My third tip is: realize that every commander has to build his own experience, and thus, try to be as available as possible. I hope that your environment, including your family, and your health, will help you, and if not, that you will find in you the strength to be successful.

Professional excellence, moral rigor and experience are insufficient. Human being is a social being, and sociability is particularly crucial for the military. You will not do much without your subordinates, colleagues, leaders, family members and friends. **My fourth tip** is: try to build a sustainable network, within the armed forces and the civil society. It helped me a lot in my career and in other activities.

Soon or later, you will have to implement a change in the way your unit processes. **My fifth tip** is: remember that the success will firstly be based on your commitment, on the way you will express your vision to the staff, direct and indicate priorities. The success will secondly be based on your leadership, on your charisma, on your expertise and on your ability to motivate, by taking the other into account. Discipline is not enough: change requires consensus and personal involvement.

Change needs a dynamic balance between the technical factors, and the human factors. After Patton's words, "you need to overcome the tug of people against you as you reach for high goals". Try, for example, to convince the members of the organization you will lead that change will represent for them a real improvement, or put them away from imminent danger. Once convinced, they will want change, and urgently. But the sense of urgency may not lead to brutal actions: they causes revolutions, who are often less effective than reforms: these, sparking less opposition, produce more lasting results.

It is time to go over to my second topic: *European Defense*.

But why an European Defense? Well, ladies and gentlemen, do you know what Dwight D. Eisenhower, the then SACEUR, said in 1951: « *[With] unity achieved, Europe could build adequate security and, at the same time, continue the march of human betterment that has characterized western civilization. [...] If, with [U.S.] moral and material assistance, the free European nations could [unite], the laborious NATO machinery of mutual defense [could be] vastly simplified.* »?²

Unfortunately, our governments have been unable since then to create the United States of Europe, to look for synergies and economies of scale, by federalizing European defense, by applying the principle of subsidiarity, which states that every political problem must be resolved by the appropriate level of power.

Progressing from the perspective traced by Eisenhower, but also by Churchill, a few years before, my research analyzed from 2010 to 2015 the impact of the Europeanization on military affairs and developed a concept of European defense and security.

² Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Address at The English Speaking Union Dinner at Grosvenor House, Park Lane, London, 3/7/1951*, <http://www.eisenhowermemorial.org/stories/english-speaking-union-speech.htm>, seen on 2/9/2012.

I found that, although reduced by two third since the fall of the Berlin Wall, European defense spending is still 200 billion euros per year, about one third of the U.S. defense budget. But it is wasted in great part: Europe generates only 6% of the U.S. military capabilities. With equal efficiency, Europe should have 6 times more capabilities. The 28 EU Member States still have one and a half million soldiers, but about 5% are send in external operations. Many weapon systems are inoperative, due to a lack of maintenance and spare parts. The intelligence services are struggling to communicate, because they work within different legal frameworks. Personnel and infrastructure absorb more than two third of the European defense budgets. What remains for the formation, training, maintenance, retrofitting, intelligence, cyber defense and operations is very insufficient.

That is why I advised the then President of the European Council of heads of State and Governments, and the then Belgian Prime Minister to revive the political Europe and the European defense. As Patton said, "If everyone is thinking alike, then somebody isn't thinking".

Because the European Council in December 2013 only produced a small step forward after seven years of stillness, I founded the European Defence Society, to put the ideas of Eisenhower about European Defense in concrete form, to promote humanism. Humanism summarizes the European values.

It is now time to conclude.

Helping to avoid to repeat 9/11 or the Paris or Brussels attacks seems me the best way to honor the victims, to support their families, the members of the emergency and security services, the citizens who intervened.

In Europe, it requires making it capable of ensuring its own protection, of becoming, finally, a valuable U.S. ally. Therefore, we need innovative, federal solutions, and, within the European Defence Society, I do my best to contribute to their development.

In the complex, unstable, dangerous world that surrounds the West, it is highly desirable that the latter acts, before it's too late. It takes sacrifice, perseverance, resolution in pursuing the goal.

I don't know what the future threat will be, but I already know who will have to act. It's you, ladies and gentlemen. Within the NATO or other alliances, stay one force, one fight.