

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES

INFORMATION DIVISION
DEPARTMENT OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS
OTTAWA - CANADA

No.48/10

HOW THE PRINCIPLES OF WAR CAN BE APPLIED TO PEACE

An address by Field Marshal, The Right Honourable The Viscount Alexander of Tunis, K.G., Governor General of Canada, delivered at MacDonald College, McGill University, on the occasion of the Second Annual War Memorial Assembly, February 26, 1948.

On this historic occasion when we are gathered here to commemorate the many men and women of Macdonald College who served in two World Wars, and to honour the memory of the seventy-four who gave their lives, I feel deeply honoured for the privilege of addressing you tonight.

Those names which are inscribed in the Book of Remembrance, which has just been unveiled, were those of great Canadians. They were citizens who were willing to give all they had for their country. We honour them, and I need not say that this generation and those who come after us will ever remember them and their deeds.

During the recent World War, I had the good fortune to command Canadian soldiers in battle. And amongst all the many fighting men of the different nations which composed my Army Group, none played a more gallant and distinguished part in our victory than Canada's own sons-- your countrymen.

Those days now belong to the past, and glorious as they were they will only be lived again when old warriors get together to exchange their reminiscences or be brought to life once more in the pages of history books. Therefore, tonight we will say "farewell to the past" and direct our thoughts to the problems of the present and the future.

In choosing a title for my address to you this evening, I have been to some extent influenced by the occasion which brings us together on this Second Annual War Memorial Assembly, but perhaps even more so by my experiences as a soldier over the past thirty-seven years. I hope, therefore, that some of my observations, based on that background, may prove of some value to you in helping find a solution to the manifold problems which face us today.

Most people of this generation have a very sincere dread and hatred of war. The word "war" scares them. Now, I think it very important that we are quite clear in our minds what this word, war, means. It is not a curious phenomenon which arrives suddenly by itself and strikes us down like a thunderbolt. War is no more peculiar than peace--they are both conditions. War is simply the extension, by other means, of the ends which a nation hopes to gain by peaceful means. Clausevitz said "War is the continuation of policy by

other means". The sharp cleavage, therefore, which many envisage existing between war and peace is not so sharply defined after all. It is a transition only, whereby the methods change but the objects remain the same.

I would ask you to dwell on this point, and in your study of past history and of day to day events, maintain a proper perspective because it is greatly influenced by this fact which I have just mentioned.

No doubt some of you have read the memoirs of the statesmen who held high office before World War II, and you will see from their observations that so-called peaceful events foreshadowed those darker ones to come.

Since the beginning of time, the conduct of war has been governed by certain principles and strangely enough these principles have remained immutable despite the advance of science and the change of methods of warfare down through the ages.

Tonight I am going to enumerate these principles of war and suggest to you how they can be applied to the rules of peace.

A principle may be defined as a fundamental truth which will serve as a basis for reasoning and which, in turn, will result in the evolution of a general law guiding subsequent action.

Now the first and paramount principle of war is the selection and maintenance of the objective--or aim.

This must be regarded as the master principle to which all others must be subservient.

It is, therefore, essential in the conduct of war as a whole, and in every operation of war, to select and clearly define the aim.

Each phase and each separate operation must be directed towards the achievement of this supreme aim.

Naturally each operation will have its own limited objective, but taken as a sum, all operations are designed to gain the desired goal. Operations which do not enhance the achievement of the ultimate goal are worse than useless.

On the 10th August, 1943, Mr. Winston Churchill handed me a directive written in his own hand which read as follows:

1. "Your prime and main duty will be to take or destroy, at the earliest opportunity, the German-Italian Army commanded by Field Marshal Rommel, together with all its supplies and establishments in Egypt and Libya.
2. You will discharge or cause to be discharged such other duties as pertain to your Command without prejudice to the task in paragraph (1) which must be considered paramount in His Majesty's interests."

There is no mistaking what was wanted here.

You will note that the first paragraph defined beyond any shadow of doubt what the "aim" was. And the second paragraph ensured that the maintenance of the aim was not to be prejudiced under any circumstances.

Many of you here tonight may think that the selection and maintenance of an aim is much easier in war than it is in peace.

Whether that be so or not is beside the point. Let us for argument's sake assume that the selection of an aim in peace time is difficult--that is no reason why it should be avoided. The hard fact remains that he who chooses an aim and sticks to it will make his way in life--and he who does not will drift aimlessly like a ship without a rudder.

Of course, I cannot venture to suggest towards what specific goal you should direct yourselves--that is a matter for each individual to decide for himself. That free choice of action is one of the great blessings of our way of life in Canada and one of our most cherished possessions.

But I can say this:--If every individual has a clear purpose in life and is prepared to work for it, he will not only benefit himself, but achieve the great aim of making his country happier, stronger and more prosperous.

In concluding my remarks on this principle of war, and of peace, I suggest you ask yourselves: "Have I selected my aim, and if so, am I maintaining my course towards it". If the answer is "no" - then reassess your position and correct your course.

Another principle of war which has its counterpart in peace is -
"the maintenance of morale".

History affords endless examples that success in war depends more on moral attributes than on material possessions.

I do not want you to misunderstand that statement because numbers, armament and resources, are essential ingredients of victory, but alone they cannot compensate for lack of courage, energy, determination, skill and the bold offensive spirit which springs from pride of race and a national determination to conquer.

Today we are faced with problems at home and abroad, the solution of which will demand every bit as much courage, energy and determination, as were required to win the war.

If we display less of these qualities, we will drift and gradually sink downwards and others will rise above us.

It is only human nature to feel sometimes depressed and discouraged when we gaze out on the world today. But when you feel like that, just think of the difficulties which your forebears overcame to make Canada, the country you enjoy in 1948.

It was only their high morale that made this

great achievement possible, for certainly those early pioneers were not blessed with many of the worldly goods such as: tools, instruments, railways and power installations which we all take for granted today.

The principle of morale, therefore, is just as important in peace as it is in war and takes a fitting place beside the first principle I gave you.

And now for the third principle: "offensive action".

This is the necessary forerunner of victory; it may be delayed, but until the initiative is seized and the offensive taken, victory is impossible.

No fight was ever won by sitting down.

It is the same in civil life.

Success can only come to individuals and to nations if they are prepared to take the offensive against those conditions and circumstances which bar the way to progress. Unless we, as individuals and as a nation, are willing to accept the challenge which confronts us, we are doomed; we either beat the challenge or we succumb to it.

Our next principle is - "Security".

A sufficient degree of security is essential in order to obtain freedom of action to launch a bold offensive in pursuit of the selected aim.

This entails adequate defence of vulnerable bases and other interests which are vital to the nation or the armed forces. Security does not imply undue caution and avoidance of all risks. On the contrary, once we have established a firm base, developments are unlikely to interfere seriously with the pursuit of a vigorous offensive.

Now, how do we interpret this in civil life? I think it means simply that as we go along we should build on a firm foundation. It means also that each individual must, so far as he is able, be a self-reliant and self-sustaining member of the community. He must not expect someone else to look after him if, by his own efforts, he is capable of looking after himself.

And nationally I think it means the broadening of this same individual philosophy. We must ensure that our home base is secure against threats from within as well as from without.

I do not propose to dwell on the need of armed forces in time of peace, for I think it requires no emphasis on my part to stress that we must be secure in the broadest national sense if we are to be sure that our own way of life will not again be threatened.

Surprise is yet another principle which has a most effective and powerful influence in war, and its moral effect is very great.

Every endeavour must be made to surprise the

enemy whilst guarding against being surprised oneself. By the use of surprise, results out of all proportion to the effort expended can be obtained, and in some operations when other factors are unfavourable, surprise may be essential to success.

Surprise can be achieved strategically, tactically, or by exploiting new weapons or material.

The elements of surprise are - secrecy, concealment, deception, originality, audacity and rapidity.

We, in Canada, have no desire to surprise with an ulterior motive, any nation. We do not, on the other hand, wish to be surprised ourselves either at home or abroad by some act or political movement which is detrimental to our well-being as a nation. To guard against this, we must keep forever alert so that we may not be caught napping.

As you are well aware, in many countries abroad subversive action has been carried on under cover and to such an extent that when disclosed it was already too late to do much about it.

We do not want that to happen here. Therefore, we must guard against being surprised.

To achieve success in war, it is essential to concentrate superior force, moral and material, to that of the enemy at the decisive time and place.

This is known as the principle of "Concentration of Force".

Concentration does not necessarily imply a massing of forces, but rather having them so disposed as to be able to unite them rapidly to deliver a decisive blow when and where required or to counter the enemy's threat.

If we look on the enemy in peacetime as any or all of the problems which require solution for the advancement of our people and the betterment of our country, this principle simply means that we should select first things first and concentrate our efforts in that direction - rather than disperse our energy by riding off in all directions at once.

For example, in your case as individuals, I would say that while you are within these walls, your primary objective is to obtain your degree and to that end you will no doubt require to concentrate your forces against that well known enemy, the final examinations.

In larger fields we see many good examples of this principle. Take, for instance, the Community Chests throughout Canada. Here we see many charitable organizations which were previously working independently and appealing for funds at various times and for various purposes, now concentrated against the enemy, Poverty.

And in a wider field still, we find the United Nations knit together with the aim and with the hope that by concentration of effort they may achieve a lasting peace.

This brings us logically to the principle of Economy of Effort.

In war a commander rarely has men or material to spare for all he would wish to do. Consequently, he must use for any one task only the requisite force capable of dealing with the situation.

There are many applications of this principle, but one is that we should not squander our natural resources in order to obtain a result that could be equally well attained by better methods and with less waste. This is a principle which applies to most phases of our life and is just as important to success in peace as it is in war.

And then there is Administration, if we can call it a principle.

Good administration in war makes it possible for the commander to have the maximum freedom of action in carrying out his plan and of applying the other principles which I have enumerated.

Bad administration will cripple the best laid plans and the results will be ruinous rather than successful.

I need not stress what an important role good administration, both economic and political, plays in the affairs of the individual, the nation, and indeed the whole world.

We are witnessing today a global order whose administration has been so disrupted by war, that even plans based on the highest humanitarian motives are almost impotent because the administrative machinery for carrying them out is broken down and rusty. Efforts are being made by UNESCO, the Marshall Plan and other measures to restore this machinery so that the world's administration may be restored and the world's troubles thereby alleviated.

The last, but one of our principles, is the "Principle of Flexibility".

Modern war demands a high degree of flexibility to enable pre-arranged plans to be altered to meet changing situations and unexpected developments.

This entails good training, organization, discipline and staff work and, above all, that flexibility of mind which gives rapidity of decision on the part of both the commander and his subordinates, which, in turn, ensures that time is never lost.

It calls also for physical mobility of a high order, both strategically and tactically, so that forces can be concentrated rapidly and economically at the decisive time and place. We must be prepared to alter our plans quickly once it becomes evident that circumstances demand it.

How often do we find in every day life that the course which seemed best, when it was originally set, is no longer the best.

It is then that we must be prepared to alter it to meet new factors, which changing economic conditions at home or abroad have produced. Once the necessity for change becomes evident, it is worse than useless to bemoan what might

have been. Let us rather grasp the new opportunity offered us and act with prompt decision.

Finally, we come to the last principle of all, but one of extreme importance. "The Principle of Co-operation".

In the Services, co-operation is based on team spirit and entails co-ordination of all units so as to achieve the maximum combined effort from the whole. Above all, goodwill and the desire to co-operate are essential at all levels.

The increased interdependence of the services on one another and on the civilian war effort at home, has made co-operation a matter of vital importance in modern war. This is one of the great principles which applies, without modification, just as much to peace as it does to war.

The greatest world organization for peace will stand or fail on that principle. Unless the spirit of co-operation can be nurtured and grow within the Assembly of the United Nations, the maximum combined effort for peace cannot be attained.

Closer home, we see a spirit of co-operation which is an example to the whole world. Never before have the nations of the Commonwealth stood more staunchly by each other than during the recent world war, whilst today, Canada bridges the Old World and the New, bringing two great peace-loving and democratic racial groups into close contact with each other.

We must see that this great spirit of co-operation is never impaired or weakened, but rather that it be steadily strengthened and improved. And let us never forget that co-operation at home here in Canada is equally important if Canada is to grow and develop into a major power, as I believe to be her destiny.

We who are here tonight have the means and the responsibility to contribute our share to the destiny of Canada and to the peace of the world. If we do our duty, we will at least have discharged our responsibility to those countrymen of ours whose names are forever honoured in that Book of Memory.