

ADDRESS BY BRIGADIER WOOTTEN, DSO Commander 18th Brigade 2nd AIF, circa 1942

The intention of this talk is to place before junior officers a number of their responsibilities and duties, which, it appears that they do not yet realise. These points I shall mention by no means cover all such responsibilities and are therefore not exhaustive; but they are all essential and of the greatest importance although, to the inexperienced officer, they may not yet appear so. Hence, they will be accepted as being so and the greatest attention paid to them.

Firstly, let us realise that in this war we are fighting not only for high ideals, but for our very existence as an Empire. We are fighting against a ruthless enemy who at present has the best trained, best equipped, and by far the largest army in the world. We must win. To make up for our inferiority in numbers and equipment, we must exceed and excel the army in military efficiency. "Military efficiency" comprises and includes many qualities and characteristics formed and built up by a system of military training, discipline and administration out of the raw material of the ordinary civilian. Let me say at once that I don't intend tonight to go into any question of weapon training or tactics training, except that officers must be thoroughly skilled and trained in the weapons and tactics of their army. It is my intention to talk about, chiefly, the responsibilities and duties of officers in regard to administration, interior economy and discipline. Having realised the seriousness of the position of the Empire at war, and having accepted a commission in the AIF and the implied trust to do everything in his power to become an efficient officer, it immediately devolves on every officer to study and work at the profession of arms as applied to himself with all his power from every available angle in order that he, and the men under him may reach the highest possible stage of military efficiency as soon as reasonably practicable. The Officer must realise that he must set the example. He cannot expect NCOs and men to be keen if he himself is not keen. He cannot expect to get good discipline if he himself is not well disciplined.

He cannot expect them to be smart if he himself is slovenly or punctual if he is not so. Hence, the first step is for the officer to take himself in hand, set a high standard for himself in ALL essentials and live up to that standard.

But here, I want to point out some of the common faults in officers themselves. Officers owe a high standard of duty and conduct not only to their uniform and the King's Commission which they hold but to their Unit, their Commanding Officer, their brother officers, and to the name of Australia, which they carry on their shoulders.

1. Officers must get used to the fact that the Army day is a 24 hour one. While any work or duty requires to be done, there is no such thing as knocking off work. Everything that requires to be done must be done, and the officer should enjoy doing it, out of his sense of service and duty.

2. Leave is a privilege which may be granted by a senior officer or higher authority. It is not a right and should not be sought or granted while any urgent work or duty remains uncompleted. Too many officers appear to think that as soon as ordinary parade hours are over, they have a right to expect leave. This is a totally wrong point of view.

3. An officer is under certain obligations of duty at ALL TIMES (even when on leave). He must at ALL TIMES take appropriate action to deal with any case of breach of discipline, whether of his own men or others, which would not otherwise be dealt with. If an officer cannot command men and maintain good discipline in a peace camp, such as this, he cannot expect their confidence and discipline in the trying circumstances of battle. When he gives an order, he must ensure that it is carried out. This implies his following it up. If you simply rely on its being done, then you will be let down.

4. Officers must father and mother their men. That is to say, it is the Officers' duty to attend to the quarters, the feeding, health, clothing, general care, cleanliness and recreation of his men. All these things he must receive his constant attention. The officer must ensure that then lines, tents, offices, etc, are scrupulously clean and all gear laid out and folded according to the correct pattern. Tent walls must be removed for the proper airing of tents in dry weather. On rainy days, tent walls will be arranged to prevent rain entering tents. All tent rope ends must be neatly picked up and coiled and all loose pegs collected. This is not being done at present. Every officer will make it a point of honour that his men are as comfortable as possible and fed before he himself goes off to look after his own comfort and food. If you take a real interest in your men and their welfare, they will appreciate it and they will back you by giving willing and loyal service. Officers must see that their men's clothing is repaired as soon as it commences to wear or tear. "*A stitch in time saves nine.*" They must ensure that his 'housewife' contains all requisites. Buttons must be kept sewn on all trousers and tunics. The men must be carefully watched to see that they bath themselves, that they change and wash their underclothing, that their feet and other parts are free from, or treated for tinea, etc., that their toenails are kept cut. The fitting and repair of their boots is of the greatest importance and a Platoon Commander's direct responsibility also. Officers must look after their men in the men's spare time and help with their recreation, games etc. This is one way that enables an officer to get to know his men thoroughly. He should get to know all about their families and private lives and get to know all men well. All these things are just as important here as in a parent battalion or Unit. If things are not right in any unit or sub-unit, it is more likely to be due to the Officers and NCOs than to the men.

5. This brings us to a further point - that Officers must insist on their NCOs functioning properly - - any slackness in discipline or lack of keenness or slovenliness must be corrected at once and the NCOs punished. Any lack on the part of NCOs to support their officers, or of officers to support one another, will be severely dealt with.

6. *Discipline of Officers.* Officers cannot be expected to have well disciplined and well conducted commands unless they themselves are well disciplined and well conducted. This implies, first of all, the carrying out by officers of all Standing Orders. If an officer does not carry out such orders, then he is to be punished like an NCO or other-rank for failing do so. It implies, also, a carrying-out of military custom and military etiquette. This casts on senior officers the duty:

- i. of instructing and informing the junior officers in regard to these matters;
- ii. of seeing that they carry them out.

It casts on junior officers the necessity of seeking out and learning them, and putting them into practice as soon as they can.

7. Some matters particularly which come to mind are:

- i. Carrying out of all security instructions
- ii. Drunkenness

Security instructions are not being carried out. Bolts are being left in rifles, rifles are not chained up, unauthorised ammunition is held by some personnel, revolvers and rifles have been fired under circumstances which call for court-martial charges. Some of the latter may be due to drink: but that is no excuse. In some officers' messes, there has been too much drunkenness and horseplay. This is a direct reflection on the Commanding Officers and the officers themselves. Any further cases will be made the subject of court-martial charges; COs will take that as a Direct Order. I do not wish or intend to stop officers from enjoying themselves in messes; but I do wish and intend that officers shall behave as officers should; otherwise I shall do all in my power to see that they cease to be officers, so let all to whom these remarks apply take immediate heed. Let it be clearly understood that, in all ranks, I intend to have a high standard of conduct and discipline -- I shall not hesitate to break or punish an officer or WO just as quickly as I would an NCO or private soldier.

8. Officers must show practical ability and common sense at all times. They must continually be on the alert and, apart from ceremonial, must at all times be where they can best control or instruct their men.

A number of Officers and NCOs march at the head of their men and cannot see what is going on at the rear of the column. Often the step is too long or too fast in front and the rear is almost doubling to keep up; often the standard of discipline and drill at the rear is very bad due to the fact that there is no supervision. In such cases, get at the rear or such other place that you can exercise control *and exercise it!*

There is only one standard of everything; that is the highest. See that you strive for it always. *Never* be content with a low standard at any time.

9. Strive at all times for the utmost efficiency in everything; be firm but tactful. Lead by personality and superior knowledge. Be always fair and consistent in your dealings with your men. Treat them as intelligent men. Take them into your confidence, where possible, and let them know not only the order, but the plan or as much of it as they may be told. Tell not only what has to be done; but, if possible, the "why". This applies more to battle; but often assists men to understand why certain things are done during training periods.

10. Remember above all that you are no longer civilians nor are your NCOs or men. The whole object of our being here is to turn every man, whatever his rank, into a thoroughly trained soldier of high morals, so that he can take his place in the line of battle and, by being a better soldier than the enemy, win.

To have thorough training and high morals, he must have thoroughly competent officers and NCOs and must have confidence in them. The lives of the finest fighting men in the world (when trained) are in your hands. Are you worthy of the trust? Can you make yourselves fit to command them and train them and lead them in battle? If not, you will waste their potential value and, in addition, you will waste many unnecessary lives. Your responsibility is terrific. See that as Australian Officers you rise to it. It is not easy; but it is well worth while, and your country and the Empire expect it of you.