MORALE IN BATTLE

ADDRESS GIVEN TO THE ROYAL SOCIETY
OF MEDICINE

BY

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I have chosen for my talk the subject of morale in battle. High morale is a quality without which no war can be won; it is therefore a vital quality. And since it is a mental quality, because it is essentially the product of a mind and a conscience, it will be of peculiar interest to the medical profession.

We must first understand what we mean by "morale." This is wrapped up in the human factor, since the raw material with which we soldiers have to deal is "men."

The Human Factor

I would like to begin by giving you my general views about the nature of our Army. One great lesson stands out clearly in my mind from the late war, in which we went through some very bad times, but stood up undaunted, and then hit back. It is this. The true and ultimate strength of a nation lies in its people, in their capacity to work, in their virility. It lies, in fact, in the national character. It is this national character that produces the fighting-man—the soldier.

The soldier is not chiefly a military figure; he is primarily a social figure. He is influenced by his home, his upbringing, and his historical tradition. He is only a soldier because military training has imposed a certain fixed pattern of behaviour upon him. The soldier is, in fact, a citizen of the nation. The Army is woven into the social fabric of the nation and is an integral part of the community. No matter what may be instilled into him in the Army, the soldier will retain his individual character, which he derives from his environment. He will reflect, primarily, the national character of his country. The national character is therefore of immense importance. Anything that weakens the national character weakens the Army. An army is not, and never can be, merely a collection of individuals. It is a fighting weapon moulded by discipline and controlled by leaders. The aim of an army is to achieve success in battle against the enemies of the nation. All training must be directed towards this end, and it must never be forgotten even though the country is at peace. Training must from the earliest days concentrate on the selection of leaders and the infusion of discipline. It is by discipline that an army is welded into a fighting weapon; it is by leadership that it is led to victory. These are the fundamental factors which affect the morale of the soldier and lead to success in battle.

The Quality of Morale

In war the moral stature of some men increases, and their characters grow stronger and more closely knit in proportion to the discomforts and dangers they are called upon to face. Such men will occasionally perform in battle remarkable acts of selfless courage and daring, and will endure with extraordinary fortitude and patience the burdens thrust upon them. Other men, however, will under the stress of hardships or dangers surrender to fear or fatigue and will allow their characters to disintegrate. This disintegration will usually take the form of a loosening of the moral fibre, which results in timidity of action and slackness in appearance, while those who have gone to seed will be dirty and their appearance will be slovenly. In these latter cases there has been a general loosening of the character due to a partial surrender to fear. The good soldier—the man with high morale—has not surrendered to fear and has maintained his personal standards; the bad soldier—the man with low morale—has become incapable of independent action and has to some extent shed a part of his human individuality.

Morale is a mental and moral quality. It is that which in battle keeps men up on humanity's level. But humanity's level is not enough, because the strongest human instinct is the instinct for survival. Morale is also that which develops man's latent heroism so that he will overcome his desire to take the easy way out and surrender to fear. The quality which maintains human dignity in battle and at the same time develops man's heroism is high morale. It is necessary now to make

clear what high morale is not. It is not contentment or satisfaction bred from ease or comfort of living. Both of these contain a hint of complacency, an acceptance of luxury as an end in itself. High morale is far more than any of these; for it implies essentially the ability to triumph over discomforts and dangers and carry on with the job.

Nor is high morale achieved through fitness or healthiness alone. It is important not to confuse the idea of physical happiness with morale. The happy faces of men after a good game of football are not necessarily the faces of men with good morale. Morale is a mental rather than a physical quality, a determination to overcome obstacles, an instinct driving a man forward against his own desires. High morale is not happiness. Happiness may be a contributory factor in the maintenance of morale over a long period, but it is no more than that. High morale is not toughness. Some very tough men in war have turned out to be very disappointing in action. Toughness is a physical and not a mental asset. Tough men will occasionally perform an isolated act of bravery. Morale, however, is not a quality which produces a momentary act. It influences behaviour *at all times*.

In brief, high morale is a quality which is good in itself and is latent in all men. It maintains human dignity. It enables fear and fatigue to be overcome. It is involved with the idea of conscience, but it should not be confused with fitness or happiness or toughness.

Basic Factors of Morale

We must now consider what factors constitute the morale of the soldier in the heat of battle. Certain factors may be described as essential, conditions without which high morale cannot exist. These four basic factors are: (1) leadership, (2) discipline, (3) comradeship, (4) self-respect. A fifth factor, devotion to a cause, must exist but need not necessarily influence all the soldiers. Finally, there are numerous contributory factors which are of great importance but are not essential conditions.

Leadership

Morale is, in the first place, based on leadership. Good morale is impossible without good leaders. Human beings are fundamentally alike in that certain common characteristics apply to all men in varying degrees. In battle the most important of these characteristics is fear. All men are afraid at one time or another to a greater or lesser extent. In moments of fear they band together and look for guidance; they seek for a person to give decisions; they look for a leader.

In times of war the leader has opportunities denied to him in peace. The difficulties, dangers, and discomforts inseparable from the battle-field make men cry out for the leadership they can do without in peace. At such moments men are too weak to stand alone; they find the burdens too great to bear and their own selves unequal to the task. The leader himself accepts the burdens of others and by doing so earns their gratitude and the right to lead them. The men recognize in their leader some quality which they themselves do not possess; that quality is "decision." Fear makes men sluggish and indecisive, unable to decide or act for themselves. The leader's power over his men is based on his ability to cut through this "fear paralysis," and in so doing to enable others to escape from it. The rightness of the decision taken by the leader is irrelevant. What matters is that the decision should be taken and that the leader should shoulder the responsibility for that decision. The leader must convince his men of its rightness, even though he himself may be uncertain of his own judgment. If the leader will decide, the men will follow and will fight. If there is indecision they will hesitate and will flee. In short, "fight and survive," "fear and be slain"; the leader decides.

The leader's power of decision results from his ability to remain imperturbable in the crisis. His greatest asset is the ability to act normally in abnormal conditions, to continue to think rationally when his men have ceased to think, to be decisive in action when they are paralysed by fear. The object of training must be, first, to select those who possess within them the potentialities of leadership, and, secondly, to develop these potentialities. This is accomplished by giving the leader responsibility. A leader's character will develop in proportion to the responsibility with which he has been entrusted. His

position as the man responsible for the lives and well-being of his men must be impressed upon him. In battle his preoccupation with his men's affairs will give him less time to think of his own fears. The mere fact of responsibility will increase the leader's powers of decision and make him confident of his ability to handle any crisis. The two vital attributes of a leader are: (a) decision in action, and (b) calmness in crisis. Given these two attributes he will succeed; without them he will fail. Our great problem in peace is to select as leaders men whose brain will remain clear when intensely frightened; the yardstick of "fear" is absent.

Discipline

The object of discipline is the conquest of fear. There are two aspects of fear. Fear can suddenly attack a man through his imagination. A corpse in a ditch or a grave by the side of the road will remind him of the peril of his position. He will suddenly realize that he himself is liable to be killed. It is a function of discipline to fortify the mind so that it becomes reconciled to unpleasant sights and accepts them as normal everyday occurrences. Fear can also creep upon a man during periods of monotony in the line. At such a time he will have the opportunity to appreciate the dangers which beset his life. Fear acting through his thoughts can so reduce the man's hard core of courage that he will become nervous and fearful. Discipline strengthens the mind so that it becomes impervious to the corroding influence of fear. It teaches men to confine their thoughts within certain definite limits. It instils the habit of self-control.

The basis of fear is the awareness of danger. Man becomes aware of danger when he feels himself opposed to something more powerful than himself. It is important for a man to lose his individual feeling and to become an integral part of the battalion, division, and army to which he belongs. It is here that discipline shows its value, for it can help a man to lose his own identity and become a part of a larger and stronger unit. It is in this way that discipline will conquer fear. This corporate sense which discipline creates helps men to face the unknown.

The method by which the conquest of fear is achieved is the unifying of men into a group or unit under obedience to orders. Men require to be united if they are to give of their best. Discipline seeks to instil into all ranks a sense of unity by compelling them to obey orders as one man. This obedience to orders is the indispensable condition of good discipline. Men learn to gain confidence and encouragement from doing the same thing as their fellows; they derive strength and satisfaction from their company; their own identities become merged into the larger and stronger identity of their unit. Men must learn to obey orders when all their instincts cry out for them not to be obeyed. They must learn to obey orders in times of stress so that they will do so in times of danger. They must learn to carry out their tasks under any conditions and despite all difficulties. In this way the mass of loose individuals, with their fears and weaknesses, can be welded into a united whole, ready to act on the word of a leader.

Discipline implies a conception of duty. Nothing will be accomplished in the crisis by a man without a sense of duty. The sentry in an outpost holds his ground in the face of attack because he has a sense of duty to those behind him. This sense is instilled by discipline because it teaches men to obey orders as a matter of course, to know that it is wrong not to obey them, and right—that is, their duty—to do so. For the soldier this conception of duty does not embrace abstractions such as freedom or empire or democracy. In battle a soldier's sense of duty extends only to the friends who are around him. It is the job of the junior leader to encourage this sense of duty. In brief, discipline seeks to conquer fear by welding men into a cohesive whole, united by obedience to orders. It aims to create a body strong enough to carry each of its members through dangers and difficulties which they themselves would be unable to face alone. In this way it promotes comradeship, which is the third factor of morale.

Comradeship

Morale cannot be good unless men come to have affection for each other; a fellow-feeling must grow up which will result in a spirit of comradeship. An army is made up of human

beings, so that however much a leader may inspire his men, however perfect the discipline, the morale will be hard and unsympathetic if the warmth of comradeship is not added to it. War, though a hard business, is not necessarily a grim one. Men must laugh and joke together, must enjoy each other's company, and must get fun out of life even in times of danger. Comradeship is based on affection and trust, which between them produce an atmosphere of mutual good will and a feeling of interdependence. Men learn to have faith in each other and to depend on each other according to the abilities of each. Comradeship is a great antidote to fear because it gives a man friends. If he has friends he will derive strength from their presence and will be anxious not to let them down in battle. All men have within them a streak of generosity and unselfishness—a touch of nobility—and these qualities will be brought out in their attitude to their friends. Friendship causes men to give of their best.

In conclusion, comradeship is vital to high morale because it surrounds a man with an atmosphere of warmth and strength at the very moment when he is feeling cold and weak. It encourages his finest instincts, and the demands of friendship serve to strengthen him in battle. These demands are also a challenge to his self-respect—a quality which must now be considered.

Self-respect

No man can be said to possess high morale if the quality of self-respect is lacking. Soldiers must be encouraged to respect themselves at all times and under all conditions. Self-respect implies a determination to maintain personal standards of behaviour. A man who respects himself will allow neither himself to become slovenly nor his quarters dirty; even in action he will take care to see that his personal appearance suffers as little as possible. It is the job of the N.C.O. to maintain this aspect of discipline; it is the function of the officer to encourage and instil self-respect.

Efficiency is inseparable from self-respect. Men must take pride in their ability to carry out all jobs allotted to them. They must feel that they are good soldiers and are therefore of value to other people. Men can be persuaded of this fact by being trusted. A man who feels he is trusted will feel that he is efficient, and he will at once begin to respect himself. He will have confidence in his own ability to fight. Men who are trusted gain self-confidence. It is the job of the officer to convince his men that he trusts them. Self-respect is a quality which will develop inevitably if the three essential factors already considered are present. It is true to say that without self-respect good morale is impossible; it is equally true to say that if the standards of leadership, discipline, and comradeship are high, the quality of self-respect will also be high.

Devotion to a Cause

It is impossible to make devotion to a cause either a basic or a contributory factor to good morale. It must stand by itself between these two categories. I do not believe that soldiers are greatly influenced by "cause"; they do not advance over dangerous and fire-swept ground in the conscious pursuit of an ideal; they fight for reasons which have little obvious connexion with freedom or democracy. There are of course exceptions. But rhetorical statements which assert that the soldier

"... must know what he fights for
And love what he knows"

must not be allowed to confuse the issue. The fact is that the soldier, instead of having a "fire in his belly," advances into battle with a cold feeling inside him. These statements must be qualified.

No nation could fight an unpopular war; the war must be accepted by the people, since a democracy cannot oppose the will of the majority of its citizens. The soldier, as a citizen, must therefore be convinced of the rightness of the cause. At least his reaction to the declaration of war must be one of acquiescence, even if this is only passive; he must not be hostile to it. The way to change this passive acceptance to active enthusiasm in battle has already been given in the four basic factors. Nevertheless, nothing which I have said must be interpreted as minimizing the influence of "cause" on those officers and men who are moved by it. For these few, "cause"

will be a sustaining and strengthening factor and may be of greater importance to them than any of the four factors.

Contributory Factors

There are certain contributory factors which powerfully assist morale but do not themselves constitute essential conditions for it. It is possible to have high morale without any of these contributory factors, but it is very difficult; it requires the highest standards of leadership and discipline and the strongest feelings of comradeship and self-respect. In the normal case one or more of these contributory factors must be present. There are many of them, and only a few are considered here.

Success.—High morale is possible in defeat but not during a long period of defeat. On such occasions confidence in the leaders will inevitably wane and the first basis will be undermined. Success will aid good morale by creating confidence in the leader and in the command.

Regimental Tradition.—The regimental spirit can be a powerful factor in making for good morale. The more a soldier feels himself to be identified with his regiment the higher will be his morale if the four essential conditions have been fulfilled. There is a difference between comradeship and regimental spirit. Comradeship is the spirit of fellow-feeling which grows up between a small group of men who live and work and fight together. Regimental spirit is the soldier's pride in the traditions of his regiment and his determination to be worthy of them himself. Nothing but good can result from this spirit, which should be constantly encouraged; it is not, however, a basic factor of morale, because in the crisis of battle the majority of the men will not derive encouragement from the glories of the past but will seek aid from their leaders and comrades of the present. In other words, most men do not fight well because their ancestors fought well at the Battle of Minden two centuries ago, but because their particular platoon or battalion has good leaders, is well disciplined, and has developed the feelings of comradeship and self-respect among all ranks on all levels. It is not devotion to some ancient regimental story which steels men in the crisis; it is devotion to the comrades who are with them and the leaders who are in front of them.

Personal Happiness.—A man should be happy in the sense that his personal life should be in order. Nothing weakens a man more than trouble at home; it encourages him to think of home, and all that it implies, when he should be occupied with the enemy. It turns his mind to peace and his desire to live at the moment when it is necessary for him to steel himself to face the possibility of death. He must never be allowed to forget that his job is to fight. His function is to kill the enemy, and in so doing he must expose himself to danger.

Administration

A man's ordinary day-to-day life must be well organized. Thus, hard conditions imposed on him in training to inculcate discipline do not rule out the desirability of good living-quarters; and in the line a soldier's morale will be much improved if the administrative arrangements are good and if he is assured of proper conditions, with a reasonable amount of leisure and comfort when he leaves the front. But here a warning must be given. There is a danger to-day of "welfare" being considered as an end in itself and not as a means to an end, one of the means of maintaining morale. Welfare by itself will not produce good morale because it is essentially soft; and it has already been stated that morale cannot be good unless it contains a quality of hardness. Hardness and privation are the school of the good soldier; idleness and luxury are his enemies. Men will endure great hardships if they know why and are convinced of the necessity. "Blood, toil, tears, and sweat" is not for nothing one of the great rallying calls of the English race. Goering's cry, "Guns before butter," expressed the same truth. If men believe in the need, hardships are in themselves a stimulant to morale. But the opposite is also true. Let there be any suggestion that butter can come before guns and some men will at once choose the butter. If this happens there will be no morale in the sense of this definition.

Propaganda.—The uplifting effect of modern propaganda on a soldier is perhaps a new development. A man's morale is raised immensely by feeling that his efforts are appreciated and applauded, not only by his comrades and his officers but by the world at large. Remarkable results can be achieved by the use of modern publicity methods. These results will be achieved only if the fighting soldier is differentiated from the soldier who serves behind the fighting line. The latter often works at dull, monotonous jobs and lacks the stimulus of battle conditions; it is good for his morale that his work should be publicized in the press. But it is no good writing of the Bren gunner and the G.H.Q. clerk in the same terms. The sharp distinction between those who risk their lives in actual battle with the enemy and those who do not must not be blurred. A fighting soldier thus glorified will soon become convinced of his own importance. This artificially stimulated feeling of self-importance is a quality lower and less lasting than that of self-respect, but it is none the less of momentary value.

Conclusion

In brief, high morale has been defined as the quality which makes men endure and show courage in times of fatigue and danger. The cultivation of morale depends upon the training of leaders, the inculcation of discipline, the encouragement of comradeship, and the infusing of self-respect. The leaders must have a belief in their cause, and they must pay attention to numerous contributory factors of considerable but secondary importance.

We live to-day in a scientific age. But we soldiers have to remember that the raw material with which we have to deal is "men." Man is still the first weapon of war. His training is the most important consideration in the fashioning of a fighting army. All modern science is directed towards his assistance, but on his efforts depends the outcome of the battle. The morale of the soldier is the most important single factor in war.

CENTENARY OF ANAESTHESIA CELEBRATION DINNER

As part of the centenary celebrations of the first administration of ether the Association of Anaesthetists of Great Britain and Ireland held a dinner in the Great Hall of Lincoln's Inn on Oct. 31 under the Presidency of Dr. A. D. Marston. Proposing the toast of the association Sir Alfred Webb-Johnson said that the centenary marked the beginning of the most brilliant phase in the history of British medicine. He praised the anaesthetists for having raised the standard of their specialty by insisting on a diploma and recognition of the status of anaesthetists. "You are," Sir Alfred said, "practising physicians. You administer drugs of very high potency." In reply, the President thanked the College of Surgeons for the facilities granted to his association. As an example of the increased scope of the anaesthetists' work he observed that in Birmingham anaesthetists were responsible for anti-shock and resuscitation work. The position of the specialist anaesthetist was becoming recognized, and "we now have a Group within the B.M.A." The toast of the guests was proposed by Dr. John Gillies, and in reply Dr. Charles Hill referred to the two-way linkage of the Association of Anaesthetists—in the academic sphere with the Royal Colleges and in the medico-political sphere with the B.M.A. The B.M.A. would see that in any future National Health Service the anaesthetists would be assured of their proper role and status. As a profession, he said, we seek no quarrel with established authority, but we have a treasure to preserve in the freedom and integrity of the profession. Dr. Wesley Bourne, of the Department of Anaesthesia at the McGill University, also replied for the guests. He represented the American Society of Anaesthesiologists and the Canadian Anaesthetic Society, as well as his own university. By all three he had been charged to congratulate the Association of Anaesthetists on this occasion. He also conveyed the thanks of the anaesthetists of the fighting Forces of the U.S.A. and Canada for the courtesy extended to them during this war. Two weeks ago, he observed, a meeting of anaesthetists, dentists, surgeons, and physicians was held in Boston to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the use of ether in a surgical operation.