

**“BATTLE DOCTRINE  
FOR  
FRONT LINE LEADERS”**



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Originally published by the 3d Marine Division for its front line leaders, and subsequently distributed Corps-wide as an official training guide during World War II by LtGen A. A. Vandegrift, Commandant, U. S. Marine Corps, this pamphlet contains in pure form the formula for positive combat leadership. The essence of its fundamentals applies both on and off the field of battle to all leaders, at all times, regardless of rank, specialty, or duty assignment. I commend these truths to your careful study. Failure to follow them can cost your professional creditability in peacetime, and, in war, the lives of those dependent upon your leadership.



D. M. TWOMEY

Major General, U. S. Marine Corps  
Director

## FOREWORD

This forceful restatement of the fundamental principles of troop leadership, supplemented by rules based on combat experience in the Solomon Islands Area was prepared by the Third Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force. It is worthy of careful study by every Marine who is or may be charged with the leadership of other Marines in battle.

(Signed) A. A. VANDEGRIFT

## INTRODUCTION

The Senior Commander of a force plans the battle in its broader sense and is responsible for ultimate success or failure. However, once a subordinate unit has been committed to action, he must, for the time being, limit his activities to providing the necessary support and insuring the coordination of all components. Regardless of how well conceived the Senior Commander's plan may be, it can be nullified if his front line platoons are incapable of carrying out the mission assigned.

The conduct of the front line rests with company commanders, and their platoon and squad leaders. The front line leader must plan and execute his own battle. He must know his enemy, his own men, and must aggressively employ all of his weapons in coordinated fire and movement. He must personally lead his unit to success. The paramount importance of front line leadership cannot be overestimated.

1. The prime factor in a successful fighting unit is ESPRIT DE CORPS. This needs no explanation. It simply means that no Marine ever lets another Marine down. The expression, "A Squad of Marines," has for over a hundred years been synonymous with such other expressions as "coiled rattlesnake," "concentrated dynamite," "powder keg," etc. Its meaning has been well-earned.

2. Of almost equal importance to a fighting unit is DISCIPLINE. This applies to all activities at all times. It must never be relaxed, particularly during times of hardship, discomfort, or danger. It spells the difference between a "Mob" and a "Unit." Discipline is obtained mainly through diligence of the leader in insisting that things be done "right," and added by the judicious daily application of rewards and punishments. Justice, consistency, firmness, and respect are the roots of discipline. Men like to serve in a well-disciplined unit. Mob methods disgust them.

3. Be neat in your person; habitually wear your insignia of rank on all uniforms and have all your subordinates do the same. Insignia may be dulled or blended just before entering close combat--but not before.

4. Exercise and display absolute loyalty toward a superior, particularly when he is absent. This is not only morally correct, it is the only sure footing in any military organization. It also enhances your personal prestige among your subordinates.

5. Refrain from "blowing up" under stress or when irritated.

6. Always show enthusiasm - it is infectious.

7. Never allow yourself to be unduly rushed or stampeded. There is usually ample time for considered judgment, even during battle. Dignity and poise are invaluable assets to a leader.

8. In the field, practice the habit of making daily inspections (using the "sample" method) and insist on: (1) clean weapons, (2) presence of arms, ammunition, mess gear, helmets and other items of individual equipment, (3) care of the feet, (4) alertness while on watch. See that rewards and punishments are promptly awarded.

9. At the front, visit all of your men frequently—talk to them—be sure they know what you want them to do at all times, and where you can be found.

10. Do not get your unit lost—nothing destroys confidence quicker.

11. As a general rule do not call for volunteers to do a dangerous or distasteful job. Pick out the individuals yourself and assign them to the job clearly, and in the presence of others.

12. Give your orders positively and clearly at all times. Avoid vagueness.

13. Never allow cruelty, it undermines the natural courage and manliness of the perpetrator. Be respectful to the dead—even the enemy dead. Bury the dead quickly.

14. Be prompt and accurate in making reports. Send back information at least once each hour during an action. The commanding officer can't help you unless he knows your situation.

15. If anything goes wrong, do not be too quick to blame our artillery, aviation, engineers, supply services, or any other organization. They can be depended upon always to do all they can with the information and means at hand. They, too, have a job which requires courage and determination, and they are doing their best to back you up.

16. Take active charge of all activities on the front which lie within your sphere of responsibility.

17. A front-line Marine demands little from his leader, namely: (1) a clear conception of what he is expected to do, (2) ammunition, (3) drinking water, (4) rations, (5) medical service, and eventually (6) cigarettes and mail. These items must be your continuous concern.

18. Always arrange for the comfort of your men before you do your own.

19. Maintain your leadership. Nothing is more humiliating to a nominal leader than to see his men naturally turning to a subordinate for direction in times of danger.

20. Arrange continuously for your men to get as much rest as the situation will allow. Avoid unnecessary harassments, such as "standing by." Unless your unit is on the move, or unless you or the enemy are actually attacking, you can usually arrange for at least two-thirds of your men to sleep at night.



21. Do not tolerate any evidences of self-pity in your men. It makes any difficult situation worse.

22. Keep to yourself alone any concern you may have as to your general situation, and do not let it be reflected in your countenance or actions. Remember that all situations look critical at times.

23. Encourage common decency—do not tolerate vulgarity or filthy language in your presence.

24. Insist on carrying out all rules for field sanitation, even in the front lines.

25. Do not encourage rumors—they are usually disturbing—most of them are entirely without foundation. Find out for yourself and be the first to tell your men the truth.

26. Win a reputation for moving your outfit promptly. Depart and arrive on time.

27. Be "time and space" conscious. By practice, know the average time it takes: (1) to issue your orders, (2) to assemble your unit, (3) to move it a hundred yards over varied types of terrain, (4) to deploy it for battle. Always have your watch set at correct time.

28. Keep your men informed as to the enemy situation and your plans. Devise and execute plans for taking prisoners.

29. Offensive tactics, briefly summarized, may be stated as follows: Hold the attention of your enemy with a minimum force, then quickly strike him suddenly and hard on his flank or rear with every weapon you have, then rush him when his fire slackens. Any plan that accomplishes this will usually win if it is driven home quickly. Be slow to change a plan—the reason for the change should be obvious.

30. Remember that supporting arms seldom destroy—they paralyze temporarily. Take quick advantage of their support before the enemy "comes to." Act suddenly.

31. In a surprise meeting of small forces, hit the enemy immediately while he is still startled; don't let him get set, be persistent, and "keep him rolling."

32. Be prepared always. Anticipate your action in case of an emergency. Ask yourself what you would do immediately in case the enemy should suddenly appear. If you have to hesitate in your answer, you are not sufficiently prepared. Keep thinking, and at all times be one jump ahead of the immediate situation.

33. Never permit men to remain inactive under machine gun fire. Give orders quickly.

34. Do not permit the slightest rearward movement of any individual while under heavy fire, except to get wounded out, or when openly directed by you. It is usually best to go forward, or dig in until the fire ceases.

35. Always endeavor to confront your enemy with a superior volume of accurate fire. This may be accomplished at any given point by means of maneuver and coordination of the fire of all weapons. Use every weapon you have—they are all especially effective if used together.

36. A great and successful troop leader said that there comes a point in every close battle when each commander concludes that he is defeated. The leader who carries on, wins.

37. It has been recently observed that an enemy often slackens or ceases his fire right at the time he appears to be getting the upper hand. He then simply crouches in his hole. This means that he cannot sustain a fire fight. Stick to your plan and hit him harder.

38. Positions are seldom lost because they have been destroyed, but almost invariably because the leader has decided in his own mind that the position cannot be held.

39. Beware of daylight withdrawals. They may appear logical in a classroom but they are always dangerous in practice. In a tight spot hold on, at least until nightfall.

40. Nothing on this earth is so uplifting to a human being as victory in battle; nothing so degrading as defeat.

41. "Battles are won during the training period."