Personality Styles of Effective Soldiers

Major Michael Russell, US Army

MANY OF THE MILITARY'S efforts are directed toward developing, refining and procuring hardware. Less effort is being made, however, to profiling personality styles of the successful professional soldier. What makes a good "war asset"? This article asserts that the military is composed of two fundamentally different types of individuals, each with unique advantages and weaknesses. Both types are always present in the military population to a greater or lesser degree. Times of peace favor one style; conflict favors the other. Unfortunately, US military forces tend to enter conflict with an incorrect balance of these types, thus suffering greater initial losses than necessary, due as much to inadequate leadership as to failed hardware. This tragedy is both predictable and preventable.

Psychologists have labeled and developed tests for many different personality characteristics. The American Psychiatric Association lists approximately a dozen types of personality disorder, including proposed and established entities, in their Diagnostic and Statistical Manual.[1] A personality *disorder* is said to exist when the individual has only a limited number of coping strategies, some of which may be dysfunctional, and is diagnosed only when the style causes "significant difficulty in social or occupational functioning."[2] Individuals with personality disorders have difficulty prospering in the military. Military life, with its frequent changes in job and locale, requires considerable flexibility, which the disordered individual usually lacks.

A consequence of having any sort of personality, however, is having a personality *style*. These styles mirror the traits that, in extreme forms, are labeled disorders. Some of these traits are becoming popular terms, such as "narcissistic" and "histrionic," while others are less commonly used. The labels capture a certain style of being that colors how people think, act and react — the decisions

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they make and why they make them.

To provide a nonpejorative label to these groups, I will use an idea coined by the American Psychiatric Association in their diagnostic manual, which groups these different styles into three major groupings, or clusters.[3] Cluster A comprises people who are described as odd or unusual. Cluster B is a collection of styles of people prone to externalizing, who deal with psychological tension by directing it outward toward the external world. Cluster C contains people prone to anxiety, who tend to internalize (worry, ruminate) about their conflicts. To apply common labels, for example, most introverts are found in cluster C and most extroverts are found in cluster B, although this is only one aspect of their stylistic difference.

On the whole, the military is composed of healthy and effective individuals. Many of the most dysfunctional styles are weeded out early. This includes nearly all of cluster A population. The styles seen in abundance among the career military, therefore, are mainly representatives from clusters B and C. Psychologists would tend to label cluster Bs as mildly Antisocial or Narcissistic. Those individuals who are in cluster C are mainly variants of the Obsessive-Compulsive or Dependant Personality styles.
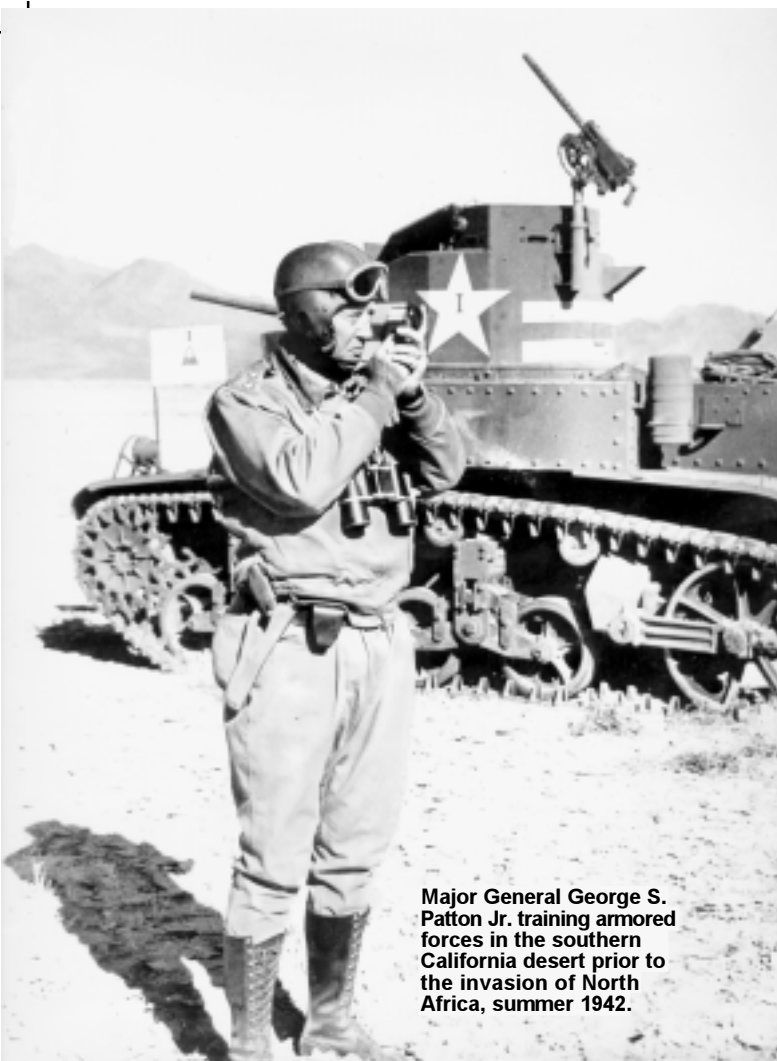
Major General George S. Patton Jr. training armored forces in the southern California desert prior to the invasion of North Africa, summer 1942.

One of Patton's early evaluations read: "This officer would be invaluable in time of war but is a disturbing element in time of peace." He failed to be selected for Command and General Staff School, a prerequisite for advancement, and languished as a major until he was 49. . . . Likewise, Dwight Eisenhower began the war as a colonel with very little chance of promotion to brigadier. When things changed, they changed very swiftly.

There are differences in how effectively individuals employ a given personality style. Most trial lawyers, politicians, police officers and juvenile delinquents, for example, all share the same basic style but differ in how effectively they employ it to meet their needs. One noted psychologist, Harrison Gough, rates individuals not just by style but on how well they have obtained the best qualities of that style.[4] Each person taking his "California Psychological Inventory" is rated on a seven-point scale of actualization as well as being classified as to type. A prison inmate may thus be a cluster B at level 1 — a successful politician may be a cluster B at level 7. For purposes of comparison, I would like to con-

sider people of equal caliber: matched on intelligence and other measures of effectiveness but differing in fundamental personality style.

Type B	Type C
Adventuresome	Dependable
Imaginative	Conscientious
Innovative	Detail Oriented
Daring	Punctual
Decisive	Selfless

The table above lists the positive features of each style. Their limitations are that they possess to a lesser degree the features listed for the other style. A cluster C personality style is motivated mainly by harm avoidance. To dip briefly into psychological phraseology, he has a substantial superego, with many internalized values, which drives him to do things to avoid the anxiety that comes from threat. This threat may be either from their internal conscience or from fear of imagined external consequence. In contrast, his comrade with cluster B dynamics is less disabled by anxiety and is motivated mainly by mastery and goal attainment. To put it concisely, one style strives to obtain the positive, the other strives to avoid the negative.

To apply this to the military, it has long been recognized that a peacetime army differs in many ways from that of an army at war. This is intuitively obvious: destruction of personnel and equipment, even enemy equipment and personnel, is somewhat antisocial. To plan the ultimate defeat of an entire army or nation on the battlefield requires at least a dose of narcissism. Therefore, those personality attributes that make for a war "hero" are primarily from cluster B. These people do not function as well in garrison — such individuals thrive on challenge and require constant stimulation.

By contrast, cluster C individuals do thrive in garrison. Their reasons for joining the military are different, as are their motivations for staying. Cluster B individuals are drawn by the potential for excitement and adventure. Cluster Cs are drawn to the security of the military system, the guaranteed employment and often by a sense of duty or obligation. For some, the attraction is not much different from that of any other civil service position.

The tension between wartime and peacetime personalities is therefore unavoidable. The variables at play in the peacetime Army tend to attract and maintain cluster C individuals while repelling and punishing cluster B personnel. There is often little opportunity for rapid advancement or glory in our peacetime Army, and people seeking these things will move on to more promising employment. In

an era when one recorded slip, or one bad mark ends a career, only those who cautiously make no errors can survive. In a zero-defects environment, harm avoidance rules.

As an extension of this observation, the longer a military is at peace, the more pronounced this tendency becomes, until a fully "peacetime army," with a peacetime force structure, has developed. This does not appear to be a quick process. There is always a fresh supply of both types of individuals at the entry level, but as differential promotion takes place, the mid and upper levels shift. In previous eras, it may have taken two decades to complete this transition. Under today's rules of promotion, it may take less than a dozen years.

Is this shift undesirable? A military composed of largely cluster C individuals offers fewer disciplinary problems and will score higher on most measures of garrison function. Yet history has repeatedly shown us what happens when a peacetime army goes to war. The phenomenon is so frequent as to be the rule rather than the exception.

Cluster C individuals often have great difficulty with two things—taking risks and making decisions. David Shapiro wrote eloquently of the problems facing an individual with one of the cluster C styles when asked to make a decision: "Among the activities of normal life, there is probably none for which this style is less suited. No amount of hard work, driven activity or willpower will help in the slightest degree to make a decision. . . .What distinguishes obsessional people in the face of a decision is not their mixed feelings, but rather in the fact that these feelings are so marvelously and perfectly balanced. In fact, it is easy to observe that just at the moment when an obsessional person seems to be approaching a decision, just when the balance seems to be at last tipping decisively in one direction, he will discover some new item that decisively reestablishes that perfect balance."[5]

Sometimes a decision can be reduced to following a rule or a formula, which they will do quite well. However, the ambiguity and "fog" of war make such rules hard to follow. An army can be ground to a standstill by layers of frozen, immobile individuals afraid to make a mistake.

Doctrine, a sometimes-useful set of guidelines, is also a prosthetic device for the decisionally impaired. Doctrine will sometimes cover for the cluster C's indecisive nature but excellent ability to follow rules. The peacetime proliferation of rules rises in frequency with the percentage of cluster C individuals in power. Such over regulation usually

worsens the disaster to come: rules stifle innovation, "prepare for the last war," and are usually more geared to garrison management than battlefield leadership. On the eve of the Spanish American War,

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retired General William T. Sherman, observing the wreckage of his once-proud army, wrote that "a general to be successful would have, as we did in 1861, to tear up his Army Regulations and go back to first principles"—which was what eventually happened.[6] E.K.G. Sixsmith, writing of Eisenhower, notes that wherever he served, "he hated anything that savored of war department rigidity or inflexibility."[7]

General Ulysses S. Grant recognized precisely the dichotomy of men this paper addresses. He wrote in his memoirs, "It did seem to me, in my early army days, that too many of the older officers, when they came to command posts, made it a study to think what orders they could publish to annoy their subordinates and render them uncomfortable. I noticed, however, a few years later, when the Mexican War broke out, that most of this class of officers discovered that they were possessed of disabilities which entirely incapacitated them from active field service. They had the moral courage to proclaim it, too. They were right; but they did not always give their disease the right name."[8]

Both the Civil War and World War II graphically illustrate the disaster of an initial lack of leadership. Many of the Union's best officers deserted to the South, but during the war's opening months, many observers thought the Army of the Potomac could win in "three months." Instead, its fearful leaders were paralyzed and humiliated. It fell to Grant, a man employed at the war's conception as a clerk in his father's store, who had failed at farming, real estate and an attempt at elected office, to turn the war to the North's advantage.[9]

Much the same happened during World War II. Within a year of the war's initiation, the leaders of the 1930s were replaced with men, not necessarily

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younger, but different, who had languished in the peacetime Army. General George S. Patton Jr. is a notable example. He suffered adverse officer evaluation reports throughout the 1920s and 30s. One of Patton's evaluations read: "This officer would be invaluable in time of war but is a disturbing element in time of peace."[10] He failed to be selected for Command and General Staff School, a prereq-

uisite for advancement, and languished as a major from 1917 until he was 49. In 1938, he was placed in a terminal position and expected to retire, starting the war as a lieutenant colonel. Likewise, Dwight Eisenhower began the war as a colonel with very little chance of promotion to brigadier. When things changed, they changed very swiftly.

It appears that the rapid promotion of successful leaders in time of conflict will usually favor the cluster B types: whereas the cluster B sees potential for great victory on the battlefield, the cluster Cs are preoccupied with thoughts of avoiding great defeat.

If this pattern is repeated so often, why is it allowed to continue? For one thing, cluster B individuals are not without their flaws. They tend to demand immediate gratification and be less reliable for the completion of mundane tasks than their cluster C counterparts. Their primary positive attribute to a military force is their sense of invulnerability, which spurs them to attempt deeds that the more rational people might not.

Managing and Motivating by Rewards

LTC José M. Marrero, US Army

As military professionals, we all face leadership and management challenges. Among these, we have the responsibility of appropriately rewarding our subordinates. But whom do we really reward? And, equally important, what kind of behavior and specific traits do we reward? Don't we reward in many cases:

- Fast work instead of quality work?
- Noisy joints instead of quietly effective behavior?
- Complication instead of simplification?
- Busy work instead of smart work?
- Mindless conformity instead of creativity?
- Short-term Band-Aids or quick fixes instead of solid and long-lasting solutions?
- Appearances instead of realities?
- Subordinates who are strictly "loyal" to us instead of those who are also loyal to their own subordinates?

Those in the last two categories are out to impress the boss exclusively without paying much attention to the people under them. Additionally, many rely more on cosmetics and their theatrical abilities instead of efficient, solid and long-lasting products. Certainly, when we reward a subordinate, we also reward and promote his behavior throughout the unit. In other words, we send an implicit message to all others: "These are the traits we want to see in this outfit." Consequently, we reinforce whatever behavior pattern we are rewarding, so commanders must look beyond appearances and cosmetics. Those who do can identify actors as well as efficient workers and reward them accordingly.

Consider this scenario. A captain receives a less than outstanding officer evaluation report (OER) and has trouble understanding why. After all, during the rating

period, he made sure the battalion commander saw him in action and saw his battery in the best light. He chatted with the colonel, impressed him with astute observations and joked around with him all to foster a closer relationship. He took pains to show he was in control of everything. He always had his uniform pressed and his boots shined. Who deserved a better rating than he did?

He complains to the colonel, "This is the first time in my military career that I have received anything, well, less than outstanding on an OER. No one can question my loyalty to you. Every time you have asked me to do something, I was there. I came through, whatever it was. And every time you've needed me, you could count on me. I don't . . . and I don't. . . ."

The colonel looks out the window, evidently taking a second or two to organize his thoughts. The colonel knows the captain well, and has listened attentively while expressly keeping from interrupting him.

Lining up his thoughts like high-explosive rounds, the colonel fires them off: "You've said it! You've always been there for me. For me—not for your subordinates." The senior officer pauses, then continues, "Captain, you must be loyal in every respect."

"But sir, I have been loyal . . . "

"Loyal? To whom? A loyal leader doesn't just serve his superiors! You cannot be loyal to me if you are not loyal to your soldiers! Genuine leaders take care of their people all the time, even when the boss is not there. Do you think the boss has to be present to know how you're doing? How do you think I pegged you? A good unit not only should look good but must be good! Take care of your men, Captain. That's all."

The accumulated peacetime inertia makes the military less likely to need its skills and increasingly recalcitrant to commit to combat. The cluster B leader who believes in his troop's superiority and their ability to succeed is unquestionably more likely to advocate military engagement than is a cluster C leader who would fear their defeat.

Is it possible to find individuals with the strengths of both styles but without the weaknesses of either? At higher levels of functioning, both styles acquire the ability to assume qualities of the other—a veneer of compulsiveness for the cluster B, a gung-ho facade on the cluster C. But stress tends to strip away these veneers. The father of American psychology, William James, wrote in 1898 that "The Character (personality) is set in stone by age 18, a continuing truism."[11] Essame, in his review of Patton, wrote "the qualities essential in a commander and those in a good staff officer are poles apart."[12] The style of an effective staff member, "tactful, patient, reticent and diplomatic," are simply not those of the

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combat leader.[13] As I have repeatedly observed men who rise to positions of authority by longevity alone, it is simply not possible to completely change one's stripes, even when called upon to do so.

The solution for the future is not as simple as retaining effective cluster B individuals in a peacetime

We should ask ourselves whether we reward the right traits. Are we more impressed by people who talk about their accomplishments or by those who let their work speak for itself? Do we reward long work hours instead of efficiency? Do we appreciate it when our leaders insist on modest, economical products, or do we prefer to see our budgets wasted on window dressing that makes their products look more attractive? Do we reward quantity or quality? Effusiveness or efficiency?

Every human being, regardless of intellectual capacity, is motivated by the possible consequences of his actions. He does his work best when he expects to be rewarded. If every leader, however junior, can find a way to motivate each of his subordinates, he can significantly increase productivity.

Motivating through rewards is a part of leadership, and rewards need not be written. Rewarding people while a project is under way often produces better results than waiting until the project is completed. Similarly, giving a soldier free time is often a better or fairer reward than a medal. Simply giving a subordinate a "Well done!" may also be appropriate.

What a leader does or fails to do also communicates something to his subordinates. "Silence means consent" in more instances than just tactical situations—when a leader, for example, fails to correct a soldier who is out of uniform, he is practically giving him permission to do so. Likewise, every time we ignore the apparent laziness of a few soldiers while making our way through a training area, we are rewarding negative behavior. On the other hand, when a leader fails to reward a subordinate's good behavior, he diminishes the value of

that behavior in the eyes of the subordinate, and he also diminishes the likelihood that the behavior will continued. The next time we are moved to reward someone, let's stop and think: Are we about to reward appearance or substance? We might even ask whether we may have shared in molding the wrong kind of officers. Could it be that the captain above started out on the right track, only to notice that those who sought their own reward were the ones who received it?

Guided by the professional, and moral definitions of loyalty, many officers live it to the letter, whether they are properly rewarded or not. They focus on their unit missions. They know what moderation and balance mean. They are tactful. They work instead of talking about work. And no matter how successful they may be, they do not become arrogant, lest they lose the proper focus.

Let's take a good look at our units and soldiers, then ask ourselves again: Whom do we really reward?

The answer should reveal the traits we value most in our subordinates.

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military; cluster C has a legitimate role. Throughout it history America has fought major armed conflicts every 20 to 30 years. In some of these major conflicts (1812, 1846, 1865, 1898, 1917, 1941, 1950, 1965, 1990), disasters also befell American forces because of an overabundance of cluster B soldiers. Cluster C individuals provide order essential to effective support and logistic functions. Lacking a standing army, a call to arms for an impending conflict will attract mainly cluster B individuals. Without a standing infrastructure of support personnel to maintain it, there will be substantial problems with logistics, which will hamstring an army as effectively as a lack of will to fight.

The Spanish American War serves as a prime example of the worst of both worlds, when a tiny bureaucratized and micromanaged peacetime Army was overwhelmed by volunteers. Major General Rufus Shafter, a Medal of Honor winner, certainly did not lack for fighting spirit. Teddy Roosevelt outshone Shafter, not so much by spirit, but by the ability to supply and equip his forces with private and personal funds outside the hopelessly overwhelmed military logistic chain.

What, then, can be done to maintain a proper balance of these forces? Many suggestions could be made to correct this situation, but five seem most salient:

● Recognize that "leadership" is not a synonym for "management." Peacetime initiatives will likely seek to make systems more "quantifiable"; inevitably these quantities will measure management rather than leadership. In peace or war, the ability to inspire, motivate and, perhaps above all, the moral courage to make tough decisions should be cherished and rewarded.

● It is important to maintain funds for training, deployment and opportunities for advancement.

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● In adolescence those who will eventually grow up to be our best leaders resemble German Shepherd pups—they chew up the furniture. To grow effective leaders, the personnel system should allow people to recover from mistakes if they are otherwise laudable. Some of the best sergeant majors I have served with decry the fact that "zero defects" standards do not allow soldiers today to make the same mistakes that they themselves were permitted.

● It would not be possible today for good war assets to maintain themselves in uniform more than a few years. The "up or out" policy rapidly eliminates effective wartime leaders and would have retired Patton sometime in the 1920s. It may be time to reconsider this policy.

● People naturally prefer the company of their own types. However, these different styles are both vital for a successful military in peace and war. The next major conflict may not permit the "handover" time from peace to war mix. The best and most effective teams contain elements from both camps— respect for the strengths that other styles bring to a team is our best strategy for maintaining the force structure for victory. **MR**

NOTES

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