

**ADDRESS BY FIELD MARSHAL THE VISCOUNT SLIM
ON 14 OCTOBER 1952 TO
OFFICER CADETS OF THE ROYAL MILITARY ACADEMY SANDHURST**

“A long time ago when I was a young officer, I sat next to an older man at dinner, and after talking to him for a bit, he said: *‘What is your job? What do you do?’* I said *‘I am an Army officer’*, and he said *‘Good Lord! Do you mean to say that you are going to be content for the rest of your life to watch fellows forming fours on a barrack square?’* Well, he was a manufacturer of glass bottles, which is a very honourable and interesting and, in his case, lucrative career. I don’t mind betting though, if he is still alive, that in the last 30 years I have had a more interesting, a more varied and possibly an equally useful career – although I must confess I don’t think it has been a bit as lucrative!

Now I am at the end of my military career. You are at the start of yours and don’t get deceived in any way, like that manufacturer of glass bottles. Being an officer means a great deal more than watching other chaps do things. It means doing a hell of a lot of things yourselves. All of you here very shortly, some of you very shortly indeed, will become officers and that means that your Sovereign has selected you, individually, to lead your fellow-countrymen in battle, and that your Queen and your country can do you no higher honour. Whatever happens to you, whatever rank you achieve, whatever honours are showered on you, you will never have a greater compliment paid you than that. And, in return for that honour and that trust, you, when you go out from here, will live up to the traditions of a Sandhurst trained officer of the British Army. You will inherit those traditions and you will live up to them. Some people profess in these days to scoff at tradition. They are right if you regard tradition as meaning that you must never do something for the first time. But if you regard tradition, as you should, as a standard of conduct laid down for you by those who have gone before, and below which you will never fall, then, how wrong they are who scoff at tradition! If you feel tradition is that standard of conduct, then, instead of being a handcuff to limit you and bind you, it will be a handrail to guide you in steep places.

One of the greatest traditions that you will inherit as a British officer is the tradition of leadership. The be-all and end-all of an officer is to be a leader. Now leadership is that combination of example, persuasion, and compulsion that makes men do what you want them to. It is, in effect, the extension of personality. Leadership is the most personal thing in the world, for the simple reason that leadership is just plain *you*. I have said that this is the projection of personality. If you are going to project something, you have got to have it to project. You have got to have a certain personality. You have got to have certain qualities. There is no man in this room who has not got those qualities. If you had not got them you would not be here, still less would you stay here. Those qualities I always consider to be: first of all *courage*; then *will-power*; then *initiative*; and fourthly *knowledge*.

Now as far as *courage* is concerned, thank God you and I come from a race which whatever its faults, has never failed for want of courage. Courage is bred in us. We were lucky enough to get it from our forefathers – and from our mothers too. But the courage of the officer must be a little different from that of the men. You will always take greater hazards than your men. You will always be first in danger. Not only will you be braver than your men, but you will go on being braver a little longer than they are. It is the time factor in an officer’s courage which is most important. You will find, whatever you command, in a difficult situation there will come a pause when everything will stop. It does not matter whether you are a sergeant commanding a section, or a general commanding an army. There will come a pause when everyone will look to you. They will look to you for leadership. Believe me, when that happens, you will feel very lonely. I can remember, once, getting out of a tank (because a tank was my only means of communication) and standing outside were two subordinate generals and a Chinese general. The situation was about as bad as it could be. It looked as if we would all be finished in a day or so. I thought, *‘I’ve got to put a good face on this’* so I stepped out of the tank and those fellows, a half dozen of them, just looked at me and I didn’t know what the hell to say, so I thought, *‘I must say something’*, so I said, *‘Well, gentlemen, it might be worse.’* There was one unspeakable fellow there who said *‘How?’* I could not think

of what to say, so I said '*It might be raining!*' Believe me, in two hours it was raining – like hell. I do not hold it up to you – you might remember it sometimes – as one of those times when there is that pause and they look to you for leadership and somehow or other you have got to give it to them because they turn to you for it.

There is another kind of courage you must have as an officer. You must have moral courage. Moral courage is a much rarer thing than physical courage. Moral courage means you do what you think is right without bothering very much what happens to you when you are doing it. It is not often a question of great issues. It is a small thing of everyday life. A young officer passes an untidy soldier on the road who does not salute him, and the officer does nothing about it and pretends he does not see. He does that because if he calls after him, '*Why didn't you salute?*' he may get a bit of lip back at him and it may be a bit unpleasant and there may be a scene. It is much easier to take no notice and walk on. Every time that you do that you are losing your stock of moral courage. Every time that you check a man for something that is wrong you add to your stock of moral courage and you build it up. Do not think you can dodge the little issues – the little everyday things of duty – and then when the great test comes you will be alright. You won't because you will have undermined the foundation. That is the courage that makes him do what is right because he believes it to be right.

The *will-power*. You will never be a leader without strong will-power because it is surprising, when you want to do anything, how much opposition you get. I was so enraged the other day that I said that the War Office was entirely staffed by officers whose sole duty it was to prove that war was administratively impossible anyway. I think you will be surprised when you try to do anything, the amount of opposition you will get. You will get opposition from the enemy. Well, that's fair enough. That is what you expect. You will get opposition from your friends and allies. But that has all got to be overcome. You will get opposition from every kind of man and nature. You can develop that, but what you have got to watch is that your strong will does not become just pig-headed obstinacy. If you can hold the balance between obstinacy and vacillation, you have gone a long way towards becoming a real leader. And that is often the problem of leadership – to keep the balance between strength of will and flexibility of mind. Keep your mind bright and flexible. You have got to be not only a couple of jumps ahead of the enemy, but a couple of jumps ahead of your own men!

Another quality you have got to have is *initiative*. Initiative simply means that you do not sit down and wait for something to happen because if you sit down it will happen alright and when it does it will be damned unpleasant. Do not let the situation take charge of you, get out and take charge of the situation. If you are doing absolutely nothing, you are doing something wrong. Cultivate initiative. Cultivate it in your pastimes as well as in your work.

The other quality I gave you was *knowledge*. Unless you know more than the men you are trying to lead, you have no business to be an officer. If you command a small unit, a platoon or section – (and, by the way, the command of a platoon is, I think, the best command you will ever have. I have commanded everything from a section of half-a-dozen men to an Army group of a million-and-a-half, and I still look back to the time when I commanded a platoon as the best command I ever had.) If you command a small unit, you ought not be satisfied until you can do every task which you order each man in the small unit to do, as well as he can, if not better. If you can't, get out behind the barracks and practise until you can. You have also got to have knowledge that is at least as important, if not more important – a knowledge of your men. Again, if you command a platoon you ought to know more about the men in that platoon than their own mothers do – a lot of things about them that the old lady doesn't. And you ought to be as fond of them as their mothers are too. Know your job and know your men. Those are the two kinds of knowledge you have got to have.

Now, if you have got these qualities – if you have got courage, will-power, initiative, and knowledge you will make a leader but you won't necessarily make a leader for good. You have got to have one more quality to be a leader whom men will follow. When their bellies have turned to water with fear, when they think all is lost, that's the time when leadership is tested. I'm a hell of a general when I am winning and everybody is walloping along and the enemy is running away. We can all be jolly good at that. When it is I who am getting the

hammering and the enemy is after me, that is a very different matter. The test of leadership comes not so much when you are winning as when you are taking a hammering. Unless you have one more quality men will not follow you. The quality you have got to have is integrity, which really means that the men trust you and they won't trust you unless you have got that. If you want that described, it really is the old fashioned Christian virtue of self-sacrifice. You have got to put somebody before yourself. You have got to love your neighbour more than you love yourself. In effect, what you have got to do is place the honour and interest of your Queen first. That of your regiment next. The security, comfort, and well-being of the men under your command after that; and last, and last all the time, you have got to put your own well-being, your own security, and your own comfort. If you do that – and you won't be living up to the traditions of a British officer if you do not – if you do that, then your men will follow you everywhere. Now, in 40 years wearing the Queen's uniform – or her father's or her grandfather's – there is one thing that is very much borne in me – and if you forget everything else I have told you I would like you to remember this – that in the British Army there are no good units and no bad units, there are only good or bad officers. When you go from here, see to it, that you are good officers – and good luck to you!"