

Address to Officers and Men of the Second Armored Division,
Fort Benning, Georgia

May 17, 1941

Soldiers! I feel that, since we are about to embark on a long series of maneuvers, our success in which may have a profound influence on the country and on the Armored Corps, it is an appropriate time that I called your attention to a few essentials.

Although discipline is one of the commonest words in the military profession, it is also the least understood. Few soldiers and no civilians realize either its purpose or importance.

Let me begin by stating that you men and officers are, in my opinion, magnificently disciplined. But you are disciplined because you have taken it on faith and not because you know its real purpose and meaning. The true and vital purpose of discipline is to produce habit, habit stronger than the fear of death.

In every man there is a natural reluctance to doing what he is told. As children you objected to washing behind your ears, or to brushing your teeth, or to buttoning your pants; but your parents insisted, and you eventually formed the habit and now feel quite uncomfortable if, by inadvertence or necessity, you are unable to do any of these things. When you first became soldiers, you had the same aversion to saluting, to standing at attention, or moving by command; but, eventually, the insistence of your officers and non-commissioned officers produced in you the habit of doing these things. The same thing applies to all the other military accomplishments which you have been taught. Yet, eventually, you do them all and do them all well.

The query then naturally arises in your mind, "What more is there to this discipline?" The answer is, infinitely more. For example, at Christmas or New Years, you can eat to satiety in half an hour, but it takes you a day or more to digest it, if then. I think it is perfectly true that any intelligent soldier can be taught the fundamentals of his craft in six weeks. But, at the end of six weeks, he has to think in order to do any of the things which he has been taught. The fact that he has to think is a sure sign that he is not thoroughly disciplined or thoroughly trained.

All of you have, I hope, indulged in fist fights. If so, you must remember that, in the first fight, after the first blow was struck, your mind went out of action; and you did whatever you did subconsciously and usually wrong, and furthermore, you have no memory of what happened. Now the whistling of a questing bullet, the crash of a bursting shell, the gasp of a wounded friend, or the gey wess of his brains which you wipe from your face — have a much more disconcerting effect on you than has a fist fight. To a lesser degree, hunger, cold, and fatigue, have the effect of making you unable to think; yet, in war you will experience all of these things, and unless you are able to carry on by habit-automatically, you will either do the wrong thing, or what is worse, do nothing at all.

As children in Public Schools, many of you were probably required to form in column of twos to march in and out of the buildings. After months of doing this under the direction of the teachers, you did it naturally -- by habit. Why was this desirable? So that, in the horrible event of fire, you would not assilate the crazed crowd in the theaters and trample one another to death in a futile attempt to escape. But by complying with your habit, would form in column and march out to safety. This is exactly the reason that we insist that in entering and leaving the vehicles, you do so in a specified manner, so that, in the event of sudden surprise, you will not all rush to get in at once and jam one another and waste time; but, by complying with habit, you will get in the way you have been accustomed to do.

You cannot be disciplined in great things and undisciplined in small things. Many nations have attempted to do just that. They have said that, "For our people there is a special kind of discipline." At the beginning of the Civil War, both armies said that it was not necessary to have discipline. At the end of the Civil War, the discipline in the armies, both North and South, was as strict as any that had been known in the world. The cataclysmatic intensity of present day war makes rigid discipline more necessary than ever before. In the cacophony of sound caused by bursting bombs, bursting claxtons, clattering tanks, and hissing bullets, you must operate with instant and machine-like precision, and I know you will. All men are equally brave, but the brave, undisciplined men have no chance against the disciplined valor of other men. Have you ever seen a few policemen handle a crowd?

Before leaving this subject of discipline, I would like to call your attention to one thing. A great many people, foolish people, say that we should not salute. They do not realize that the salute is the mutual greeting of respect and loyalty between members of a fighting organization. If you take pleasure, as most of you do who belong to secret societies, in giving the grip, how much more so should you take pleasure in giving the grip of the Army, the salute to other members of that same grand profession.

Why do you suppose that I insisted that, during the summer, we wear the patch of the Second Armored Division on our shirts? Because I am proud of you, and I want everyone who meets you to know that you belong to the Second Armored Division, and that, not only are your officers proud of you, but you are proud of yourself. For pride is the greatest thing that a man can have. I do not speak of foolish pride, but I speak of pride in demonstrated ability. You, so far as you have had an opportunity, have demonstrated that ability, and we look forward to your proving it to the world, and, if the worst comes, to your enemies.

While all of us are members of an Armored Division, I feel that many of us do not know either the general organization or the purpose of an armored division, or how it fights. I feel, that in maneuvers and in battle, you will do much better if I take a little time to explain to you just what you are members of and just how each and every one of you should do his job.

An armored division is the most powerful organization ever devised by the mind of man. Last year, some twelve of them, aided by a few dive bombers, practically destroyed an army which, until that time, had been considered the model for all armies. How did they destroy it? By attacking the soul of the leaders, by attacking the means of signal communication and the means of supply -- that is what we are for. In terms of football, an armored division is that element of the team which carries out the running plays. We straight-arms and go around and dodge and go around.

Beginning with the element nearest the enemy, we have, in an armored division, a squadron of thirteen airplanes and three messenger planes. These airplanes precede the division in the direction of the enemy by from seventy-five to one hundred and fifty miles on a hundred-mile front, and, through observation, try to locate the principal hostile units. They are in radio communication with the next element of the division -- the Reconnaissance Battalion, which, as you know, consists of two scout car companies, one tank company, and one heavy weapons company. This outfit, preceding the remainder of the division by some fifty or a hundred miles, and operating on a front of perhaps a hundred miles, gathers the information from the air and makes it more specific by ground reconnaissance. But it is not the function, or at least not the primary function, of the Reconnaissance Battalion to hold on to the enemy after they have located him, they attempt to go through or go around and find out what is behind. If they have a chance to hurt him, they do.

Next come the Reconnaissance companies and machine gun companies of the light tank regiments. Their mission is more specific, more confined. Their job is to locate the enemy's line, and having located it, to keep it under constant observation. This mission is of vital importance, because we do not wish to run into a prepared position, where a few relatively inexpensive anti-tank cannon can destroy a large number of relatively expensive tanks, and, so far as you are concerned, their precious freight, of members of the Second Armored Division.

I want to impress you with this business of reconnaissance. It is the vital and distinguishing element of an armored division and what differentiates it from the old tank units of the World War.

Our mission is to attack weakness, and our reconnaissance is what permits us to find that weakness -- the soft spots in the line of the exposed flank.

Every element of the Division, from the platoon up, must reconnoiter and find out what is in front of it. We must not rush blindly like galled buffaloes across level fields against the certain destruction of undestroyed enemy fortifications.

A tank in motion can produce effective fire over a radius of 250 yards. Hence, if we were on a flat and open plain, the maximum interval between tanks would be about 400 yards. The usable interval is any distance less

then 100 yards, at which the vehicles are mutually visible. Remember that and don't jam up. By so doing, you are no more deadly and you provide your enemy with a much more lucrative target.

Again, successive waves or lines of tanks should not be too close together. They should be far enough apart so that those behind can take advantage of the actions and discoveries of those in front. Frequently rear waves will not be deployed in line, but will be in line platoon columns of vehicles, because in this formation it is easier to handle them and to deploy them in the desired direction to take advantage of what has occurred in front of them.

But the tanks do not attack alone. We have, as you know, two regiments of artillery, whose function it is, once having the enemy located, to pound and jelly him, so that somewhere in his line there is a hole through which we may go or a flank around which we may run. Frequently the perfidious enemy will not fight fair, but will hide behind a river or a mountain, and then we must force a passage. For this we have our engineers and our infantry who, supported by the guns, do with their own flesh and blood what armor is unable to accomplish. In addition to the elements I have described, we have the Medical Battalion which takes care of the wounded and the sick. We have the Ordnance which does the same thing for the sick or wounded vehicles. We have the Quartermaster, which not only takes care of the quartermaster vehicles, but further supplies us with food, with clothing, and with gasoline, which is more precious than any of the others.

Many of you have seen or seen pictures of the steel traps which are used in the North Woods to catch game. These consist of two jaws with a trigger in the middle. If you will consider any element of an armored division as such a trap, turned up on edge and moving toward the enemy, you will get the idea when the enemy touches that trigger in the middle, the two jaws close -- they close behind him. That is what we must do. We must find out where the enemy is, we must hold him, and we must get around him.

Years ago I wrote, and I see no reason to change it now, that the whole art of war consisted in catching the enemy by the nose and kicking him in the pants. Try to do that in the maneuvers, and in the war, if it comes. There is no form of war in which the junior man -- the Lieutenant, the sergeant, the corporal, and the private has more responsibility or greater opportunity than in an armored division. Many times the fate of the whole battle, the fate of your Division, the fate of the Nation may depend on your courage, your intelligence, and your initiative.

Remember, make it a fixed principle, to find out where the enemy is, hold him in front by fire, and get around him.

Suppose you are in a reconnaissance company, a machine gun company, or a tank company and get to a road block. You immediately pull your leading car back and, dismounting a couple of guns, take to the defenders of the

road block under fire. Then, you send other cars around. If they are wheeled vehicles, they may have to dismount, if there is a stream in front. If so, they take their guns with them and attack the enemy on the ground from the rear flanks. Usually he will not wait to be so attacked; he will start to move out, then those who are just behind the hill in front of him have an opportunity to charge him when he limbers. Those in the pivot must watch the enemy, so that the instant he moves out, they can charge.

Remember, that one of the greatest qualities which we have, is the ability to produce in our enemy the fear of the unknown. Therefore, we must always keep moving, do not sit down, do not say, "I have done enough," keep on, see what else you can do to raise the devil with the enemy. I remember once when I was trying to play football at West Point, I didn't do so well. The coach came up and said, "Mr. Patton," he added a few profane words, "If you can't do anything else, throw a fit!" The same thing applies to armored forces, if you can't think of anything else to do, throw a fit, burn a town, do something!

Now, to accomplish the various missions which I have tried so briefly to point out to you, you must have discipline. You have it. You must have a desperate determination to go forward. That, I am sure, you will develop. With those two things, discipline and determination, plus the magnificent equipment which we are getting or already have, we are irresistible. The Germans are not going to be beaten by defensive operations. When we beat them, we will beat them by attacking sooner and harder than they do.

Finally, I want to say a few words to you about how to conduct yourself at maneuvers. Fortunately, or unfortunately, as you may look at it, there are no bullets in maneuvers, and things sometimes get a little dull. But play the game; don't lie in the shade, don't pretend you are manning an anti-aircraft gun or a machine gun while you are lying down. Be on your toes, if an aircraft comes over you, track it with your gun and pretend you are shooting hell out of it! If a tank or an infantryman approaches you who is an enemy, do the same thing; play the game. If you have to charge, go fast, if you have to retreat, do so, but as slowly as possible. Your officers will explain the meaning of the various flags. Obey them absolutely. Remember that the umpires have the job of representing the bullets. They don't like to do what they have to do, but you will never get anywhere if you make them mad. Do what they tell you and do it promptly, and pretty soon you will find that they err in shading the decisions in your favor. Try, above all things, to use your imagination. Think this is war. "What would I do if that man were really shooting at me?" That is the only chance, men, that you are going to have to practice. The next time, maybe, there will be no umpires, and the bullets will be very real, both yours and the enemy's.

In closing, I wish to congratulate every officer and man of the Second Armored Division for the honest effort and enthusiastic support he has