Admiral James M. Loy
"Holding the High Ground"
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Amenities:

It's a pleasure to be here with you tonight in Tulsa. But when I think about how far we are from the nearest seacoast, it makes me wonder whether the Chiefs' mess knows something that the rest of us will soon find out—as is usually the case. … When I return to Washington tonight, I'll be sure to check the latest information about the impact of global warming on rising sea levels and coastal flooding!

Master Chief, Senior Chief Scaramastro and Chief Wells, thank you for inviting me to break bread with you. I think there is no greater honor than to be invited into the Chiefs' mess. And I couldn't be more pleased that Secretary Mineta and his wife, Deni, have honored us with their presence here tonight. Of course, as an honorary Command Master Chief, the Secretary is really just testing early whether Master Chief Patton was blowing smoke, when he told him the Master Chief Insignia would get him free lodging and chow in any hotel in the country!

[Extemporaneous acknowledgement of Mrs. Mineta as the sponsor of CGC SYCAMORE, and as latest CG "Qualified Lookout," based on her excellent reporting of a SAR case near their home in Annapolis.]

It is customary in many cultures, after enjoying a sumptuous feast, to tell tales of heroic deeds and recount the days of yore. I'd like to follow that tradition tonight with a story of one of my favorite heroes of the Civil War, and along the way tell you about something that must be a great concern for all of us.

Introduction:

In the month leading up to the battle that was to become the most decisive of the Civil War, Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain of the Union Army had a tremendous retention problem. At Antietam, an especially bloody battle, he had lost much of the 20th Maine Regiment to the ravages of war. His regiment then stood at less than half-strength. But his problems went beyond casualties.

In fact, his problems went beyond those encountered by most military commanders during either war or peace. He had been dealt a hand that seemed unplayable. To reinforce his war-weary troops, he had been given charge of a band of mutineers from the 2nd Maine Regiment.

Chamberlain's position was precarious. He faced the unenviable choice of either incorporating into his own ranks troops proven to be disloyal, or isolating them and using scarce manpower to make sure the malcontents did not desert until they could be tried at courts-martial.

As he surveyed this apparent dilemma, he also observed that these men actually had some good reasons behind their desires to quit and go home.

They had expressed bitter dissatisfaction with their former leadership, and disillusionment with the army—they had not been paid; a lack of focused vision, and uncertainty in the plans of war had produced a lack of hope in the future. Most likely, they didn't much like the odds of advancement, either, although opportunities were quite good, provided one could live long enough to get promoted!

From the perspective of the men themselves, their choices were limited: either they could face courts-martial and imprisonment, be shot for attempting desertion, or continue to fight what they considered at the time to be a losing cause against a fierce and determined enemy. Meanwhile, Chamberlain had a war to fight.

What was a good military leader to do?

Retention or Retreat

I'll bet that none of us in this room has ever faced quite the same retention challenge as Colonel Chamberlain's. But maybe we can identify with him somewhat. Certainly, we in the Coast Guard today are facing our own battle of retention. Many of you are very familiar with this situation and are on the front line in our efforts to keep good sailors around.

At nearly every level of our organization, but especially through our junior ranks, we have experienced a rate of attrition during the past few years that is, in a word, alarming. I don't think I need to convince you Chiefs of that fact.

The extraordinary attrition in first-term re-enlistments overtaxes our recruiting forces and impacts severely our capability to produce much-needed petty officers. The situation with officers, especially in the junior ranks, is not much healthier.

The Coast Guard is not alone, however. Other military services and business organizations across the country also are experiencing this problem, for a variety of reasons. Competition for good talent is severe. It's tough to keep well-trained, highly skilled members in service, especially those in technical and specialized fields.

No doubt, as good Chiefs you will observe that our rate of attrition is not nearly so alarming as that of our young colonel from Maine. And the reasons for our attrition rate, thankfully, are not nearly so severe in degree as were those of the 20th Maine Regiment. But we should also observe that many of the Coast Guard men and women

who leave our organization each year also have some good reasons for doing so, not unlike Chamberlain's renegade reinforcements.

Those reasons might include being dissatisfied with leadership, being uncertain of the game-plan, being overworked and underpaid, experiencing uneven advancements, pay inequities between public and private sectors, and a lack of hope in the future. Meanwhile, we have an important mission to accomplish, too.

What is a good military leader to do?

Chamberlain's Solution

What did Chamberlain do? The short of it is that Chamberlain led what remained of the 20th Maine, with just a few weeks of preparation, and at the end of a prolonged forced march, into the Battle of Gettysburg on July 2nd, 1863. There, in a place called Little Round Top, his beleaguered troops valiantly stood their ground on the exposed left flank of the Union Army… bravely fought back five ferocious charges by seasoned Confederate troops, and in so doing helped turn the tide of the Civil War in favor of the Union.

How did Colonel Chamberlain turn things around? What military tactics class did he draw upon? What new book on leadership did he have at hand? What recent study helped him decide how best to retain his soldiers, incite their loyalty, and inspire them to face unimaginable hardship and long odds? The answer to each of these questions is: none.

Colonel Chamberlain did not attend West Point, nor did he have any formal military training. Before the war, he had been a professor of rhetoric at Bowdoin College. The governor of Maine appointed him to his regimental post. Though he persistently read every book he could get his hands on regarding military strategy and battlefield tactics, none told him how to deal with this particular situation. And he had no time to hire a consulting group to conduct a study on workplace climate.

To what means, then, did he resort? I suggest to you that his means were not extraordinary. In fact, he resorted to the same basic means available to each of us as leaders every day. You know them well.

Chamberlain was remarkable and complex in a number of ways, but his approach to the problem of retention was quite simple. He knew it was a question of leadership, not money or material. He acted on sound principles of leadership, learned by observing carefully other successful leaders around him, both officer and enlisted.

First, he cared for the needs of his men and attended to them, as best he could. Second, he motivated them by insisting that, without the help of each individual soldier fighting together in a common, noble cause, the war would be lost. Third, he resolved to

hold his ground "at all hazards" (in his words), as he and his men fought bravely, side by side.

Other facets of Chamberlain's leadership are worthy of careful study, and I urge you to do so in your continuing journey as leaders. I have singled out these three because I think they are so clearly relevant to his success and to ours. I'd like to dwell on each of them just for a moment.

Caring, Motivating, and Resolving to Stand Fast:

The conditions of war had aggravated the grievances of Chamberlain's mutineers into outright rebellion. According to the men, they had been underfed, inadequately equipped, and over-extended in combat. They wanted to go home.

For us today, I'm certain that none of us looks underfed, especially after that wonderful meal! But maybe we can appreciate the other conditions. Beyond that, we can't overlook the fact that these men had been charged properly with mutiny. In fact, they were not on their way home, but to the brig…maybe the gallows.

> In the midst of his dilemma, however, Chamberlain took the time to listen to these men, even as they complained. His response to their insubordination and "belly-aching" as some might be inclined to see it, defied military logic. He allowed them to keep what weapons they had, supplied them with additional weapons and ammunition, fed and clothed them to the best of his ability, and incorporated them among his dispirited ranks. He cared personally, and then entrusted their care to his commissioned and non-commissioned officers.

Without making promises he couldn't keep, he told these men that he would look into the charges made against them, and help them as he could, if they would continue fighting. Chamberlain cared enough to listen to the needs of his troops, especially to their complaints, and acted on what he heard to the best of his ability. In so doing, he built a relationship of trust with these men from the outset, although he had every reason to distrust them.

Dr. John C. Maxwell, a noted expert on leadership, calls the principle of building relationships on trust the "law of connection." As he puts it in his book, The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership, "People don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care." Maxwell goes on to say that the relationship established between a leader and those in his or her immediate charge has more to do with their loyalty to the organization than any other single factor, including, by the way, adequate pay or benefits.

That is unequivocally true in our Coast Guard. We have seen it countless times, and study after study bears it out. Sometimes we don't even understand it. That's the

magic of our work…so noble we continue even in the face of challenges that would convince others to look elsewhere for their daily work.

Chamberlain's exact words to his troops during the days leading up to the battle of Gettysburg were not recorded. Long after the battle was over, however, others pieced together his words to them. In short, Chamberlain spoke to these mutineers as individuals, challenging them to come together as a new unit, fighting for the same purpose … that's MOTIVATION.

He noted that they were fighting in a different kind of army than the world had ever known -- an army "going out to set men free." He set the stakes even higher by saying that if they lost the next fight, the war would be over. Without the individual effort of each soldier, the battle would be lost, and so would the war. In other words, each person held a stake in the outcome of this noble cause.

It is easy to get lost in the cogs of a great military machine. It takes clear vision to see how much difference each individual person makes in the outcome of any venture. The job of the leader is to maintain that clarity of vision and to convey it to others so as to motivate them to complete the task at hand.

As Stephen Covey, another esteemed expert on leadership, so succinctly states, "Principle-centered leadership suggests that the highest level of human motivation is a sense of personal contribution." Chamberlain seemed to understand this basic principle, and applied it to his own dilemma.

Results and Recovery

Colonel Chamberlain had no way of knowing for sure how his words and actions would affect the performance of his troops in battle. The best that he could hope for in the days and weeks that followed the incorporation of the mutineers was that his treatment of the 2nd Maine regiment would keep his men from bolting in the face of an enemy, if and when history provided an opportunity.

Just 40 days later, his methods and his men stood the ultimate test. They were standing shoulder to shoulder at Little Round Top. Chamberlain stood with them, as the opposing forces mustered time and again throughout that day in their attempts to rout the Union forces and take the critical high ground. Chamberlain knew that the Confederates, led by Colonel William Oates from the 44th Alabama, had found their weaknesses in the previous charges, and he knew that the final charge would be the hardest fought.

Chamberlain watched the enemy in gray gathering yet again in the heat and smoke of that July afternoon, and as he later recalled, "I saw the faces of my men, one after another, when they had fired their last cartridge, turn anxiously toward mine for a moment." Loyalty… "Hold this flank at all hazards!" were his orders. "Hold this ground!"

He could not retreat, and he knew they were not ready to meet another assault. Instead, Chamberlain decided to order a bayonet charge. As he turned to give the command, almost before he could finish shouting the word "Bayonets!" his men were forming the line and arming the muzzles of their weapons with the glint of sharp steel.

The hand-to-hand counter-charge down that hill came as such a surprise to the Confederates that, by their commander's own admission, they "ran like a herd of wild cattle." The rout was complete. The 20th Maine, augmented by the disloyal remnants of the 2nd Maine … had held their line. Colonel Oates later recounted that Chamberlain's "skill and persistency and the great bravery of his men saved Little Round Top and the Army of the Potomac from defeat."

Aristotle once observed that "we become brave by doing brave acts." It was Chamberlain's resolve "to hold at all hazards" that inspired his men to stand with him and not be moved, even when things looked very bleak. He called upon their warrior spirits to stand fast in hard times. Being brave does not always involve facing danger or terrible odds, however. Sometimes, it is simply the resolve to face an uncertain future without giving ground.

Lessons of Leadership

Colonel Joshua Chamberlain was not a military superhero; his nature was quiet and unassuming. He was quite simply an ordinary man rising to the challenge of extraordinary circumstances. He applied the basic principles of leadership as he had observed them in the performance of his duties. It might interest you to know that, many years after the war, Colonel Chamberlain was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor for his service at Little Round Top.

He remained in the Army until the end of the war, though wounded four times, once almost fatally. Eventually, he rose to the rank of Brevet Major General, and was charged by General Ulysses S. Grant with receiving the surrender of the Confederate colors at Appomattox Court House in April of 1865. It seems to me that his adherence to those basic principles served him very well.

Caring, motivating, and resolving to hold your ground in the hardest times—even when your readiness is weakened—these three simple acts of leadership brought honor and victory to a worn-out, rag-tag group of men. What application can we then make to our retention problem?

We have no mutineers in the Coast Guard. We are not at war with an enemy. So our problem is not as large as Colonel Chamberlain's. But we do need to persuade our new recruits and our veterans to stand with us to retain the strength of our workforce. Some of the young people that we need to keep have violated the regulations or broken the bounds of indiscretion, endangering their careers. They might need the second chance that Chamberlain provided his men.

I wonder how the enthusiastic application of these three basic leadership principles that served Colonel Chamberlain so well might affect our rate of retention? For instance, when was the last time you personally asked someone in your charge why they were leaving the service, and then tried to do something about it? How clear is your vision regarding the personal contribution that each of your subordinates provides to your unit? What do people see when they look your way, in terms of holding your ground in the face of adversity and uncertainty in a tough budget year?

> Let me just remind you of something that I think you already know very well as leaders. The success of the Coast Guard in the next four to five years, which is just about the duration of the Civil War, depends in large part on our ability today to restore our readiness and shape our future.

I have spoken often and at length in previous settings about my intended vision and direction for our service and about the need for transformation. That direction, however, depends fundamentally upon retaining the quality and depth of our workforce. We cannot restore readiness simply by building better ships, airplanes, and equipment. We also must focus on keeping our young sailors aboard. They must be willing to stand with us.

Some of you are worried about our budget woes. Think about this for a moment: For every 37 petty officers that we can retain, we save over one million dollars in recruiting and training costs. That could go a long way in easing our pain.

Our Human Resources folks are working very hard to improve quality of life and compensation issues that impact retention, such as increased SRBs, incentives for specialties, increased geographic stability, TriCare Remote, and other such initiatives. But I hope you can see clearly that retention in the Coast Guard also depends very heavily on leadership at every level, especially where the daily struggles are waged.

Let me make one final point about Colonel Chamberlain. As I have said before, he was not a typical military man. He was a teacher. He had spent his early life studying the classics of literature and philosophy, and even briefly considered becoming a minister. Not your typical "grunt." He was different, you might say. Yet, his personal qualities proved critical to that decisive battle on the hills of Gettysburg.

Many among us are different in many respects. Just look around. Valuing those differences and managing them well is crucial to our success in keeping the best talent. We must take full advantage of those differences as we stand together, shoulder to shoulder—one in unity, one in plurality, one in diversity.

Conclusion

In five years, when Deepwater and other projects like it are fully upon us, some of you will be leading the outcome. In five years, as our nation faces new and different

hazards that have little to do with traditional warfare, you will be holding the flank. In fact, you are even now, and I know you realize that.

Tonight, I speak to your gathered conference for the last time as your Commandant. Don't misunderstand . . . I still have 9 months of hard work ahead and plan to be in the trenches every minute with you.

Many of you have been my shipmates over the years. Master Chief Patton is my soulmate. He's been by my side for the past 15 years—caring, motivating, and holding the high ground. Alex Keanan was present with me when we gave birth to Leadership Development and gave verbal expression to our core values.

ENC George Taylor and BM1 Ernie Styron nurtured me as a shiny new CO on the CGC Cape Falcon in 1965. Five different BMCs and ENC Norm Caribo were my heart and soul as we fought together in Vietnam and got every kid home safely.

I remember two MKCs, Gene Hill and Harry Darling, on the COURAGEOUS who between them brought our engineering department from worst to first and took a dozen new firemen under their wings and made sailors of them.

> Yesterday, I pinned an MSM on BMCS Bill Davies. He's one of the toughest characters I've ever worked with … in Panama after Just Cause, in Trinidad, Bolivia and Tres Esquimos, Colombia … places where the tough survive and the weak don't. I watched him give skills and competence to indigenous native sailors, who loved him for working them to the bone, because he cared, motivated, and held his ground, and they had never experienced that before.

Apart from the common oath that we swear to defend our country, I think one of the most eloquent passages in our Coast Guard lexicon is the Chief's Creed. It's a fundamental statement of loyalty, well-crafted and well-followed.

I have three pieces of parchment that I will treasure forever … my original commission, my certificate from the President when he gave me this final job in my beloved Coast Guard, and the certificate that forever assures me a place at your table as an honorary Chief Petty Officer. It's important to me that you know of the respect that I have for each of you and of the constancy of this challenge that will always be ours who are blessed to be leaders in this service.

As to our retention challenge, I am depending upon each of you, as individual leaders, to undertake now to care about your troops, to motivate them, and to resolve to hold your ground and claim the ultimate victory in making sure the Coast Guard remains <u>always ready</u>. As we consider the uncertainty of the new century before us, I challenge each of you to remember the wise admonition of Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, coming down to us through the years:

"We know not the future, and cannot plan for it much. But we can…determine and know what manner of men [and women] we will be whenever and wherever the hour strikes."

SEMPER PARATUS! And hold your ground!