

Warriors or Peacekeepers?

Kjetil Enstad • Paula Holmes-Eber
Editors

Warriors or Peacekeepers?

Building Military Cultural Competence

 Springer

Editors

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Foreword

I have been around for more than 60 years, 40 of them as a leader for large and small units at home and abroad in national settings as well as in complex international operations. The ability to fulfil your mission and thereby support the overall operational objectives is the most important measure of success for a leader. The Norwegian Armed Forces has a saying that expresses a subtle but critical success formula: “strive to accomplish your mission while also taking care of your men and women.”

To live by that saying means to understand culture. When I have led conventional units and had the responsibility for training and equipping Special Forces, it has struck me that “culture eats structure for breakfast,” as the saying goes. Having a well-functioning unit where leaders on all levels are trusted, trust the team, seek responsibility, and take initiatives is a question of culture. So this is what has become for me the most important elements in leadership: responsibility, integrity, mission focus, and care for one’s colleagues, superiors, and soldiers.

A culture characterized by these values is a culture that creates a short vertical distance in the unit, that nurtures the differences that create strength and the ability to find good solutions and that stimulates objections and gathers around a common goal once decisions have been made. Such a culture creates good units.

However, there is another dimension of culture, which now, more than ever, is key to military operations: How do we meet foreign cultures? It is all too easy to step wrong, and if we do, we create conflict and reduce our chances of success, thus failing to fulfil mission objectives. I have stepped wrong myself, and I have witnessed many mistakes in my career. I remember well my own dread after having given a speech in the Middle East and one from the audience made me aware of the fact that I had shown the students the soles of my feet when I crossed my legs on stage. While this was a minor transgression, the military leader will encounter much more difficult dilemmas: it was hard for me to accept during one of my missions that dialogue had to continue, even when it dawned on me that extreme violence against women and children as a way of sending a message to opponents and to civilians was seen as both natural and necessary for my counterpart.

We must therefore study and learn about culture, generally, as well as related to the specific deployment areas. This is a book about conditions for learning about culture, how one can learn about culture, and about the place of cultural understanding in military organizations as well as during operations. The book offers insight on what cultural understanding actually means. Thus, it is an important book.

Unit culture lays much of the foundation for how we meet foreign cultures, not least as it can stimulate or inhibit critical examination of the world around us and reflection on the central questions of our times. Therefore, my advice to military leaders is never to stop reading, learning, and discussing the important aspects of your profession! This book can inspire such learning and discussions.

Oslo, Norway
2019

General (Ret.) Robert Mood

Acknowledgments

This volume grew out of a conference entitled “Teaching Culture at Military Academies” in Oslo, Norway, in the fall of 2017. Academics from military educational institutions in many different countries responded to the invitation, and the papers, the discussions, and not least the convivial atmosphere among the participants during these couple of days in the dark Norwegian autumn prepared the ground for this book project. We are immensely grateful to Hans Kristian Felde and Ole Martin Stormoen for their help in organizing the conference and to the Norwegian Military Academy for funding it. We are also indebted to Brendan MacBride for his invaluable help in proofreading the manuscript, and we would also like to thank our editor at Springer, Annelies Kersbergen, for her flexibility and her prompt and precise answers to all our queries as we prepared the manuscript.

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