



Photo: AF News Room

LEADERSHIP

A SPEECH GIVEN BY **Air Commodore Leonard Birchall**
AT THE CANADIAN FORCES SCHOOL OF AEROSPACE STUDIES
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PREFACE BY **Major William March**

Air Commodore Leonard Birchall was the epitome of an officer. During his 62 years of service, in peace and war, he demonstrated what a leader should be through his devotion to duty and willingness to put the safety and comfort of personnel under his command ahead of his well being. Although his story has been told many times, it was a rare treat to hear him in person as he strove to impart practical lessons in leadership to generations of young airmen and airwomen. The article that follows is the transcript of one such speaking engagement. As such it provides a personal glimpse of an airman whose accomplishments were described

by Major-General James R. Davies of the United States Marine Corps thusly: "In circumstances where only too many officers had failed to live up to their responsibilities, the tales of Birchall's leadership carried ... throughout the system of camps, brought renewed faith and strength to many hundreds of men. It is incredible how morale of disheartened men can rise behind the example of a courageous officer, Birchall came to be something of a symbol, to stand in the hearts of men as a true officer."

**Here then, in his own words,
are the musings of a true officer.**

I apologize for my copious notes, but at my age, and this past July I became 82 years young, there are three serious losses which you encounter in your physical capabilities. First your eyesight grows dim, and you will note the rather strong lenses in my glasses. Second, your hearing is not too good, and I admit that I am in great need of a hearing aid. Third... and I'll be damned if I can ever remember what that one is. Thus, I must stick closely to my text or I shall wander all over the place. Actually there is a fourth serious loss in our physical capabilities which we old chaps encounter but we do our utmost not to even think about that one, let alone discuss it, as whenever we do all we do is sit around and cry.

You will note that it is necessary for me to take frequent sips of water and this is due to the fact that during my indoctrination into Japanese culture, which was administered with severity by clubs of various sizes, all too often I would zig when I should have zagged and the damage to my throat has finally caught up with me resulting in my having to have a series of drastic throat operations and intense radiation treatments, leaving me with a perpetual dry mouth and throat, so I ask you to please bear with me.

After I had accepted the kind invitation of your Commandant to give this lecture on "Leadership", I received a Course Lecture Brief titled "EO 404.10 - Leadership - Retired General Officer's Perspective" which I am certain you have all read. Now this states in part: "Without being restrictive or exhaustive, the presentation should address the following teaching points where possible". It then goes on to list 8 points. I am afraid that my lecture is not that well structured and I can only hope that I will cover the required points. If not, then you can take me to task in the question and answer session.

On 21 April '96 I qualified for the 5th bar to my CD having completed 62 years of undetected crime in the Canadian Services, and hence the greatest part of my life has been spent in the Canadian military. Napoleon once said: "There are no bad men ... only bad officers".

The question then is have I been a good or bad officer, and here there is no set criteria or standard. Some believe that the best measure of success is the rank you attain, but I do not accept this. Some of the finest men I have met, served with, and held in the highest regard were not necessarily those who were the most senior. One thing I do recognize as a measure of success is leadership, as everyone I have held in high esteem has had that quality and this, I believe, to be essential for success in any walk of life. As a member of the Armed Forces and regardless of rank, the opportunities for development and use of leadership are immense, and the satisfaction you will derive is equally so. There is still the old adage, however, that you can lead a horse to water but you cannot make him drink. Or the other version, you can lead a horse to drink but you can't make him water. Thus, while you will have these opportunities, the success you will achieve depends entirely on the amount of effort you put forth. Nothing is ever free in this life or handed to you on a plate; the price you must pay is **HARD WORK, TOTAL EFFORT AND SELF SACRIFICE.**

I would now like to give you my concept of leadership and the reasons for my beliefs. I notice that point number 4 of the teaching points is "Leadership versus Management", which would obviously call for a definition of those terms. The most succinct one I have heard for leadership is being able to tell someone to go to Hell and have them look forward to the trip, whereas the one for management is being able to keep three balls in the air with one hand while protecting your own with the other. If you ever have to lead troops into combat, and I pray this will never happen, you will find that you appear before your men stripped of all insignia and outward signs of authority to command. Your leadership is judged not by your rank, but by whether your men are completely confident that you have the character, knowledge and training that they can trust you with their lives. Now men are shrewd judges of their leaders, especially when their lives are at stake, and hence your character and knowledge must be such that they are prepared to follow you, to trust your judgment and carry out your commands.

Let us now examine these two major things which the men look for in their leaders. The first is “character”, and here I believe that the prime ingredient, the absolute corner-stone, is integrity. Integrity is one of those words which many people keep in the desk drawer labeled “TOO HARD”. It is not a topic for the dinner table or cocktail party. You can’t buy or sell it. When supported with education a person’s integrity can give them something to rely on when their perception seems to blur, when rules and principles seem to waiver, and when they are faced with hard choices of right or wrong. It’s something to keep them afloat when they are drowning; if only for practical reasons it is an attribute that should be kept at the very top of a young person’s consciousness. Without personal integrity, intellectual skills are worthless. As the ancient Roman philosopher Epictetus said in the field manual he produced for the Roman soldiers in approximately the year 50 A.D.:

“It is better to die in hunger, exempt from guilt and fear, than it is to live in affluence and with perturbation” .

This means that you must demonstrate the utmost honesty in everything you do in your dealings with superiors and subordinates alike, both on and off duty. It is this that inspires your men to carry out a similar integrity. When they know your word is your bond, then confidence and trust will permeate the entire unit. The men will feel they can come to you, their leader, with the bad news as well as the good news. Never shoot the messenger as this will just discourage others from giving you the honest feedback needed for you to command. You must report the good, the bad, and the ugly up the chain of command to your superiors. There is no substitute for honesty in our profession, what we do is just too important.

Integrity also means having the courage **to take the full responsibility for your actions and those of your subordinates.** Don’t quibble, don’t try to shift the blame, don’t look for scapegoats. If you or your command has fouled up, then fess up, and

press on. In doing so, you will set the right example for your men, and earn the respect of your subordinates and superiors alike. Nothing destroys a unit’s effectiveness and leadership quicker than the leaders not taking the sole responsibility for their actions, and the first sign of this is usually careerism, the C.Y.A. factor, which very often has the tendency to first appear in the higher headquarters. Once started, it rapidly feeds on itself and spreads like wildfire down through the entire organization. At the first indication of this selfish, self-centred, self-serving attitude, you must take every step possible to root it out and replace it with integrity.

The second major thing which the men look for in their leaders is knowledge and training. It is essential that you ensure you have the knowledge, information, and training necessary for you to properly assess and solve the problems which will face you and your men. All this must be done to the very best of your ability regardless of the size or importance of the problem. Never accept the second best or mediocre solution because you think the problem is not worth your time and effort. If you don’t have the necessary knowledge and information, then go get it by asking for assistance, advice, guidance, doing research, until you are satisfied you have everything you need to reach the best solution. Then carry out that solution with your full out effort and determination.

Another point that the men look for in you as their leader is your concern and effort on behalf of the welfare of those who serve under you. You must prove beyond any doubt that you are fair and just in your dealings with them, and that you genuinely like and respect them. In all circumstances you must place their well-being ahead of your own, regardless of the cost to yourself.

And finally, one other and perhaps equally important factor is that once you are accepted as a leader, your men will not only follow you but will also emulate to the best of their ability your character and behaviour. That is why as a leader you must at all times and in all places set and maintain the highest of standards.

Let us now put these bits and pieces into service life and see the results in actual practice. In doing so I would like to use the life as a P-O-W to demonstrate the reasons for my beliefs. The great social historians, the Durants, have said that culture is a thin veneer that superimposes itself on mankind. This is very true, and when men are stripped of this veneer and every other vestige of civilization, are treated and live as animals as we were forced to do as P-O-Ws, then the laws of the jungle soon take over. It is in this environment that the true basics of leadership emerged for me.

When I first arrived in Japan courtesy of the Japanese Navy, I was sent to a special questioning camp under the Japanese Navy at a place named Ofuna, a suburb of Yokohama. This was a special interrogation camp where we were placed in solitary confinement in small cells, no speaking allowed, and we were questioned and beaten every day. We were not considered as P-O-Ws, but rather we were still on the firing line and could be killed at any time. I was moved from this camp after six months, when they brought in a U.S. Catalina crew shot down out of Dutch Harbour, and I was sent to the starting up of the working camps in the Yokohama area.

The first working camp I went to was located in a baseball stadium in the centre of Yokohama which had been built by the Standard Oil Company. We were housed in a large indoor area under one of the grandstands, and I arrived there the same day as the first batch of prisoners from Hong Kong. There were five officers with this group of approximately 300 P-O-Ws. In Hong Kong the Japanese had raped and bayoneted [sic] nurses, women and children; killed doctors and patients in the hospital wards, operating theatres and recovery

rooms; bayoneted, mutilated, shot and beheaded P-O-Ws just to amuse themselves; humiliated and degraded them in every way possible; no medical treatment or supplies for the sick and wounded; the lowest possible living conditions and way below starvation diet. We were joined two months later by 75 P-O-Ws from the Philippines, and these were some of the survivors from the Bataan Death March where over 16,950 P-O-Ws were killed (over 2/3rds of the entire total number of P-O-Ws involved). All these prisoners, both the Hong Kong and the Philippine P-O-Ws, had then to endure the "Hell Ships" where thousands died enroute from Hong Kong and Manila to Japan. In one ship alone, the Arisan-Mar, out of 1800 P-O-Ws, only 8 survived. The Oryoku-Mar started out with 1,619 P-O-Ws and only 200 survived that trip.

The order sent by the Japanese Tokyo Headquarters down to Hong Kong and the Philippines camps was to send their best and healthiest prisoners to work in Japan. Now as you well know, when a Commanding Officer gets an order to send his best men, this is when he unloads all his dead-beats, no-gooders, troublemakers, sick, wounded, incompetents, etc.



Squadron Leader Leonard Birchall aboard the Catalina Flying Boat before being shot down and captured by the Japanese in 1942. Credit: AF News Room

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I was the senior P-O-W in all the working camps that I was in, but this was a title in name only, as with no means of physically exerting discipline, you had only the vast inherent responsibilities for the health and well-being of all those in the camp, but no means to enforce your decisions. The nature of military

discipline encompasses two basic forms: the imposed discipline and the discipline which the individual decides is necessary, which is self-discipline. Field Marshal Sir Archibald Wavell, in his book "Soldiers and Soldiering", describes this as follows:

“Discipline makes a man do something he would not do unless he has learnt that it is the right, the proper and expedient thing to do. At its best it is instilled and maintained by pride in oneself, in one’s unit, in one’s profession and only at its worst by fear and punishment”.

In our case, punishment was completely out of the question. The conditions and environment in which we existed reduced our health to the very razor edge of complete collapse, and we needed every bit of our health, strength, stamina and reserve to barely keep living from day to day. Having to undergo punishment on top of all this would have been tantamount to issuing a death sentence. Thus,

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the authority we had was only that which the men wished to give us when and if they felt like it.

As officers, we were singled out by the Japanese for special treatment. Every method possible was used to degrade us in front of the men in order to counter any control or discipline we might try to develop. From the men’s point of view all officers were under great suspicion. They felt they had been let down and that the incompetence of their officers was responsible in large part for their being prisoners. Another sad factor was that after being captured, unfortunately a lot of

the officer’s [sic] prime concern had been for themselves. They had taken the best quarters, furnishings, clothing and supplies available, and only after they had taken what they wanted or considered their share as an officer, did the troops get what was left. This was particularly true in the distribution of food. Since the P-O-Ws were on a starvation diet, food was of the greatest importance as it meant life or death, and when the officers took more than their equal share of the daily ration per prisoner it not only meant that it drastically reduced the food left for the men, but also the men’s chances of survival.

The first night we were in the Yokohama camp, we, the five officers from Hong Kong and myself, decided that we had to share the privations, maltreatment and work at least equally with the men, and that this could only be done by demonstrating that we took on an obviously greater share than the men. We immediately set up a system whereby the food and everything else we received was dished out in full view of the men. If anyone thought he had less than an officer he was free to exchange his share for the officers [sic] and no questions asked. The officers were always the last to take up their share. The men tried us on by eating

some of their food and then changing it for an officer's bowl, but in no time flat the troops themselves sorted this out and woe betide anyone who tried it. In fact, in a way this backfired as when the Japanese reduced an officer's ration because he was sick or as punishment, the men themselves made certain that the officer still received his fair and equal share, and in some cases more than his share.

Cigarettes became the currency of the P-O-Ws, and with the horrible conditions and starvation under which we lived the addiction to tobacco increased beyond belief. It seemed that when you were smoking you could, to a limited degree, blot out reality and ease the continual terrible pangs of hunger. Men who were starving, never without intense hunger 24 hours of the day and every day of the year, knowing that their very lives depended on the small bits of food we got, would still trade away their food for cigarettes. We, the officers, gave up smoking which was no easy task itself, but in this way we removed ourselves from any criticism and were able to put our ration of cigarettes into the ration for the men and also to create a small supply for our doctor to be used in keeping the heavily addicted from trading away their food. Anyone offering to buy or sell food for cigarettes was reported by the men themselves to the doctor who would then talk to those involved and take remedial action. In this way our lives were made much more bearable and many lives were saved.

Another immediate action we took was whenever a Japanese guard started to beat up a prisoner, the closest officer would jump in between them, the prisoner would get lost as quickly as possible and the officer would take the beating. Sometimes the guard would become bewildered to find he was beating the wrong man and would stop, whereas sometimes he would become infuriated and take it out on the officer. We just had to take our chance and hope for the best.

A word about dress and deportment. Clothing was at an absolute premium as we only had what we had with us when captured.

The only clothing issue we were given was what the Japanese had captured and then did not want for themselves or could not use in other ways. Believe me, the pickings were very slim indeed, and we lived in rags and tatters. The clothing issues we were given all went to the men, but again in short order the men made certain that every officer had one good shirt, tie, tunic, trousers and hat to wear whenever we had to parade in front of the Japanese.

We were given one square inch of soap per week with which to do all our laundry and to keep our bodies clean. There was no hot water, and even the cold water was in very limited supply. We were allowed one hot and sometimes only a warm bath once a month. The supply of razors, razor blades, hair clippers, scissors, needles, thread, and all other such normal items were only those which had been brought into the camp by the men after their surrender. It was, therefore, impossible to maintain the normal standards of cleanliness. In addition, we were out of the camp for about 12 hours of the day doing coolie labour on starvation diet. The result was that we were sick, starving, cold, filthy, infested with lice, fleas and bedbugs, but unable to find the time, energy or the means to do very much about it. Despite all this, through the height of ingenuity and improvisation we still managed to keep ourselves as best we could. When we turned out on parade it may have been in rags and tatters, but we were as clean, upright, formidable, proud of our heritage and still as undefeated as we could possibly be.

Here may I quote from Field Marshal Slim in writing about his W.W. II campaign in the jungles of Burma in which he said:

“At some stage and in some circumstances, armies have let their discipline sag, but they have never won victory until they have made it taut again, nor will they. We have found it a great mistake to belittle the importance

of smartness in turn-out, alertness of carriage, cleanliness of person, saluting or precision of movement, and to dismiss them as naive, unintelligent, parade-square stuff.

I do not believe that troops can have unshakeable battle discipline without showing these outward signs which mark the pride men take in themselves and their units, and the mutual confidence and respect that exists between them and their officers. It was our experience in a tough school that the best fighting units in the long run were not necessarily those with the advertised reputations, but those who, when they came out of battle, at once resumed a more formal discipline and appearance”.

How true!! How true!! As an indication of what I am saying, may I draw to your attention that as you tread the streets of Ottawa, unfortunately you will see all too often the many instances of the state of dress, or should I say undress of the military, and this causes me very great concern.

It was a long hard process for us P-O-Ws, but slowly the confidence, faith and self-respect was restored not only in the men but also in ourselves as officers. The first winter in Japan, 1942-43, was the worst as we tried to climatise [sic] ourselves to the living conditions, the cold winter in unheated barracks where we had only one blanket each, the daily coolie labour, the starvation diet, and the total absence of any medical treatment. Approximately 35% of all the P-O-Ws in the working camps in Japan died that winter, and yet in our camp with its average of 375 P-O-Ws, during the first two years we lost only three

men, less than one half of one percent per year, giving ample proof of the success of the efforts made by that entire camp.

Let us now look at the mutual concern for one another, or comradeship which developed and which is such a vital part of leadership. I believe the good book says:

“ Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends ”.

This to me defines the comradeship we developed, and may I give you one example. Medicines were practically non-existent as we were never given any medical supplies whatsoever by the Japanese. The Red Cross medical supplies sent to Japan for use by the P-O-Ws were taken by the Japanese military, re-packaged, and sent to their combat troops. After the war the allied forces found warehouses all over Japan filled with Red Cross medical, clothing and food supplies which had been sent for use by the P-O-Ws and which had been stored to be used by the Japanese troops in the event of an invasion of their homeland. Our only hope was to pool whatever meagre supplies we had in the camp and use them for the maximum benefit of all. This had to be done in complete secrecy as the Japanese confiscated any medical supplies they found and treatment of P-O-Ws by our own doctor was absolutely forbidden. This presented a very great problem as everyone hoarded whatever medicines they had. While you may not have the right medicine or drug for whatever illness you encountered, at least you had a chance to barter or trade for the one you did need. On our starvation diet we had no resistance whatsoever to any disease or infection. We suffered at all times from the ravages of malnutrition and its medical consequences, Beri-Beri, pellagra, blindness, gangrene, etc. Once our doctor got going on secret sick parades the men soon believed in us and started to turn in their bits and pieces of medical supplies to the doctor. A detailed account was kept of all our camp medical supplies as to where they came from, who

gave them, how much we had, how much was used, and on who. These accounts were available and could be seen at any time by anyone in the camp.

One P-O-W from Hong Kong had smuggled in three morphine pills which he turned in to the doctor, and as these were the only pain killers we had it was agreed that a unanimous vote of the entire camp would be necessary before one could be used. The reason for this was that you never knew when it might be your turn to need such help to get over that last big painful hump, and hence you had better have a say as to how and when they were used. Once they were gone there just wasn't any more. Time and time again the doctor would decide to use a pill in such cases as drastic surgery due to gangrene as all this had to be done without any anaesthetic. He also recommended that they be used in the case of the three men we lost just before they died, when there was nothing more we could do for them. In every instance the unanimous decision was obtained from the camp only to have it vetoed by the man who was to receive the pill. I was separated from that camp after two years, but I understand that those three pills were still unused at the end of the war.

A word about our stealing because this was one of the main ways to our survival. Our camp worked at many various jobs each day and it was possible on a lot of the jobs to steal things which were not only of great benefit to the camp, but also to the Japanese with whom we worked. A good example was an oil factory where they crushed peanuts, coconut, soya beans etc. to make various cooking oils and also lubricant oils from castor beans. This was a gold mine for us as we stole peanuts and coconut for food, and we set up making soap in the boiler plant of the factory by making trays out of old tins, stealing coconut oil and caustic, which we then cooked on top of the boilers. The coolies we worked with knew what we were doing so we marked trays with their name on it. When their tray of soap was done we would cut the slab of soap in half and give them half. We would then smuggle the soap out of the job

and back to camp. We were searched inside the factory by the factory guards before we left the job, and then again outside the job by the Army guards before we got on the trucks or were marched back to the camp. At the camp we were searched once again inside the camp by the camp guards. If at anytime in this entire process we were caught we never implicated the Japanese workers and they knew this, so they trusted us even more than they did their own fellow workers. Other items of great value to the Japanese because of strict rationing in addition to the soap, was sugar, salt and cooking oil. These items we stole not only from the factories, but also when we were unloading or loading railway cars, ships and barges. We were able by stealing at one job and trading with the Japanese coolies with whom we worked on other jobs to get a meagre supply of drugs which were available on the Japanese market to supplement our supplies.

As for the men who did the stealing, we set up a system whereby anything of value to the camp such as food, trade goods, etc., the man doing the stealing would notify the officers and an officer would go out to work on the job with him. If the man got caught then the officer would step in and say that he had ordered the prisoner to steal. In this way the officer took the giant share of the bashing, solitary confinement, and other punishment. If the stealing was successful, then half the goods was turned into the camp supplies and used for the sick or to trade with the coolies for medicines. Here again complete records were kept and anyone could see them at anytime to ensure just how the goods were being used.

A few words on the pride and self-respect of the men no matter what their original background or the results of the degradation and environment in which we existed. I was far from being the ideal prisoner, and when one of the Japanese guards consistently beat up the very sick prisoners, I went after him and beat him into the deck. I shall not go into the aftermath of that affair, suffice to say I was extremely lucky to barely survive the punishment and not be killed. When the beatings of

the sick started up again, the men said I should try something else as I would never live through that punishment again. So we held a sit-down strike, and after I had received a terrible beating, but also the assurance that the sick would not have to go to work, did I give the order for the men to go to work. My hour of glory was very short lived in that I was removed from that camp within an hour and sent to a severe discipline camp at Omori, Tokyo, to show me the error of my ways.

There I was set up as a very bad example and it was the kiss of death for any other prisoner to even look at me in front of the specially selected sadistic guards. For the first two weeks I worked all day sewing bits of fur together and then all night in the cookhouse. Here the punishment was to stand on the hot brick ovens in bare feet and holding two large buckets of water. With our painful beri-beri [sic] feet this was sheer hell. I slept in little short naps whenever I could, out of sight of the guards. About this time the P-O-W camp of Canadians in Yokohama, which had no doctor and whose senior P-O-W was an RSM, ran into a bad session of sickness. A group of the sick were moved to another camp, but enroute they stopped off at the discipline camp for a few days. The day they arrived they heard that I was in camp and the Canadian Sergeant in charge of them came to see me in the shop where the officers were sewing the bits of fur together. He threw the first salute between P-O-Ws that had been seen in that camp and explained that the Canadians had heard about my efforts on behalf of the P-O-Ws, and as I was the first Canadian officer they had met since leaving Hong Kong, they would like to hold a parade for my inspection. I tried to explain what this would mean but to no avail. Reluctantly I agreed, and he said they would be formed up in a few minutes. They formed up in the open dirt area which we used for roll calls, parades, and forming of working parties. They were dirty, sick, ragged, starved, some had to be held up by their comrades, but they were all there. As I expected, no sooner had we got started than the storm broke in all its fury and the guards came charging into us like a bunch of raving maniacs,

swinging fists, clubs, rifle butts and kicking the daylight out of those who fell down. None of us minded, and when it was all over we crawled back into our huts to lick our wounds and to have a damned good laugh at the Japanese.

I guess one interpretation would be that it was an act of defiance and that may be right. Bear in mind that these men were from the reserve units out of Montreal and Winnipeg, and in the majority of cases their military background was practically nil. All had been reduced to the lowest state of civilization possible by their maltreatment and horrible environment, and yet there was a pride in these men such as I had never seen before or expect to see again. It made me proud to be admitted into their ranks. I might add that news of this parade spread like wildfire throughout the working camps in Japan and the rise in morale amongst the P-O-Ws made life hell for the Japanese guards.

The Ormori discipline camp was on a small island out in the Tokyo harbour, made from the silt and sand dredged up from the Tokyo harbour, and was about 50 ft. from the mainland. There was an anti-aircraft battery on one end and a searchlight battery on the other with our camp sandwiched in between. We were housed in the standard prefabbed single story wood buildings used by the Japanese military, and we were right opposite the main fighter base at Haneda Airport which protected the Tokyo-Yokohama area. With no markings whatsoever to show we were P-O-Ws we were extremely vulnerable, and so whenever a single B-29 came over, obviously on a photo recce, we would run out into the open parade area and unbeknownst to the Japanese we would form the letters P-O-W in hopes that this would show up in the photos.

The fire bombings and fire-storms wiped out the entire area around our camp, and the only thing that saved us was the 50 ft. of water separating us from the mainland. The whole area all around us was as flat as a pancake, exactly like our northland after a big forest fire. With no food, water, electricity or places to work, the Japs started to move some of us out

into the outlying areas, and as I was one of the bad actors, I was one of the first to go.

They took a bunch of us from the various camps in the Tokyo area and put us into railway boxcars where we were jammed so that we had to take turns standing and sitting. It was cold, no food, water or sanitation facilities, and we were there for over 48 hours. Many of us had amoebic dysentery or diarrhoea, and life soon became grim to say the least. We were taken up into the mountains northwest of Tokyo and here we ended up on a siding where we were able to get out and lie down on the ground. This was the first opportunity I had to see what prisoners were there, their physical condition, and then the sad realization that once again I was the senior P-O-W. There was a total of 280 P-O-Ws, a real mixed bag, and the physical condition was the worst I had ever seen. Some were blind from lack of vitamin A, some had lost a foot or hand from Beri-Beri followed by gangrene. All were skin and bones from prolonged malnutrition. As we were the first batch out of the Tokyo camps, the Commandants had unloaded all their sick, invalids and misfits. We were now jammed onto flatbed trucks and taken off to our camp up in the mountains at a place named Suwa. As it was high in the mountains it was cold, especially at night when we might even have a thin coating of ice on any open water.

The camp was only half built, some of the buildings had no roof, some had no side walls, there was no kitchen, cooking, or sanitation facilities. The wiring consisted of a single line running through the camp with one or two 40 watt bulbs in each building. It was pouring rain, everyone was soaked, cold, miserable, starving and filthy beyond belief. The barracks were of little protection as there was no straw on the bare boards for us to lie on and the floors were just mud.

The next day we tried to fix up the camp. We found that we were on the side of a mountain which was all terraced with rice and vegetable paddies. Our water supply was a small creek which ran down through the paddies

and then through the camp. Since the fertilizer they used was human excreta we had to set up a system to at least boil all our drinking water. We tried to make our barracks as airtight as possible with mud, straw and grass as we had no heat whatsoever, and we set up the most basic washing and latrine facilities. The work detail started at once. The prisoners left the camp at 7 am each morning, walked down the side of our mountain and up the side of the next one to get to an open face mine where they dug out the ore which was some kind of white metal. The path between the camp and the mine was all rough broken stone, and with no shoes, only wooden clogs, the number of seriously infected feet went completely out of control. Our food ration was the lowest I had encountered, and with no medicines or medical treatment this was indeed a death camp. The first week three men died, and our number of seriously ill doubled. It was our conservative but well considered estimate that we would be extremely lucky if just one of us would survive the coming winter of 1945.

As the war started to go against the Japanese and the Allies began their island hopping advance toward Japan, the orders had gone out from Tokyo Headquarters to all the military that they were never to retreat but rather fight to the last man even with suicidal attacks. The Kami Kazi aircraft was a good example of this philosophy. Also the orders were that at the first sign of a landing and attack on their area, they were to kill all the P-O-Ws, internees, sick, wounded, incompetents, etc. so that every able-bodied Japanese could fight to the death without hindrance. In the P-O-W camps we had to dig trenches, and machine guns were placed at each end. We were then to be marched into the trenches, doused with gasoline, and set on fire. Anyone trying to escape would be killed by the machine guns. Proof of this policy was more than evident in the Japanese occupied islands which were overrun by the Americans where they found all the P-O-Ws, sick and wounded captives, and Japanese, all massacred by the Japanese as they retreated.

With the Japanese surrender we took over our camp to ensure our survival, and concentrated on getting ourselves physically fit enough to get out of there and into the hands of the Allies. We took over all the food we could find and ran the kitchen on a 24-hour basis. We bought a pig, a horse, and a cow which we slaughtered and put into the stew pot. Believe me, everything went in with the possible exception of the skin and hooves. We scoured the countryside for all the medical supplies we could beg, borrow, buy, or just expropriate so that our doctor and his helpers could work day and night to bring the seriously ill back to as good health as possible. We got yellow paint and painted big P-O-W signs on the roofs of our buildings. We made flags out of old bed sheets and coloured them with crayons, we put these up on flagpoles and then we waited. The U.S. Navy planes soon found us and we were showered with bundles from heaven containing clothing, food, medicines, and goodies such as cigarettes and chocolate bars.

When the doctor felt we were as fit as he could get us, we made our move and came out overnight by train to Tokyo. When we couldn't find any Allied forces near the Tokyo railway

station we moved over to the station for the electric train and went to Yokohama. Here we went outside the station, sat down, and flew our flags on some bamboo poles we had liberated.

It was not all that easy. You must remember we had some prisoners who were blind, some minus a foot or hand, some unable to walk on painful feet from Beri-Beri, and all of us at the end of our endurance. Thus, we had to commandeer trucks, wagons, bicycle trailers, anything we could lay our hands on, to carry our sick and invalids. The healthiest P-O-Ws carried the Japanese guard's [sic] rifles just in case we met up with trouble, as once we left the relatively safe confines of our camp we were on our own, and God help us.

We didn't have long to wait outside the Yokohama station before a jeep came by with a U.S. Army officer and a big radio on it. We identified ourselves, the chap got on his radio and we were soon inundated with buses, trucks and ambulances which took us down to a reception centre set up in the Yokohama docks. We were then told to get out and go into the dock area. Next thing I knew our senior P-O-W N.C.O. called the troops to attention, formed them up into marching order, turned the parade over to me, and we marched into the dock area with our home-made flags flying. We were dirty, tired, clothing in rags and tatters, many of the men had to be supported or semi carried, but they were all there, all those who could possibly walk, as defiant, proud, a force that could never be beaten.

The first thing was to strip us of all our clothes and to throw them into an incinerator. Next they removed all our body hair and put us through a de-lousing station. From there into a hot shower with lots of hot water and soap. While stark naked we were confronted by a horde of doctors and nurses



Air Commodore Leonard Birchall seen two years before his death on September 10, 2004 at the age of 89. Credit: AF News Room

who segregated us up into groups depending on our medical condition, then into a room with all the clothes in the world where we could take as much of everything as we wanted. Finally we were given a thorough interrogation by a team of intelligence and war crimes officers. All the time this was going on there were Red Cross girls going around dishing out cigarettes and chocolate bars.

I was taken to the hospital ship, USS Marigold, as I was out on my feet and don't even remember going on board. I do recall that I was taken to a cabin which I had all to myself. This was the first time since being captured that I was all on my own except when I was in solitary. I had pajamas, and clean ones too, the first time in 3-1/2 years, I was really clean and clear of lice, fleas and bedbugs, the first time in 3-1/2 years, and finally I had absolutely no responsibilities for anyone other than myself, the first time in 3-1/2 years.

Our camp was unique in having 100% survival from the instant that war ended until we were recovered by the Americans. This was only due to the full out cooperation and self-discipline of all the men in that camp. By way of explanation, the Americans were very cautious and stayed in the Yokohama dock area until they were certain that the Japanese military and civilians would accept the surrender and not kill the P-O-Ws and internees as they had been ordered to do. A large part of the Japanese military would not accept the surrender and vowed to fight to the finish, while a tremendous number of the civilians who had lost members of their families, especially in the fire bombing, were very hostile. For those P-O-Ws who were inland such as ourselves, you either had to wait a long period of time to be recovered or try to beat your way out. I am afraid that in the majority of camps it was every man for himself, and in a lot of cases this was fatal. The civilians retaliated as did the military. Some P-O-Ws ate poisonous food or drank wood alcohol and died. Others started out on journeys far beyond their physical capability and died enroute to freedom. You must remember that it was most difficult, if not impossible, to control men who

had been through 4 years of sheer and utter hell, especially when there was absolutely no way of enforcing any discipline. During the war over 30% of all the P-O-Ws and internees taken by the Japanese were either killed or died in the prison camps, and thus never did make it home. Here I think that the epitaph on the memorial in the Allied War Graves cemetery in Kohima, Burma, where over 1,500 Allied servicemen are buried, sums it up very well:

**“When you go home tell them of us and say,
For your to-morrow we gave our to-day”.**

Catch phrases are wonderful things, and by way of trying to summarise this whole thing, if I had to use one to define my concept of leadership it would be the 3 “Cs”.

CHARACTER COMPETENCE COMRADESHIP

1st CHARACTER: It is my firm belief that the true and solid foundation is Integrity, or as Shakespeare had Polonius say in Hamlet: “This above all else to thine own self be true and it must follow as the night the day thou canst not then be false to any man”. Say what you mean which is the telling of the truth as against the telling of lies, and mean what you say which is integrity. Having the morale [sic] fibre to face the issues of right and wrong and then the courage to stand up firm and strong regardless of the consequences to yourself.

2nd COMPETENCE: Having the necessary knowledge, education, training and judgement, and to make full use of them. No matter how large or small the problem, to ensure that you have given it your fullest consideration. Once you have done this and made your decision then to carry it out to the very best of your ability. Know what you are doing and how to do it.

3rd COMRADESHIP: Taking a full out interest in your subordinates. Having true respect and concern for them to the extent that at all times and in all circumstances you put their welfare and well-being ahead of your own, regardless of the cost or inconvenience to yourself.

Once these are firmly in place then those other important aspects such as discipline and self-discipline ... pride in yourself and in your unit ... self respect and respect for both your superiors and subordinates ... proper dress and deportment at all times ... all these will develop and strengthen as they feed on one another until what I call "**TRUE LEADERSHIP**" emerges. Live by these precepts and as a member of the Canadian Forces devoted to the well being of your fellow Canadians and the preservation of our Canadian way of life, you will not only attain true self-respect but also the respect of everyone with whom you associate. You can never have a better goal in life. Canada needs you, you who will [sic] the leaders, the protectors and defenders of our country in the years 2000 A.D. It needs your youth, courage and energy, but there is also a desperate need for your self-discipline, your discipline of

the mind, your character, your integrity, in short your **LEADERSHIP**.

As I look around this room I have absolutely no qualms about the future of our service. Admiral "Bull" Halsey, the famous World War II Admiral of the U.S. Fleet in the Pacific, once said:

“There are no great men ... there are only great challenges ordinary men are forced by circumstances to meet.”

As the history of our service shows, there has never ever been nor will there ever be any shortage of ordinary men and women such as are gathered here who are ready, willing and most capable to take up the challenges they will be forced to face. **Per Ardua Ad Astra. Through Adversity to the Stars.** This is the heritage which has been entrusted into your hands, guard it well, as I have every confidence you will. Ladies and gentlemen, it has been an honour and a privilege to have shared these thoughts with you, Bonne Chance et Merci Bien. ■

Editor's note: Although this article has been edited, punctuation conventions used at the time of writing have been maintained.