STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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FIELD MARSHAL SIR WILLIAM J. SLIM - PARAGON OF MORAL AND ETHICAL COURAGE

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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ABSTRACT

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Field Marshal William J. Slim is known by many as one of the most persevering, triumphant, and yet caring leaders of this century. His accomplishments, particularly those in the Burma campaign during World War II, received much well deserved commendation. Undoubtedly, some of the more interesting aspects in the Burma campaign and other periods in Field Marshal Slim's lifetime were his unwavering ethical standards and personal moral strengths during the most desperate and brutal times. This paper looks closely at Field Marshal Slim's ethical development and leadership during his younger years, his senior leader years, and his later years. The examination shows the value of maintaining high ethical and moral standards, and how high standards can build a courageous organizational bond between soldiers that can prevail in the face of insurmountable odds in war and peace.

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PART I - THE TENETS

Studies of history reveal that successful military leaders possess numerous characteristics or qualities. Several of these characteristics, often described by terms such as technically and tactically sound, robust, ethically and morally courageous, physically and mentally courageous, determined, creative, standard bearer, developer, and integrator, are conspicuously evident and common within the great leaders in history. The list continues and perhaps increases as new tactical technologies and techniques create the need. Each of these characteristics and qualities, in themselves, are separate entities. But at the same time they are interrelated and interdependent with each other. Using any of these qualities effectively is a great accomplishment. An even greater task is to blend the total interrelationships or "holistics" of these qualities of leadership. The truly great and successful leaders are those who have mastered the art of effectively bringing these holistic leadership skills to bear during all realms of their command, especially during those most difficult times of war.

Mastering these interrelationships of such a wide spectrum of individual skills is in itself remarkable. What makes this even more extraordinary is the strenuous environment in which these skills need to be applied in order to make most difficult decisions. While instinctively applying this interwoven "hybrid" of attributes, leaders must make decisions utilizing information

that is sketchy and constantly changing; decisions that could result in the loss of lives or the destruction of a country. Young military leaders study these decisions and their accompanying foundations throughout their early years, attempting to incorporate them into their leadership positions and into their lives. Older military leaders attempt to imbed these learned skills into their organizations and lives. Historians analyze the great leaders who have mastered the art of successful leadership and made those most difficult decisions.

The historian's analysis provides many points to consider regarding successes and failures of great leaders during an era. There are two important points that come to light throughout these studies. First, leaders are not born. Leaders are cultivated. They are cultivated deliberately through their own analyses of historical studies of other great leaders and then attempting to incorporate the concepts into daily situations. They are also cultivated naturally through a lifetime of experiences that challenge and develop leadership qualities. Of course, a combination of both could occur. Obviously, the great leaders of years past did not have the luxury of having many volumes of historical examples readily available to study during their youth. More than likely they developed mostly through life's experiences.

The second common point that came to light from these studies was that of all the leadership qualities found within

successful leaders, ethics and moral courage was always present. Strong arguments could be made for other qualities to be more important: robustness; creativity; determination; knowledge. However, no argument could change the fact that those qualities could never come to be without that inner conscience for what is right and the courage to stand for that conviction, particularly during the stresses of war.

> For war is the hardest place: if comprehensive and consistent moral judgments are possible there, they are possible everywhere.[1]

Simple written words do not adequately illustrate the deep importance of ethics and moral courage as a combat multiplier. Studies of great leaders during war can help provide a clearer picture. Any period of history will suffice because technology and tactics are of no importance. The human element, the only common element throughout all battles, decides the victor.

> When the chips are down, there is no rational calculation in the world capable of causing an individual to lay down his life. On both the individual and collective levels, war is therefore primarily an affair of the heart. It is dominated by such irrational factors as resolution and courage, honor and duty and loyalty and sacrifice of self. When everything is said and done, none of these have anything to do with technology, whether primitive or sophisticated.[2]

Field Marshal William J. Slim, first Viscount, is a superb example of a great leader who had mastered the holistic art of leadership. Slim's ethically and morally courageous traits appeared time and time again amid his gauntlet of grueling challenges. These traits offered Slim a powerful insight into

human nature. They were the edge that enabled Field Marshal Slim to lead the 14th Army to victory against a ferocious enemy in Burma and then continue on fulfilling a lifetime of courageous and influential civic duties.

The following examination of Field Marshal Viscount Slim will delve into three main periods of his lifetime: his younger years, his senior leader war years, and his later years. The first section will examine Slim's youth. It will show that he was not a born leader. Slim developed his leadership abilities mostly through experiences as a young man. What Slim *was* born with was the manner in which he dealt with and understood his fellow human beings as he encountered them throughout the formulating years of his youth. Consequently, as Slim's leadership skills were honed, they took on a heart-based flavor. Slim's youthful experiences in school and work helped him develop deep-rooted feelings towards other human beings. William J. Slim developed a courageous and ethical base that would be put to the test in years to come.

The senior leader years portion of Slim's life will use a few episodes to paint the picture of ethics and moral courage during excruciating hardships. This examination will portray Field Marshal Slim as a successful strategic leader possessing those vital characteristics, especially ethics and moral courage. Not only did Slim's youthful building blocks remain intact throughout these war years, but they grew stronger in the

process. Field Marshal Slim's success in the Burma campaign is a prime example of how an army can fight outnumbered, outpowered, and outequipped and win. There is no single item or any combination of items that will ever be able to defeat a soldier's heart. The force possessing that inner strength in their hearts as their center of gravity will ultimately be victorious. Field Marshal Slim had exactly that quality and recognized that his soldiers also had that quality. Slim had to bring out all these individual inner strengths and mold them into one. He then had to orchestrate that force towards the common goal to guide his army from defeat into victory.

The final section will examine Field Marshal Viscount Slim in his later years after the war. Truly a remarkable man with his continued love for his fellow man, Slim remained steadfast in his ethically and morally courageous approach to life as the Governor-General of Australia. Slim was hand picked by the Queen of England for the position and placed in the midst of a most challenging situation. Although not as life threatening as in war, the situation was much the same as Slim had been thrown into in the midst of the Burma campaign. Slim dealt with these challenges as he had done all his life. William Slim left his mark of ethics and moral courage on those he touched in this final period of his life; the same mark he had left on those he touched during the war and those he touched in his youth.

PART II - THE FOUNDATION

CHILDHOOD

William J. Slim was born in Bishopston, England in 1891. During the first two decades of his life, Slim developed into an ethically strong and morally courageous individual. Short of some kind of personal cataclysmic type event, ethics and moral courage are extremely difficult or perhaps impossible to instill in a person. Certainly, a strong family environment and early lifetime filled with daily examples of goodness can nurture goodness. But that will not necessarily guarantee positive results. However, in the case of William Slim, his keen sense of ethics and morals were derived from his formative years which were blessed with strong family values and great school and work opportunities; an environment conducive to develop a strong leader with a strong courageous heart that would be paramount to endure many years of tremendous challenges.

When Slim was a child of five or six years old, he was fascinated with the honor and distinction that would come with being an admiral or knight. Knowing now how the story ended, it is interesting that forty-seven years later, Slim had become what he had dreamt of becoming. Perhaps his dreams were created partly from the times his father, John Slim, would spend reading to him and his brother. John would frequently read books to them, including British Battles by Land and Sea. This could have been the beginning of William Slim's burning desire to be in the

military. Years later, Slim's desire to be in the military included attending Sandhurst which was the officer candidate school of choice. The great expense to attend Sandhurst made this part of his dream impossible. Slim's brother was attending medical school and his father could not afford any more schooling expenses on his income as a hardware tradesman. William Slim thoroughly understood his father's position and never made an issue of the situation. However, he remained steadfast in his hopes and dreams.

SCHOOL BOY SLIM

William Slim's school years revealed early evidences of the basic courage to stand up for his beliefs. Academically, Slim was a good student. He was a good writer, reader, and a particularly good debater. Slim was also very independent. Once he was punished for breaking a school rule. The punishment forbade Slim from attending the school play, something for which he had a deep love. He attended anyhow. He was caught at the play, he pleaded his case, but was forced to leave in spite of his plea. This was an early display of Slim's courage to stand up for what he believed. His natural independence was not at all shackled in the face of school authorities. Nor was he stubborn or disrespectful to his school masters over the issue. He did what he thought was right, pleaded his case when caught, and then

moved on. This strength would become very effective in his future challenges.

As a newcomer at St. Philip's Grammar School and displaying his growing air of self esteem, William Slim attracted the attention of the school bully. Philip Pratt took great exception to the manner in which Slim handled himself in school. He used his best schoolboy attempts to get Slim to fight. He was never successful. In time, Pratt became drawn to admire Slim because of the way in which he handled these continuous offenses. Slim would never push back or talk back. He would most always turn and walk away, usually with a big grin. This was another example of Slim's courage. This time his courage had taken on an ethical shade. Pratt and Slim eventually became lifelong friends. Up until Slim's death, they kept in touch with each other regardless of the time and distance the war had placed between them.

THE WORKING SLIM

After the school years, Slim's reading and writing skills enabled him to go on to a teaching job. This became a key piece to Slim's life. Because Slim began teaching at King Edward's School, he was allowed to join the Officer Training Course. He became a Lance Corporal and suddenly Slim's deepest dreams of being in the military became a reality. The lack of money needed to attend the more prestigious school of most successful military

leaders was no longer a problem. Slim's patience, understanding, and unending desire helped his dreams come true.

Teaching brought another interesting characteristic to light. Slim's burning desire to teach gave him a strong optimistic attitude towards the students and their future. Most all the other teachers were outraged by the poor, unwashed, and sometimes barefooted boys in the school. Slim saw good lurking within these boys. He approached the challenge positively. He always respected the opinions and attitudes of the other teachers. However, he saw a different side of the boys. They were deprived of basic needs as Slim had never before seen. They suffered through each day and still remained cheerful. When he had to punish them, they took it without resistance. They were extremely quick-witted and very loyal towards those they accepted as one of their own. They were all especially loyal to their mothers. Because Slim could easily relate to these boys he achieved great results. This ingrained understanding of human beings, enabling Slim to get the best positive results while working with them under most unpleasant conditions, would grow to become the crux of the successful relationship Slim had with his soldiers. He had the inestimable merit of never have forgotten the smell of a soldiers' feet.[3]

In 1913 William Slim left teaching and went to work in the Black Country iron works. This was an extremely difficult place to work, supervising some real tough lower class men. Slim

approached the job with his typical positive human outlook and viewed the men as a mere grown up style of King Edward's School boys. Slim had a deep admiration for the dirty, drinking, gambling but strong, innovative and loyal workers. What a great place to learn how to "do it yourself"! Slim's life and the lives of his soldiers would need to rely on this concept many times.

These early years of William Slim, the readings of his father, parental bonds, school boyhood experiences, teaching experiences, and working experiences cultivated this ethical and morally courageous man. Future dealings with subordinates, peers, and superiors would be accomplished in the same ethical and morally courageous manner as when he was a youth and a young man. Slim would simply do what he felt was right in his heart. The next period of William Slim's life will examine the manner in which his ethics and moral courage prevailed during a most desperate World War II campaign - Burma.

PART III - THE BURMA TEST

There are a great many ways in which the military can define ethics and moral courage. However, text book type definitions do not adequately describe these as well as the actions of Field Marshal Slim. Slim's military career was filled with the most crucial tests of character and strength. He never faltered from his standard of dealing with each situation as he had done all

his life. He faced the challenges directly and optimistically, and did what he felt was right in his heart. Early in his career, Second Lieutenant Slim was faced with a mutiny. Most of the men involved in the mutiny were miners from the Black Country. Slim understood these men and their behaviorisms because he had worked with men from the Black Country Iron Works. Contrary to the sergeant-major's plan to treat them as deserters, Slim nervously confronted them alone. He talked with them and found that the real problem was they were not receiving their pay. Slim corrected the problem and the strike ended with absolutely no harm done. Although this may seem to be a small incident, it demonstrated Slim's strength of character when an easier course of action could have been taken. Slim's tendencies of optimism and goodness towards his fellow human beings had apparently been carried forward to his military life. Much more difficult situations in the Burma campaign follow.

In 1942 Field Marshal Slim left the 10th Indian Division command in the Iraqi desert and reported to command the I Burma Corps in Burma. He went on to command the 15th Corps symbolized by three V's for fifteen and victory[4], then the 14th Army, and ultimately the Commander in Chief of the Allied Forces in South East Asia. For approximately three and one-half years he commanded an army of six nationalities that spoke eight different languages all while battling a ferocious Japanese army in an extremely rough and disease ridden environment.

When he was initially assigned, he took command at the mid-point of one of the greatest retreats in British history. The command met with a disastrous defeat suffering horrible and massive losses. They had put on a most valiant but hopeless effort against the Japanese. There was no alternative other than to fight. The treatment of British prisoners while in the hands of the Japanese was horrendous. There were instances where prisoners were beaten, tortured, tied to trees then used to demonstrate Japanese bayonet fighting to local villagers. Obviously, surrender was never an option. The fighting was extremely fierce and desperate so as not to succumb to the same fate as their fellow soldiers who had become prisoners. In addition to the ferocious Japanese, Slim and his soldiers had to deal with the severe weather conditions and the mass evacuation of refugees. In spite of the fact that the monsoons had nearly beaten the last ounce of breath from them, Slim and his men shared what little energy and food they had with the thousands of evacuating women, children, and elderly. This courageous effort was one more drain on the morale, health, and welfare on the already nearly decimated army. Consequently, those men of the Burma Corps who had survived, suffered terribly from malnutrition, exhaustion, and depression. Approximately eighty per cent of those survivors became sick, and many died.[5]

Although the situation was disastrous, Slim's optimistic attitude and keen insight into the hearts of people, as he had

done so many times in his life, gave them hope. He was very proud of the men and of what they had accomplished.

> On the last day of that nine-hundred-mile retreat I stood on a bank beside the road and watched the rear-guard march into India. All of them, British, Indian, and Gurkha, were gaunt and ragged as scarecrows. Yet, as they trudged behind their surviving officers in groups pitifully small, they still carried their arms and kept their ranks, they were still recognizable as fighting units. They might look like scarecrows, but they look like soldiers too.[6]

Slim was in the right place at the right time. For he was the strength by which the soldiers could regain their morale and will to fight. The immoral and unethical manner in which the Japanese conducted battle strengthened Slim's heart and burning desire for victory. He knew that the Japanese had to be defeated and pushed from Burma. Slim also knew that the Japanese had them outnumbered with men and equipment and that the priority for the allied effort in Europe would make replacements, supplies, and new equipment unlikely. The most important advantage the Japanese had and the only one Slim knew he could overcome was that of spirit. The Japanese long unbroken chain of victories in Burma coupled with an already powerful willingness to die for the emperor, created a seemingly unbeatable foe. Slim knew the importance for his soldiers to defeat this powerful enemy force. He had learned many times, at home and school and work, of the strengths that come from within the hearts of people. The difference with this situation as compared to challenges of the past was the terrible physical and mental condition of his

soldiers. The road to recovery after such a massive defeat was very difficult and lengthy. However, Slim was quite successful in this endeavor. Slim's number one priority was to strengthen his soldiers physically and emotionally. He had to rebuild a spiritual team with a strong belief in a cause in order to create a greater will to win than that of the Japanese. The rebuilding process was long. During this time, Slim reflected on what had happened to them to try to prevent a reoccurrence. He formulated two basic premises. His soldiers had to be bettered prepared for jungle warfare, and he had to keep their morale high. The preparation for jungle warfare could commence once the soldiers recovered physically. The morale concern was much deeper and required much analysis. Slim's thoughts concluded that they had inner spiritual strengths that the enemy did not possess.

The critical difference in the foundation of an organization like the Japanese and that of the Allies is spirit. The Japanese were tough, expert fighters with a high degree of loyalty to the Emperor. The problem with this type of organization is that once they are beaten, as difficult as that may be, they do not have the spiritual power to recover. Spiritual strength was grounded not only in religious faith but also in the genuine belief in a cause. The Allies, in particular the 14th Army, had this spiritual strength. Slim realized that this was the biggest advantage he had over the Japanese. Belief in a real cause, based on real spiritual values, was far more of an advantage than

anything else. After all, they were fighting to preserve their basic free world values such as freedom of religion, freedom of thought, or freedom of happiness. These basics were threatened. Slim recognized religion as a main cog in the spiritual foundation and one of the greatest generators of high morale. So, with this realization, Slim clearly understood the essence of the solution of the problem at hand: how to build the morale of the soldiers and how to fight outnumbered and win.

Slim's implementation was simple and direct. With religion as the foundation of morale, rebuilding had already begun naturally to some degree. When a person is in danger, suffering, or in a desperate situation, they reach to their religious beliefs for inner strength. This is especially true in the military. There were many strong religious beliefs within the 14th Army. Slim personally visited all his soldiers to insure there was a grand feeling of unending courage towards a mutual goal. All soldiers of the 14th Army had to have a totally selfless effort and focus towards the mission of destroying the Japanese army.

Personally visiting all of the 14th Army was certainly no easy chore. But Slim used this concept during the massive retreat in 1942, and it is what held his army together. He felt that when the times are at their worst, the leaders need to be in the presence of their soldiers. Slim's visits took much time and effort. In some cases language differences posed problems. Slim

was not an orator, but understood that all was necessary was to know what he was talking about and say it from the heart. He spoke from his heart and strengthened theirs. Slim had resurrected the 14th Army. They were now trained in jungle tactics and mentally prepared to pursue the enemy. This time they had with them a combat multiplier that the Japanese could not match: a morally courageous, heart centered force.

Burma's rugged terrain and sickening weather coupled with the lack of logistics support from higher headquarters made the mission seem impossible. The weather and terrain were enough to deal with. However, add to that no chance of replacements from the headquarters and the environment becomes a real strain on the morale of the troops. The men of the 14th Army called themselves a "Forgotten Army".[7] Slim and the his army appeared to reach their culminating point frequently throughout their endeavor to destroy the Japanese army in Burma. Multiple crossings of the Irrawaddy river, climbing the two-thousand foot high Mayu Range, or traveling the muddied roads during the monsoons, whenever things looked to be at their worst they would invent a new tool, build a new road, build rafts, or do whatever necessary to continue. Each time they were put to the test they succeeded. They became proud of the name "Forgotten Army" because of their successes. The more they succeeded the prouder and better they got. Slim frequently encouraged his men by openly telling them how proud he was of their accomplishments.

> God helps those who help themselves. Anybody could do an easy job. It would take real men to overcome the shortages and difficulties we should be up against - the tough chap for the tough job.[8]

Field Marshal Slim demonstrated his ethically and morally courageous style during this desperate period of the war. His deep rooted beliefs and positive attitude toward mankind, that he had conceived during his youth, laid the foundation for success in Burma. However, there are those who criticized Slim for performing what could be construed as an unethical act towards the Japanese in a final episode of the Burma campaign.

The Japanese had been beaten and finally surrendered in August, 1945. Slim had issued specific instructions regarding the manner in which the Japanese in the Southeast Asian theater were to officially surrender. The ceremony included the Japanese officers surrendering their samuri swords in front of their men. Prior to these instructions, General MacArthur had ruled that surrendering of swords was an archaic practice not to be done partly for fear that the Japanese officers might lose control of their men after losing face.[9] The fear was that the Japanese officer's honor was so centered on his samuri sword that if made to surrender it, he would commit suicide. Therefore, this public humiliation was forbidden. Field Marshal Slim had the Japanese surrender their samuri swords in spite of Gen MacArthur's proclamation. On the surface, this could appear to be an unethical act. However, when Slim believed in something he would stand up for that belief, exactly as he had done all his life.

Higher authorities could not keep Slim from doing what he believed to be right. He did not insist on the surrender of the swords as a final retaliatory measure to get revenge on the Japanese for all the suffering they had caused to he and his men. Slim developed a deep understanding of the Japanese power and how to defeat them.

> We talk a lot about fighting to the last man and the last round, but the Japanese soldier is the only one who actually does it.[10]

Slim knew that the only way to totally insure that the Japanese soldiers comprehended their own defeat was to have them witness their commanding officers surrender their samuri swords. Once this event was completed there would be no chance for the Japanese to ever believe they were invincible.

Certainly there were many factors which were instrumental in the victory over the Japanese in Burma. Improvisation, cunning, tactics are a few. Field Marshal Slim proved that the most critical factor is the human factor. He proved it to all those who study the 14th Army in the Burma campaign. But even more important, he proved it to his soldiers. Slim helped his soldiers find the will to win deep within their hearts by caring for them as a fellow soldier, not just a commander. With this inner strength they knew that ultimate victory would go to the morally courageous, tougher, more innovative army regardless of equipment, material, or manpower.

PART IV - POST WAR

By the end of the war with the Japanese, Field Marshal Slim had become the Commander, Allied Land Forces of South East Asia (ALFSEA). The years preceding this last promotion, Slim had been through the toughest of times with his men. He had gone a long way and had learned many important lessons, particularly those dealing with human feelings, behaviors, and capabilities. As the post war times proceeded, Slim's successes had become more and more visible to his country. Slim and the 14th Army had become a legend. The time had come for the British government to better employ the talents and wisdom of the hero of the "Forgotten Army".

Slim was invited back to London for rest and relaxation and then to become the commandant of the Imperial Defense College. At this point in time there was no better person than Slim to restart the school that had been closed for approximately six years during the war. Reorganization of the school required a new curriculum that would be an appropriate follow-on to a world war. The atmosphere had to be less stressful than in the past. Slim knew the curriculum had to steer the students away from the war hardened prejudices in order to allow a more relaxing reflection on lessons learned while at the same time factoring in the new concepts such as the atomic bomb and the Iron Curtain. Slim's approach for the Imperial Defense College became a big success. This put the legendary war hero into the limelight in

England and he became much in demand for public speeches and broadcasts on BBC. One famous broadcast on "Courage"[11] set the stage for Slim's charisma with the people of England. His great leadership during the war is what made him famous. Ironically though, his broadcasts were not about the war, but about moral and mental qualities presented with simple words of much thought and integrity. The way in which Slim expressed these common values, shared by his audience, instilled his charisma throughout England. Slim's power lead to other prestigious positions in England, eventually Chief of the Imperial General Staff. In time, Slim's fame spread throughout the world, particularly to Australia.

The Prime Minister of Australia, Sir Robert Menzies, was very impressed with Slim, in particular his high level of moral standards and courage. Menzies had been considering replacing the Governor-General in Australia. The position had become the means for the controlling political party to reward a deserving party member. The Australian labor unions' deep involvement in this traditional appointment program, along with the loss of importance due to the recent war years, severely diminished the true value of this position. Menzies wanted to break this tradition and felt confident that Slim was the man to restore augustness to the position of Governor-General. The Queen of England agreed with Menzies' desires, and in 1952 Slim became the

next Governor-General of Australia. Once again Slim was placed in a demanding position.

Slim dealt with this situation as he had done with those situations all his life. He never rushed into any challenge until he had a clear perspective of the objective. Slim had taken the oath to be the personal representative of the Queen of England to Australia. With this oath Slim's ethical and moral courage would again be put to the test. Not only was he facing the challenge to break the mold of the previous political appointed Governor-Generals, but also he faced the post war air of independence Australia was beginning to unveil. Slim approached the situation carefully and slowly, and eventually succeeded as he had done in all other challenges. Slim learned that most Australians admired a person who stood for what was right. What was right for Slim though was not necessarily right for them. However, their respect for his steadfastness provided the space for Slim to do his job. Eventually the Australians realized that the revised functions of the Governor-General that Slim had styled were acceptable. Slim got beyond the problems and beneath the layers of ferment by using his genuine humanitarian heart and influenced the spirits. Just as he had done with the 14th Army, he did with the Australians. He understood the need to reach the people of Australia because he understood the power in their hearts and the heart of their country.

> The influence of the Governor-General in the government of Australia will vary a good deal according to the degree of respect in which a Governor-General is held. If he is thought to have some depth of experience, to have some degree of wisdom, some measure of tolerance and understanding of various points of view and to be worthy of confidence and trust and be able to keep his own counsel and the counsel of others, his influence will be much greater than if he were held in a much lesser degree of respect. His influence would disappear altogether if he were thought of as one who would do whatever he was told without asking the reasons why.[12]

Slim met all these standards and more. Just as he had had genuine humanitarian loyalty to the soldiers of the 14th Army, so did he have to the average Australians. Slim was remembered by his peers for his wisdom and professional accomplishments, but remembered by the Australians as a man.

When Slim returned to London in 1960 he was nearly seventy years old. His reputation for sound judgment, honesty, and common sense put him high in demand to be the director or the chairman for many industries. Slim successfully fulfilled these challenges, but soon was back in the service of the Queen. In April, 1964 he was the Queen's personal representative to attend General MacArthur's funeral in the United States. Then, as his good health continued, he served his country as the Deputy Constable and Lieutenant-Governor of the Windsor Castle.

PART V - CONCLUSION

War, especially one in a gruesome environment as experienced by the 14th Army in Burma, is a substantial test for any man's ethical and moral endurance. An even better test is time. In

this case, time is the entire life of William Slim. Moral and ethical courage marked the trail left by Slim throughout his lifetime. Not only are Slim's accomplishments as a child, schoolboy, supervisor, commander, and senior government official inspirational to those who come to know of them, but also the wholesome, honest, and courageous mood he fostered throughout his years. "He carries his English weather in his heart wherever he goes, and it becomes a cool spot in the desert, and a steady and sane oracle amongst all the deliriums of mankind. Never since the heroic days of Greece has the world had such a sweet, just boyish master."[13]

Throughout all the trials and tribulations, William Slim never lost focus on what was nearest and dearest to his heart; his family and his comrades. Except for the years of the war, Slim's wife Aileen was always at his side. He shared his innermost thoughts with her and she provided him great support through all their years together. Aileen was so much in tune with Slim's Burma experiences that even though she was not with him in battle, she could comprehend some of his post-war facial expressions and described them as his "There are Japanese at the bottom of the garden face"[14].

In Slim's heart, the comrades of the 14th Army held a close second to Aileen. Slim always kept in touch with the 14th Army, and when he was finally home in England to stay, he started the Burma Star Association. Each spring thousands of his comrades

would converge from all over England. There Slim would speak to them, utilizing the emotions of the masses, and remind them all that the collective power they had generated and used to defeat the Japanese was still present for use to overcome their present day problems. Slim touched the hearts of these men as he had done in the war, now reminding them of how self-sacrifice and courage saved their lives and their country. He primed their self esteem to get them to realize that what they learned about themselves during the war can be used to help them survive in peace.

Slim never considered himself a religious man in the conventional sense. He believed in God but he did not worship regularly in public as most would expect of a religious man. He came by his deep beliefs through a lifetime of experiences with family, friends and comrades in war and in peace, uncomplicated by dogma. However, he lived his life by doing what was right. There was one thing however, that bothered Slim. Just prior to his death, many of his friends thought Slim's distressed appearance was an indication that he needed some spiritual lift prior to dying. What it proved to be was a severe sense of guilt resulting from a broken youthful promise he had made to his mother never to abandon the Catholic faith. The guilt was not due to his failure to practice Catholicism, but it was his broken promise to his mother.[15]

Field Marshal Sir William Slim passed the test of time. From childhood until death on 14 December 1970, he lived a most exemplary life of high morals and courage deeply touching the spirits of all those who grew with him, worked with him, fought beside him, and, of course, loved him. (6,033)

ENDNOTES

[1] Michael Walker, Just and Unjust Wars (New York: Basic Books, 1977), xvii.

[2] U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences, Determinants of Effective Unit Performance (Alexandria: U.S. Army Research Institute for Behavioral and Social Sciences, 1994), 233.

[3] Ronald Lewin, Slim (London: Leo Cooper Ltd, 1976), 9.

[4] Field Marshal Viscount Slim, Defeat Into Victory (London: Cassell & Co Ltd, 1956), 126.

[5] Ibid., 113.

[6] Ibid., 109.

[7] Ibid., 181.

[8] Ibid., 194.

[9] Lewin, 250.

[10] Slim, 538.

[11] Field Marshal Sir William Slim, Courage and other Broadcasts (London: Cassell & Co Ltd, 1957), 5.

[12] Lewin, 309.

[13] Ibid, 311.

[14] Ibid, 304.

[15] Ibid, 4.

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