

26. Wèi Lyáudž 24:10-11
 Losses 兵令下
 Chín, c0230

The Sūndž had warned¹ that a general too solicitous of his troops is a bad general. Casualties are expected in war; soldiers must be prepared to die. In its final chapter, the Wèi Lyáudž picks up that challenge, and discusses loss rates. It is not after all advantageous for the army to keep its loss rates low. It is *fear of the army* that intimidates the rest of the world.

24:10. 臣聞古之善用兵者，能殺卒之半，其次殺其十三，其下殺其十一。能殺其半者，威加海內，殺十三者，力加諸侯，殺十一者，令行士卒。故曰，百萬之衆不用命者，不如萬人之鬪也，萬人之鬪，不如百人之奮也。Your servant has heard: Those in antiquity who were good at using soldiers could kill half their troops; the next killed three in ten; the least killed one in ten. One who could kill half: his awe extended to all within the seas. One who killed three in ten: his power reached to the lords of the states. One who killed one in ten: his orders were followed by his officers and men. Thus it is said, a multitude of ten myriad who do not execute commands are not as good as the fighting of a myriad men, and the fighting of a myriad men is not as good as the impetuosity of a hundred men.

This is pretty severe stuff, but so is a lot of what precedes it in the same text. The result of this severity will be a perfectly functioning instrument of war. As the next passage (the last in this text) lyrically assures us.

24:11. 賞如日月，信如四時，令如斧鉞，利如干將，士卒不用命者，未之有也。

If his rewards are like sun and moon, if his credibility² is like the four seasons, if his orders are like battle-axe and halberd, if their sharpness is like that of Gān-jyàng³ – then that his officers and men should not execute his commands, is something that has never been.

The final phrase 未之有也 is a standard idiom of assurance that the preceding principle is true. At least it worked for Chín. The Legalists, in this draconic Chín version, did field ruthless armies, and cities did tremble in fear of them.

Whence the unified Chín Empire, which was finally achieved in 0221.

¹See page 40, Sūndž 8c1e.

²If it is believed that he will do what he says; that the threat of punishment is real. This restates the “rewards and punishments” theory of controlling the masses. The early Christians held that prayer, without prior faith that God will *answer* prayer, is useless. The name of the game, the name of all these games, is credibility.

³A famous sword of antiquity.

Reflections

And with Chín as its prime example, this Chín text concludes.

But loss rate is not always an index of good generalship. Readers familiar with the American Civil War may be reminded of Grant and Lee.

Grant, in his early career, was a “one in ten” general, with an average loss rate of 10·03%; Lee in the same period averaged 16·20%.⁴ In the last year of the war, Grant’s losses were similar, 10·42%, despite the fact that he was typically attacking, not defending. Once in the war, Lee reached the next Wèi Lyáudž level, with 30·1% losses. This was at Gettysburg, a defeat. His other highs were Antietam (22·6%) and Seven Days (20·7%), both also defeats. We should ask, of any operation, what has been gained by this sacrifice?

Perhaps the lesson to be drawn from this example is that it is not prudent to read a single line of some military text, The whole doctrine must be understood if it is to be successfully applied. Losses alone do not guarantee victories.



⁴Fuller 273-274, so also next.