

Stanhope as a leader



Arguably, Stanhope often proves himself an effective leader throughout *Journey's End* through his prioritizing of others' needs above his own. Gerald Brooks said that "when you become a leader you give up the right to think about yourself", which is definitely the case for Stanhope's character, as he sacrifices sleep to stay up doing paperwork and to keep the men on the front line company as they suffer through the night shift, creating a strong sense of unity and camaraderie throughout the battalion, giving them the motivation to keep fighting in the war. It is mentioned in Act 1 that Stanhope was the captain of the rugby team whilst at school, implying his natural instinct to lead others, and the fact that he is so young yet made commander of C Company suggest he has proven himself an effective leader to secure this important role in the army. However, he is often hostile and resentful towards other characters, predominantly Raleigh, stemming from his experience of loss during the war and his fear of losing someone he cares for so deeply, presenting his introverted love for the men most important to him, Raleigh and Osborne. There are moments throughout the play wherein the audience question Stanhope's mental stability, yet Sherriff leaves the audience with the overall impression of Stanhope's commitment to his job and deep care for the men he commands.

At times Stanhope's leadership is questionable, as he takes on a menacing, authoritative facade whilst trying to convince Hibbert not to desert during Act 2 Scene 2, threatening to shoot him rather than let him be sent home for a false case of neuralgia. Contextually, the horrors of war became far too much for many men to cope with, leading to their insanity or desertion, the latter resulting in death by firing squad if they were caught and bringing

shame upon their family. This is something that Stanhope threatens to spare Hibbert from, telling him “ better to die from pain than deserting”, emphasizing the backlash that he would be faced with if he chose to leave his company, and reminding him that death would be preferable to such shame. Stanhope goes on to call him “ swine”, connoting a deep contempt and disdain for his behavior, and implying that he looks down on men like Hibbert who are “ deserters”. This conjoined with the fact that Stanhope coerces Hibbert into hitting him portray a manipulative and tyrannical leader abusing his power, leading to the audience’s strong dislike for his character in that moment. However, the audience don’t necessarily condemn Stanhope for his volatile outburst and loathing of Hibbert, as he symbolizes everything Stanhope detests - weakness and cowardice. The stem of his denigration is from the fact that he’s seen so many comrades die, and he finds it disgraceful and belittling of their sacrifice for his men to not have the same vigor and commitment to ending the war. In Act 1 he tells everyone in the dugout they’re all “ going to take an equal chance - together”, planning to regimentedly lead by example, arguably the most effective form of leadership and creating a sense of unity between soldiers, keeping up morale and priding himself on on the bravery and commitment of his company.

However, Sherriff changes Stanhope’s body language and speech profusely - along with the tone of the scene by alleviating much of the tension - in the space of a few lines as Hibbert waits to be shot, as he is “[smiling]” and “[gently placing his hand on Hibbert’s shoulder]”, portraying a far stronger leader to put aside his frustration and console his officer. Sherriff’s choice of

language at this point, including “ gently” expose some of Stanhope’s more vulnerable attributes to Hibbert, which include his sense of compassion and his willingness to comfort those who need it. Perhaps encouragement was his aim when he scared Hibbert – a guess at what could be an effective way of leading as he doesn’t know Hibbert well, and from that confrontation he learned that the best way of connecting with him was to make a personal connection and to show him sympathy for his emotional trauma. Stanhope also calls Hibbert “ good man”, a huge contrast to his previous ferocity and disdain for the officer, implying Stanhope’s mental instability or perhaps his deep care for Hibbert in that he’d go as far as to become dictatorial simply to persuade him to do the right thing and behave as an honorable soldier. The audience watch as Stanhope shows Hibbert sympathy and respect, and validates his fears, saying “ I know what you feel Hibbert – I’ve known all along”, a huge breakthrough for Stanhope’s apathetic and emotionally inept character to reveal his true fears, especially to Hibbert who he has never had a strong bond with and continues to despise throughout the rest of the play. The audience could perceive these actions as tactful to persuade Hibbert to stay, or perhaps a show of strong leadership as he puts aside his distaste for Hibbert to do his duty and keep him motivated to fight the war.

Stanhope resorts to reminding Hibbert of the morbidity of war and the solace that lies in death, telling him “ if you’re killed you – you won’t have to stand this hell anymore”, using this macabre thought as motivation to get him to stay. This could be Sherriff’s intention to portray how some soldiers rarely truly believed in a future outside of the war after watching so many of their men die, and the despair they must’ve felt being trapped in trenches for

such long periods of time. Stanhope's actions of finding a way to connect with Hibbert to provide him with consolation, disregarding his own personal boundaries show how he is an effective leader and will do whatever it takes to boost the morale of his men, and he takes the time to get to know them to know what will bring them comfort in such a harsh environment. Stanhope also reminds Hibbert to "think of all the chaps who've gone already [...] sometimes I think it's lonelier here." The symbolism of heaven as an escape from the suffering these soldiers are experiencing may be intended to sadden the audience as they begin to understand the true psychological effects war had on soldiers, and admire the sacrifices they made for their country whilst under so much distress and pressure to maintain a strong and masculine appearance. It is clear that soldiers like Stanhope saw little hope for the future besides death, showing how desperate they were to go home to their loved ones and be alleviated of the horrors they'd endured, and how they would sooner die than live through the merciless onslaught of the enemy. This also highlights the solitariness of war and the importance of camaraderie to cope, which was Sherriff's main intention to show his audience through his play, and the strength Stanhope's character must hold to uphold an authoritative reputation with the men, when really he is shown to be just as stressed and frightened as they all were.

Stanhope also shows respect for the other officers and reminds Hibbert to consider them in his personal decisions, asking him rhetorically "don't you think it's worth standing in with men like that?", showing how, as a strong leader, he values his comrades and the work they do and believes that they should hold the same admiration for each other. Stanhope's calming of

Hibbert and persuading him to do the honorable thing is very similar to how Osborne relaxes Stanhope, suggesting that Stanhope too has the potential to become an avuncular figure to Hibbert, portraying influence and trust, both of which would strengthen Stanhope as a leader. However, perhaps Osborne is the true leader of the officers in the dugout, even if he doesn't have the title, as it is he who emotionally supports Stanhope, and without him, Stanhope couldn't lead the company as he'd be too emotionally unstable and would have no one to turn to when he needed to put down his facade and be himself, Dennis, not the powerful Captain Stanhope role he takes on for days on end. We see the close bond between Osborne and Stanhope in Act 1, when drunk Stanhope shares his vulnerabilities and concerns about Raleigh joining the company, and Osborne validates his worries, but also distracts him and convinces him to get to bed. When Stanhope laughs "tuck me up, Uncle", Sherriff is really portraying the importance of friendship in war, and how nobody, not even Stanhope, can be a good leader without a confidant for his true emotions, vulnerabilities and the reality of his experiences. This greatly contrasts how Stanhope reacts to Hibbert telling him to "get to bed" in Act 3, as he becomes furious at the mention of anyone else trying to take care of him besides Osborne, who at this point had just that day died, connoting the importance of the relationship between the two for Stanhope's sanity and the success of the raid, both of which are arguably lost by the denouement of the play.

Although Stanhope has irregular tendencies for emotional (often cruel) outbursts when he's been drinking whisky, this ineffective coping mechanism is backed with good intentions as he aims to stop himself from emotionally

crumbling under the pressures of war, demonstrated by Sherriff when Stanhope tells Osborne “ without being doped up on whisky - I’d go mad with fright!” Stanhope’s desperate attempt to numb himself from the pain of losing his comrades and the emotional pressure he faces by being in charge of so many lives shows his affectionate intentions, and his devotion to being a good leader and role model is what makes him so. Contextually, whisky was used as a coping mechanism for soldiers “ to forget” the horrors that they witnessed, such as Stanhope does after Osborne’s death. As well as being readily available, whisky numbed physical and emotional pain for short periods of time, giving the soldiers ‘ Dutch courage’ before they went into battle to reduce their nervousness a little, and proving useful to allow soldiers who had survived those battles sleep, which they were often unable to do due to PTSD unless they were blackout drunk. In the exposition, Hardy’s disdain for Stanhope “ drinking like a fish” demonstrates how every soldier had a different coping mechanism, and perhaps were not always too sympathetic to one another. Hardy highlights Stanhope’s obvious dependence on alcohol, just as fish cannot function without water, and sees it as part of his personality, rather than an escape from the war around him. Although Stanhope’s alcoholism makes him irritable and unpredictable at times, it also makes him able to be a strong and altruistic leader, as without it, we imagine he, like Hibbert, could be described as a “ pathetic little worm”, his weaknesses showcased by his lack of distraction from the war.

In conclusion, Stanhope shows many qualities of an excellent leader, and as Raleigh wrote in his letter home, “ the men simply love him”, showing his powerful act truly does motivate the men and gain their respect, and his

emotional breakdowns only ever appear in the comfort of the dugout, which the audience cannot judge Stanhope for because of the horrors he's faced at war. He is a flawed, vulnerable, hostile, yet compassionate character; a complex consequence of the effects of war. Overall, he presents himself as a strong and capable leader, but will show his humanity and emotions when away from the men and in private.