CHAPTER XXVIII.

Al-Muhallab's Strategy and His Qualities of Generalship.

Even when he was a mere lad, al-Muhallab was promising enough to earn from Caliph 'Umar the compliment that he was the prospective 'chief of all the sons of 'Abū Ṣufra.' Similarly (1) he also evoked from the poet Bukair b. al-'Akhnas the verse:

خُذِيْنِيْ بِهِ إِنَّمَا يَسِدُّ سَوْرَتَا أَسْمُمُ وَيَبْعِرُ حَتَّى لاَكُونَ لَمْ شَل مُّمُّ (Uyun 1/230; Jah. 3/138).

As the lad grew up and advanced in military career, these early promises of leadership and glory were more than fulfilled. Al-Muhallab is generally remembered as the first man to introduce two innovations in the Arab army; first, the cropping of horses' tails which he learnt from the Turk' horsemen whom he encountered in Qīqān and, second, the substitution of wooden stirrups by iron ones which was suggested to him by his own experience and ingenuity. Up to the time of al-Muhallab's campaign against the 'Azāriqa the Arabs used to have only wooden stirrups which were often easily cut by the opponent during the combat, thus leaving the horseman without a necessary support which was almost indispensable for exerting force in attack (2). These innovations,

(1). Jah. (3/161) also records the following:

(2). Kam. 675. 'Imrān b. 'Iṣām al-'Anāzī eulogises al-Muhallab for the same in the following verses:

See also Jah. 3/12.
though important enough in themselves, were still more remarkable in that they symbolised the true spirit of the original mind which disdained to cling to the old rut and was destined to make a worthy contribution to the prevalent mode of warfare.

The popular method of warfare during the time of al-Muhallab was the simple traditional one of seeking a direct encounter with the enemy and defeating him in a quick soldiers' war on the open field. The expediency of avoiding a straight combat for some time was seldom seriously examined and delay was often held attributable to hesitancy and lack of courage. Certainly blockade and siege operations were not uncommon but a closer study will reveal that in many cases they were only imposed by the enemy's desire to evade a straight fight. They rarely formed part of a commander's predetermined strategic plan and were seldom resorted to in the spirit of a preferrable expedient for exhausting the enemy without suffering the serious losses necessarily involved in an open fight.

It will be observed that this simple method of warfare was in its very nature not conducive to accustom the Arabs to have a nice regard for the intricate problems connected with the 'mechanism of war'—i.e., topography, movement and supply. Hence administrative matters were often neglected even more than strategy. It is really amazing how such far-reaching expeditions as those to Constantinople and the eastern limit of Sijistân were undertaken without an elaborate consideration of such vital problems as the nature of the country, consolidation of positions, safeguarding the lines of communication and retreat, regular maintenance of supplies, etc. The troops took a
direct route to their distant objectives relying solely on their faith to move the mountains and their dash and tenacity to sweep all before them. They continued their advance forward as far as the enemy retired before them, pausing only for a clash of arms. In these circumstances disasters like that which befell 'Ubaidullah b. 'Abi Bakra in Sijistan were almost inevitable. The reason why the early Muslim armies escaped such disasters was that 'Umar was always far-sighted enough to keep their enthusiasm in salutary check and to take every conceivable precaution to ensure their safety. 'Umar likewise devoted due attention to consolidation with the result that the early conquests were all systematic. About the time of al-Muhallab's generalship, however, there were few military commanders who showed prudence enough to take all these important matters into consideration. Hence we come across examples of many years of unsystematic and wasteful penetrations, for example, into Transoxiana and Sijistan. Typical of the neglect for strategy was the attitude of the governors of Khurasan who fought assiduously against the hostile native chiefs but never thought of attacking them in their winter rendezvous (vide supra p. 33). Leo VI, the wise Emperor, was not far from truth in saying that the military successes of the saracens were due to 'the fanatical courage of the fatalist'(1). The methods that he advised for counter-acting and harassing them were all based on the primary assumption that they lacked in strategy(2). That the counter-measures were not without effect even at a much later date shows that his assumption was not entirely wrong.

(1) Prof. Oman: Hist. of the Art of warfare, p. 206.
(2) Ibid., 209.
Al-Muhallab's command of the campaign against the Azāriqa began at a time when more than one commander of proven valour had met with total disaster, and was further interrupted three times in order to divert him to other more urgent tasks. This circumstance although it put off the extermination of the Azāriqa for a considerable time and caused al-Muhallab start anew with his work after every break, was yet helpful in bringing out by contrast the distinctive features of his own method of warfare. It is noteworthy that of all the commanders other than al-Muhallab who were at different times dispatched against the Azāriqa, ʻUmar b. ʻUbaidullah was the only fortunate one who escaped a fatal disaster. Why? Because all the rivals and colleagues of al-Muhallab, not excepting even ʻUmar b. ʻUbaidullah, were unimaginative adherents of the traditional method and lacked the originality or courage to extricate themselves out of the old rut. They simply sought head-on clashes and received hard knocks from a mighty enemy of whose strength they never cared to have a realistic view. They were so indifferent to studying the real nature of the enemy that even the successive failures would not make them realise that the Azāriqa presented an entirely new problem. The old method which depended for its success merely on superior dash and tenacity, could have achieved conspicuous results against an enemy lacking in that religious faith and missionary fervour which was the fountain head of 'the fanatical courage of the fatalist.' But it was, indeed, quite futile to expect the same results when the enemy was similarly inspired by a fanatic missionary zeal which enabled him to put up an equal
amount of courage and sacrifice. As a matter of fact, in the war between the Başrans and the Azāriqa it was the latter who fought primarily, if not exclusively, for the triumph of their faith, the main interest of the former being the protection of their hearth and home. Thus they could claim to their credit such astounding feats as the triumph of a band of forty Azraqites over a contingent of two hundred soldiers(1). The other commanders failed to appreciate this basic fact which proved to be the secret of al-Muhallab’s success.

No doubt, physical courage, dash and tenacity were all important factors in those days of close-range fighting and as such al-Muhallab was as particular about them as any of his rivals. As a soldier he himself gave ample proof of these qualities and even as a commander his own personal example was always there to serve as an inspiration for his troops. But the chief credit of al-Muhallab was that he could distinguish between bravery and rashness. He knew that bravery, if not used on proper occasion, was a sheer waste. His bravery was complemented and tempered with prudence.

Al-Muhallab was all alone in his days not to fall a prey to over-drawn self-confidence. He made a fair and exact estimate of the nature and the strength of his enemy. Further, it was he who for the first time realised the principle that when the enemy was impregnable to direct attack, as the Azāriqa were, there should be no head-on clashes except on particularly

(1). Kam. 587-8.
opportune moments when the enemy had been weakened by other methods of exhaustion. He not even once made the blunder that all others, including 'Umar b. 'Uba'idullah, did to attempt to annihilate the 'Azāriqa in one short decisive blow or even in a series of desperate battles. Thus the principle enjoined by him that 'al-makīdah' was often more effective than 'al-Najdah' represents his most original contribution to the art of warfare.

Another important fact which al-Mu'allab's rivals equally failed to take note of was that the menace of the 'Azāriqa was not confined to a small compact locality. It extended over Karma'n, Fars and Khuzistān and at times even up to the limits of al-Furat chiefly due to the 'Azāriqa's extraordinary powers of locomotion. This circumstance was the very negation of a necessary condition for the effective use of the traditional method which, in the very nature of it, could only succeed in a localised affair. Speaking in modern terms, the momentous contribution of al-Mu'allab was the transition from the strategy of lightning blows to one of exhaustion. He was indeed much in advance of his time in discovering that the Napoleonic method (as it is called in our days) of crushing the enemy by a single decisive battle was only possible where the forces are most unequal and a clash is localised. On the other hand when first class opponents meet it is impossible to achieve a solution at one blow. Then the war should take the form of a long and merciless contest designed to test the economic and political foundations of the enemy. This was indeed a pioneer method as evidenced by the fact that most people even those of the calibre of al-Ḥajjāj found it difficult to appreciate its true worth or even to understand it.
No doubt, al-Muhallab from the very beginning foresaw and prepared his plans for a prolonged war. But a prolonged war has problems of its own and it is a still greater tribute to his military genius that he fulfilled in ample degree all the conditions necessary for its successful prosecution. The conditions as deduced from al-Muhallab's own words and deeds are the following:

(1) The first condition, to use al-Muhallab's own word, is "ṣīla" i.e., the necessary amount of steadfast patience which may guard the commander and the troops against yielding to ennui. It will be realised that a waiting game in a continuous state of alert watchfulness is often likely to prove racking for the nerves. It is, therefore, the supreme duty of the commander not to let the morale of the troops deteriorate from inaction. If the commander is wearied into launching a premature attack then clearly the very object of the prolonged war will be frustrated. Al-Muhallab proved the capacity to keep steadfastly to the defensive for years together without letting the enthusiasm of his troops wane on that account. As a matter of fact his troops showed remarkable understanding of and confidence in his policy which was always to compel the enemy to take the initiative for an attack so long as the odds remained equal. In such a case, as he explained to his sons on one occasion, it was the aggressor who suffered the greater loss without being able to drive home the attack against equally strong and alert defenders.(1)

(1) Kam. 677, 14-15. See also Appendix p. 15.
No doubt, the leader of a prolonged campaign should be chary in coming to grips with his enemy so long as the latter remained strong and resolute. But he should also be vigilant enough to take advantage of every moment of weakness and unpreparedness on the other side. He should be able to act quickly and promptly to press an attack whenever the enemy betrayed the least sign of relaxation and irresolution. In this respect too, al-Muhallab never failed to seize to the fullest advantage an opportunity of striking at the enemy whenever he felt confident that the odds in his favour were sufficiently reassuring. He knew when it was wise to stop but at the same time he also knew when it was opportune to strike. He possessed a judicious judgment which took note of every circumstance favouring a change of the waiting for a forcing game and with amazing alacrity acted up to it. His lightning blow which turned an accomplished defeat into conspicuous victory at Sillâ-wa-Sillibrâ is the most illustrious example of this unique quality. Whenever he decided to launch an attack he did so with all his might and main and staked his all in it. His onslaughts were always delivered with such vigour and determination as to make it virtually impossible for the enemy to survive them. In the wars against al-Mukhtar as well as on other occasions his action always proved to be the final blow. Last but not the least, the final push against the Azâriqa provided a conclusive proof of his mastery of swift offensive operations as well.

Really, there can be no better description and no greater testimony of the above two complementary aspects of al-Muhallab's tactical policy than that of his inveterate foe, Qaṭari b. al-Fuja'a:
"If you caught one end of a cloth he (al-Muhallab) would hold the other end. He would draw it when you let it loose and would let it loose when you draw it." (Supra p.112)

(3) Thirdly, for a prolonged war to have the desired effect it is of very vital importance that it should be directed on a deliberate and systematic plan with a clear and definite aim behind it. Otherwise it is only likely to add to the strength of the enemy instead of weakening him.

The aim should in the main be twofold; first, to undermine the economic position of the enemy and, second, to subvert his political organisation. These are the two points which are particularly assailable through a prolonged war and are so vital that a successful blow at them is virtually the same as hamstringing a camel. Further, the waiting game is a particularly helpful choice for the side which at the outset is handicapped by deficiency in economic and material resources. Obviously, the supreme need of such a party is to conserve its present resources and to mark time with a view in the meantime to achieve parity with, if not superiority over, the foe. For this purpose, the waiting game is doubly advantageous. On the one hand, it conserves the existing resources and strength by avoiding the heavy losses inevitable in an immediate offensive and affords the time and opportunity of augmenting them still further. On the other hand, it relieves considerable forces for hampering the means of supply to the enemy and affecting his position adversely. Thus the effects of a purposeful prolonged war are doubly enhanced because it detracts very greatly from the strength of the enemy at a relatively very small expense of one's own resources.
Improvement of his own economic position and a parallel depletion of the resources of his enemy formed a very clear and definite object of al-Muhallab's plan from the very beginning. First he, with his characteristic resourcefulness, expanded the means at his disposal e.g., by obtaining credits from the traders, making the most advantageous use of stones, etc. Then he proceeded to spread his tentacles patiently, systematically and gradually round the position of the 'Azāriqa with a conscious design to wrest bit by bit the economic resources which the enemy had seized. It is remarkable that he was always content with the results of a battle if the enemy were forced to abandon a part of his possessions to him. He never hastened to take a step forward unless he had consolidated and exploited his previous gains to the full. A closer study will reveal that al-Muhallab always made it a point to exhaust the economic strength of the enemy through effective siege and blockade operations before launching an offensive.

Al-Muhallab also made deliberate and systematic efforts to destroy the political unity of the 'Azāriqa. He spoke of 'distressing hunger' and 'a split in their views' (supra p. 134) in the same breath. He knew full well that internal discord was far more detrimental than external pressure. Thus concurrently with economic warfare he also launched a diplomatic manoeuvre to destroy the political fabric of the enemy. He displayed remarkable insight into the peculiar psychology and the genius of the 'Azāriqa in devising his subtle moves. The uniformity of the tenets of their faith was the cornerstone of the political unity of the 'Azāriqa which was further cemented by their implicit faith in, and unquestioning obedience to,
their leaders. The moves of al-Muhallab were directed against the same two points. Shrewdly exploiting the peculiar foibles of the 'Azāriqa he succeeded conspicuously in creating dissen­sions in their religious faith and sowing suspicion and distrust among them. The result was that the political organisation broke down almost simultaneously with the loss of their economic superiority.

The position of al-Muhallab was unique inasmuch as he was not a mere military commander. In addition to the direction of the campaign he also had to attend to the provision of financial outlay on the maintenance and the equipment of his troops. It will be realised that the magnitude of the problem of finance is far greater in the case of a prolonged war than in the case of a short campaign such as al-Muhallab's rivals were wont to.

Moreover the cost of al-Muhallab's campaign was exceptionally high because he had to make up the deficiency in armour and equipment to which his predecessors had paid scant attention. Curiously enough even the resources were not ready at hand. Al-Muhallab had to wrest them from the grip of his enemy and then to marshal and exploit them for his own advantage. Thus it was an obvious necessity that he should devote particularly unusual attention to tax-collecting. That is why he often paused after every engagement in order to levy taxes from the land abandoned by the enemy. It is indeed a high tribute to al-Muhallab's capacity for planning that he co-ordinated in a remarkably successful manner the task of financial provision with other considerations of consolidation and strategy. No doubt the principle that
'whoever is incompetent to collect the taxes will prove still more incompetent to fight the foe'(1), which he asserted in reply to al-Hajjâj's allegations of a selfish motive, represents a very important part of his original contribution to the art of warfare. It shows what a great importance he attached to economic factors in the general scheme of warfare. It must be remembered that the real crux of generalship is the matter of administration and not tactics and strategy which come only afterwards.

Al-Muhallab's handling of the finances under his control can only be inferred from stray hints here and there. As to what proportion of revenue he appropriated to himself, the reports are not clear. To all appearances, he does not seem to have restricted himself to any specific limit as evidenced by his words to Yazīd to the effect that with the conclusion of the campaign the position had changed from what it had been before so that thenceforward he could have only such amount as al-Hajjâj was pleased to allow him(2). There is, however, not the slightest evidence to show that he ever allowed his selfish interests to affect adversely the interests of the State. He always proved that he treated the demands of the campaign as the first charge on the revenue at his disposal; any amount left over must, of course,

(1). Supra p. 181. See also Appendix p. 189.
(2). See supra p. 249.
have gone to his private purse. What is really important is that he had the sense of duty and honesty to subordinate every consideration to the supreme interest of the successful prosecution of war.

On one occasion, however, al-Muhallab appears to have been guilty of dereliction of duty if not of deliberate unlawful misappropriation. Al-Ḥajjāj is reported to have indemnified him with a million dirhems on account of the arrears of the Kharāj of al-ʿAḥwāz to which he had been appointed for a short period by Khalid b. ʿAbdullāh. Here al-Muhallab is described as a man of extravagant habits who never cared to save anything for future contingencies and consequently had to resort to borrowing whenever he was thrown out of job. He had great difficulty in paying off this indemnity. Half of it was borne by his son, al-ʿAḥāfra who had been entrusted with the taxes of ʿIṣṭakhr during the same time that al-Muhallab was sent to al-ʿAḥwāz. The other half was made up by a loan of three lakhs from ʿAbū Mawiyya, the mawla and treasurer of ʿAbdullāh b. ʿAmir, and the sale of the ornaments of al-Muhallab's well-known wife, Khaira al-Qushairiyya (1). Al-Muhallab must really have been remiss and negligent in his duty for he appears to have submitted to the demand of al-Ḥajjāj without demur. Of course, al-Muhallab was not the man to have submitted to an unreasonable and unjustifiable demand without a bold vindication of his position.

(1) Tab. 2/1034-5. Similarly on another occasion al-Muhallab was unable to pay an indemnity of two hundred thousand dirhems which had to be borne by Ṭalḥa on his behalf (Tab. 2/1119).
Al-Muhallab's use of diplomacy as a weapon of war was as conspicuous as his attention to economic and administrative matters. Just as the latter brought upon him the charge of selfishness similarly the former earned him the sobriquet of a liar or an imposter (1). The falsehood of which al-Muhallab is alleged to have been guilty is said to be of two kinds; first, his deceitful moves against the enemy and, second, his exaggerated and false promises to his own troops. He is said to have often made false promises of help and succour to his troops in order to inspire courage and confidence among them.

But all the instances that have come down to us belong only to the first category. We know that al-Muhallab often employed deceit against the enemy yet we never hear of his making any false statement to his troops. Thus it is more than probable that, as asserted by Ibn Qutaiba (Isa. 3/536; IKh. 2/146), the use of the sobriquet must have first originated with his opponents as an expression of anguish over the clever ruses of al-Muhallab of which they often fell an easy victim. It is particularly plausible that it should have originated with the 'Azāriqā who, by virtue of their rigid puritanism, were incapable of distinguishing 'Al-Lūb from 'Al-Dira. But undoubtedly the

(1) The allegation of Al-Lūb is referred to in the following verses:

(Uyun 2/26. See also al-Zamakhshari: Mustaqṣa, '1- Amthāl under 'Al-Lūb'.

(Kam. 633).)

It is also reported that 'al-Nadab', a tribe of al-'Azd used to say whenever they saw al-Muhallab coming to them (Kam. 633, 632).
use of the sobriquet must have become widespread very soon, so much so that it has left us a proverb 'الکبّ می‌زنیم' (1).

As a matter of fact, al-Muhallab was not guilty of such. On the testimony of al-Mubarrad(2), he only believed in and practised دبلیو the essence of war and the use of which is expressly allowed in dealings with the enemy. Such eminent authorities as 'Ibn Hajar and 'Ibn 'Abd al-Barr also declare him to be دبلیو i.e. just and trustworthy and expressly exonerate him of 'الکبّ' in the manner of al-Mubarrad.

As for his dealings with his own people, al-Muhallab does not seem to have gone beyond a shrewd and deliberate play upon their religious and other sentiments. It is again one of the distinctions of al-Muhallab that he possessed a deep knowledge of humanity, which he brought to bear on the conduct of the war (cf. his valuable advice to al-Ḥajjāj during the revolt of 'Ibn al-ʿAshāth). He paid due regard to the psychological and emotional factors which might be exploited in rousing in his troops a contempt for the foe. He would remind them that they were fighting for the survival of their religion and the protection of their homes, women and children; he would tell them that their opponents were mere low class rabble and that the Khāshabīyya had no weapons other than wooden clubs; and he would assure them that they, despite their inferior numbers,

(2). Kam. 632.
were strong enough to turn the tide of the battle. But we search in vain for a single example of his having made any false promises of help or any such thing. Surely, such a conduct would have shaken the faith of the people in his words and would have ultimately defeated the very purpose which al-Muhallab had at heart. To appreciate the true merit of al-Muhallab one need only remember that the real secret of the success of an army is not the fact but rather the belief that it is the stronger. Hence, al-Mawardi counts it as one of the primary duties of a commander to rouse enthusiasm in his troops and to make them feel the stronger of the two parties.

Apart from the essential qualities mentioned above, al-Muhallab possessed many other auxiliary qualities without the harmonious combination of which a prolonged campaign is only likely to end in disaster. Two such qualities were foresight and alert watchfulness. We have evidence of al-Muhallab's foresight at every step, the most striking example of which is the agreement with al-Qubā' and the Baṣran chiefs. The conditions demanded by him clearly show that he had at the very start foreseen the whole course of the campaign and had a vivid estimate of the difficulties which might have hampered his plans. He could always prejudge the movements of the enemy and the direction of attack. It was the result of intelligent anticipation of events that his enemy could never catch him unawares. The 'Azāriqa always found their moves forestalled beforehand and were forced to call him the Sorcerer of Musāf which title must be regarded as the greatest tribute to his foresight.

Combined with foresight al-Muhallab also possessed an inexhaustible capacity for unrelenting vigilance. His scrupulous
regard for defensive arrangements can be gauged from an account of his camp which is recorded in Tab.(2/585). According to it, 'whenever al-Muhallab settled down for a bivouac he carefully laid out and prudently entrenched his camp with a ditch. Troops were ordered to continue all the time in their proper formations. Pickets and vedettes were set up at carefully selected points and spies were dispatched all around.'

No doubt, the use of ditches and trenches for the defence of citadels and towns was already known to the Arabs. But the system of guarding temporary camps with such elaborate measures was perfected only by al-Muhallab. Here again a contrast will show the true merit of al-Muhallab. While all the other commanders had to pay dearly for their criminal neglect coupled with foolish arrogance, the 'Azariqa could never seize a single moment of unpreparedness on the part of al-Muhallab. It is reported and is also borne out by facts that al-Muhallab always took care to look to the defence measures personally and would not entrust them to anyone except to his sons and special confidants (1).

Al-Muhallab's extraordinary regard for vigilance could not but make him a great believer in the utility of an efficient intelligence service. Both in peace and in war his spies were always active everywhere, in cities as well as in the country(2). Particularly in war time he maintained a constant touch with the enemy and kept himself informed of all the happenings in the opposite camp. That is why he could always judge with astonishing correctness the hourly changes in the strength of

(1) Kam. 672, 5.
(2) Kam. 630.
the enemy. The infallibility of al-Muhallab's calculations cannot but impress the reader of his exploits. All his forward plans and long-range schemes never suffered through the least miscalculation. His counter-attack at Silla-wa-Sillibrā was a very great risk indeed but it turned out exactly according to his plans.

Although al-Muhallab was promoted to High Command at the ripe age of 59, yet he had lost nothing of the boldness and fire of youth. Aided by superior knowledge and tried judgment, his mature mind still had the capacity to originate bold and unorthodox designs and practical sense and energy to carry them through. He was still robust and had the ability to withstand shocks of war with stolid calm and obstinate determination. He refused to acknowledge defeat and played his best when things went badly e.g., at Silla-wa-Sillibrā. Moreover, al-Muhallab was possessed of unshakable confidence in his own independent judgement and had the courage to stick to it even under the pressure of severe threats from his overlords. To him the protection of secret was a sufficient advantage of independent judgement (Wat. 77. See also Appendix p. 12). He stoutly refused to submit to the anomaly that 'the decision should lie with one who possesses superior authority rather than one who is competent enough to judge.' (See Appendix p. 15 and supra p. 138). He had the touch of a gambler in him and refused to be bound by regulations and dictates. But at the same time his sense of discipline and loyalty was strong enough to hold him back from the other extreme of revolt which 'Abn al-'Ash'ath chose for himself. Al-Muhallab's sense of responsibility and obligation
was proved by his refusal to take up the command of the campaign against the Azariqa without being absolved of his previous engagement by 'Iyān al-Zubair and by his prompt action in paying the traders of al-Hasra at the earliest possible opportunity. He served his masters, even those who were avowedly jealous of him like Khalid b. 'Abdullāh, earnestly and faithfully through thick and thin so long as he had the least hope that his services could help them. But when faced with a fait accompli he, in the true spirit of a military commander, did not hesitate to swear allegiance to the new conqueror, all the time keeping himself scrupulously above all temptations of material gain.

Al-Muhallab was very jealous of his honour and could brook no affronts even from his superiors like al-Ḥajjāj. With his rivals he always behaved with perfect dignity and even generosity and forgiveness except in case of 'Attāb whose open defiance was too detrimental and too hard for him to bear. With remarkable restraint he never stooped to seek glory at the expense of his rivals. On the other hand he was prepared to recognise merits in others as well.

As for his relations with his troops and subordinates, al-Muhallab always treated them firmly but 'kindly like a father.' His solicitude for the personal comforts of the soldier, regular pay and rations, good billets etc., was not a whit less than his earnestness in providing the necessary arms and equipment. He showed himself to his troops as frequently and, we may believe, as impressively as possible for he did not neglect to surround his imposing personality with due ceremonial. There was no discrimination of any kind whatsoever. His own sons, nobles and 'mawālī', Persians and the
Arabs, Basrans and the Kūfans, - all of them stood on an equal footing. All had an equal opportunity to show their mettle and were given precedence according to military honours alone. A keen judge of character as he was, he had a fair estimate of the real worth of every individual and always chose the best man for a particular task.

Undoubtedly, al-Muhallab had a very severe code of discipline for his troops but he was always scrupulous enough to administer it fairly and reasonably. It was this iron discipline which, above all other factors, e.g. hope of loot and glory, devotion to country etc., fostered a spirit of endurance and enterprise till it turned al-Ruqād, an ordinary soldier, into "the great warrior of the Arabs." Under al-Muhallab, a soldier felt himself assured of personal safety; the cautiousness and the circumspection of the commander being a sufficient guarantee that he shall be put into fight with as good a chance as possible of victory and survival. It was this assurance which inspired such immense confidence among the troops that they fought zealously and selflessly of their own free will whereas under other commanders they only obeyed under duress and often with strong suspicions as to the wisdom of their moves. Al-Muhallab’s commands were always executed without any question and in right earnest but at the same time he never allowed himself to be so haughty as to reject outright an advice from his lieutenants (cf. his acceptance of the suggestion of al-Ḥarīṣ b. Hilāl: Supra p.81-2).
He had no reason to be obsessed with any such diffidence or doubt about the faith of his troops as was betrayed by ʿUmar b. ʿUbadullāh.
Prudence and restraint being the constant companions of al-Muhallab, he never practised violence for its own sake; he was never ruthless beyond the needs of the situation. He would keep the prisoners in detention only so long as mischief was apprehended from them - a course which al-Ḥajjāj was unable to understand. Similarly he would try every chance of reforming the miscreants while al-Ḥajjāj would only dispatch them to their doom. It will be noted that it was his aversion to use force where it was impertinent and unnecessary that led to his adoption of the new method of exhaustion. But, on the other hand, he carefully avoided the other extreme of indecision or weakness. He never showed any hesitation whatsoever in using firmly and resolutely all the force that was absolutely necessary in order to achieve the desired victory. He dealt with the ʿAzāriqa practically in the same manner as they were wont to treat their opponents and even justified his action in making captives of them on the same ground.

Lastly, it must be confessed that the motive of al-Muhallab in the war against the ʿAzāriqa was not mainly religious; it was primarily political. But it must be recognised that on many a critical occasion he gave ample proof of his genuine concern for the solidarity and the unity of the Muslim community. Hence it cannot be said that he was a mere henchman of the Umayyids. No doubt, he worked for the spread and the stability of the Umayyid rule but he did so with a full satisfaction of his conscience and religious scruples. To him, peace, order and contentment of the Muslim community were linked up with the established government of the Umayyids; hence he deemed it a religious duty as well to crush the ʿAzāriqa.

The governorship of Khurāsān revealed al-Muhallab as an
eminent civil administrator as well. As a matter of fact his successes on the battle-field owed a great deal to his superb insight into civil, political and administrative problems. His considered attitude towards Mūsā b. ʿAbdullāh b. Khāzīm was indeed a stroke of administrative wisdom which was fully vindicated by subsequent events. During his tenure of office the province was singularly free from all internal disorder such as marred the regime of his predecessors. The reason was that he, though strongly attached to his own tribe, was never unjust to any section of the people so as to give cause for grievance and dissatisfaction.

Al-Muhallab is remembered in history not only as an able commander and a successful administrator but also as an eminently generous notable. His bountiful disposition would not allow him to entertain a minor request (IN.109. See also Appendix p. \(\text{\textbullet}\)) while he would fain fulfill the vows of those who had sworn to receive a particular sum from him on the occasion of his victory (Ibid). Deeds of gallantry and beautiful verses were rewarded by him with great sums which sometimes ran into tens of thousands. Al-Mughīra b. Ḥāmā returned from him with his hands full of riches. (Agh.11/162).

Al-Muhallab indeed very well deserved the tribute of Nahār b. Tausiʾa:-

"ربُّ وَرَبُّ الْأَلْجِرِيَّ وَالْعَدُّ مَرَجَّسٍ"