

THE COLLAPSE OF THE ARMED FORCES

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Introduction

THE MORALE, DISCIPLINE and battle-worthiness of the U.S. Armed Forces are, with a few salient exceptions, lower and worse than at any time in this century and possibly in the history of the United States.

By every conceivable indicator, our army that now remains in Vietnam is in a state approaching collapse, with individual units avoiding or having refused combat, murdering their officers and noncommissioned officers, drug-ridden, and dispirited where not near mutinous.

Elsewhere than Vietnam, the situation is nearly as serious.

Intolerably clobbered and buffeted from without and within by social turbulence, pandemic drug addiction, race war, sedition, civilian scapegoatise, draftee recalcitrance and malevolence, barracks theft and common crime, unsupported in their travail by the general government, in Congress as well as the executive branch, distrusted, disliked,

and often reviled by the public, the uniformed services today are places of agony for the loyal, silent professions who doggedly hang on and try to keep the ship afloat.

The responses of the services to these unheard-of conditions, forces and new public attitudes, are confused, resentful, occasional pollyanna-ish, and in some cases even calculated to worsen the malaise that is wracking. While no senior officer (especially one on active duty) can openly voice any such assessment, the foregoing conclusions find virtually unanimous support in numerous non-attributable interviews with responsible senior and mid-level officer, as well as career noncommissioned officers and petty officers in all services.

Historical precedents do not exist for some of the services' problems, such as desertion, mutiny, unpopularity, seditious attacks, and racial troubles. Others, such as drugs, pose difficulties that are wholly NEW. Nowhere, however, in the history of the Armed Forces have comparable past troubles presented themselves in such general magnitude, acuteness, or concentrated focus as today.

By several orders of magnitude, the Army seems to be in worse trouble. But the Navy has serious and unprecedented problems, while the Air Force, on the surface at least still clear of the quicksands in which the Army is sinking, is itself facing disquieting difficulties.

Only the Marines—who have made news this year by their hard line against indiscipline and general permissiveness—seem with their expected staunchness and tough tradition, to be weathering the storm.

Back to the Campus

To understand the military consequences of what is happening to the U.S. Armed Forces, Vietnam is a good place to start. It is in Vietnam that the rearguard of a 500,000 man army, in its day and in the observation of the writer the best army the United States ever put into the field, is numbly extricating itself from a nightmare war the Armed Forces feel they had foisted on them by bright civilians who are now back on campus writing books about the folly of it all.

"They have set up separate companies," writes an American soldier from Cu Chi, quoted in the New York Times, "for men who refuse to go into the field. Is no big thing to refuse to go. If a man is ordered to go to such and such a place he no longer goes through the hassle of refusing; he just packs his shirt and goes to visit some buddies at another base camp. Operations have become incredibly ragtag. Many guys don't even put on their uniforms any more... The American garrison on the larger bases are virtually disarmed. The lifers have taken our weapons from us and put them under lock and key... There have also been quite a few frag incidents in the battalion."

Can all this really be typical or even truthful?

Unfortunately the answer is yes.

"Frag incidents" or just "fragging" is current soldier slang in Vietnam for the murder or attempted murder of strict, unpopular, or just aggressive officers and NCOs. With extreme reluctance (after a young West Pointer from Senator Mike Mansfield's Montana was fragged in his sleep) the Pentagon has now disclosed that fraggings in 1970 (109) have more than doubled those of the previous year (96).

Word of the deaths of officers will bring cheers at troop movies or in bivouacs of certain units.

In one such division—the morale plagued Americal—fraggings during 1971 have been authoritatively estimated to be running about one a week.

Yet fraggings, though hard to document, form part of the ugly lore of every war. The first such verified incident known to have taken place occurred 190 years ago when Pennsylvania soldiers in the Continental Army killed one of their captains during the night of 1 January 1781.

Bounties and Evasions

Bounties, raised by common subscription in amounts running anywhere from \$50 to \$1,000, have been widely reported put on the heads of leaders whom the privates and Sp4s want to rub out.

Shortly after the costly assault on Hamburger Hill in mid-1969, the GI underground newspaper in Vietnam, "G.I. Says", publicly offered a \$10,000 bounty on Lt. Col. Weldon Honeycutt, the officer who ordered (and led) the attack. Despite several attempts, however, Honeycutt managed to live out his tour and return Stateside.

"Another Hamburger Hill," (i.e., toughly contested assault), conceded a veteran major, is definitely out."

The issue of "combat refusal"—an official euphemism for disobedience of orders to fight—the soldier's gravest crime—has only recently been again precipitated on the frontier of Laos by Troop B, 1st Cavalry's mass refusal to recapture their captain's command vehicle containing communication gear, codes and other secret operation orders.

As early as mid-1969, however, an entire company of the 196th Light Infantry Brigade publicly sat down on the battlefield. Later that year, another rifle company, from the famed 1st Air Cavalry Division, flatly refused—on CBS-TV—to advance down a dangerous trail.

(Yet combat refusals have been heard of before: as early as 1813, a corps of 4,000 Kentucky soldiers declined to engage British Indians who just sacked and massacred Ft Dearborn [later Chicago].)

While denying further unit refusals the Air Cav has admitted some 35 individual refusals in 1970 alone. By comparison, only two years earlier in 1968, the entire number of

officially recorded refusals for our whole army in Vietnam—from over seven divisions—was 68.

"Search and evade" (meaning tacit avoidance of combat by units in the field) is now virtually a principle of war, vividly expressed by the GI phrase, "CYA (cover your ass) and get home!"

That "search-and-evade" has not gone unnoticed by the enemy is underscored by the Viet Cong delegation's recent statement at the Paris Peace Talks that communist units in Indochina have been ordered not to engage American units which do not molest them. The same statement boasted—not without foundation in fact—that American defectors are in the VC ranks.

Symbolic anti-war fasts (such as the one at Pleiku where an entire medical unit, led by its officers, refused Thanksgiving turkey), peace symbols, "V"-signs not for victory but for peace, booing and cursing of officers and even of hapless entertainers such as Bob Hope, are unhappily commonplace.

As for drugs and race, Vietnam's problems today not only reflect, but reinforce those of the Armed Forces as a whole. In April, for example, members of a Congressional investigating subcommittee reported that 12 to 15% of our troops in Vietnam are now using high-grade heroin, and that drug addiction there is "of epidemic proportions."

Only last year an Air Force major and command pilot for Ambassador Bunker was apprehended at Ton Son Nhut air base outside Saigon with \$8 million worth of heroin in his aircraft. The major is now in Leavenworth.

Early this year, an Air force regular colonel was court-martialed and cashiered for leading his squadron in pot parties, while at Cam Ranh Air Force Base, 43 members of the base security police squadron were recently swept up in dragnet narcotics raids.

All the foregoing facts—and mean more dire indicators of the worse kind of military trouble—point to widespread conditions among American forces in Vietnam that have only been exceeded in this century by the French Army's Nivelles mutinies of 1917 and the collapse of the Tsarist armies in 1916 and 1917.

Society Notes

It is a truism that national armies closely reflect societies from which they have been raised. It would be strange indeed if the Armed Forces did not today mirror the agonizing divisions and social traumas of American society, and of course they do.

For this very reason, our Armed Forces outside Vietnam not only reflect these conditions but disclose the depths of their troubles in an awful litany of sedition, disaffection, desertion, race, drugs, breakdowns of authority, abandonment of discipline, and, as a cumulative result, the lowest state of military morale in the history of the country.

Sedition—coupled with disaffection within the ranks, and externally fomented with an audacity and intensity previously inconceivable – infests the Armed Services:

At best count, there appear to be some 144 underground newspapers published on or aimed at U.S. military bases in this country and overseas. Since 1970 the number of such sheets has increased 40% (up from 103 last fall). These journals are not mere gripe-sheets that poke soldier fun in the "Beetle Bailey" tradition, at the brass and the sergeants. "In Vietnam," writes the Ft Lewis-McChord Free Press, "the Lifers, the Brass, are the true Enemy, not the enemy." Another West Coast sheet advises readers: "Don't desert. Go to Vietnam and kill your commanding officer."

At least 14 GI dissent organizations (including two made up exclusively of officers) now operate more or less openly. Ancillary to these are at least six antiwar veterans' groups which strive to influence GIs.

Three well-established lawyer groups specialize in support of GI dissent. Two (GI Civil Liberties Defense Committee and New York Draft and Military Law Panel) operate in the open. A third is a semi-underground network of lawyers who can only be contacted through the GI Alliance, a Washington, D.C., group which tries to coordinate seditious anti-military activities throughout the country.

One anti-military legal effort operates right in the theater of war. A three-man law office, backed by the Lawyers' Military Defense Committee, of Cambridge, Mass., was set up last fall in Saigon to provide free civilian legal services for dissident soldiers being court-martialed in Vietnam.

Besides these lawyers' fronts, the Pacific Counseling Service (an umbrella organization with Unitarian backing for a profliery of anti-military activities) provides legal help and incitement to dissident GIs through not one but seven branches (Tacoma, Oakland, Los Angeles, San Diego, Monterey, Tokyo, and Okinawa).

Another of Pacific Counseling's activities is to air-drop planeloads of sedition literature into Oakland's sprawling Army Base, our major West Coast staging point for Vietnam.

On the religious front, a community of turbulent priests and clergymen, some unfrocked, calls itself the Order of Maximilian. Maximilian is a saint said to have been martyred by the Romans for refusing military service as un-Christian. Maximilian's present-day followers visit military posts, infiltrate brigades and stockades in the guise of spiritual counseling, work to recruit military chaplains, and hold services of "consecrations" of post chapels in the name of their saintly draft-dodger.

By present count at least 11 (some go as high as 26) off-base antiwar "coffee houses" ply GIs with rock music, lukewarm coffee, antiwar literature, how-t-do-it tips on desertion, and similar disruptive counsels. Among the best-known coffee houses are: The Shelter Half (Ft Lewis, Wash.); The Home Front (Ft Carson, Colo.); and The Oleo Strut (Ft Hood, Tex.).

Virtually all the coffee houses are or have been supported by the U.S. Serviceman's Fund, whose offices are in New York City's Bronx. Until May 1970 the Fund was recognized as a tax-exempt "charitable corporations," a determination which changed when IRS agents found that its main function was sowing dissention among GIs and that it was a satellite of "The New Mobilization Committee", a communist-front organization aimed at disruption of the Armed Forces.

Another "New Mobe" satellite is the G.I. Press Service, based in Washington, which calls itself the Associate Press of military underground newspapers. Robert Wilkinson, G.I. Press's editor, is well known to military intelligence and has been barred from South Vietnam.

While refusing to divulge names, IRS sources say that the serviceman's Fund has been largely bankrolled by well-to-do liberals. One example of this kind of liberal support for sedition which did surface identifiably last year was the \$8,500 channeled from the Philip Stern Family Foundation to underwrite Seaman Roger Priest's underground paper OM, which, among other writings, ran do-it-yourself advice for desertion to Canada and advocated assassination of President Nixon.

The nation-wide campus-radical offensive against ROTC and college officer-training is well known. Events last year at Stanford University, however, demonstrate the extremes to which this campaign (which peaked after Cambodia) has gone. After the Stanford faculty voted to accept a modified, specially restructured ROTC program, the university was subjected to a cyclone of continuing violence which included at least \$200,000 in ultimate damage to buildings (highlighted by systematic destruction of 40 twenty-foot stained glass windows in the library). In the end, led by university president Richard W. Lyman, the faculty reversed itself. Lyman was quoted at the time that "ROTC is costing Stanford too much."

"Entertainment Industry for Peace and Justice," the antiwar show-biz front organized by Jane Fonda, Dick Gregory, and Dalton Trumbo, now claims over 800 film, TV, and music names. This organization is backing Miss Fonda's anti-military road-show that opened outside the gates of Ft. Bragg, N.C., in mid-March.

Describing her performances (scripted by Jules Pfeiffer) as the soldiers' alternative to Bob Hope, Miss Fonda says her case will repeat the Ft. Bragg show at or outside 19 more major bases. Although her project reportedly received financial backing from the ubiquitous Serviceman's Fund, Miss Fonda insisted on \$1.50 admission from each of her GI audience at Bragg, a factor which, according to soldiers, somewhat limited attendance.

Freshman Representative Ronald V. Dellums (D-Calif.) runs a somewhat different kind of anti-military production. As a Congressman, Dellums cannot be barred from military posts and has been taking full advantage of the fact. At Ft. Meade, Md., last month, Dellums led a soldier audience as they booed and cursed their commanding officer who was present on-stage in the post theater which the Army had to make available.

Dellums has also used Capitol Hill facilities for his "Ad Hoc hearings" on alleged war crimes in Vietnam, much of which involves repetition of unfounded and often unprovable charges first surfaced in the Detroit "Winter Soldiers" hearings earlier this year. As in the case of the latter, ex-soldier witnesses appearing before Dellums have not always been willing to cooperate with Army war-crimes investigators or even to disclose sufficient evidence to permit independent verification of their charges. Yet the fact that five West Point graduates willingly testified for Dellums suggests the extent to which officer solidarity and traditions against politics have been shattered in today's Armed Forces.

The Action Groups

Not unsurprisingly, the end-product of the atmosphere of incitement of unpunished sedition, and of recalcitrant anti-military malevolence which pervades the world of the draftee (and to an extent the low-ranking men in "volunteer" services, too) is overt action.

One militant West Coast Group, Movement for a Democratic Military (MDM), has specialized in weapons theft from military bases in California. During 1970, large armory thefts were successfully perpetrated against Oakland Army Base, Forts Cronkhite and Ord, and even the Marine Corps Base at Camp Pendleton, where a team wearing Marine uniforms got away with nine M-16 rifles and an M-79 grenade launcher.

Operating in the middle West, three soldiers from Ft. Carson, Colorado, home of the Army's permissive experimental unit, the 4th Mechanized Division, were recently indicted by a federal grand jury for dynamiting the telephone exchange, power plant and water works of another Army installation, Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, on 26 July 1970.

The Navy, particularly on the West Coast, has also experienced disturbing cases of sabotage in the past two years, mainly directed at ships' engineering and electrical machinery.

It will be surprising, according to informed officers, if further such tangible evidence of disaffection within the ranks does not continue to come to light. Their view is that the situation could become considerably worse before it gets better.

Tough Laws, Weak Courts

A frequent reaction when people learn the extent and intensity of the subversion which has been beamed at the Armed forces for the past three or more years is to ask whether such activities aren't banned by law. The answer is that indeed they are.

Federal law ([18 USC 2387](#)) prohibits all manner of activities (including incitements, counseling, distribution or preparation of literature, and related conspiracies) intended to subvert the loyalty, morale or discipline of the Armed services. The penalty for violating this statute is up to ten years in prison, a \$10,000 fine, or both.

Despite this tough law, on the books for many years, neither the Johnson, nor so far, the Nixon administration has brought a single prosecution against any of the wide range of

individuals and groups, some mentioned here, whose avowed aims are to nullify the discipline and seduce the allegiance of the Armed forces.

Government lawyers (who asked not to be named) suggested two reasons for failure to prosecute. Under President Johnson, two liberal Attorneys General, Messers. Ramsey Clark and Nicholas deB. Katzenbach, were reportedly unsympathetic to military pleas for help and in general to prosecutions for sedition of any kind. Besides, the lawyers said, the courts have now gone so far in extending First Amendment shelter to any form of utterance, that there is doubt whether cases brought under this law would hold.

Whatever the reason—and it appears mainly to be disinclination to prosecute or even test existing law—the services are today being denied legal protection they previously enjoyed without question and at a time when they need it worse than ever before. Continuing failure to invoke these sanctions prompted one senior commander to comment bitterly, "We simply can't turn this thing around until we get some support from our elected and appointed civilian officials."

One area of the U.S. government in which the Armed forces are encountering noticeable lack of support is the federal judiciary.

Until a very few years ago, the processes of military justice were regarded as a nearly untouchable preserve which the civil courts entered with reluctance and diffidence.

Plagued by a new breed of litigious soldier (and some litigious officers, too), the courts have responded by unprecedented rulings, mostly libertarian in thrust, which both specifically and generally have hampered and impeded the traditional operations of military justice and dealt body blows to discipline.

Andrew Stapp, the seditious soldier who founded the American Serviceman's Union, an organization aimed at undermining the disciplinary structure of the Armed forces, last year had his well-earned undesirable discharge reversed by a U.S. judge who said Stapp's right to unionize and try to overthrow the Army was an "off-duty" activity which the Army had no right to penalize in discharging him.

Libertarian Supreme Court Justice W.O. Douglas has impeded the Army in mobilizing and moving reservists, while his O'Callaghan decision not only released a convicted rapist but threw a wrench into military jurisdiction and court-martial precedents going back in some cases nearly two centuries.

In Oakland, Cal., last year, a federal court yanked some 37 soldiers from the gangplank of a transport for Vietnam (where all 37 had suddenly discovered conscientious objections to war) and still has them stalled on the West Coast some 18 months later.

The long-standing federal law against wearing of Armed forces uniforms by persons intending to discredit the services was struck down in 1969 by the Supreme court, which reversed the conviction of a uniformed actor who put on an antimilitary 'guerrilla

theater" skit on the street in Houston, Tex. As a result the Armed Forces are now no longer able to control subversive exploitation of the uniform for seditious purposes.

Tactics of Harassment

Part of the defense establishment's problem with the judiciary is the now widely pursued practice of taking commanding officers into civil courts by dissident soldiers either to harass or annul normal discipline or administrative procedures or the services.

Only a short time ago, for example, a dissident group of active-duty officers, members of the Concerned Officers' Movement (COM), filed a sweeping lawsuit against Defense Secretary Laird himself, as well as all three service secretaries, demanding official recognition of their "right" to oppose the Vietnam war, accusing the secretaries of "harassing" them, and calling for court injunction to ban disciplinary "retaliation" against COM members.

Such nuisance suits from the inside (usually, like the Laird suit, on constitutional grounds) by people still in uniform, let alone by officers, were unheard-of until two or three years ago. Now, according to one Army general, the practice has become so common that, in his words, "I can't even give a directive without getting permission from my staff judge advocate."

Racial Incidents

Sedition and subversion and legal harassment, rank near the top of what might be called the unprecedented external problems that elements in American society are inflicting on the Armed Forces.

Internally speaking, racial conflicts and drugs—also previously insignificant—are tearing the services apart today.

Racial trouble is no new thing for the Army. In 1906, after considerable provocation, three companies of the 25th Infantry (a colored regular regiment) attacked white troops and townspeople of Brownsville, Texas, and had to be disbanded. Among the few pre-World War II War Department records still heavily classified and thus unavailable to scholars are Army documents on racial troubles.

Racial conflicts (most but not all sparked by young black enlisted men) are erupting murderously in all services.

At a recent high commanders' conference, General Westmoreland and other senior generals heard the report from Germany that in many units white soldiers are now afraid to enter barracks alone at night for fear of "head-hunting" ambushes by blacks.

In the quoted words of one soldier on duty in West German, "I'm much more afraid of getting mugged on the post than I am of getting attacked by the Russians."

Other reports tell of jail-delivery attacks on Army stockades and military police to release black prisoners, and of officers being struck in public by black soldiers.

Augsburg, Krailsheim, and Hohenfels are said to be rife with racial trouble. Hohenfels was the scene of a racial fragging last year—one of the few so recorded outside Vietnam.

In Ulm, last fall, a white noncommissioned officer killed a black soldier who was holding a loaded .45 on two unarmed white officers.

Elsewhere, according to Fortune magazine, junior officers are now being attacked at night when inspecting barracks containing numbers of black soldiers.

Kelley Hill, a Ft. Benning, Ga., barracks area, has been the scene of repeated nighttime assaults on white soldiers. One such soldier bitterly remarked, "Kelley Hill may belong to the commander in the daytime but it belongs to the blacks after dark."

Even the cloistered quarters of WACs have been hit by racial hair-pulling. In one West Coast WAC detachment this year, black women on duty as charge-o-quarters took advantage of their trust to vandalize unlocked rooms occupied by white WACS. On this rampage, they destroyed clothing, emptied drawers, and overturned furniture of their white sisters.

But the Army has no monopoly on racial troubles.

As early as July 1969 the Marines (who had previously enjoyed a highly praised record on race) made headlines at Camp Lejeune, N.C., when a mass affray launched by 30-50 black Marines ended fatally with a white corporal's skull smashed in and 145 other white Marines in the sick bay.

That same year, at Newport, R.I., naval station, blacks killed a white petty officer, while in March 1971 the National Naval Medical Center in Bethesda, Md., outside Washington, was beset by racial fighting so severe that the base enlisted men's club had to be closed.

All services are today striving energetically to cool and control this ugly violence which in the words of one noncommissioned officer, has made his once tough unit divide up "like two street gangs."

Major Gen. Orwin C. Talbott, at Ft. Benning, has instituted what he calls "race relations, coordinating groups" which work to defuse the resentments of young black troopers at a Georgia base.

Major Gen. John C. Bennett, commanding the 4th Mechanized Division at Ft. Carson, Colo., has a highly successful "racial relations committee" which has kept Carson cool for over a year.

At once-troubled Camp Lejeune, Major Gen. Michael P. Ryan, the Tarawa hero who commands the 2nd Marine Division, appears to have turned off the race war that two years ago was clawing at the vitals of his division.

Yet even the encouraging results attained by these commanders do not bespeak general containment of the service-wide race problem any more than the near-desperate attack being mounted on drug abuse has brought the narcotics epidemic under control within the military.

Drugs and the Military

The drug problem—like the civilian situation from which it directly derives—is running away within the services.

In March, Navy Secretary John H. Chafee, speaking for the two sea services, said bluntly that drug abuse in both Navy and Marines is out of control.

In 1966, the Navy discharged 170 drug offenders. Three years later, (1969), 3,800 were discharged. Last year in 1970, the total jumped to over 5,000.

Drug abuse in the Pacific Fleet—with Asia on one side, and kinky California on the other—gives the Navy its worst headaches. To cite one example, a destroyer due to sail from the West Coast last year for the Far East nearly had to postpone deployment when, five days before departure, a ring of some 30 drug users (over 10 percent of the crew) was uncovered.

Only last week, eight midshipmen were dismissed from the Naval Academy following disclosure of an alleged drug ring. While the Navy emphatically denies allegations in copyrighted articles by the Annapolis Capitol, that up to 12,000 midshipmen now use marijuana, midshipman sources confirm that pot is anything but unknown at Annapolis.

Yet the Navy is somewhat ahead in the drug game because of the difficulty in concealing addiction at close quarters aboard ship, and because fixes are unobtainable during long deployments at sea.

The Air Force, despite 2,715 drug investigations in 1970, is in even better shape: its rate of 3 cases per thousand airmen is the lowest in the services.

By contrast, the Army had 17,742 drug investigations the same year. According to Col. Thomas B. Hauschild, of the medical Command of our Army forces in Europe, some 46 percent of the roughly 200,000 soldiers there had used illegal drugs at least once. In one battalion surveyed in West Germany, over 50 percent of the men smoked marijuana regularly (some on duty), while roughly half of those were using hard drugs of some type.

What these statistics say is that the Armed Forces (like their parent society) are in the grip of a drug pandemic—a conclusion underscored by the one fact that, just since 1968, the total number of verified drug addiction cases throughout the Armed Forces has nearly doubled. One other yardstick: according to military medical sources, needle hepatitis now poses as great a problem among young soldiers as VD.

At Ft. Bragg, the Army's third largest post, adjacent to Fayetteville, N.C. (a garrison town whose conditions one official likened to New York's "East Village" and San Francisco's "Haight-Ashbury") a recent survey disclosed that 4% (or over 1,400) of the 36,000 soldiers there are hard-drug (mainly heroin and LSD) addicts. In the 82nd Airborne Division, the strategic-reserve unit that boasts its title of "America's Honor Guard", approximately 450 soldier drug abusers were being treated when this reporter visited the post in April. About a hundred were under intensive treatment in special drug wards.

Yet Bragg is the scene of one of the most imaginative and hopeful drug programs in the Armed forces. The post commander, Lt. Gen. John J. Tolson, and the 82nd Airborne's commander, Major Gen. George S. Blanchard, are pushing "Operation Awareness," a broad post-wide program focused on hard drugs, prevention, and enforcement. Spearheading Operation Awareness is a tough yet deeply humane Army chaplain and one-time Brooklyn longshoreman, Lt. Col. John P. McCullagh. Father McCullagh has made himself one of the Army's top experts on drugs, and was last year called as an expert witness by Harold Hughes's Senate Subcommittee on Alcohol and Narcotics.

No Street Is Safe

One side-effect of the narcotics flood throughout the services is a concurrent epidemic of barracks theft and common criminality inside military or naval bases which once had the safest streets in America.

According to the personnel chief of one of the Army's major units, unauthorized absence, historically the services' top disciplinary problem, is now being crowded by the thefts. Barracks theft destroys trust and mutual loyalty among men who ought to be comrades and who must rely absolutely on each other in combat. It corrodes morale and is itself an indicator of impossible conditions in a fighting unit.

At Ft. Bragg, primarily because of addict thieves, soldiers in many units cannot even keep bedding on their bunks in barracks. After what used to be reveille, they strip their bunks of bedding and cram it away under lock and key with whatever valuables they dare keep on hand.

Radios, sports gear, tape decks, and cameras—let alone individual equipment—are stolen on sight. Unlocked cars, on the manicured streets of this fine old post, are more likely to be stolen than not. Fayetteville, according to soldiers, abounds with off-post fences who will pay pennies for Army blankets and higher amounts for just about anything else.

Unhappily, conditions at Ft. Bragg are not unusual.

Soldier muggings and holdups are on the rise everywhere. Ft. Dix, N.J., has a higher rate of on-post crime than any base on the East Coast. Soldier muggings are reported to average one a night, with a big upsurge every payday. Despite 450 MP's (one for every 55 soldiers stationed there—one of the highest such ratios in the country) no solution appears in sight.

Crimes are so intense and violent in the vicinity of an open-gate "honor system" detention facility at Ft. Dix that, according to press reports, units on the base are unwilling to detail armed sentinels to man posts nearby, for fear of assault and robbery.

Desertions and Disasters

With conditions what they are in the Armed Forces, and with intense efforts on the part of elements in our society to disrupt discipline and destroy morale the consequences can be clearly measured in two ultimate indicators: man-power retention (reenlistments and their antithesis, desertions); and the state of discipline.

In both respects the picture is anything but encouraging.

Desertion, to be sure, has often been a serious problem in the past. In 1826, for example, desertions exceeded 50% of the total enlistments in the Army. During the Civil War, in 1864, Jefferson Davis reported to the Confederate Congress: "Two thirds of our men are absent, most absent without leave."

Desertion rates are going straight up in Army, Marines, and Air Force. Curiously, however, during the period since 1968 when desertion has nearly doubled for all three other services, the Navy's rate has risen by less than 20 percent.

In 1970, the Army had 65,643 deserters, or roughly the equivalent of four infantry divisions. This desertion rate (52.3 soldiers per thousand) is well over twice the peak rate for Korea (22.5 per thousand). It is more than quadruple the 1966 desertion-rate (14.7 per thousand) of the ten well-trained, high-spirited professional Army.

If desertions continue to rise (as they are still doing this year), they will attain or surpass the WWII peak of 63 per thousand, which, incidentally, occurred in the same year (1945) when more soldiers were actually being discharged from the Army for psychoneurosis than were drafted.

The Air Force—relatively uninvolved in the Vietnam war, all-volunteer, management-oriented rather than disciplinary and hierarchic—enjoys a numerical rate of less than one deserter per thousand men, but even this is double what it was three years ago.

The Marines in 1970 had the highest desertion index in the modern history of the Corps and, for that year at least, slightly higher than the Army's. As the Marines now phase out of Vietnam (and haven't taken a draftee in nearly two years), their desertions are expected to decrease sharply. Meanwhile, grimly remarked one officer, "let the bastards go. We're all the better without them."

Letting the bastards go is something the Marines can probably afford. "The Marine Corps Isn't Looking for a Lot of Recruits," reads a current recruiting poster, "We Just Need a Few Good Men." This is the happy situation of a Corps slimming down to an elite force again composed of true volunteers who want to be professionals.

But letting the bastards go doesn't work at all for the Army and the Navy, who do need a lot of recruits and whose reenlistment problems are dire.

Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt, Jr., chief of naval Operations, minces no words. "We have a personnel crisis," he recently said, "that borders on disaster."

The Navy's crisis, as Zumwalt accurately describes it, is that of a highly technical, material oriented service that finds itself unable to retain the expensively-trained technicians needed to operate warships, which are the largest, most complex items of machinery that man makes and uses.

Non-Volunteer Force?

If 45% of his sailors shipped over after their first enlistment, Admiral Zumwalt would be all smiles. With only 13% doing so, he is growing sideburns to enhance the Navy's appeal to youth.

Among the Army's volunteer (non-draftee) soldiers on their first hitch, the figures are much the same: less than 14% re-up.

The Air Force is slightly, but not much, better off: 16% of its first-termers stay on.

Moreover—and this is the heart of the Army's dilemma—only 4 % of the voluntary enlistees now choose service in combat arms (infantry, armor, artillery) and of those only 2.5% opt for infantry. Today's soldiers, it seems, volunteer readily enough for the tail of the Army, but not for its teeth.

For all services, the combined retention rate this past year is about half what it was in 1966, and the lowest since the bad times of similar low morale and national disenchantment after Korea.

Both Army and navy are responding to their manpower problems in measures intended to seduce recruits and reenlistees: disciplinary permissiveness, abolition of reveille and KP, fewer inspections, longer haircuts—essentially cosmetic changes aimed at softening (and blurring) traditional military and naval images.

Amid such changes (not unlike the Army's 1946 Doolittle Board coincidences intended in their similar postwar day to sweeten life for the privates), those which are not cosmetic at all may well exert profound and deleterious effects on the leadership, command authority and discipline of the services.

Soulbone Connected to the Backbone

"Discipline," George Washington once remarked, "is the soul of an army."

Washington should know. In January 1781, all the Pennsylvania and New Jersey troops in the Continental Army mutinied. Washington only quelled the outbreaks by disarming the Jersey mutineers and having their leaders shot in hollow square—by a firing squad made up of fellow mutineers.

The Navy's only mutiny, aboard USS Somers in 1842, was quelled when the captain hanged the mutineers from the yardarm while still at sea.

If Washington was correct (and almost any professional soldier, whether officer or NCO, will agree), then the Armed Forces today are in deep trouble.

What enhances this trouble, by exponential dimensions, is the kind of manpower with which the Armed Forces now have to work. As early as three years ago, U.S. News and World Report reported that the services were already plagued with "... a new breed of man, who thinks he is his own Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, and Attorney General. He considers himself superior to any officer alive. And he is smart enough to go by the book. He walks a tightrope between the regulations and sedition."

Yet the problem is not just one of trouble-makers and how to cope with them.

The trouble of the services—produced by and also in turn producing the dismaying conditions described in this article—is above all a crisis of soul and backbone. It entails—the word is not too strong—something very near a collapse of the command authority and leadership George Washington saw as the soul of military forces. This collapse results, at least in part, from a concurrent collapse of public confidence in the military establishment.

General Matthew B. Ridgway, one of the Army's finest leaders in this century (who revitalized the shaken Eighth Army in Korea after its headlong rout by the Chinese in 1950) recently said, "Not before in my lifetime ... has the Army's public image fallen to such low esteem ..."

But the fall in public esteem of all three major services—not just the Army—is exceeded by the fall or at least the enfeeblement of the hierarchic and disciplinary system by which they exist and, when ordered to do so, fight and sometimes die.

Take the case of the noncommissioned and petty officers.

In Rudyard Kipling's lines, "the backbone o' the Army is the noncommissioned man!"

Today, the NCOs—the lifers—have been made strangers in their own home, the regular service, by the collective malevolence, recalcitrance, and cleverness of college-educated draftees who have outflanked the traditional NCO hierarchy and created a privates' power structure with more influence on the Army of today than its sergeants major.

No Office for the Ombudsman

In the 4th Mechanized Division at Ft. Carson, Sp. 4 David Gyongyos, on his second year in the Army, enjoys an office across the hall from the division commander, a full-time secretary, and staff car and driver also assigned full time. He has the home phone numbers of the general and chief of staff and doesn't hesitate to use them out of working hours when he feels like it.

Gyongyos (with a bachelor's degree in theology and two years' law school) is chairman of the division's Enlisted Men's Councils, a system of elected soviets made up of privates and Sp. 4s (NCOs aren't allowed) which sits at the elbow of every unit commander down to the companies. "I represent, electively," Gyongyos expansively told this reporter, "the 17,000 men on this post."

The division sergeant major, with a quarter-century in the Army, who is supposed to be the division's first soldiers and—non-electively—father and ombudsman of every soldier, has an office which is not on even on the same floor with the general (or Sp. 4 Gyongyos either). He gets his transportation, as needed, from the motor pool. He does not "rap" freely over the phone to the general's quarters.

The very most that Gyongyos will concede to the sergeant major, the first sergeants, the platoon sergeants—the historic enlisted leadership of armies—is that they are "combat technicians." They are not, he coldly adds, "highly skilled in the social sciences."

The soldiers' soviets of the 4th Division represent an experiment in what the Army calls "better communications." Conditions throughout the rest of the Army do not quite duplicate those at Carson, but the same spirit is abroad. And experienced NCOs everywhere feel threatened or at least puzzled.

Most major units of the Army, Navy, and Air force have some form of enlisted men's councils, as well as junior officer councils. Even the trainee companies at Ft. Ord, Calif. Have councils, made up of recruits, who take questions and complaints past their DIs to company commanders and hold weekly meetings and post minutes on bulletin-boards. General Pershing, who once said, "All a soldier needs to know is how to shoot and salute", would be surprised.

The Vocalists

As for the officers, said a four-star admiral, "We have lost our voice."

The foregoing may be true as far as admirals are concerned, but hasn't hampered short-term junior officers (including several West Pointers) from banding together into highly vocal anti-war and anti-military organizations, such as the Concerned Officers' Movement (COM). At Norfolk, the local COM chapter has a peace billboard outside gate 2, Norfolk Naval Station, where every sailor can profit by the example of his officers.

Inspection—one of the most important and traditionally visible tools of command—is being widely soft-pedaled because it is looked on as "chicken" by young soldiers, sailors, and airmen.

In a move "to eliminate irritants to Air Force life" all major Air Force commands got orders last year to cut back on inspection of people and facilities.

"You just damn near don't inspect barracks anymore," said one Air Force colonel, "this is considered an irritant." Besides, he added, (partly to prevent barracks theft and partly for privacy), airmen keep the keys to their own rooms, anyway.

Aboard ships of the Navy, where every inch of metal and flake of paint partakes in the seaworthiness and battle readiness of the vessel, inspection is still a vital and nearly constant process, but even here, Admiral Zumwalt has discouraged "unnecessary" inspections.

If officers have lost their voices, their ears have in many commands been opened if not burnt in an unprecedented fashion via direct "hot lines" or "action lines" whereby any enlisted man can ring up his CO and voice a gripe or an obscenity, or just tell him what he thinks about something or, for that matter, someone.

Starting last year at naval Air Station, Miramar, Cal., sailors have been able to dial "C-A-P-T" and get their captain on the line. The system so impressed Admiral Zumwalt that he ordered all other shore stations to follow suit, even permitting anonymous calls.

At Ft. Lewis, Wash., soldiers dial "B-O-S-S-" for the privilege of giving the general an earful.

At the Air Force Academy, cadets receive early indoctrination in the new order of things: here, too, a cadet (anonymously, if he wishes) can phone the Superintendent, record his message and, also by recording receive the general's personal thanks for having called.

Word to the Whys

"Discipline," wrote Sir John Jervis, one of England's greatest admirals, "is summed up in the one word, obedience."

Robert E. Lee later said, "Men must be habituated to obey or they cannot be controlled in battle."

In the Armed forces today, obedience appears to be a sometime thing.

"You can't give them an order and expect them to obey immediately," says an infantry officer in Vietnam. "They ask why, and you have to tell them."

Command authority, i.e., the unquestioned ability of an officer or NCO to give an order and expect it to be complied with, is at an all-time low. It is so low that, in many units, officers give the impression of having lost their nerve in issuing, let alone enforcing orders.

In the words of an Air Force officer to this reporter, "If a captain went down on the line and gave an order and expected it to be obeyed because 'I said so!'—there'd be a rebellion."

Other officers unhesitatingly confirmed the foregoing.

What all this amounts to—conspicuously in Vietnam and only less so elsewhere—is that today's junior enlisted man, not the lifer, but the educated draftee or draft-motivated "volunteer"—now demands that orders be simplistically justified on his own terms before he feels any obligation to obey.

Yet the young soldiers, sailors and airmen might obey more willingly if they had more confidence in their leaders. And there are ample indications that Armed Forces junior (and NCO) leadership has been soft, inexperienced, and sometimes plain incompetent.

In the 82nd Airborne Division today, the average length of service of the company commanders is only 3 years.

In the Navy, a man makes petty officer 2d class in about 2 years after he first enlists. By contrast, in the taut and professional pre-WWII fleet, a man required 2 years just to make himself a really first-class seaman.

The grade of corporal has practically been superseded in the Army: Sp. 4s hold most of the corporals' billets. Where the corporal once commanded a squad, today's Army gives the job to a staff sergeant, two ranks higher. Within the squad, it now takes a sergeant to command three other soldiers in the lowly fire-team.

"This never would have happened," somberly said a veteran artillery sergeant major, "if the NCOs had done their jobs ... The NCOs are our weak point." Sp. 4 Gyongyos at Ft. Carson agrees: "It is the shared perception of the privates that the NCOs have not looked out for the soldiers."

When B Troop, 1st Cavalry, mutinied during the Laos operation, and refused to fight, not an officer or NCO raised his hand (or his pistol) or stepped forward. Fifty-three privates and Sp. 4s cowed all the lifers of their units.

"Officers," says a recently retired senior admiral, "do not stand up for what they believe. The older enlisted men are really horrified."

Lieutenant William L. Calley, Jr., an ex-company clerk, was a platoon leader who never even learned to read a map. His credentials for a commission were derisory; he was no more officer-material than any Pfc. in his platoon. Yet the Army had to take him because no one else was available. Commenting on the Calley conviction, a colonel at Ft. Benning said, "We have at least two or three thousand more Calleys in the Army just waiting for the next calamity."

Albert Johnson, the tough Master Chief Petty Officer of the Atlantic Fleet, shakes his head and says: "You used to hear it all the time—people would say, 'The Chiefs run the Navy.' But you don't hear it much anymore, especially from the Chiefs."

A Hard Lot at Best

But the lot of even the best, most forceful leader is a hard one in today's military.

In the words of a West Point lieutenant colonel commanding an airborne battalion, "There are so many ways nowadays for a soldier that is smart and bad to get back at you." The colonel should know: recently he reduced a sergeant for gross public insubordination and now he is having to prepare a lengthy apologia, through channels to the Secretary of The Army, in order to satisfy the offending sergeant's congressman.

"How do we enforce discipline?" asks a senior general. Then he answers himself: "Sweep it under the rug. Keep them happy. Keep it out of the press. Do things the easy way: no court-martials, but strong discipline."

Towards the end of the eighteenth century, after years of costly, frustrating and considerably less than successful war, Britain's armed forces were swept by disaffection culminating in the widespread mutinies in most of the ships and fleets that constituted England's "wooden walls" against France.

Writing to a friend in 1979, Britain's First Lord of the Admiralty said, "The Channel Fleet is now lost to the country as much as if it was at the bottom of the sea."

Have things gone that far in the United States today?

The most optimistic answer is—probably not. Or at least not yet.

But many a thoughtful officer would be quick to echo the words of Brigadier Gen. Donn A. Starry, who recently wrote, "The Army can defend the nation against anything but the nation itself."

Or—in the wry words of Pogo—we have met the enemy, and they are us.