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A predominant professional concern of midcareer naval officers at the Naval War College is personnel management under changing societal conditions. While it is generally agreed that the military has to change its way of doing business to cope with changes in society, there is far less agreement on methods and future military standards. However, both the diversity of opinion and spirit of inquiry expressed by these officers show a genuine interest in "why are we what we are?"—in contrast to the stereotype image of the rigid "military mind."

REFLECTIONS ON THE MILITARY ORGANIZATION

An article prepared

by

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It is almost a truism to observe that the American public is ambivalent in its feelings toward the U.S. military as an organization. On the one hand, within the strong American tradition of political liberalism the military symbolizes state control and the loss of personal freedom. On the other hand, the military exists to defend freedom, as in World War II. It is clear that the public in general regards the military as more than just a necessary evil. While the military does exhibit instances of bungling, waste, arrogance, and irresponsibility, it also sets national examples of courage, asceticism, selflessness, and devotion to duty. These latter traits, despite counterculture claims to the contrary, are admired by the Nation as a whole. We all need heroes as exemplars, both in terms of organizational efficiencies and personal accomplishments.

Whether the public chooses to emphasize the positive or negative aspects of the military, such is affected by a host of interdependent factors, including warfighting performance, media coverage, international crises, and the like. One thing is clear: the public's image of the military does fluctuate significantly and is given substantial attention by the press.

One might also speculate, however, on how the military views itself, with Vietnam in the past and the environment of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) in the present. What follows are perspectives on the military as an institution drawn from extensive conversations with and the written responses of numerous officers in the grades of lieutenant commander through captain (equivalent for other services) at the Naval War College. Sixty percent were

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naval officers, with the remainder roughly split among the sister services.

The majority of the naval officers stressed personnel management under changing societal conditions as the single most critical element facing the U.S. Navy in the next 10 years, while few addressed in any depth the factors of force structure or procurement. (See table 1 for a summary of these and other data elaborated upon in this article.) This outlook probably reflects the fact that many officers came to the War College from operational billets where the size and structure of the force were treated as fixed.

Less easily explained are attitudes concerning military standards. It can be argued that the public should expect from the military a higher set of professional standards—devotion to duty, technical expertise, et cetera—than from any other organization in order to discharge its four primary responsibilities. First, the military's standard of effectiveness must provide against losing a

war or otherwise failing to insure national security interests, for to do so threatens the freedom of the Republic. Second, efficiency is demanded. To waste or overspend resources deprives the public of a potentially higher standard of living. Third, the military has the moral responsibility to obey duly constituted civilian authorities and not usurp national power or otherwise render the public the servants of the military. And fourth, the military must not abuse its power to unjustly dominate or constrain the actions of other peoples.

Despite those responsibilities, however, a sizable number of officers (12 of 36 polled) felt that the standards of military behavior and professionalism would have to be lowered, assuming an army cannot for long be better than society demands it to be. These officers argued that the military had to lower certain standards in order to appeal to a youth market whose values were markedly different from those of en-

TABLE 1—ATTITUDES OF MIDDLE-RANKING (O4-O6) OFFICERS

1. Most critical Navy need (N=44)	Personnel Management 60% (27)	Strategy 16% (7)	Force Structure & Procurement 23% (10)
2. Military Standards should be: (N=36)	Higher than civilian organizations 67% (24)	Not higher 33% (12)	
3. A. Discipline 1965 vs. 1974 (N=30)	Less 93% (28)	More 0	Same 27% (2)
B. Performance 1965 vs. 1974 (N=30)	Better 20% (6)	Worse 20% (6)	Undecided 60% (18)
4. Hair length should be: (N=40)	Longer if desired 70% (28)	At current rule length 30% (12)	
5. Early selection for promotion (N=27)	Favor 85% (23)	Do not favor 15% (4)	
6. Personal Awards & Decorations (N=50)	Favor present system 25% (13)	Restrictions required 75% (37)	

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listees 10 years ago. Lower standards not attributed to measures of intelligence but rather to value systems held by both new officers and enlistees.*

However, most officers (24 of 36 polled) disagreed that changes in societal values meant the Nation should expect a lower military standard or excellence, particularly from the officer corps. In fact, the All-Volunteer Force may be looked upon as a singular opportunity to improve standards. No service faces draftees or unwilling (draft-motivated) volunteers. Hence each service is responsible for the image it freely chooses to project in its call for volunteers. Recent recruiting has frequently been tailored to depict the military in such a way as to appeal to the standards of today's youth, i.e., the average civilian. But the All-Volunteer Force affords the opportunity to appeal to those willing to be different and to dedicate themselves to those high standards of service to the Nation that do indeed require self-discipline and personal sacrifice.

While the officers polled differed in their views about future military standards, almost all agreed the military had to change its way of doing business to cope with changes in our society. Twenty-eight of 30 officers polled asserted there had been a lessening of

discipline servicewide between 1965 and 1973. There was no consensus as to the effect upon performance, with most officers holding that adequate peacetime measures of the relationship were lacking. Further, the point was made that discipline—if defined as systematic training to instill the habit of obedience—was but one of several factors which would provoke a willing response to orders. That same response would be forthcoming if the respondees had high faith in the proven capabilities of their seniors or if the Nation had a cursading culture (Russia in WW II or Israel today) or if the service fostered a tradition of esprit and solidarity.

But clearly some level of discipline must be imposed to insure a reliability of response necessary for three reasons. First, the normal good order of the services needs to be maintained through rules, standard operational procedures, and hierarchical arrangements which limit the bounds of acceptable behavior. Disciplined responses such as saluting are symbols which acknowledge a willingness to comply with controls set for routine organizational control. Second, some forms of imposed discipline have direct utility on the battlefield, such as firing a rifle properly. And third, discipline such as close order drill can have indirect warfighting benefit in that it instills in men an instinct for coordinated action. The problem is that, because of habits built up over years and a lack of confidence in one's ability to lead, discipline may become more intense than is technically necessary. In the extreme, such ritualization of discipline could impede the mission of the services, either by decreasing the enlistment or reenlistment of good men or by building up such resentment in the ranks that some enlistees will not comply properly even when an order is reasonable.

The naval officers polled were especially conscious of the fleetwide decrease in the emphasis placed on disci-

*It may also be that the original set of Defense civilian "intellectuals" unwittingly contributed to a dilution of standards by refusing to accept military judgment as a valid criterion and insisting instead upon quantified "logic." For reasons of organizational self-defense, military officers occasionally employed a rationale they felt was specious yet would be acceptable for its jargon. This contributed to the bureaucratization of the military, a state of organizational nature where bureaucratic politics is the norm. It is interesting to note that in 1966 the Israeli Army, offered the Program Planning Budget system, rejected it on the grounds that playing the procurement game would divert them from their main mission of leading men in combat and could turn them into an army of bureaucrats.

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pline. Eight factors seemed to contribute to this decrease. First, at least some high-ranking officers—including Admiral Zumwalt—believed rules and discipline had in cases become ritualized, resulting in the undue harassment of seamen. Second, given the annual rise in the mean intelligence of the enlisted men, some rules seemed cognitively unnecessary. Third, a change had occurred in the cultural expectations of youth. Discipline by fiat was not automatically accepted. Fourth, black consciousness and black achievement goals could not be ignored. Many problems could not be handled successfully by insisting upon the rule book. And justice required that rules bent to meet black grievances be bent for whites also. Fifth, rules are less efficient for many naval tasks than is rational problem solving. The move to the expensive AVF demanded more personnel efficiency, since stupid rules cost money, either in the form of more men to do the same job or “make work” jobs. Sixth, sophisticated technology and missions require a flexibility of approach not amenable to pretask specification. Naval missions are becoming more sophisticated, demanding of officers a subtlety of mind not fostered by rule-run lives. Seventh, in WESTPAC the war (which operationalized some Navy missions and kept men on station busy) fostered in place of conscious discipline the substitution of persuasion and willing cooperation in output-oriented tasks. Eighth, by specifying behaviors in advance of their execution, rules substituted for communication in effecting the coordination of interdependent subgroups. As technology provided faster, surer means of communication, a tradeoff downgrading the use of rules (and the discretion of lower levels of command) occurred.

The result, according to the officers polled, was that while ritualized discipline did abate, there were dysfunctional aspects as well. Some officers and

chiefs felt their authority and leadership were undercut when high-ranking officers bypassed them to announce rule changes directly to the sailors. Some changes were announced before there were the material means for accomplishing them. When rising expectations were not met, the result was more disgruntlement. Moreover, the publicity accorded the rule changes created, to quote one naval officer, “an aura of perceived permissiveness” which, although factually incorrect, further affected expectations. Externally, the Navy’s image—and that is important—has been helped by its campaign against ritualized discipline and hurt by examples of poor leadership and enlisted discontent, such as the *Pueblo* and *Kitty Hawk* affairs.

In light of both sides of the discipline issue, 60 percent of the officers polled were undecided whether the rule changes had adversely or positively affected performance. In part this is due to a lack of reliable measures of performance. Given that in other service matters the officers held firm opinions, this ambivalence or wait-and-see attitude is significant in its deliberateness. This is especially true since most officers polled felt that, on balance, some service rules had become mechanistic and out of date, contributing unnecessarily to resentment and discontent.

A classic example of this feeling was exhibited in the responses to the issue of haircuts. Nineteenth century photographs of military men show a hirsute splendor which would rival the dust jackets of today’s hard rock records. By World War I, military hair length had radically shortened, perhaps for reasons of hygiene or comfort under helmets. Gradually, wearing short hair became a goal in itself, either because it grew into a tradition, and therefore a prerequisite for social acceptability and promotion, or because the services discovered benefits related to the rule (haircuts) rather than to the original goal (e.g., hygiene). One obvious benefit was that cutting

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hair also shears a youth of a symbol of his individuality. By increasing the homogeneity of the group, a service finds it easier to inculcate into each individual its norms and values. The process of organizational socialization is thus facilitated.

A second possible benefit may have been the transferral of the habit of neatness. Short hair in most cases is neater and more functional (i.e., less scraggly, less time-demanding, et cetera) than long hair. Any spillover of this habit into operational areas, such as keeping the decks uncluttered, would be applauded and the assumed factors contributing to the spillover, such as short haircuts, maintained by the service.

Since every service also requires efficiency and interchangeability, uniformity and homogeneity of parts (including people) are sought. Uniformly short haircuts contribute to the self-image of interchangeability.

A service's public image also affects in a contradictory way the tendency toward short haircuts. On the one hand, the counterculture, identified by the services as their image-opposite--i.e., the standard bearers of softness, instant gratification, devotion only to self, et cetera--symbolize their movement by long, unkept hair. As a reaction to establish the distance between the counterculture and themselves, it could be expected the services would insist on maintaining short hair. The services must also please Congress, who expect a neat, conforming image which does not include long hair. But, on the other hand, most services must compete for recruits who expect to retain some individuality and the symbols thereof, forcing most services to modify somewhat their views on the proper length of a man's hair.

Of 40 officers whose views on haircuts were solicited, all asserted longer hair was permitted now than 10 years ago. But only 12 favored the current regulations. The others argued the

services should allow substantially longer hair. Practically all explained the haircut requirement in terms of enhancing organizational goals and individual obedience (discipline), but most believed the services lost in terms of recruits and dissidence more than they gained. Most felt the regulations could be further relaxed without damaging the good order of the services and with improvement in recruiting morale and output.

The officers were sensitive to the problem of modifying barnacle-encrusted rules without promoting laxity. There was a feeling that the Navy tended to look too high for detailed leadership and that instead the junior officers should exert more leadership and responsibility for their men. Toward this end, a sample of 31 surface line lieutenant commanders and commanders revealed a strong belief that all surface line ensigns should attend a 3-month general skills school before reporting for fleet duty. The school was recommended not so much to increase the ensign's technical skills as to insure that he understood how the Navy works and how he is expected to act.

The officers at the War College also favored, according to 39 of 40 polled, providing opportunities for graduate education. Positive benefits cited included greater technical expertise, broader perspectives, and an enhanced public image. Strengthened credentials for a second career were also mentioned. The negative features included the recognition that promotion may go to a man because he is better educated, not because he does a better job, thus creating an incentive whereby all strive for advanced degrees, which deprives the services of useful time on the job and performance-related promotions. It was also noted that subsequent service underutilization of increased talents could lead to individual dissatisfaction. Some officers further felt the services feared the indoctrination of academic,

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antimilitary values (and opportunities).

Of course, the officers recognized that schooling can only do so much and that the right sort of young man must be attracted into the officer corps in the first place. While this attraction is partially a function of the public image of the military, it is also related to the career opportunities the military offers. Key among these is promotion, the criteria for which are easier to specify in theory than in practice. Perusing the solicited comments of 27 officers on this subject, it became apparent that most at issue was the time-in-grade prerequisite for advancement, a modification of a seniority system adopted by the services over a century ago to ward off political appointees. Service promotion boards select among zone-eligible officers with little or no civilian interference and with no significant lateral entry system. The military is one of the few guilds to survive the Industrial Revolution, technology, politics, and bureaucracy. To reach the top, one has to start at the bottom and spend a certain amount of time at each rung on the hierarchical ladder. While thus, by definition, the emergence of a latter-day Alexander the Great or Oliver Cromwell is impossible, neither can an incompetent from the outside political arena be thrust into admiralship.

Seniority, or advancement by year-group cohort, has provided the military organization with the additional benefit of peer group cooperation and solidarity. Competition is kept within reasonable bounds, being more related to how well each does his job rather than how one does against the other. To illustrate this fundamental point, consider its obverse—a world in which seniors know their juniors were routinely advanced ahead of them, thus decreasing their own promotional opportunities within the rank pyramid, and in which officers of the same rank could expect to advance at any time. Individuality would certainly flourish,

as would problems of command, control, and coordination. Competition would pit senior against subordinate in the race for advancement.

By promoting the claims of younger Arab princes against the position of their seniors, the militarily weak Ottoman Empire was able for years to control vast Middle East territories against feuding opposition. In some bureaucracies, including the civilian Office of the Secretary of Defense, competition may deliberately be fostered to evoke a maximum range of policy alternatives. In contrast, the military's objective of an effective war-fighting output requires a high degree of coordination and cooperation both between seniors and juniors and among peers. Hence intraorganizational competition must be properly controlled and directed to job achievement rather than interpersonal rivalry. The seniority system modifies competition, promotes long-term stability, and facilitates cooperation.

It can also promote boredom, mediocrity, conformity, cultural obsolescence, and resignations. Twenty-three of the 27 officers who commented on promotion favored accelerated promotion for that minority (less than 15 percent) of officers rated head and shoulders above their peers. The feeling was that this policy did indeed help attract and retain top talent who otherwise might become bored or dissatisfied because truly outstanding performance was not adequately rewarded. Although qualified for advancement, a top performer forced to wait several years might seek a less restricted career outside the military.

Large organizations like the military, whose tasks involve attrition and hence require interchangeable and replaceable parts, tend to develop standard operational procedures (SOP's). Conformity to the SOP's is demanded in order to insure replaceability. By definition, conformity drives out innovation and over

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time can result in a remarkable similarity of outlook on the part of an officer peer group. This is particularly true in units with high esprit and limited contacts outside their own group, such as marines, fighter pilots, and nuclear submariners. Unless the environment must be confronted, the possibility exists of measuring performance by a set of inputs to which all participants must conform. Since the military confronts only infrequently the environment of war, for which it exists, the danger of cultural obsolescence arises. The grotesque stupidity of senior commanders on both sides in World War I is in large measure explained by the similar framework adopted by most European nations for training and promoting army officers. C.S. Forester's *The General* brilliantly portrayed a British promotion system which rewarded conformity to a set of characteristics which confused stubbornness with courage, inflexibility with leadership, and stoicism with strategy.

Early selection was perceived by the officers polled as a moderating influence upon conformity to the standards of the mean. When combined with more innovation, such as the "Mod Squad," it is an antidote to cultural obsolescence. However, the officers were sensitive to the backlash of resentment which strikes when the early selectees perform in a nonbrilliant manner. Particularly in light of the post-Vietnam slowdown in promotion flow, peers tend to be irritated by a process which selected from among them some officers they do not acknowledge as being clearly better than they. While wishing to retain the early selection procedure, 16 of the officers polled stated that the process suffers from a lack of fairness because most fitness reports are exaggerated and 15-30 percent of any year group are rated outstanding. To select from that sizable minority the few who truly are heads and shoulders above their peers requires, by US Naval War College, as well as other military organizations, that those

holding this view asserted that few early selectees repeat, thus either confirming the element of chance or suggesting a Peter Principle modification; i.e., as a man is promoted he regresses to the mean of his peers.

Several officers favored the inclusion of peer group ratings in fitness reports, arguing that in many instances those working alongside an officer know more about his abilities than those above him. In certain billets this may be correct. Having found a congruence between Korean battlefield performance and previous peer group ratings, the Marines, for instance, have since relied upon such ratings to help evaluate their officer candidates. A further fitness report modification would be the occasional inclusion of the opinions of an officer's subordinates. By taking such suggestions to their hyperbolic extreme, they can be turned into a strawman and dismissed as efforts to manage the services with all the mature judgment of a high school popularity contest. But any competent reporting senior uses some informal means of gathering and assessing views other than his own concerning the subordinate officer he is evaluating. At the Naval War College, for instance, as at many civilian universities, the military (and civilian) teachers are evaluated by the officers whom they teach. The President of the War College has made it crystal-clear that the final evaluation of a faculty member rests with him. He writes and signs the fitness reports. The other evaluations are there to aid him as he sees fit. So, too, in this way in other billets throughout the services might peer and subordinate ratings aid a reporting senior or a promotion board in the discharge of their responsibilities.

In addition to promotion, the other tangible rewards a service can bestow upon high achievers are pay, location, and medals. In contrast to private business, pay, which is basically controlled by Congress, is distributed to officers on the basis of group identi-

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cation in terms of rank, seniority, and technical skill. Aviators, submariners, or the like as a group will receive a differential, but no single person may collect a bounty or commission for piecework, such as shooting down an enemy aircraft or receiving a ship's E. Like promotion opportunity by year group, income equality minimizes competition among peers and fosters group solidarity by setting a common economic standard (and cultural style) of living.

Given their force missions and dispositions, the services are also restricted in rewarding performance by assignment to preferred duty stations. The needs of the service, not the man, must come first, a fundamental sacrifice inherent to a military career and one which is accepted with good grace. Moving is a hardship for an entire family. It is a physical and emotional burden which, on balance, deserves more media coverage than do such incidental military extras as the tax savings on gas purchased on base.

Unlike pay and location, however, the services have wide latitude in bestowing decorations, which may rank second only to promotion in distinguishing among officers. While other professions, such as the police, wear distinctive uniforms as symbols of their vocation, only the military has a ribbon system which displays to all who see an officer his exceptional accomplishments, especially as they relate to the reason for his career: warfighting.

The original purpose of awarding medals was to provide an incentive, especially for the enlisted man, to place the organizational goal of winning battles and wars above the human goal of staying alive. By calling public attention through medals to battlefield bravery, the commander singled out the recipients for honor, thereby enhancing their status over those of their peers. The hope was that the example of the medal holders would be emulated and

the overall effectiveness of the unit thus increased. Historically, man has actively sought, and taken risks to attain, symbols of his bravery (which is productive in winning battles); e.g., the Indians' counting coup. The device of medals as such was practiced first on an intensive level by Napoleon to spur on the enlisted men. He motivated his officers by sudden promotions (and demotions), with attendant social, political, and financial power.

In the U.S. military, however, over time the awarding of medals resulted in the object of generating better battlefield performance being partially displaced by prerequisites for promotion, particularly among officers. In its gentler form, this goal displacement resulted in a plethora of "I was there" ribbons, given for physical presence rather than personal performance. Such increased quantity has diluted the significance of medals in general. In its more pernicious form, this goal displacement has cheapened the value of many medals of valor, as they have come to be awarded for average performance in certain officer billets and are sometimes

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Professor Francis J. West, Jr., did his undergraduate work at Georgetown University and earned a master's degree in public affairs from the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University. He has

served as an infantry platoon commander with the U.S. Marine Corps in Vietnam, as a project director for the Rand Corporation, as Special Assistant to the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Systems Analysis, and is currently serving on the Management faculty of the Naval War College. Professor West has authored numerous articles and two books—*The Village* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) and *Small Unit Action—Vietnam* (New York: Arno Press, 1967).

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referred to as Good Conduct ribbons.

Of 50 officers who commented on military decorations, 37 felt the award system required substantial review and overhaul. Practically all respondees indicated they discounted the worth of a medal—in particular the Bronze Star and the Air Medal—in relation to its theoretical written criteria. Coincidentally, at least one service—the Marine Corps—has officially demanded an end to routine or automatic medals because such dilution of standards destroys the basic value of awards.

In summary, having read hundreds of

papers by the officers on the general subject of the military as an organization, the one word I would select to summarize my impressions is flexibility. The diversity of opinion among the papers showed a spirit of inquiry, neither bitter nor rose-colored either, but a genuine interest in the question: why are we what we are? If the attitudes of these officers are a representative sample of the midcareer officers in the Navy, and perhaps the other services as well, they stand in sharp contrast to that stereotype image of the rigid "military mind."



The art of progress is to preserve order amid change and to preserve change amid order.

Alfred North Whitehead: Forbes, 1 December 1957