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## Challenge

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## CHALLENGE!

These are stimulating and challenging days for the military officer. We in uniform are facing today a movement of national proportions which calls into question not only the methods and ways with which we carry out our mission, but the very nature of that mission itself. And as the targets of antimilitarism, it is we who must concern ourselves with the nature of our opposition and how best to respond to it.

Any large organization whose operations require the expenditure of public funds is inevitably an object of continuing analysis, and justly so. Criticism of the military establishment is as commonplace in the history of this country as is that of any arm of the Federal Government. From time to time that criticism has become widespread and antagonistic enough to deserve the term antimilitarism: the feeling in some sectors of the public, during the periods after the Civil War, just before and after the first World War, and just before the Korean war are random examples.

There are, however, certain distinguishing characteristics which it is well to identify in the current antimilitary trend.

First, it has appeared and flourished during the prosecution of a war, despite the Kipling philosophy of "Tommy Atkins." In most periods of conflict in this century, demonstrations in most sectors of the U.S. public have been affirmative, in strong support of the principles which our Armed Forces have defended, and, by association, of the

environment has usually acted to discourage, rather than foster, dissent. Obviously, the reverse has been true in the last few years, although ours has been a wartime environment only in a qualified sense.

Objection has been more uniformly widespread than ever before, not only in the numerical strength of the movement, but in the diversity of its support. It has found followers, not only in the academic world, but in churches, industry, the news media, the Congress, and among the public at large. What is more, proponents of antimilitarism seem more dedicated and more skillful than ever heretofore. The registration of dissatisfaction has become almost a vocation in itself, entailing a wide variety of complex talents applied with diligence and timing. The attacks on the Armed Forces ROTC programs and the recent Vietnam Moratorium are cases in point. Modern communications permit a far more effective application and coordination of public and political pressure, as well as providing a ready means for the solicitation of support.

These, then, are the salient traits of the current opposition to the Armed Forces. But they are perhaps less important than the nature of that criticism itself.

Nothing could be more salutary, both for the armed services and for the country, than a rigorous and continual

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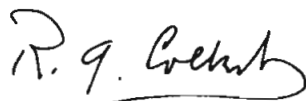
public interest in and questioning, when appropriate, of military competence and our overall military capability in the furtherance of national security. Constructive criticism directed toward the effectiveness and professionalism of the services in the pursuit of their mission can only result in increased efficiency and may well generate even a more sympathetic understanding of our military needs and problems.

A questioning of professional integrity, however, is an altogether different state of affairs. It affects not only the morale of those in uniform, but the essential trust with which we have traditionally been charged and which is indispensable to our ability to carry out our assigned tasks. This is the true challenge of today's antimilitarism. If we are found to be below the standards of efficiency demanded by our civilian leaders, then we can, and we must, improve. But the charge of willing and calculated delinquency, even deception, is virtually impossible to answer.

There appears to be an ironical correlation in this regard between those who comprise the antimilitary movement and the Armed Forces themselves. There is undoubtedly a minuscule minority within the services of men whose principles are inconsistent with the responsibilities they bear. This is inevitable in any large group of human beings. But it must be brought home to our detractors that the occasional exception does not alter the overwhelming conscience of the military to act in the public interest.

Likewise, it is incumbent on us to recognize that there are among the current movement a few individuals—some of them leaders—who are malicious and irresponsible. Nevertheless, a large number of those who criticize us are motivated by a sincere desire to promote the best interests of the country as they interpret them. We can ignore the strident epithets of the self-seeking agitator. But the honest doubts of the thoughtful critic must be allayed, and to be allayed, they must be understood and responded to thoroughly and sympathetically.

One of our most pressing tasks must be to demonstrate that the force of our critics' arguments is diluted by gratuitous attacks upon the good will, the motivation of the services. By the same token, we must avoid the dangers of attributing to all those who criticize us the irrationality and irresponsibility of a few. Only when these tasks have been accomplished can a straightforward intercommunication be established between the military community and those who criticize us. And only by such interchange, on a calm level of mutual response, can the difficulties which confront us be resolved.



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