

THE CARE AND CLEANING OF NCOs

POLICIES AND PRACTICES

1939 - 1969

By

John M. Collins

DEDICATION

To Sergeant Major Paul T. Connolly
and other non-commissioned troop leaders of the U.S. Army,
who deserve better than they get
from the policy-makers and practitioners who chart their course.



Frontispiece. Combat NCO, Belgium, 1945, Sergeant
Joseph Holmes, Company C, 320th Infantry near
Bastogne.

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PREFACE

Former Presidential Press Secretary Pierre Salinger, when challenged to a 50-mile hike, had the presence of mind to chortle, "I may be plucky, but I'm not stupid!"

The author, lacking such commendable self control, voluntarily joins the ranks of drunks, fools and Quixotic windmill jousts by attacking the Army's sacred cow, the Non-Commissioned Officer Corps.

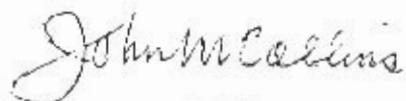
Actually, wrath falls not on NCO's, but on the policy-makers and practitioners who, willy-nilly, have actively aided and abetted the demise of enlisted leadership since the days of my long-lost youth, by essaying absurdities over and over until they finally congealed as doctrine. No matter whether the decline and fall is relative or absolute, the loss of responsibility and authority over the past 30 years is agonizingly real.

This critique began as a frontal assault in 1964, taking shape as a subjective, opinionated and abortive magazine article denouncing management ills and concocting half-formed corrections. Reluctantly, the manuscript was interred with full military honors early in 1965, but the basic idea lingered on.

Subsequent efforts by grand potentates and other great high moguls to shore up the damage made faltering progress, but nowhere was there evidence of a master plan.

Since almost nothing has been published on this subject, except in fragmented form, my treatise was pieced together like a patch-work quilt from wildly diverse sources, ranging from newspaper clippings to statistical abstracts. Much of the material is primary, including personal letters, memoranda, colloquies, working papers and official documents buried in musty, little-used files. Invaluable assistance was donated by military personnel and civilians alike in the National Archives and Federal Records Center; Department of the Army offices and operating commands, particularly Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (DCSPER) and Office of the Chief of Military History; and in Libraries of Congress, the National War College, Industrial College of the Armed Forces and the Pentagon.

The final product is far from being a definitive work, but if it is provocative, it serves its purpose well. It is my fondest hope that the views expressed herein may stimulate new thought among those in positions of power, and that the resultant ideas may be translated into action beneficial to Army NCO's.



John M. Collins
Alexandria, Virginia
March 1969

Any naive, country boy assumption that the conclusions and recommendations herein really might serve some useful official purpose were quickly and rudely dispelled.

First, a nearly-complete draft was submitted to Sergeant Major of the Army William O. Wooldridge, who was asked if he could see his way clear to contribute a two-page foreword -- not an indorsement, but a simple statement saying "when I was a young noncom, there were some problems; now that I am the senior NCO in the Army, this is what we are doing about them."

Further audience with this gentleman was not forthcoming. Telephonically, his Staff Sergeant assistant reported that SMG Wooldridge indeed had read the document twice, "with interest", but had been directed by Chief of Staff Harold Johnson to keep hands off. The draft was returned by mail. End of subject.

In conformance with Army Regulations, which stipulate that all formal public utterances by active duty members must first be cleared for security, accuracy and suitability, the Office for the Freedom of Information dispensed three copies of the final manuscript to ~~Deputy Chief of Staff~~ DCSPER ~~for Personnel (DCSPER)~~ on 23 March 1967 for beatification; a fourth draft found its way through the back door.

Enthusiasm at the "indian" level in some cases was high, but among those in authority, reaction almost universally was belligerent and defensive.

Colonel Charles L. Crain, DCSPER's Chief of Classification and Standards Division, conceded that "the conclusions and recommendations are certainly well thought out", and asked for a retention copy, despite "shock-

ing poor taste (and) crudities....not indicative of what we would expect from a Regular Army officer." After all, he reproved, "angry criticisms of policy and policy makers usually are not popular or acceptable....In its present form, (the book) would probably provoke only a feeling of anger, then disgust at the vulgarity, and finally questioning the competence and worth of the author." Perhaps, he opined, "it could be reoriented and purged."

Lieutenant General James K. Woolnough, then the DCSPER, was less charitable. Although neither security matters nor factual accuracy ever were in doubt, his official censure, repeated in full below, irretrievably slammed the door -- brooking no discussion, negotiation, rebuttal or appeal:

"1. DCSPER objects to publication of the attached manuscript at the present time.

2. Publication of this manuscript would tend to create controversy. Such controversy at a time when the Army is forced to defer consideration of some personnel policy areas due to personnel turbulence, Southeast Asia requirements and budgetary limitations, could only result in lowering morale.

3. It appears to DCSPER to be inconsistent with accepted ethical standards. The author has used the time and effort of other officers to write an article critical of his own Service.* Its publication will necessarily require more time and effort in providing rebuttals to the questions which will be raised.

FOR THE DEPUTY CHIEF OF STAFF FOR PERSONNEL:

Incl
nc

DONALD R. WARD
Colonel, GS
Executive "

* DCSPER graciously made certain files available to the author, thus aiding in research. Total time devoted by other officers, including discussion of findings, approximated 3-4 man-hours.

The DCSPER position was firm on 1 May 1967, and was forwarded to the Office for the Freedom of Information at that time. Despite repeated queries from the author, who was scheduled to depart for duty in Vietnam in mid-June 1967, neither DCSPER nor the information office apprised him of the rejection until 2 June. Reasons for this devious tactic are obscure, but by implication, it seemed calculated to obviate any unpleasant confrontations with an intractable officer who soon would be out of sight and out of mind.

Now, seven years after the original magazine article was bombed by DCSPER for "exceeding the bounds of propriety", this historical overlook of the Army NCO Corps finally is free for publication.

Incidentally, an equally illuminating dossier could be compiled concerning progress of the Officer Corps since 1939, in light of ever-increasing assumption of command responsibility by civilians, concentration of authority at higher and higher echelons, absorption of commissioned officers into the civilian community during off-duty hours, divergent assignment, training, promotion and retention policies for Regular Army officers versus Reserves on Extended Active Duty, the impact of specialization as opposed to generalization, fancifully inflated efficiency reports and a variety of other applicable factors. Haggard and hairless John Martin Collins is not the one to do this. He now lacks zeal and zest, and his flesh is weak. This absorbing task remains for one of a younger generation.

John M. Collins
Colonel, USA (Ret)

WEST JACKRABBIT, Neb.
14 MAY 1971

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