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THE U. S. ARMED FORCES AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON THE AMERICAN PUBL--ETC(U)
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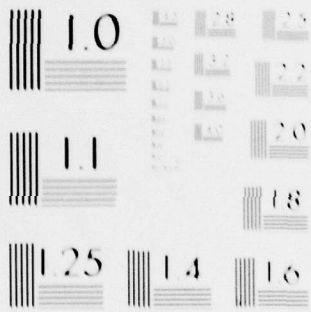
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A RESEARCH STUDY SUBMITTED TO THE AIR FORCE FACULTY

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FORT LEAVENWORTH, KANSAS

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Approximately 32.5 million veterans of the Armed Forces live today in the United States. It is estimated that the number will increase at the rate of one half million every year until at least the year 1990. The vast majority of these veterans have served only two to four years. The rest, 1.2 million, qualify for retirement by spending at least twenty years in the service.¹ This large number of people who have participated in the military make the Armed Forces one of the most important agencies in our society.² Thus, while the military as an institution remains fairly stable, the majority of its members pass through it and are mostly transients. As a result, the veterans bring back to their civilian world some of the attitudes which prevailed in the Armed Forces. This paper will demonstrate how much the U. S. Armed Forces affect American society and vice-versa, although there are some who contend there are many barriers to social research on the military.³ It will discuss the effect of military service on veterans. Does it change them, their value systems, their attitudes, their future civilian view of the military? What effect do these changes have on society in general, or on shaping public policy? And finally, how have the traditional characteristics of the military profession been changed by the influence of education and societal trends.

Although the Armed Forces are only theoretically concerned with the efficient use of their personnel, socialization has in fact often been a major goal.⁴ Much of each service's recruiting program revolves around the promise of an opportunity to learn skills which can be transferred to the civilian world. At one time in the 1950's and 1960's it was not uncommon for judges to give young convicted criminals a choice between

a prison sentence or enlistment in the Army. Following World War II, President Truman tried to justify his Universal Military Training bill (UMT) on the grounds that military service would improve the quality of America's youth. The president said his primary interest was "to develop skills that could be used in civilian life, to raise the physical standard's of the nation's manpower, to lower the illiteracy rate, to develop citizenship responsibilities, and to foster the moral and spiritual welfare of our young people."⁵ Although Congress never approved the program, the military, or more correctly the Department of Defense and the Executive Office, have persisted in using the military as an example for citizenship, and moral and spiritual values.⁶ The services take men and women who would ordinarily be rejected on grounds of functional illiteracy and create special programs to teach them to survive in modern society. In terms of increasing reading capacity, productivity, and dependability, the programs have generally performed well. Because of the previously stated high turnover rate of personnel, and the increasingly complex demands military technology places upon military personnel, the Armed Forces have developed a comprehensive program of education.⁷ In many ways the Armed Forces have been much more effective in handling individuals with educational deficiencies than the public school system. This may be because of military task orientation: the purpose of military education is not to provide the individual with an education necessarily, but rather to provide the particular service with a person properly equipped to perform certain designated tasks. As a result, primary responsibility for learning is often given to the teacher rather than the student. It is the task of the service school to produce properly trained graduates. This is in

contrast with the usual assumption in civilian life that the primary responsibility for learning lies with the student. Starling, without referring specifically to the military, has recognized what he calls the "public sector's" willingness to provide job-training services.⁸ Thus, because of the military's need to train large numbers with a high percentage of success, they tend to assume a low level of preparation by the students. As a result, the pace is rarely challenging for the well prepared student, but is generally well designed to insure some minimum level of preparation for the majority of students.

In addition to being educationally oriented to specific military requirements, all of the military services have voluntary programs designed to raise general education levels. The principal agency for this is the program of correspondence courses administered by the United States Armed Forces Institute (USAFI). USAFI offers more than 250 courses of its own, plus it makes available over 6000 additional correspondence courses from the extension divisions of cooperating universities. Although USAFI does not grant credit for its courses, most high schools and state departments of education are willing to give high school credit, or issue high school diplomas or equivalency certificates, on the basis of USAFI courses and test scores.

This route to a high school diploma is important because of the high proportion of veterans who do not complete high school before entering the service. The USAFI program has been notably successful in providing a second educational chance for those who have not completed a civilian high school. In 1969 Morris Janowitz reported that more than a quarter of the enlisted people on active duty completed high school after entering the service.⁹

The Armed Forces also place great emphasis on the role of education in an officer's career. Two kinds of education are emphasized: a series of professional schools, and the provision of opportunities for post-graduate study in specialized fields. Although there are variations among the services, the basic pattern of professional schooling provides for four levels of schools: 1) immediately after commissioning, basic or technical training to prepare the new officer for duties as a junior commissioned officer; 2) at about the four to eight year point, a "career" course to prepare the officer for assuming greater responsibilities; 3) at the point of nine to fifteen years' service those officers who are likely to be promoted are sent to a one-year command and staff college where they study large-scale military planning, and staff procedures; and finally, 4) sometime during the sixteenth and twenty-second year of service selected officers spend a year at one of the highest level military schools: National War College, Industrial College of the Armed Forces, or the Army, Naval, or Air War Colleges. Not all career officers attend all four levels of school due to the weeding out process. But generally the successful completion of each level of school is a prerequisite to promotion.

The implication would seem to be that the Armed Forces, by raising the educational level of those who spend a few years in the service, tend to incrementally raise the educational level of society as a whole. There is another aspect to this, however. The G. I. bill no longer exists for new service members. How it affects the educational level of the military and its veterans remains to be seen. For those service members and veterans eligible, the educational benefits of the G. I. bill have encouraged large numbers to continue their education

after leaving the service.

What cannot be determined, is the effect the military service has upon an individual's desire for education and his or her ability to profit from it. Logic would tell us the veteran returns more mature and serious about getting an education, but the difficulty of adequate controls has prevented any clear findings on the point by sociologists. The best assessment of the evidence is probably that the Armed Forces do enhance educational levels, particularly for careerists and for those who entered the service with poor educational backgrounds.

How do the Armed Forces and veterans influence public policy and the government bureaucracy? Which government positions impact upon the conduct or planning of public policy? Are those positions filled by active duty military service people or veterans? Are there other groups of military who impact upon public policy?

Retired military veterans impact upon public policy in a variety of ways. One recent study shows that, as of June 1975, more than 141,000 people who had retired from active military duty, worked for the federal government. They were employed by every federal agency. Most of them, over 78,000, worked for the Department of Defense.¹⁰ Another study concludes that one of every seven retired military people now holds a federal civilian job. In the mid-1960's approximately eight percent of all veterans worked in state or local government jobs.¹¹

Many other retired military personnel are employed by firms engaged in defense contracting. Estimates of the numbers involved vary widely in a number of studies dealing with various aspects of the military industrial complex.¹² Such studies make interesting headlines. However, beyond pointing out the fact that many ex-military are employed by

defense contractors, and that some of them might have some influence in defense procurement, few conclusions have been made. In fact, there has been little to suggest widespread impropriety related to employment of retired military veterans.¹³

Military veterans hold membership in military associations which represent the interests of individual services, certain categories of military personnel, or of the Armed Forces in general. These organizations perform a variety of services for their separate constituencies by many means, one of which is lobbying in both the Executive and Congressional branches of government. There are many officer and enlisted personnel in the Reserve and National Guard units who influence government policy. In many cases their impact on public policy at the federal, state, and local levels may be significant. Many hold appointments to governmental executive positions and many are members of Congress and state legislatures.

The chain of command defines the active duty Armed Forces member's role in the conduct of public policy. The operational chain of command, established by the National Security Reorganization Act of 1958, flows from the Commander-in-Chief through the Secretary of Defense to the commanders of the unified and specified commands. The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) serve formally as the principal military advisors to the President, National Security Council and the Secretary of Defense on operational matters, and have authority to translate policy directives into military operations. Although not technically within the formal chain of command, it has become standard for operational orders to be transmitted through the JCS to commanders in the field. The chain of command for all functions other than military operations (management,

policy, etc.) flows from the Commander-in-Chief through the Secretary of Defense and the civilian service secretaries to the individual service chiefs of staff.

Members of the Armed Forces advise the Secretary of Defense and the President on strategic and structural decisions in defense matters. These decisions have worldwide application since they affect the composition, readiness, deployment, and employment of military forces and foreign policy. The structural decisions normally are directed toward internal problems. They involve the procurement, allocation, and organization of people, money, and material which make up the Armed Forces.¹⁴

In the end the ability of the Armed Forces to influence public policy often depends on the credibility and personal prestige of military figures who have gained the public's attention and confidence. The period in Vietnam produced no such military leaders. It will be interesting to see how General Alexander Haig fares in the near future upon his retirement.

Does military service have an effect on an individual's occupation, and thereby the public, after discharge or retirement? The concept of occupation and its influence on the public is discussed by Joseph Kahl:

In the first place, a man's occupation is the source of his income, which in turn provides the style of life that serves as one of the major clues used by his neighbors in making their evaluations. But occupation stands for more than merely a certain level of income. It indicates a person's education: it suggests the type of associates he comes in contact with on the job; it tells something of the contribution he makes to community welfare; it hints at the degree of his authority over other people.¹⁵

What effect does military service have on an individual's occupation? Or perhaps more to the point, is a veteran better or worse off in terms of occupational opportunities than the non-veteran? A simple com-

parison of veterans versus non-veterans would give an inaccurate indication. Those who serve in the military are far from being a representative cross section of the public. Evidence indicates that military service is more likely to be performed by those in the middle of the social structure than by those in either the lowest or highest levels. Those at the bottom of the social structure are the most likely to be rejected by the Armed Forces on the grounds of physical, emotional, or intellectual unsuitability. Those at the top of the social structure are most likely to be inducted into the public and private middle managerial positions as entry level jobs. Thus the highest proportion of veterans comes from the middle groups of the society.¹⁶

It is necessary to identify ways in which military service affects later occupational chances. One way to start is to determine if military training provides the individual with an occupational skill which can be transferred directly to civilian life. Another way, mentioned earlier in the discussion of the effect of military service upon education, is for the individual to equip himself for employment at a higher occupational level by raising his general education. The effect of military service can prove detrimental to the veteran's occupational status if it permanently interrupts his or her education, or if he or she cannot overcome the detrimental effects of a later start in his or her chosen occupation.¹⁷

Another role played by the military services is that part which permits the social mobility of careerists. This kind of mobility takes two forms. One is that achieved by the enlisted veteran who works his way up to a higher status in the military than he would have been likely to have achieved in civilian life. For some this may be senior non-commis-

sioned officer status; for others it may mean commissioning through one of the programs which permit enlisted men to become officers. The other way is direct entry into officer programs by individuals from working-class backgrounds. Individuals from lower-class backgrounds are increasingly populating the once aristocratic officer corps. Morris Janowitz has commented that the present rates of recruitment of individuals of working-class origin into the officers corps make "the military as open a professional group as any in the United States."¹⁸

There is also evidence that lower-status individuals are more likely to become military careerists than are individuals of higher status, presumably because in comparing their life in civilian society with life in the service, the military looks relatively better than it does for someone from a higher-status background. Statistics on re-enlistment rates, for example, point out that blacks are much more likely to re-enlist than whites. This fact may serve as more of a statement on the lack of opportunities open to blacks in the civilian community than it does as evidence of the benefits of a service career. In general the effect of military service upon individual occupation patterns is to improve the life style and income of individuals from lower-class backgrounds, while having little effect on those from higher-class backgrounds. In this sense the military appears to provide another chance for at least some individuals whose life chances in the civilian society are limited. Although several years of military service delays an individual's entry into a civilian occupation the evidence indicates veterans appear to have benefited occupationally from their time in the military service.¹⁹

It can be said the typical military veteran has changed over the past few decades. The role of the military, especially in national

civil disturbances and emergencies has expanded. While it is almost impossible to establish the precise mechanisms by which the military has expanded its role, some observers would blame the enthusiasms and increased education and political awareness of military professionals. Moreover, it must be recognized that there is a strong civilian component behind military role expansion. Civilian personnel seem all too willing to defer to military "expertise" in many situations. Civic action, intelligence gathering and riot control are distasteful operations for most civilians anyway; civilian officials and politicians often prefer to have someone else do them, and the obvious agency is the military.

Thus, observers of the American political system must be alert not just for military usurpation of formerly civilian functions, but must be equally self-conscious about the types of roles civilians thrust upon the Armed Forces. Since the end of Vietnam, the size of the military establishment has decreased. Military spending as a proportion of the gross national product has now dropped to the lowest level since the beginning of the Korean War. Military manpower has been cut sharply.²⁰ This reduction, accompanied by rising antimilitary sentiments in parts of the populace, could have the effect of further politicizing the military. If a large proportion of the population becomes resentful toward recent American foreign policy, military men and veterans will work harder to generate political support for their activities. Furthermore, in the effort to avoid being drawn again into a no-win war, military men will understandably seek the capacity through education to make their own judgements about the political appropriateness of their activities. It is in this sense that the civilians responsible for a foreign policy that has failed are also responsible for

the increased political awareness of the military.

The United States has created the most powerful Armed Forces the world has ever known. The military has reached a size and has influence on American society in far more ways than any founding father envisioned. It has a direct and deep impact on all Americans and it is apparently here to stay. The military reflects the society from which it comes. The most remarkable thing is that America has managed to create an institution of such a large size without being swallowed up by it. For in spite of the Armed Forces increased education and political knowledge, it does not dominate our lives, establish values, or dictate our public policy.

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