



The Army War College Current Affairs Panel discusses key questions for Parade. From left: Lt. Col. James G. Van Straten, Col. Richard K. McNealy, Lt. Col.

Henry Doctor Jr., faculty member Lt. Col. Lewis S. Sorley III (panel chairman), Col. Gerald E. Galloway, Lt. Col. Donald P. Shaw and Lt. Col. Richard L. Tripp.

What Military Officers Think of Today's Vital Issues

by Donald Robinson

What are the chances of a military coup in the U.S.?

Do military men hate civilians?

Do they really believe in détente between the United States and the Soviet Union?

What's their opinion of Watergate?

Questions like these are being asked with increasing frequency in this post-Vietnam era, when the military establishment is undergoing persistent criticism and the nation itself is plagued by greater doubts and confusion than for a century past.

How do military men themselves think of the current state of the United States, and how do they visualize their own role? Is the nation's security, both internal and, external, safe in their hands?

To get the answers to urgent questions like these, I visited the Army War College at Carlisle Barracks, Pa.; the Naval War College at Newport, R.I., and the Air War College in Montgomery,

Ala. These are the institutions that are training the most promising officers in all three services for top command—the colonels, lieutenant colonels and commanders who'll be the four-star generals and admirals of tomorrow. I talked to them freely, and they answered my questions frankly. From their replies I've put together what I believe is a clear and complete picture of how our top military officers of the future feel about our country and its future.

Dedicated to democracy

First of all, we can be reassured on one crucial point—we need have no fear that a military junta will seize control of the U.S. government. The vast majority of officers are deeply dedicated to the democratic form of government. They agree that a military putsch is inconceivable because respect for civilian authority is too deeply ingrained in the minds of American officers. Said Col. Leonard W. Johnson, an Air Force

flight surgeon: "We professional military men have too much appreciation for the system under which we grew up to want to reverse it. There is nothing that makes us feel we need to overthrow, disrupt or upset the basic constitutional structure of this country."

Added Vice Admiral Stansfield Turner, the President of the Naval War College: "The basic dedication of the officer corps to supporting the U.S. Constitution over all these years gives us a foundation that would take a long period of erosion or an awfully big upheaval to wear away."

"What about a civilian coup?" I asked a group of officers. "Suppose some President says: 'I have no more use for Congress. It isn't doing its job. As Commander-in-Chief, I order you to march up Capitol Hill, surround Congress, and send them home.' What would you do?"

An Air Force colonel spoke for everyone when he answered: "I've explored

that question in my mind many times. If an official order came down through the chain of command stating that the President wanted us to 'go up the Hill,' I'd refuse to obey, even if it meant a court-martial."

"This would be the time I'd resign, right there," put in another Air Force colonel. "If it's a coup," added an Air Force officer, "I'd say the hell with it."

Are most officers far to the right politically?

Not today, I was assured. Col. Lewis S. Sorley, a thoughtful Army officer, pointed out: "A very high percentage of the senior officers in the services have now attended graduate schools at hundreds of civilian universities. They have come into contact with the thinking of a wide assortment of faculty people and students, and their views have inevitably been shaped by this experience."

Effective safeguard

Many officers emphasized that the partition of our Armed Forces into three separate services constitutes an effective safeguard against any coup. It would be difficult for any one clique to get control of all the services, they maintained. Furthermore, they pointed out, the civilian components of the Armed Forces—the National Guard and the Reserves—would almost certainly take up arms to resist a putsch.

Some of the views the officers hold on other matters might not fall so easily on civilian ears, however. Many officers candidly concede that deep antagonism toward civilians developed in military quarters during the last years of the Vietnam war. They blamed this on the indignities to which they were subjected—an Air Force officer told of obscenities shrieked at him by a stranger, a Navy man said his daughter had been ostracized at college because of his profession, one officer recalled a

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Watergate is one issue on which officers of the three services split

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student assembly at an Eastern university during which bloody chicken entrails were poured on the caps of military men invited to speak.

Fortunately, the officers said, civilian attitudes have undergone a change, and so have theirs. Col. Hervey S. Stockman, an Air War College student who was a Vietnam POW, reported receiving a friendly reception recently at an Ivy League school which had been repeatedly rocked by anti-war demonstrations. "The country wasn't listening two years ago," commented Col. Gerald E. Galloway. "Now the mood is much quieter, and we've all gotten together again."

Distrust press and TV

Many officers retain a distrust of press and television news. To the question "Do you believe what you read in the papers or see on TV?" the answer invariably was "no."

"The press is essentially anti-military," commented a Navy officer.

Another common belief is that television coverage of the Vietnam war broke the will of the American people to fight.

"A terrible threat of futility went through the TV news of Vietnam," said an Army officer. "According to TV, nothing that happened in Vietnam could possibly work out. That isn't what I saw there."

What about Watergate? This was one of the rare instances in which the services split. Most of the Army and Navy officers said they were horrified by President Nixon's role, and felt he should resign—but not so the Air Force officers.

Strong feeling

Naval officers seem especially strong in urging that the President leave his office. Said one Navy commander: "If my crew felt about me the way we feel about President Nixon, I would either be removed or have to leave because I would have absolutely no organization left." An Army lieutenant colonel says: "As a citizen I'm disgusted by the goings-on in Washington."

But the Air Force officers took a diametrically different position. "Watergate doesn't bother me one iota," said an Air Force lieutenant colonel. "If you ask me, it was just dirty politics, friend, the way it's been played all along. I think the President should gut it out." Another Air Force officer put it this



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Col. Leonard W. Johnson, Air Force flight surgeon: "We have too much appreciation for a system under which we grew up to want to reverse it."



Col. Gerald Galloway feels civilian and military attitudes have changed: "Now the mood is much quieter and we've all gotten together again."



Col. Hervey S. Stockman who was a Vietnam POW, tells of the friendly reception at Ivy League school once rocked by anti-war demonstrations.

way: "It was a case of staff members getting involved without the President's knowledge. I wish it had never happened, but I really can't get excited about it."

I polled the group and found that 100 percent of the Air Force officers wanted Nixon to complete his eight years in the White House. The most plausible explanation for the divergent view in the services is strong Air Force support for Nixon for securing the release of the POW's—most of whom were fliers—from North Vietnam.

I stirred up a hornet's nest when I asked if the United States had lost the Vietnam war.

"What do you mean by 'losing'?" an Army officer snapped at me. "South Vietnam is not under Communist or Northern domination today. That's about all we went in for." Added a Navy man bitterly: "The military can't be blamed for not completely winning the war because they weren't allowed to pursue it in a really aggressive way. If

the civilian authorities had really wanted us to, we could easily have defeated North Vietnam. We could have simply wiped them out."

Both Army and Navy officers expressed faith in the détente between the United States and the Soviet Union. But once again, the Air Force men tended to differ. "There's evidence that the Russians haven't stopped building their military power," said an Air Force officer. "We think the détente is leading us down the primrose path to a point where we may never recover militarily enough to defend the nation."

Air Force officers don't have too much confidence in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, either. Of the NATO nations the U.S. can count only on England, Germany and Belgium in case of a showdown with the U.S.S.R., they thought.

Officers of all three services are concerned about the end of the draft and the establishment of an all-volunteer army. They contend that the enlistment

rate is dangerously below Pentagon requirements, that many recruits have low intelligence and educational status, and that there's a lack of enlistees with critically needed skills.

Many also express concern about the high proportion, relative to the general population, of black recruits. They say that the enlisted ranks now number 19 percent black, and that the figure is headed to 26 or 27 percent.

Fears alienation

"When you have an Army that is largely black," cautions one officer, "it's going to be alienated from the population, and the population will be alienated from it." Some urged that the Army institute a quota system in its recruiting to achieve a more representative racial balance. Most seemed wholeheartedly committed to battling racial prejudice inside their services, and the Army men said it was important to overcome a shortage of black officers—now only 2 or 3 percent of the officer corps. They said industry was outbidding the military for the services of leadership-qualified blacks.

The majority of officers felt that a resumption of the draft or some form of universal military service is essential to bring the Army up to strength. To my surprise, every officer was willing to permit some type of alternative service so that a young man who didn't wish to go into the military could work in environmental activities, medical care for the poor, or similar undertakings.

Navy men said their service is acting to end sex discrimination, pointing out that the first woman naval aviator has just won her wings. A big dispute now, they said, is whether Navy women should go into combat.

"I can picture a woman on the bridge of my destroyer and I don't dread it," a Navy officer said. "What I dread is the social upheaval on my ship."

The consensus is that they should be allowed to fly in combat, do destroyer duty, and serve in submarines. But the officers split 50-50 on the question of whether women should be admitted to Annapolis.

Hopeful on defenses

I asked each service group what state our defenses are in. Each branch was hopeful. The Air Force officers said they could handle any threat anywhere. The Navy officers said that the Russian Navy has warships and equipment, but that man for man we excel.

And the Army? After 10 years of Vietnam, the officers make no rash promises, but they're staunch. Lt. Col. Donald P. Shaw summed up: "If you mean can we singlehandedly defeat every Russian east and west of the Urals, I don't know. But if you mean are our soldiers capable of operating their weapons and will they fight, you're damned right they will. Is the Army ready, you ask. The real question is: Is the country ready?"