



Lynn Sturm

## The Ordeal of the Army

By M. B. RIDGWAY

PITTSBURGH—Not before in my lifetime—and I was born into the Army in the nineteenth century—has the Army's public image suffered so many grievous blows and fallen to such low esteem in such wide areas of our society.

This is of national relevance, though it portrays but one of many manifestations of the spiritual malaise presently pervading all levels of our people, and for the first time, to my knowledge, all armed forces ranks.

The degeneration of the Army's Sergeant Major, his indictment, and that of several other senior noncommissioned officers by a Federal grand jury on charges of embezzlement of N.C.O. club funds overseas; the award of battlefield decorations for acts never performed; the pending charges against the former Provost Marshal General of the Army; and most damaging of all, the Mylai court-martial, are grievous blows.

During the past six months I have spent two days each with faculty and student groups at the Army War College and the Naval War College. These carefully selected, thoughtful senior officers had complete freedom to discuss matters which deeply concern their consciences. They posed questions such as these:

Can an officer today speak his mind freely and honestly without jeopardizing his career?

Can he expect promotion in due time without conforming to practices of which he deeply disapproves?

When testifying before duly authorized civilian officials must he hew to the "party line" views enunciated by his superiors, or may he candidly disagree when he conscientiously believes them to be wrong?

These officers cited numerous personal experiences. For example, to win Army promotions it was essential to make a record in a combat unit. To do that your unit had to have a fine record judged by the "body count" of enemy dead.

To achieve these results, the unit commander could not tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. He had to repudiate the code Sylvanus Thayer indelibly engraved in the hills of West Point—the code on which the corps of cadets was nurtured—don't lie, cheat, or steal.

Now this is of profound significance. We neither need omniscience to perceive the immutability of certain principles governing human behavior—and these are high among them—nor great wisdom to recognize that these principles have evolved in every society from tribal days to the present; that however often they may be ignored and flagrantly flouted, their observance is still the best hope for the survival of societal structures.

the corps of cadets to the West Point code—a scrupulous regard for the sanctity of one's word and the integrity of one's acts, and then an unceasing effort to imbue our associates in the officer corps with comparable standards of conduct.

I have no doubt of the response of the Army's leadership to that challenge, from its senior officers down, but it will be enormously more difficult without the strong and continuing support of its civilian secretaries, its Commander in Chief, and the appropriate committees of the Congress.

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*Gen. M. B. Ridgway, now retired, is a former Army Chief of Staff. He made these remarks before the West Point Society of Western Pennsylvania.*

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The heart of any military establishment is its officer corps. There lies the great reservoir of integrity, moral courage, competence, and subordination to lawful authority. Next in importance is the noncommissioned officer corps, seeking to follow the former's precepts and to emulate its example. These are the bulwarks of our Army. If they fail, disaster follows.

From Thayer's time to today West Point has been the inexhaustible reservoir of high-principled integrity inculcated through its graduates in our officer corps, and by it transmitted to our N.C.O.'s. I know of no substitute for that high moral force. It must not be diluted by any concession to any lesser codes of society.

How then do we answer the questions propounded at Carlisle and at Newport? How do we convey to our civilian superiors and through them to the American people our unshakable faith in the validity of the principles by which we were trained?

I know of but one way and that is by an undeviating adherence within