

From generals to GIs, U.S. Army in trouble

WASHINGTON — The Army is in trouble. From the gold braid that adorns General Westmoreland's cap to the mud that clings to the footslogger's boots. The system is floundering. The brass know it. The non-coms know it. The GIs know it.

What they all know, however, the Army is reluctant to admit. Official spokesmen give only partial answers or no answers at all to inquiries. To find out what's wrong with the Army, we have talked to GIs and generals alike from the Potomac to the Rhine, from Seoul to Saigon. Here are the stark facts:

GIs are deserting in droves. In 1970, 52 out of every 1,000 soldiers risked court-martial to escape from the Army. This is three times the desertion rate just five years ago.

Discipline is lax, approaching outright insurrection in some units. Lawful orders given under combat conditions are often ignored. Soldiers publicly participate in unauthorized demonstrations. Underground newspapers, some openly seditious, are flourishing. Lawsuits to protect soldiers' rights, unheard of just a few years ago, are becoming commonplace. The first sergeant is no longer God, but just another misguided "lifer."

The Army is literally going to pot. Marijuana is as abundant as the monsoon mud in Vietnam. Hard drugs can be purchased for pocket change in Saigon. Army hospitals have become havens of drug abuse.

Racial tension is simmering on many Army posts. Blacks and whites work together by day, segregate and fight by night. Many militants frankly intend to use their Army training to wage guerrilla warfare against the U.S.

Promotions U.S. patriotism

Too many officers put promotions ahead of patriotism. A combat command, for example, has become an unwritten requirement for field grade promotions, especially for colonels seeking their first star. Generals also move up the ladder faster if they have combat records. For the sake of their careers, combat commands in Vietnam have been rotated every six to eight months. Consequently, the troops are constantly being led by green officers. Human life literally has become a means to an end for ambitious officers. The dirt soldiers die, their parents get flag-draped coffins, and the generals receive the kudos.

Generals also feel they need medals to add to their luster. These are handed out to just about every general who takes a helicopter ride over a battlefield. Almost half of the generals back from Vietnam last year, most of them swivel-chair commanders, came home decorated for bravery in combat. Colonels in charge of battalions get decorated so automatically that their medals

have become known as the "battalion commanders' packets." Among the enlisted men who do most of the fighting and dying, in contrast, only one in ten was decorated for bravery.

It is also drilled into officers that the way to get ahead is to conform and never to criticize. Efficiency reports, which largely determine promotions, measure conformity rather than ability. Able officers who raise criticisms get low ratings. The inevitable result is that the Army has come under the sway of mediocre officers.

In recruiting for the ranks, the Army promises soft jobs for those who enlist. Those who are shanghaied—the draftees, the poor, the black, the dull, the walking wounded—are thrown into the foxholes. The best men invariably get the choice, rear-echelon assignments. Thus the cream become the bureaucrats. The dregs become the dirt soldiers. In other words, the purpose of the Army is to fight, yet its policy is keep the best men out of combat.

Washington expose

Smoking aloft—A federal study of cigarette pollution in airliners will conclude, say insiders, that the tobacco smoke is no health hazard to non-smoking passengers. Public Health Service researchers, working out of the Cincinnati office, have logged hundreds of hours aloft with sensitive equipment designed to measure the level of air contamination in airliner cabins. They attribute passenger complaints about eye irritations and nose-throat dryness to the low humidity and high ozone content. Under federal regulations, the cabin air in airliners must be completely replaced every three minutes. The study, which will be released in late January or early February, is expected to cite the rapid air turnover as one reason that smoking passengers cause no health problem for non-smoking passengers. Indeed, the 12-question passenger survey forms (more than 4,000 have already been collected) indicate that few non-smokers really want to ban smoking aboard planes.

Fiscal outlook—President Nixon has told congressional leaders privately that his State of the Union message will contain "some interesting approaches to the fiscal problem." Without going into specifics, he has made it clear that he will advocate ways to stimulate the economy. As evidence of his optimism, he is basing his budget plans upon a full-employment economy. The multi-billion dollar question: how to create a boom without causing inflation? The President is waiting for more answers before he adopts specific proposals. For instance, he hasn't made up his mind, say insiders, whether to request a tax increase.