

The Generals and The Constitution

DWIGHT EISENHOWER voiced the danger of a "military-industrial complex." The General was not noted for penetrating socio-political sayings, but this was one. It made up for his failure to wring the political neck of the late Senator Joseph McCarthy.

It meant that there is a natural bond between top commanders of the nation and industries which manufacture military goods. This bond is seldom corrupt, but it establishes an undue influence against the civilian control of the armed services, largely through congressmen emotionally involved in a big military establishment.

Yet all military men do not necessarily need this help of industry. If they have large national reputations, if they have a "heroic" image among the people, they can exert pressure of their own in the Congress, or in their capacity as advisers to the President and his civilian agents.

Generals Washington and Grant, and Eisenhower himself, had this status, and did not even think of taking advantage of it.

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SOOMETIMES GENERALS do not need to be heroes in the accepted sense, or to be so successful as to have engaged public attention, but they do need rank.

Such a one is Lieutenant General John D. Lavelle, recently of the top brass in Indochina. A few days ago he admitted he ordered about twenty unauthorized bombing raids in North Vietnam, prior to the current bombing sweep ordered by President Nixon. He called this "protective reaction." When this was disclosed he was relieved of command, and demoted.

Instead of studying military jargon, he should have studied the Constitution of the United States.



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THE CONSTITUTION brooks no authority superior to that of the President over the armed services. The clause is simple and clear, and any general can read it, Art. II, Sec. 1: "The President shall be Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy..."

The first commander who neglected to read this was that Western paragon, "Pathfinder" John Charles Fremont. Unwisely, President Lincoln named him commander of the Mississippi theater at St. Louis when the Civil War opened. It went to his head. He began issuing decrees touching slaveholders in Missouri, who were none of his business. Lincoln politely wired him to rescind. He refused, so Lincoln sacked him, and his further part in the war was negligible.

Our modern hero was General MacArthur, who attempted to make national policy in Asia while commanding in Korea. President Truman relieved him, and he retired to become a rebel without a cause.

The Commander-in-Chief mandate is eminently sensible and prudent. The Founding Fathers had served countless cases throughout history where hero-generals usurped the civil authority, and they weren't about to offer the opportunity in the Republic. That's the way it is, and the way it will stand while the Constitution stands. Let other peoples take care of their own soldiers bearing batons.

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