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# Who Needs West Point?

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By EDWARD L. KING

CHEVY CHASE, Md.—The time has come to consider closing West Point. In my view it has played a primary role in creating an institutional system that has brought about the moral decay of the Army and the failure of Vietnam. If public apathy lets this system remain largely unchanged, then we must be prepared for more Mylais probably both at home and abroad.

Even more shocking than the savagery of the ground troops at Mylai 4 (and the nearby hamlet of Mykhe 4) was the refusal of all concerned to prosecute those involved. Even a three-star general and the Secretary of the Army were unable to bring themselves to publicly reveal the existence of a second Army massacre at Mykhe 4.

The truth is that cover-ups have become part of the accepted method of operation throughout all command levels of the United States Army.

There has been little incentive within the Army to do other than advance one's individual career. These facts of Army life have produced a breed of career field-grade officers who give lip service to the higher principles of military service, while constantly maneuvering to get their "tickets punched" with successively higher levels of career-improving jobs. "Cover your rear," "don't rock the boat" and "keep your rater happy" have been the unspoken slogans of most successful Army officers over the past twenty years.

The amorphous W.P.P.A. (West Point Protective Association)—the nickname applied in the Army officer corps to all West Point graduates working together to promote and protect each other's careers—has been in operation for decades. But it has been even more of a factor since World War II because of the growth of the active duty officer corps. The corps has grown to the point where West Point graduates comprise slightly less than 4 per cent of the total active officer corps (yet make up more than 50 per cent of all general officers). All but two of the sixteen Army four-star generals now on active duty are West Pointers.

Article by King, "How the Army Destroyed Itself,"  
Saturday Review 6 May 72, filed Misc Clippings

It was not by accident that in 1968 (when Mylai occurred) 22 of the 24 principal commanders and staff officers of the United States Army were graduates of West Point. And 13 of those officers were either classmates of Gen. Harold K. Johnson, the incumbent Chief of Staff, or attended West Point with him.

This is one of the Army's critical institutional problems. West Point classmates learn to stick together, cover each other, and not to ask questions about the actions of senior graduates. Mylai is evidence enough that the graduates continue the practice throughout their Army careers. Brig. Gen. John W. Donaldson (West Point class of 1944) has been accused of doing away with all of the Americal Division records of the massacre at Mylai a year after the incident. Donaldson was not assigned in Vietnam at the time of Mylai. But he may have been attempting to protect the careers of his predecessors in the division, fellow West Pointers Maj. Gen. Samuel Koster (class of 1942) and Col. Nels Parson (class of 1944). Donaldson was a member of the club who was being helped along in his career by the old boy system of the W.P.P.A. He had every reason to believe that he would continue to receive further career rewards if he were loyal to the W.P.P.A. He did. After leaving Vietnam he was assigned to a choice job on the Joint Chiefs of Staff. And later, after a board of fellow West Pointers had dismissed charges against him of "gook-hunting"—stemming from his service in Vietnam—he was quietly transferred to Paris (hardly a hardship post), as the assistant defense attaché.

West Point perpetuates the old boy syndrome of favored clique leadership which has insulated the Army from meaningful reform. It has become an educational anachronism. The sterile educational environment and the narrow viewpoint of a chiefly alumni military faculty has served to continue the inbred characteristic of the West Point graduate. Most West Point officer-instructors hold only master's degrees (while civilian Ph.D.'s are unemployed), and teach only two or three years before being rotated to other Army duties. Qualifying these officers in the disciplines they teach is also unnecessarily costly to the taxpayer. The major purpose of the West Point curriculum and the military faculty is more to indoctrinate loyal future members of the W.P.P.A. than to broadly educate them to be innovative thinkers.

The United States Military Academy should be closed. Army career officers should be obtained through civilian college scholarship programs and direct entry from college R.O.T.C. The facilities of West Point should be converted into the senior school center of the Army. The Army War College, Command and General Staff College, Senior Noncommissioned Officer School, Army Museum and Library could be located there, and operated at a fraction of the present costs.

The public should not have to continue to pay excessive costs to maintain a military educational institution which chiefly serves to perpetuate a system of elitist control and an Army leadership more dedicated to protecting itself than the best interests of the nation.

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