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### To Serve With Honor

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the bourgeoisie whose utilitarian spirit and concern with profit prevented them from entertaining the concept.

Paradoxically, the nations themselves took up the idea of honor and declared themselves willing to go to war to defend it. Best finds so much historical hypocrisy here that he recalls one of Emerson's rare funny lines, "The louder he talked of honor, the faster we counted the spoons."

Dean Best is encouraged by what he sees as a post-World War II trend in revitalizing and broadening the concept of wartime honor. He finds it in the renewed interest of nations in reconstructing the old international law of war. He notes the number of individual nations that now deny the legality of war crime defense pleas on the ground of superior orders. He cites the widening of the concept of wartime honor to include recognition of the heroism of civilians under bombardment and occupation. He does not despair of the oft-frustrated postwar attempts of nations to construct international bodies to settle disputes without war. He finds in certain general officers of the second world war men capable of envisioning a nonviolent and just international order. Not Clark, Patton, and MacArthur are Best's heroes, but Eisenhower, Ridgway, and Marshall. He quotes the British chiefs of staff's tribute to Marshall on VE-day with Pope's lines: "Friend to truth! of soul sincere, In action faithful, and in honour clear; Who broke no promise, served no private end, Who gained no title, and who lost no friend."

Best's thoughtful little book is not without its faults. One example: He sees in Alfred Thayer Mahan a spokesman for a generation of imperialists, chauvinists, pseudo-Darwinians, racists. But he cites a strange test to back it up—Mahan's words on the meaning of honor among men and nations: "Honor speaks for

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itself; neither man nor nation should consent to that which is before God a shame to do or to allow." Now if one does not object to the theological metaphor—and to Mahan it was not metaphor but literal truth—that is really not a bad summing up of what one means by military and national honor—or the lack of it.

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Gabriel, Richard A. *To Serve With Honor: A Treatise on Military Ethics and the Way of the Soldier*. Westport, Conn.: 1982. 243pp. \$29.95

Brown, James and Michael J. Collins, eds. *Military Ethics and Professionalism: A Collection of Essays*. Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1981. 98pp.

In the wake of Vietnam, the ethics of the American military professional has become an important subject of inquiry. Richard Gabriel's earlier *Crisis in Command* analyzed military performance in Vietnam; *Managers and Gladiators* treated the military bureaucrat. *To Serve With Honor* is a natural progression toward analyzing the fundamentally opposed business and military ethics in the belief that systems analysis, cost-effectiveness criteria, and statistical measurements of military value started a process of erosion of the military ethic almost impossible to check. Successful management and efficiency of the business ethos are inconsistent with the qualities of duty, sacrifice, and group dedication expected of the military leader.\* The lamentable results of the managerial

\*Richard Nixon in *Leaders* makes much the same point, interestingly enough, distinguishing between managers (whose goal is "to do things right") and leaders (whose goal is "to do the right thing").

ascendancy are "the exponential growth of careerism in the military," loss of confidence by troops in their leadership, and the loss of the absolutely vital ingredient of combat success, unit integrity. "Crucial to the ability to bond units together under stress is the need for ethics . . . . A soldier without ethics, values and beliefs with which he can live in a moral sense will himself be destroyed by the horrors of the battlefield."

In his excellent foreword, Vice Admiral James B. Stockdale finds the most controversial section of Gabriel's book to be the proposed honor code for the military. The well-known "Duty, Honor, Country" at West Point is too vague; the military Code of Conduct aims primarily at the fighting man's responsibilities as a prisoner of war. Bureaucratic forces working against any notion of special military ethics and eroding its center are the "courting of power"—the enormous premium on promotion plus the "up-or-out" system; "careerism," which generates excessive ambition and loyalty conflicts; "excessive concern for image"—to look perfect rather than perform well, and the subsidiary "zero defect" mentality, efficiency report inflation, and indiscriminate individual citations for essentially routine performances of duty.

The Cadet Honor Code at the Point, much more rigid than the honor concept at the Naval Academy, operated to establish two standards of morality in the Army, one at West Point and another in the field. The Navy and Air Force have lesser problems here; they are "capital-intensive" rather than "labor-intensive" and are more responsive to business norms which may be disastrous for the Army. All the services share problems of drug and alcohol abuse, desertions, and related offenses. But the breakdown of the Army in Vietnam, where almost 20

percent of the officers and noncoms killed were at the hands of our own men—1,016 officers and NCOs—would hardly be corrected by a code of ethics not already covered by the Ten Commandments. The missing element of comparison is the Marine Corps, which experienced no comparable problem.

In an earlier study,\* Gabriel made a careful comparison of US Marine Corps and Army performance in Vietnam, reaching the following conclusions:

1. The Marines consistently refused to change traditional leadership practices and imitate the modern managerialism of the Army.

2. Marine Corps units fared consistently better than Army units in incidences of mutiny and combat refusals, stopping both before they affected unit cohesion.

3. Marine Corps units experienced more highly intense combat, suffering twice the statistical norm in casualty rates; 28 percent of all those killed in action, and 33.5 percent of those wounded were Marines.

4. The Marine Corps officer-enlisted ratio was far lower than the Army (1 to 14 vs. 1 to 8) and about the same as the German Army in World War II, the French in Indochina, and the Israelis today.

5. Marine Corps *unit* rotation early in the war (strongly favored by Gabriel) or *individual* rotation later in the war showed no difference in combat effectiveness.

6. Marine Corps officers stayed with their units, leaving only when killed or wounded; Army officers served only six months in the field, half the period of the enlisted men they commanded.

Gabriel concludes that "The unwillingness of the Corps to abandon such

\*Major Richard A. Gabriel, USAR, "Professionalism Versus Managerialism in Vietnam," *Air University Review*, January-February 1981, pp. 77-85.

traditional gladiatorial practices in the face of creeping managerialism must be counted as one of the greater successes of the Marine Corps in Vietnam . . . . The Army had gradually abandoned many of its traditional leadership modes and disciplinary habits in conformity with the new bureaucratic order . . . . When that happened, the effectiveness of Army units dropped considerably while indicators of unit disintegration rose alarmingly.”

Strangely, in *To Serve With Honor* Gabriel makes no direct or indirect reference to the US Marine Corps in any capacity. The omission, insofar as proving the need for a new code of ethics, may be fatal.

Why, in fact, did no general officer in Vietnam speak out against body counts, exaggerated sortie rates, and other false reporting of performance statistics aimed at pleasing superiors? Again, would a new code provide the corrective? Was it the failure of an ethical code that the German generals did not speak out against Hitler? Nobody would object to greater stress on moral integrity, courage, discipline, and other traditional battlefield virtues. The business or managerial ethos has little effect on performance below division level. Given its flaws, could we possibly be excusing serious leadership failure in the field by confusing principle with method?

James Brown and Michael Collins broaden the discussion of *Military Ethics and Professionalism* to cover three recent developments dramatically affecting the role of the professional soldier to which neither the military nor society has yet adjusted. In addition to Vietnam, the All-Volunteer Force and vastly increased numbers of women—mostly “liberated”—into a historically macho and male-dominated institution, have had consequences not even partially under-

stood. All contributing authors share the thought that something has been lost or changed and that the present situation is unsatisfactory.

Sam Sarkesian’s opening essay is useful but may put ethics on too high a level of abstraction for most readers. Thomas E. Kelly adds considerable survey material in a more practical approach toward bringing the widespread moral problem into sharper focus; Lewis Sorley finds overemphasis on statistical indicators to be less an ethical problem than a coverup for incompetence. Richard Gabriel, not wholly consistent with views expressed in his treatise on ethics above, pleads for a recapture of some aspects of the old professionalism, to rediscover successful military organizations of the past, rather than to develop new methods.

There is much of interest here, much material for wardroom and war college discussion. Is a new code of ethics really necessary; should it apply mainly to officers or to enlisted personnel as well? Perhaps a Civil War story may illustrate the latter point. When General “Uncle Billy” Sherman sternly rebuked a plundering soldier, he was told, “You can’t expect all the cardinal virtues for \$13 a month.”

Gabriel’s book, the first treatise on military ethics written by an American, and the Brown-Collins reader, both appear at a time of increasing exploration of the military officer and his moral obligation to society. Whatever the motivation, the subject merits our careful attention.

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Semmel, Bernard, ed. *Marxism and the Science of War*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1981. 302pp. \$45 paper \$17.95

This book is a collection of writings about war by key Marxist thinkers of the