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Challenge

John T. Hayward

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CHALLENGE!

In our free society, public support of almost every endeavor depends greatly upon the esteem in which that endeavor is held. This is true in all areas of government and has particular significance for the military.

As Napoleon said, "Four hostile newspapers are more to be feared than a thousand bayonets." This phrase takes added meaning with the vast improvements in mass communications media. No longer is the American taxpayer satisfied with the precept: "Don't tell them anything until it's over. Then tell them who won!" He has suddenly become an "expert" in military affairs, in good government, and in foreign policy and international relations.

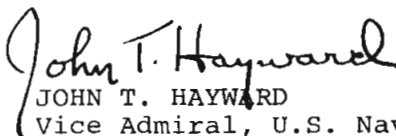
Because of this pervasive illumination, the military officer is required to concentrate more of his efforts on "image"--the image of himself, of his subordinates, of his Service, and of his Government. The image that is projected can be a symbol of excellence and professionalism, or it can be a reflection of ineptness and bad judgment. It should be a reflection of military integrity without self-aggrandizement.

The building of image is a function of public affairs. If this task is casually delegated to the junior officer of the command, it should not be a surprise when a minor fracas on the beach gets bigger headlines than the heroic shelling of a hostile coast. On the other hand, if the task commands the attention of every military officer and he imparts its meaning to his subordinates, it can foster pride and self-esteem in a military career, it can set forth the challenge, fascination, and adventure of the military, and it can publicize the problems, the responsibilities, and the rewards of service and command.

Public affairs is conducted under various titles --propaganda, public relations, combat information, community relations--but regardless of its label, it must reflect the military image and communicate it effectively. It is not enough to be well-educated and brimming with ideas. These things are to no avail without effective communication. And--the need to communicate increases geometrically with advance in rank.

The military officer, as he exercises public affairs, has a number of advantages. He is an excellent representative of Americana: he stems from every echelon of society; he represents every American geographic area; he is obviously patriotic; he is neat and well-dressed; he is widely traveled; and he is a military professional. These assets must be utilized to greatest advantage. But this is only the beginning. It is not enough to enjoy the image already possessed. Rather these assets should form the foundation of a public affairs effort which channels the imaginative efforts and loyal dedication of all echelons within the military.

This, then, is the challenge to the military officer. It is not to attempt self-aggrandizement or to cover for inefficiency. Rather it is to establish a military identity which recognizes the values of honor, pride, respect, and personal worth and which can be shared by the entire nation.


JOHN T. HAYWARD
Vice Admiral, U.S. Navy
President, Naval War College