

Colonel E. B. Crabill

the EASY CHAIR

A Combat Veteran Sounds Off

This cantankerous guest editor is better equipped to discuss military matters than most of the "experts" now issuing daily statements in Washington. He served as an infantry officer in three wars, won twelve decorations, and led the 329th Infantry Regiment in combat from Omaha Beach to the Elbe River. In its many battles, including St. Malo, Hurtgen Forest, and the Bulge, it captured more than 40,000 Germans and lost about 5,000 in killed and wounded. He recently retired after serving as chief of research and development of infantry weapons and equipment in the Army Field Forces.

SINCE the Korean war the citizens of the United States have been handed an annual tax bill of about seventy billion dollars. Instead of diminishing, this bill shows every sign of increasing to eighty billion, ninety billion, or a hundred billion, unless something more radical is done than the manicuring job normally performed by Congress.

The primary excuse for this astronomical bite is that sacrosanct monstrosity labeled "National Defense—Do not touch." It takes the major part of the taxes now and shows every indication of growing bigger. Why should it be a sacred cow? Have the people so much confidence in the Defense Department that they think it can do no wrong? Isn't there a possibility of a little empire-building mixed up with the real requirements? Isn't it possible that billions are being wasted because of incorrect conceptions of future wars?

Is it true that the only war of the future will be an atomic war, with its attendant suicidal destruction? Isn't it also true that the United States, in spite of these enormous expenditures, may find itself without the means to fight more probable wars? Isn't it possible that by spending on personnel a fraction of the money going into expensive and useless equipment, a better defense force could be built? Have the people in the United States become so intrigued with the glamor of airplanes, guided missiles, and atomic

bombs that they have forgotten that ground can be taken and occupied only by men on foot?

What the defense setup needs is a good tough inspection. Let's take a hard look at some of the prevailing sophisms that are responsible for this astronomical spending. Any of them could be the subject of a complete article. For the sake of brevity each will only be touched on here.

THE ARGUMENTS

(1) *The military leaders in our country are best able to determine our needs for national defense.* They might be if they were able to rise above their prejudices, but they are not.

It might be possible to approach a solution by asking an admiral what the Army needs, an Army general what the Air Force needs, and an Air Force general what the Navy needs, but to ask each what his own service needs is like opening the doors of the Treasury and handing him a shovel.

There is an old building in Washington that used to be called the State, War, and Navy Building. Whenever one of our admirals or generals passes it he must shudder because not so long ago it used to house them all and the State Department besides. The empires that have been built in the Pentagon have become so complex that there is a saying in the services that it is impossible for anyone to go there and get a "Yes" or "No" answer to anything.

There is a related evil that goes along with this—the staff build-up, the Indians that do the Chief's work for him. The more Indians, the bigger the Chief. All Indians have found out that the way to get to be Chief is to be on the staff of a Chief, ready to step into his job. It is also much pleasanter than to be out in the rain and mud, dodging shells. The result is that the smart boys do bird-dogging for the Chiefs and the dumb ones lead the troops in combat. This has two evils—it tends to build up the staffs and it is a little hard on the troops.

(2) *The money appropriated for military*

equipment is necessary for the defense of the country. It is about as necessary as it is to furnish each voter in the country with an air-conditioned Cadillac.

The characteristics demanded by the services in their airplanes, ships, weapons, and vehicles are now so expensive that the cost of them is from two to ten times as great as that—with a small loss in comfort, efficiency, or accuracy—of a serviceable substitute. In World War II a satisfactory liaison airplane cost about \$1,500. Ask what the present job costs and hold onto your pocketbook. The Russians have a heavy trench mortar that looks as though it had been machined with a sledge hammer, but it throws a lethal shell a long distance.

The accuracy of our weapons is so far superior to the accuracy of the persons manning them as to be ridiculous. So far I have never seen a time in combat when such accuracy was either necessary or humanly obtainable, though I have seen more combat than most officers. The advent of "human engineering," in recent years, has aggravated this problem. In the old, tough days the personal comfort of service personnel was not a consideration. Nowadays it is one of the most important considerations, which has the dual disadvantage of being extremely expensive and making softies out of the military.

(3) *It takes nine men in the rear to keep one man at the front.* This is a great understatement. It started at least as far back as the British pacification of India, where animal transportation was all that was available and communication was by runner. Nowadays with motor and air transportation, and radio and telephone communication, the proportion of rear-area personnel, instead of decreasing, has increased. In World War II, we who were in combat estimated that all the actual fighting was done by from 2 to 5 per cent of the personnel in the battle zone. Within the range of enemy artillery fire there was little visible movement and very few troops to be seen. If you started to the rear, however, every mile the clutter of vehicles, the masses of administrative, supply, engineer, ordnance, military police, transportation, signal, medical, and other staff units increased progressively. What they all did we of the infantry could not imagine. The artillery and tanks supported us and we needed daily rations, water, and gasoline, but that required only a small number. The others,

as near as we could see, must have been taking in each other's washing.

In Korea I had the task of inspecting some of these rear-area troops. I found not a single unit that was as much as 50 per cent efficient—that is, not a single administrative unit turned out as many as half of its assigned personnel for its primary duty. Where were the others? On guard, on kitchen police, sick, AWOL, on Rest and Rehabilitation, running typewriters, answering telephones, or doing bunk fatigue. Most were on duty shifts of eight hours. The soldiers at

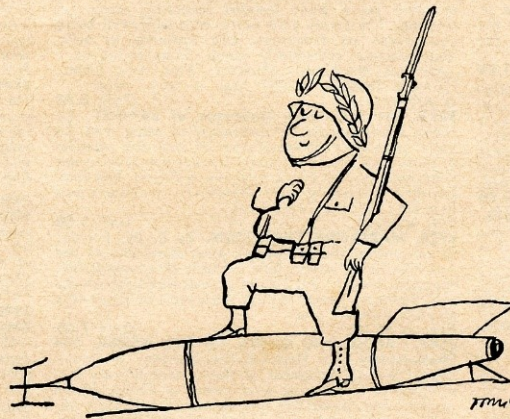
the front? Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

Can anything be done about this? Yes, but it probably will not be done. Why? The big headquarters are always in the rear areas. They want lots of communications so they can keep up their battle maps. That requires signal troops. They want comfortable housing. That requires engineers. They want good food. That

requires mess personnel. They want aspirin. That requires medical officers. They want lots of staff officers so they can get the answer to any problem that arises without having to dig it out themselves. All these people, in turn, have to be furnished rations, shelter, telephones, medical attention, and so on. If there are enough of them around they will be so busy taking care of each other they will have little time left for the troops in the combat areas.

The Red Cross, Special Services, and USO, particularly the feminine personnel, are needed to keep rear-area personnel entertained. Obviously, these entertainment people couldn't go up into the fighting areas, so they are never seen by the combat troops except the rare times the infantryman gets a pass. In World War II, Paris was so completely occupied by rear-area troops that combat troops in reserve couldn't go there because there was no room for them. A more recent example of this is the report by *Time* magazine of how a naval caretaking detachment in Naples, originally consisting of forty-five men, has been parlayed into a Shangri-La of 2,103 military, 534 civilians, and 3,166 wives and children; to take care of NATO South, an organization of 692 officers and men.

(4) *The officers in our services are brave, intelligent, zealous, and unselfish and the enlisted men, when they put on the uniform, are metamorphosed into crusaders rarin' to fight and die for the good old United Nations and the Four*



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Freedoms. I would call this about 20 per cent correct. We owe our success in wars to a very small group of heroes. The rest just go along for the ride. Nor is this small group made up more of generals than privates or vice versa. It is about the same in all ranks.

George Washington's statement that the patriotism of citizens of the United States was dependent upon what would best serve their selfish interests is as true today as it was then. In order to get one officer who is a real leader it is necessary to hire about three. If Congress ever thought it a good idea to pay service personnel a living wage, as compared to equivalent jobs in civil life, the services could probably get along with half their present boss personnel. Since Congress doesn't see fit to do this, the services manufacture a number of jobs and hope that by hiring three \$5,000-a-year men they will get one \$10,000 man. This is not only expensive but takes up a lot of time in trial and error, not to mention the casualties caused by poor leadership.

The same economics apply to enlisted men. Two enlisted men in uniform will look alike, but one will fight and the other hide. One is worth ten times the amount he is paid and the other is a liability. If we paid enlisted men a living wage, instead of babying juvenile delinquents who couldn't get a job elsewhere, the services could eliminate half their personnel who are now in baby-sitting jobs such as military police, excess administrative duty, excess instruction, special service, recruiting, and the like. Military service is just like any other business and it could be run a great deal more effectively on business principles, rather than by the politico-paternalistic methods now in vogue.

(5) All soldiers, sailors, and airmen contribute equally to their country's defense and should be equally entitled to veterans' benefits. Boloney.

If you believe this, go out some night when it is raining—it always rains in combat—dig yourself a fox-hole with about four inches of water in the bottom and spend a couple of weeks there, living on canned rations. Even without the mortar and artillery fire, the ever-present

danger of having your arm or leg blown off, or of being killed, about two weeks should make a Christian of you. Add the hazards of combat, and if you still think all veterans should be treated alike you should run for Congress.

Battles are won by a very few unusually brave men who are able to do the right thing at a critical time. Battle fronts are now usually too wide for the wily strategy of a Stonewall Jackson or the personal leadership of a Napoleon. More often they are decided by the boldness of some lieutenant or sergeant who makes a break-through which is then exploited by higher leaders.

The great mass of so-called veterans in the United States never, in the words of an old Indian fighter, "heard the whine of a hostile's bullet." They probably gave up some personal advantage in return for conversational resources that will last them all their lives. The veterans' organizations are too well entrenched politically to do much about this, but as far as justice to the ex-serviceman is concerned, Congress is shoveling out money indiscriminately so that a few deserving men will get a little of it. Being often handicapped, the deserving will probably be trampled in the rush.

(6) Wars of the future will be all-out wars like World Wars I and II. This is highly improbable. The United States military machine is now geared for only one purpose—to fight Russia. This plays directly into the hands of the Russians, who obviously have no intention of getting into an all-out war with the United States. They can gain their desired ends much more easily and effectively by piecemeal tactics. Every time there is a disturbance or outburst of violence anywhere in the world, look for the Communists. If they don't instigate it themselves they will be there shortly after the trouble starts.

"Why," they say, "take a lot of punishment conquering the world the hard way when you can take it a country at a time the easy way, using non-Russian troops?" If they can suck untrained United States troops into a few more Koreas—fine. Every one of them will hurt the United States. If we send United

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States troops into the Middle East, after getting Britain and France out, the Russians can hang the invader label on us. They also know they have nothing to fear from the United States where it counts—on the ground. As long as they can keep away from airplanes, atomic bombs, and sea battles, they can have it easy. They have five divisions to our one, and ours are too badly scattered to be assembled for combat anywhere. When the awe-inspiring Sixth Fleet moved into the eastern Mediterranean in the Suez crisis it had just eighteen hundred ground fighting troops—one battalion of Marines.

(7) Wars of the future will be decided by atomic bombs, airplanes, and guided missiles. Don't you believe it. Any time she chooses to do so, Russia can march across Europe in about three months. There is nothing in Europe to stop her. There is nothing that the United States has that could stop her. It is hardly thinkable that if the Russians occupied Bonn we would kill hundreds of thousands of Germans just to stop their vanguard. Nor would it be feasible to destroy Vienna to prevent the Russians from occupying it. It would not be possible to saturate Europe with atomic bombs. The Russians would seek out the unbombed places as the tides of the sea go around the headlands. They might possibly be stopped at the source, by bombing Russian cities and bases. Are we prepared to sacrifice the east coast of the United States for this? That is, are we prepared to commit suicide for a principle? Any Air Force officer knows that no defense will stop all the bombers. It would take only one to destroy a city.

(8) Atomic weapons are so devastating that they will eliminate war as a means of settling international disagreements. Don't believe that one either. History is replete with weapons so devastating that war would be impossible. Recent examples are poison gas in World War I, tanks in World War I, saturation bombing, V-1 and V-2 guided missiles in World War II. They had their effects in past wars and may be used again in future wars, but no weapon will ever stop all wars.

In April 1945, when I stood on a hill overlooking the devastation wreaked by American and English bombers on the Ruhr complex, the whole area appeared to me to be completely destroyed. An examining group, after hostilities ended, reported that in spite of this bombing the manufacture of weapons was operating at nearly 80 per cent of efficiency when the Ruhr was overrun by United States ground troops.

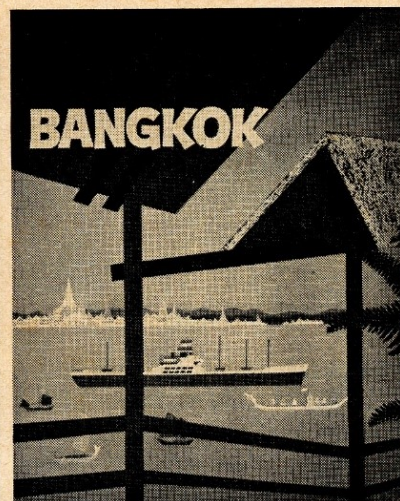
(9) Wars are won by the nations having the best machines. This follows the old saying that God is on the side of the heaviest artillery, and it is not to be depended on. History has too many instances in which a rabble poorly armed and trained but possessing high morale has defeated well-trained and well-equipped armies.

The last and most painful example of this was Korea, though in this instance the troops were not well-trained. In Korea, the United Nations forces had complete control of the sea, complete control of the air, and overwhelming superiority in tanks and artillery, but they were unable to defeat a howling mob of uneducated peasants armed with weapons mostly of World War I vintage. In this instance the explanation given was that we were not allowed to bomb beyond the Yalu River. Since our bombers regularly destroyed the bridges south of the Yalu, only to have them back in operation the next day, this appears—to one who was there—to be only an alibi. The Korean war was an infantry war and we failed to win because we did not have enough infantry and the infantry we had was not good enough.

Weapons are superior only if the persons handling them are superior and have high morale. The troops of Israel, recently, went across the border into Egypt and took away from the Egyptians, like taking candy from a baby, the mass of modern weapons that had been furnished them by the Communists.

A BETTER WAY

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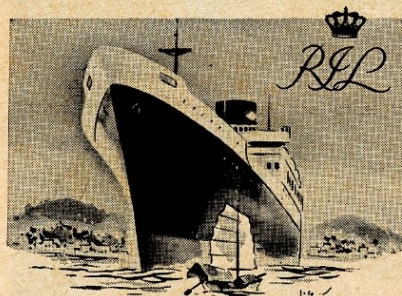
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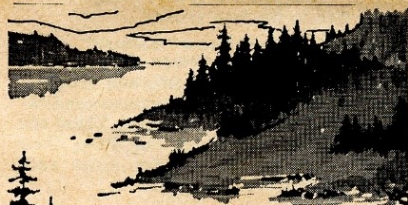


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pliance with this principle, I offer the following recommendations, none of which I expect to see carried out:

(1) Stop depending on guided missiles, atomic bombs, and airplanes to solve all defense problems. They probably won't be used in small wars and will be suicidal to use in big wars.

(2) Keep ready and available in the continental United States at least a dozen tough and well-trained divisions of professional soldiers that can be moved anywhere to back up decisions of the United Nations. Three or four of them should be airborne. They should contain no recruits and should have no administrative duties. They should be provided with sufficient troop-carrying aircraft, under Army control, to transport them with their equipment to any threatened area.

(3) Reduce by 50 per cent the personnel on duty in the Pentagon, including assistant secretaries, admirals, and generals. Require all lower headquarters to reduce their non-combat personnel 50 per cent either by eliminating installations or by reducing personnel in existing installations. The amount of administrative work deemed necessary always equals the number of people available to do the work. The source of administration is the Pentagon. Reduce it and all other headquarters can be reduced.

(4) Revise the military characteristics of war matériel, to eliminate requirements that make it expensive without proportionately increasing its combat value. The excessive cost of war matériel is our most serious problem.

(5) Start the pay of enlisted men at \$50 a week, of officers at \$6,000 a year. This would probably eliminate the draft. To compensate for the increased costs, eliminate all fringe benefits, including transportation. Transport no dependents overseas. Make the minimum tour of duty at one post three years in the United States and one year overseas. Sharply curtail the Military Air Transport Service.

(6) Eliminate the Corps of Military Police. This is an outstanding waste of good manpower. Have minimum military police in tactical units.

COMING IN

Harper's
magazine

NEXT MONTH

THE GUNS AT FALAISE GAP

A firsthand account of one of the most crushing—and least known—American victories in World War II.

By Richard B. McAdoo

WHY CANADIANS ARE TURNING ANTI-AMERICAN

A report on our neighbors' first political campaign in which both parties attacked the U.S.A. . . .

By Bruce Hutchison

HOW FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT GOT HIS MEDAL

When some Philadelphia architects decided to award a gold medal to that unpredictable patriarch of American architecture, Mr. Frank Lloyd Wright, their problems only began. A play-by-play account of a hilarious week-end shows how ornery—and wonderfully engaging—the great man can be . . .

By Alfred Bendiner

How a Classical Education Made A NOBEL SCIENTIST

A surprising recipe for training men in practical thinking, from a mathematical physicist who has been described as Einstein's successor.

By Werner Heisenberg

THE EASY CHAIR

Discharge soldiers who misbehave. Sharply reduce such military activities as Special Service, Information Service, Food Service, and Recruiting Service. Have combat units take care of their own maintenance, recreation, communications, recruiting, and police work.

(7) Reduce individual clothing and equipment of military personnel to that which can be carried on their backs or in their unit transportation. They will throw the excess away when they get in combat anyway. The criterion should be not what might add to their comfort—there is no comfort in battle—but what is the minimum with which they can operate effectively.

(8) Follow General Bradley's recommendation that hospitalization of veterans at the taxpayer's expense be limited to those whose disabilities were the result of wounds or injuries received in the war.

(9) Build no anti-atomic personnel shelters. No presently available warning system would allow time to occupy them, particularly since the bombing would be at night, when the factories and office buildings are empty.

FINALLY let me forecast the probable trend of the next war. It will start as the Korea, Indochina, or Middle East war started. It will gradually involve Communist nations on one side and non-Communist nations on the other. There will be no declaration of war. No atomic weapons will be used. No guided missiles will be used. No strategic bombers will be used. No sea battles will be fought. First there will be an air war between fighter planes for control of the air, which will be indecisive or won by the non-Communists. This will settle nothing and the non-Communist force will look around for somebody to take the ground and settle the war. Since only a few ground troops are available, the decision will either go to the Communists or will be delayed a year while the non-Communist countries can assemble some unwilling civilians, train them as soldiers, and put them on the battlefields, to die or be maimed for a cause in which they are not interested.



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