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THE MILITARY UNION THREAT TO THE U.S. ARMY

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STUDENT ESSAY

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THE MILITARY UNION THREAT TO THE US ARMY

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL CHARLES M. FOLLIO

ADJUTANT GENERAL CORPS

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US ARMY WAR COLLEGE, CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA



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USAWC ESSAY

The Military Union Threat to the US Army

by

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US Army War College
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 October 1975

iii

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ABSTRACT

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The fundamental problem is whether a serious threat to the US Army's traditional command and control exists because of proposed plans by a government employee union to organize military personnel. Several facets of the Army's personnel structure is examined, including its traditional ethnic and class composition and its career and non-career mix. The conclusion is drawn that the threat is minimal to the active Army, but serious to that 40% portion of the total force comprising the reserve components, by reason of large numbers of full time technicians holding key unit positions who are members of unions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
I Introduction	1
II Analysis	3
Political Complications	3
The Civilian Sector	6
Contemporary Soldier Unions and Issues	10
Ethnic and Class Composition	11
Guard & Reserve Technicians	14
III Conclusions	17
IV Recommendations	19
Bibliography	
Footnotes	

INTRODUCTION

An Army Times article on 16 July 1975 by staff writer Randall Shoemaker stated "Leaders of a major AFL-CIO union have revealed they are planning an organizing drive among military people next year and a showdown appears likely over the issue".

Mr. Clyde Webber, the president of the 300,000 member American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) was further quoted as saying, "servicemen need somebody to represent them, that's for sure". Further defining their intentions and justifications, Mr. Leo Pellerzi, the AFGE's general counsel, stated, "It is a volunteer Army and that means people are selecting a military career as a means of livelihood and not for patriotic reasons. Servicemen today ... want to be paid". The AFGE said its eventual goal would be to "get into contract bargaining and the regulation of grievance systems". During October 1975 Union literature was actively distributed to members of the military in the Pentagon in Washington, D.C.

This organizing effort by the American Federation of Government Employees Union suggests to some members of the military the possible widespread unionization of the American soldier. The subsequent pages address some of the events of past efforts to organize soldier and government employees along with a review of the historical socio-economic composition of the American soldier. This essay then, intends to show that the perceived fear of large numbers of soldiers affiliating themselves with unions is unfounded.

The conclusion is made that a possible threat to traditional Army command and control does exist by the widespread organization of large numbers of senior non-commissioned and field grade officers in the reserve components who are employed in full-time positions by their Army National Guard and Army Reserve units. These dual status reservists are called technicians.

II

ANALYSIS

Soldier Unions exist to one degree or another in several western European countries, namely England, West Germany, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Holland. It is important to understand that these soldier unions did not grow out of traditional workers union, such as our American Federation of Labor or Congress of Industrial Organization, but rather from joint officer and non-commissioned officer associations; military organizations very similar to our Non-Commissioned Officer Association, (NCOA) or Association of the United States Army, (AUSA). 1/ The original European forerunners of the present day Unions had objectives very similar to these Associations. Their objective was to essentially lobby for improved pay and benefits for military careerists and for improving the public image of the professional soldier.

POLITICAL COMPLICATIONS

The greatest advancement in the American Labor movement has occurred since the 1930's as a direct result of successful labor lobbying and subsequent political support by numerous members of Congress. Unlike the industrial and craft union effort of the past, federal employee unions of this decade and particularly prospective military unions, infringe upon Congress' own important area of authority, e.g., pay and benefits for government workers. This infringement could threaten Labor's past rapport with Congress perhaps even jeopardizing some of their past successes in the more important industrial and craft area.

Within Congress there is one major dissimilarity between past support for public service employee unions and potential support for military service unions. The Post Office and Civil Service Committees of both Houses were usually composed of junior and politically vulnerable members, who often acquiesced to Labor's demand for support. The prestigious House and Senate Armed Services and Appropriations Committee on the other hand are composed of the more senior and politically secure members. Almost two hundred years of history confirm that senior members of Congress are uncompromising in their unwillingness to allow the dilution in any degree of their vested authority.

One of the purposes of a professional military service is to enforce the foreign policy of the particular political administration in office. Since the early 1930's the American labor movement has been most clearly associated with the more liberal elements of our political system.

It would be naive to believe that the American Labor Movement could achieve success in organizing military personnel without receiving at least tacit support from some liberal Congressman. It would be equally naive to believe that there would not be a latent obligation on the part of organized labor to repay that liberal Congressional support by union support for the foreign policy objectives of those members, or political party, irrespective of the foreign policy of the political party in office. The potential problem for the military services, as well as the Commander In Chief, direct chain of Command could prove to be most difficult.

The present power of organized labor was evidenced as recently as August 1975, when the State Department's negotiated wheat-sales to Russia were largely nullified by Mr. George Meany, President of the American Federation of Labor-Congressional of Industrial Organizations. Any future large scale servicemens union could be expected, over a period of years, to become politically partisan. Such a partisan political involvement could negate both the effectiveness and broad based respect for the military.

Past unionization efforts of public service government organizations, such as that of the postal workers were largely achieved by the ability to disrupt a vital public service such as by a strike or a slowdown. In that regard, it must be remembered that the mission of the United States Army is, "To engage and sieze enemy land forces and to occupy and defend enemy terrain". The Army, and all military services', during peacetime is to train for their wartime mission. A strike by soldiers during peacetime would only disrupt training; during wartime, it would of course be illegal.

The restrictions on servicemen unions in all European countries clearly prohibits any form of strike during wartime. The concept is clearly "rebellion". It is next to impossible to think Congress would authorize any prospective military union with a wartime, much less a peacetime, strike provision. The single most important provision essential to past industrial and public service unionization success, however, has been the ability to strike or disrupt as essential services.

The bargaining effectiveness of a strike threat can be readily understood. With the exception of the military hierarchy and a few conservative Congressmen, it is doubtful if many taxpayers would be seriously disturbed if the military services were to strike during peacetime because the consequences would disrupt only the services' training mission. The fact is that the military establishment does not provide a vital peacetime service to the American taxpayer.

THE CIVILIAN SECTOR

In 1973 a respected scholar of the American labor movement, Professor E. Wright Bakke of Yale University, predicted that within the next few years the United States would experience increased unionization of the public sector. He also predicted that the unionization effort would be militant and that eventually strides against the federal government would be legalized. 2/ Professor Bakke's prediction has been to some extent fulfilled within the last few years lending support to the further prediction that ultimately the same unionization effort and success will occur within the military services.

A primary reason for the widely held concept that government workers, either civilian and military, should not be allowed to strike deserves a better understanding. Both civilian and military government employees are public servants. The word service is derived from the Latin word SERVITIUM meaning slave. A slave, of course never had the right to strike against his master. The American people are quite literal in the concept of their public servants being in fact servants, more

so than professional members of the United States military would like to believe.

A review of some of the conditions or grievances that have encouraged and fostered past public service unionization success surfaces the fact that other than for Congress' prerogatives of pay and benefits, the main issues have been in the area of working conditions or managements disciplinary authority. Discipline is an area in the military mostly administered by, and for the protection of, supervisory management careerists, i.e., the Non-Commissioned Officer Corps.

The present Chairman of the Civil Service Commission, Mr. Robert E. Hampton, testified before the United States House of Representatives Manpower Subcommittee on 22 May 1974 concerning labor management relations with government workers. 3/ Chairman Hampton stated that at that time 56% of all non-postal federal workers were organized into unions with the right to bargain collectively with management, i.e., the Civil Service Commission.

The nature of the negotiated grievance that Chairman Hampton outlined to the Committee is of interest concerning the possibility of eventual soldier unions.

During the congressional testimony Chairman Hampton, stated that there were 718,000 negotiated grievances with Government Employees Union concerning pay, 712,000 concerning overtime issues, 652,000 concerning safety provisions and 589,000 concerning disciplinary problems. In order, of magnitude these grievances were, Pay, Overtime, Safety and Discipline.

During the six month period between January 1975 thru June 1975 of all the Congressional complaints handled by the United States Army's Office of Legislative Liaison, 10.3% concerned discharges, 6% concerned pay problems, 4.5% concerned Disciplinary problems and 2% concerned promotion problems. It can be seen that outside of the Congressional area of pay soldiers were most concerned about disciplinary problems.

Past successful unionization efforts within industry have centered on the key issues of better wages, working and safety conditions, pension rights and, depending on the particular generation or age group, more or less overtime. Past attempts by unions to enter into management's supervisory chain of command, such as, the United Automobile Workers efforts to unionize foremen at General Motors and Ford, have been met with an unqualified "non-negotiable" stance on the part of management. Attempts by future service member unions to organize Non-Commissioned and Junior Officers could be expected to be met by a similar non-negotiable response from military management.

Based on both government employees grievances and the Army's Congressional complaints, as tabulated by the Office of Legislative Liaison, aside from the Congressional area of responsibility concerning pay and benefits, the most likely remaining grievance issue in our non-draft military service would be discipline. The disciplinary system in the military is largely administered by and for the protection of the immediate supervisory level, i.e., the Non-Commissioned Officer, the military's equivalent of industry's Foreman.

Traditionally, those who have been interested in being represented by Unions were, or intended to be, careerist in that particular industry trade or occupation. Of every 100 men and women entering the Army only 34% or about one third, remain past their third year of service. 4/ The generally accepted definition of a careerist in the US Army is one who is on his second enlistment and has three or more years total active federal service. That definition comprises only 40% of the US Army enlisted force. 5/ Large numbers of non-careerist actively seeking to become members of a servicemans union, when they have no intention of remaining in that service are unlikely when it is realized that any disgruntled soldier can now honorably separate under the provisions of the Army's Expeditious Discharge Program (EDP) before the normal expiration of his enlistment contract.

The other two thirds of the United States Army, comprising those who do not intend to stay past three years, are characterized by young people in their late teens or early twenties. This age group is not typically concerned with the long term bread and butter goals of older career motivated people and as such, could only benefit from union membership in the area of disciplinary issues. When it is realized that the fulcrum grade point of the Army is 3.96, or a specialist four, and that only 34 out of every 100 stay past three years, can the dissimilarity between the work force of the Army and that of industry be correctly understood. 6/

CONTEMPORARY SOLDIER UNIONS AND ISSUES

The most successful American soldier union attempt to date occurred during the peak of the Vietnam War when in 1969 Specialist Four Andy Stapp and a group of anti-war dissidents formed the American Servicemen Union (ASU). That group of servicemen were for the most part college educated young men from professional or white collar family environments from predominately large urban areas. 7/ After two years experience in a completely nondraft environment, enlistment statistics clearly indicate the composition of future enlistees will be primarily noncollege young men from primarily blue collar backgrounds coming from predominately rural or small town areas. In deference to the unionization goals of the American Federation of Government Employees, the Army's enlistees now come from a demographic group more closely associated with maintaining the status-quo than actively fostering such revolutionary changes as soldier's unions.

Non-Commissioned Officers and todays Junior Officers are also predominately from blue collar backgrounds, aspiring to positions of responsibility and leadership within the existing social structure and therefore in many ways the staunchest defenders of that structure.

This socio-economic background of the traditional American soldier refutes the egalitarian argument espoused by former Secretary of the Army Callaway, and many senior officers that it is essential for

the Army to be representative of society. Few professional soldiers on active duty today were in the US Army before 1940; consequently, accepting the past thirty five years of a draft motivated Army as the norm, rather than the exception.

It is understandably easier for Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers to deal with soldiers from so-called well adjusted middle class socio-economic environments. The contention, however, that this socio-economic group should constitute the mainstay of the Army's enlisted ranks, flaunts historical evidence and may not, in the long run, be in the best economic interest of a democratic society or the command and control interests of the US Army.

A major personnel problem for the young junior enlisted man and, to a lesser extent the young junior officer is achieving a degree of acceptance by, and integration into, the military careerist power structure. Once accepted, the same individuals who perhaps earlier referred to the careerist as a "liar" suddenly becomes the staunchest supporter of the system or establishment.

ETHNIC & CLASS COMPOSITION

Although not widely held, a concept does exist that because the All-Volunteer Army is no longer representative of a cross section of the American's socio-economic structure, Blacks in the Army will be more vulnerable to union organization efforts. This concept is lacking in validity, first, because Black leadership perceives organized labor

to have been a prime inhibitor of their quest for occupational advancement during the last two decades and, secondly, because Blacks are not anxious to dilute any of the traditional rank benefits just at the time they are beginning to reap the advantages of achieving that rank status.

The larger than average numbers of Blacks in the military is not the anomaly that some would have the military believe. Historically, the US Army has been structured by minorities. The American social class structure has for two centuries insured that both its military and civil servants were in fact servants as the root word implies. Before the Civil War, in the 1850's, the rolls of the Army's units were composed of large numbers of names of German extraction. It was during this time that the major German migration to America began. 8/ German-Americans were during this period the down trodden, at the lower end of our socio-economic strata. After the Civil War, during the 1870's and 1880's, large numbers of Irish began to appear on the Army's muster rolls. 9/ For example, a conspicuously large number of such typical Irish names, as Captain McDougall, Sergeants Thomas O'Neil and Thomas Murray, troopers Callan Welch and Brant, appear with General Custer at the Little Big Horn incident of 1876. 10/ It was likewise during this time period that the largest major immigrant group to America was the Irish. The period immediately before and after WWI similarly witnessed the names of soldiers of southern European extraction starting to appear

on the unit rolls. Fiorello La Guardia, one time Congressman and later Mayor of New York City, grew up on an Army Post in the Arizona territory where his father was a bandsman with the 11th Regiment as were others of Italian origin. 11/ The ethnic composition of civil servants offers an interesting and similar parallel. During these same relative corresponding periods of time, the name origins appearing on the rosters of major metropolitan police departments almost exactly paralleled that of the Army, first German, then Irish, then southern European. Today we see more and more Negroes in the military, in the Post Office Department and on metropolitan police and fire departments. It has been documented by social historians that our society has traditionally insured that the lower socio-economic group performed the public, civilian and military, as well as private servant functions. Upward social and occupational mobility did, however, exist and was encouraged within this public service system. It was not uncommon for the German-American soldier of one generation to have a son or grandson become an officer in the next generation. It was likewise not uncommon for a judge to be the son or grandson of an Irish cop of an earlier period. Unless there is a significant change to America's present immigration policy, it would appear that it will increasingly be the Negro who will fill the position of the public servant in the military as well as many government agencies such as the Post Office Department and Police Departments in the immediate future.

During fiscal year 1975 Blacks constituted 20% of the United States Army enlistments. Almost twice their representative numbers in society. 12/ For first term personnel reenlistment rates for

Caucasian AUS, Army of the United States, was 2.0%. For Blacks the AUS rate for the same period was 10.7%. Reenlistment rates for Caucasian careerist was 73.1% while the Black careerist reenlistment rate was 84.5%. 13/ The Army's Black content and cultural composition as reflected in present enlistment and reenlistment rates, clearly indicate that Blacks today perceive military service as an attractive means of upward social and occupational mobility just as other groups did in past generations. In addition to the Army's military service, in the civil service area the U.S. Postal Services Corporation (old Post Office Department) has a Black content for 1975 of 19.1% reflecting a similar perceived opportunity. 14/ Concern that large numbers of Blacks in the military would be anymore vulnerable to unionization than whites does not appear well founded. Today the Blacks in the military service, just like several earlier minority groups in our history, are working hard to become members of that established society not to destroy it.

Both the military and civil services have provided excellent means of upward social mobility for those at the lower end of America's socio-economic ladder thereby reinforcing support by these public servants for the social structure that they aspired to.

ARMY RESERVE AND ARMY NATIONAL GUARD TECHNICIANS

To provide continuity and full time administrative and technical support for Army National Guard and Army Reserve, units provisions exist for some members of those units to serve as civilian technicians in addition to their reserve unit participation. These dual status reservists are known as Technicians. Of the Army National Guard

strength of 400,000, 7% or 28,500 are technicians. Of this number, an estimated 70% or about 20,000 are members of one of several government employee unions.

Of the Army Reserve unit strength of 226,000, 3.7% or 8,500 individual are technicians of whom an estimated 50% to 60% hold union membership. The number of technicians appears relatively small until a closer look is made of the grades held. In the Army Reserve, 24% of all E-9 TOE or TDA positions are held by technicians. Technicians constitute 18% of the E-8 and 11% are E-7 positions. Even larger percentages constitute Army National Guard Technician dominance. For example in the Army National Guard 44.5% of all E-9 unit positions are occupied by full time technicians, 50.2% of the E-8, 30.3% of the E-7 and even 15.1% of the E-6 positions. In the Army National Guard 19% of all unit Major positions are occupied by full time technician, 32% of the Lieutenant Colonel and 40% of the Colonel positions are presently being manned by full time technicians. 15/ When it is realized, that significantly large numbers of these senior Non-Commissioned Officers and Senior Officers presently hold union membership, and further that collectively these components constitute 40% of the Army's total force, the possible immediate threat to the Army's traditional command and control can be better understood.

Army National Guard and Army Reserve technicians earn their livelihood as civilians. The military portion of their dual status is avocational. It is not surprising that technicians should be more concerned with

bread and butter issues that other part time military, members of the reserve units. Nor is it surprising that they should be more prone to civilian-type union membership than active Army personnel.

The increasing possibility of more crippling public service strikes by unionized police and fire departments or even a recurrence of the U.S. Postal strike of March 1970 suggests potential military control problems because unions, traditionally, cannot or will not cross each others picket lines during a strike. The expected future behavior of technicians during a public employee strike is confused. National Guard or Army Reserve unit technicians in key leadership positions, if called up by a State Governor or the President of the United States to perform the essential public health and safety functions of striking members of the same government employees unions as their own could be in a most difficult position.

III

CONCLUSIONS

Unlike private industry and the civil service, about three fourths of the enlisted members of the military services, particularly the US Army, are not planning on making the military service a career. By and large, these lower enlisted grade non-careerists are not motivated by the usual "bread and butter" objectives of organized labor. One of the main areas of union representation, outside of pay and benefits, has been in the working conditions or disciplinary area. The military disciplinary system is structured to support the authority of the NCO's, the Army's first-line supervisors, or the military equivalent of the civilian Foreman. Joining a soldier union for bread and butter reasons could prove counterproductive to the career Non-Commissioned Officer since it could possibly dilute his traditional authority position.

The main adverse thrust of the interjection of a soldier union into the military command structure is not the immediate threat of loss of unit command and control, but rather, the potential long-range implications of possible union influence into the military's ability to enforce the Commander in Chief's foreign policy decisions that might be in opposition to the unions objectives.

The whispered alarm that because the military services no longer represent a draft inspired cross section of America's socio-economic youth, Blacks will constitute greater vulnerability to union organizational efforts appears unfounded. If anything, the fact that the Army is now devoid of the socio-economic group that Specialist Four Andy Stapp and his anti-war followers constituted, mitigates again

successful unionization of the present Army, not for it.

It is the conclusion of this study that while some members of the Army Staff are preoccupied with the potential threat of unionization, particularly by junior enlisted men, they are overlooking the already existing union membership of the dual-status full time technicians of that 40% of the total force constituting the Army's two Reserve Components.

The original objective of the unit technician, to provide full time "support" to the reserve component units, may have gotten reversed through time to where the traditional part-time citizen soldier is increasingly working for the full time technicians who have concentrated their positions in the higher grades. The fact that large numbers of technicians already belong to government employee unions is not surprising, when it is realized that their Guard or Reserve membership is vocational not avocational. It should have been expected that technicians would be more civilian than military and that they be more concerned with the bread and butter issues that union representation has centered on. What direction the military services in general, and the US Army in particular, chose to take to counter this possible threat to the traditional command structure will prove to be one of the challenges of this decade.

IV

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Army should give greater recognition and support to established associations and organization such as the Association of the United States Army (AUSA) and the Non-Commissional Officer Association (NCOA) which although lobbying for improved living and working conditions and increased pay and entitlements, do not threaten the established military command and control structure as unions would. Senior members of the Army establishment should give consideration to actively encouraging increased membership and participation by Non-Commissioned Officers in the Association of the United States Army.

The Army should assure that the maximum justifiable upward occupational mobility of minority group personnel continues through the non-commissioned officer grades with appointments as Warrant Officers and selections to Officer Candidate Schools where possible.

The limited need for and opportunity to attend Officer Candidate schools should not preclude the tendering of Reserve Commissions to outstanding Regular Army Non-Commissioned Officers of demonstrated potential. So called hip-pocket commissions cost nothing to the Army but they could serve to broaden the junior officer's section base in the event of mobilization.

The Army has successfully encouraged large numbers of its Non-Commissioned Officers to attend college during and after duty hours.

Many have achieved over two years of college but some what less than a full four year degree. Many of these outstanding non-commissioned officers are presently frustrated by limited Warrant Officer and Officer Candidate School opportunities making them potentially vulnerable to unionization efforts. The opportunity for Reserve Commissions could serve as the stimulant for increased motivation to large numbers of the deserving regular Army Non-Commissioned Officers. Increased numbers of careerists in the supervisory positions of Non-Commissioned Officer and in the junior managerial positions of Warrant and Junior Officers could serve to inhibit some union organization success.

Concerning the large numbers of full time reserve component technicians who occupy senior Non-Commissioned and Field Grade Officer positions in reserve component units, the alternatives appear limited to either removing the positions from the unit TDA and TOE and establishing separate technician TDA/TOE or possibly developing a reserve component active duty support program for, and by, reservists to eventually supplant the present technician program. A system similar to the Navy Reserve TAR (The Administration of the Reserve) program. Under such a program the technicians who are presently full time civilian employees and part time military members of the units would become full time active duty military members. Serving, however, in a restricted career and assignment pattern only with reserve component units.

Charles M. Feltner
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