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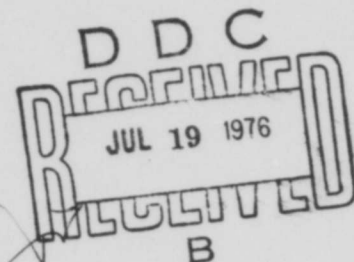
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## THE NEED FOR MEANINGFUL COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN SENIOR OFFICERS AND THE YOUNG GENERATION IN THE US ARMY RESERVE

BY

COLONEL ALFRED W. HAZEN

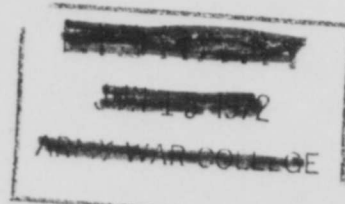


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THE NEED FOR MEANINGFUL COMMUNICATIONS  
BETWEEN SENIOR OFFICERS AND THE YOUNG  
GENERATION IN THE US ARMY RESERVE

by

Colonel Alfred W. Hazen

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US ARMY WAR COLLEGE  
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania  
25 April 1972

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★ The basic question is whether or not senior officers can communicate with the young generation in the US Army Reserve. The World War II and Korean war background of many senior officers in the reserve often places them in the position of believing that old systems, procedures, and reliance on enforcing regulations have proved to be best; whereas, the young member with no wartime experience or a short period of active duty during the Viet Nam war believe that old methods should be discarded because they have not kept pace with the times. These two concepts tend to negate effective communications. Data was obtained through literature research, interviews with senior officers and young members in the reserve, and evaluation of material resulting from senior-junior officer discussions in 91st Division (Training). Study of this material reveals that senior officers must be more viable in their approach to contemporary problems confronting them in their reserve units. Senior officers at all levels of command must communicate the need for a strong Army Reserve program. Young officers and enlisted men must be convinced that duty always connotes some degree of sacrifice which might not always be offset by available benefits.

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The meaning of communications in a world of fast moving incidents and electronic marvels is oftentimes misleading because communications to many people means the electrical and mechanical means used to transmit information. To many people, communications means the telephone, television, radio, newspapers, and telegrams. Many of us from time to time have looked upon communications as being on the receiving end of the media for news and information. The definition of the words "communicate," "communication," and "communicative" found in the American College Dictionary should be reviewed by personnel engaged in the art of communications by whatever method they may become involved:

COM-MU-NI-CATE - v.t.

1. To give to another as a partaker; impart, transmit.
2. To impart knowledge of; make known.
3. To have interchange of thoughts.

COM-MU-NI-CA-TION - n.

1. Act or fact of communicating; transmission.
2. The imparting or interchange of thoughts, opinions, or information, by speech, writing, or signs.

COM-MU-NI-CA-TIVE - adj.

1. Inclined to communicate or impart.
2. Talkative, not reserved.

Within the United States Army Reserve Program there is a tendency to forget the definitions of the words and acts involved with presenting ideas, planning based on the ideas, and the resulting implementation of the ideas among senior and junior officers and enlisted men assigned to some units. In the past, administration, logistics, and training programs were developed by higher

headquarters. Current trends directed by the Army Chief of Staff move toward the development of training programs, within the basic guidelines of higher headquarters, at the lowest unit level. The Chief of Staff has further communicated his ideas for enhancing various aspects of army life by eliminating harassment, makework programs, and in general responding to problems that have made the army less than desirable to today's youth. Efforts of senior commanders in 1970 and 1971 to identify problems and procedures which contributed little or nothing to the mission of the army were successful to a large degree. Major General Rogers,, Commanding General 5th Infantry Division (Mech) stationed at Camp Carson, Colorado, in a talk to the Army Commanders Conference on 30 November 1970, indicated that many changes brought about within his command resulted because of discussions with soldiers.<sup>1</sup> Some of the changes involved "go-go" girls in enlisted men's clubs, soldiers allowed to decorate their barracks, and other innovations that appeared to have had a direct effect of reducing the AWOL rate, the crime, and had a general improvement in morale. Yet in a Time Magazine article in October 1971, and several newspaper articles, it was vividly reported that the Seventh Army personnel in Germany were suffering the very things that had been corrected in Camp Carson Colorado in 1970.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Bernard W. Rogers, MG, "A Sample of Results," Presentation, The Army Commanders' Conference, 30 November 1970.

<sup>2</sup>"The Forgotten Seventh Army," Time, 4 October 1971, Vol. 98, pp. 18-19.

The communications from the Chief of Staff are now being fully implemented and active and reserve unit commanders are all working to improve the army and its mission capability. The necessity for doing so is amplified by the Volunteer Army concept and the need to attract and keep the best young people available to serve in our army and its reserve components.

United States Army Reserve commanders have accepted the challenge to be innovative and align their units to the new approach to problem solving and performance improvement. During the Annual Training period for units of 91st Division (Training) in the summer of 1971, "Rap Sessions" were held by the Assistant Division Commanders with separate groups of junior officers throughout the division. This was followed by similar sessions with battalion commanders. The junior officers were very frank in their discussions and suggestions for improving the reserve program. However, there appeared to be a general initial reluctance on the part of the young officers to believe that any real changes would result from their open discussions and training directives which were being published at that time. Many attendees at the sessions seemed to concentrate on suggesting changes in unrealistic policies such as the army haircut and beard policy, getting quarters allowances for single officers during annual training periods, obtaining better quarters, and similar items. In general the response to the sessions was good and several constructive ideas were presented to the senior division

representatives. However, there was a general attitude of, "Well, we told them what we thought, now let us see what they do about it."

Upon return to home station following annual training in 1971, training development and administration were decentralized down to the company level. Required training subjects were reduced to the essentials such as weapons qualification, protective mask use and care, security orientation of cleared personnel, command information topics, and other discipline related subjects. Maximum emphasis was placed upon becoming involved with the local community and related work in community projects developed and handled at the unit level. The decentralization resulted in several unique approaches to training among some of the young officers and enlisted personnel.<sup>3</sup> In one case it was advocated that only those things unit personnel wanted to do should be scheduled. In another case a committee voting approach was being developed, which in the end would have resulted in field training exercises based around a barbecue in a local park. Of course this type of approach received no support and similar approaches were stopped before they got beyond the expressed idea phase. The majority of the training ideas were good. With added command encouragement the training programs began to emerge as mission oriented unit plans which developed and maintained

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<sup>3</sup>Junior Officer and Enlisted Councils, 3d Brigade (AIT) 91st Division (Tng), San Jose: Personal Interviews, August-December 1971.

interest. In this one specific area the results have been gratifying to all concerned. There has been a marked improvement in training attendance, MOS test scores, and general attitudes. The changes made and the changes being made have not improved the reenlistment rate among the Division's units. Nor has the pay increases and changes caused present unit members to attempt to enlist their friends and associates in the units. There must be another problem that has not been identified and therefore cannot be solved. The theory has developed that the basic problem is one of communications. Personnel have not been made aware that they have a stake in the reserve program and in their community. While community help projects are well publicized and many people are involved in them, they are not really aware of the real purpose of the programs. There is a general feeling also that young people do not want to become involved with a military organization. Commanders and junior leaders at all levels of the commands are confronted with situations which do not reflect a deep commitment to the military and service to the country. How does one react to the young person who states that he wants no part of an organization which is lead by persons identified as war criminals by individuals of creditable credentials in the field? The young man quotes statements by persons he considers authorities, such as senators, representatives, and lawyers who have made these comments on television, in newspapers, books, and magazines. Mr. Telford Taylor in his recent book

advocates that President Johnson and General Westmoreland are war criminals within the context of the facts and circumstances that General Yamashita of Japan was a war criminal.<sup>4</sup> The young lad who points out that the military leaders in Viet Nam are stupid because some of the best reporters in the business say so, as do congressmen, presidential candidates, and government officials at various levels, is very difficult to convince that this is not so. The youth who responds thus to inquiries about joining or remaining with the military is adamant about his beliefs because he hears it from reliable authorities quoted in and on reliable sources. These youths cannot be convinced to read Charles B. Flood's book War of the Innocents. Flood, a reporter and writer himself, indicates that many of the reporters in Viet Nam are smart alecky, inattentative, are intent on insulting military briefers on camera, overlook good follow-up story material, and in general seem intent on damaging the United States position as much as they can.<sup>5</sup> The youths who have formed the opinions outlined will be hard to convince to join the reserves, even though they will not go to Viet Nam.

Our problem of communicating within a reserve environment is not so different from that within the active army. We are closer to the community of course because we live and work within the

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<sup>4</sup>Telford Taylor, Nuremberg and Viet Nam: An American Tragedy, (1970) pp. 179-181.

<sup>5</sup>Charles B. Flood, War of the Innocents (1971) pp. 113-115.

community 28 days out of each month. We must be prepared to respond to the ideas of the community of youth because therein lies our success or failure in maintaining unit strengths. We must be prepared to respond to adverse comments and criticisms resulting from some segments of public opinion developed against the military. However, we need not base our response solely on a defence of the country's established policy concerning Viet Nam. Our oath of office as officers and the oath of enlistment requires that we support the Constitution of the United States and obey the lawful orders of superior officers, which in effect requires our support of the President in those areas of operations directly related to our position within the reserve structure. We must base our response on the necessity of doing our job and doing it right regardless of what individual or group opinion may be concerning one of the policies of the government. Disagreement with Viet Nam policy does not permit reserve force members to forgo necessary actions to insure that men maintain their equipment in a readiness status, insure that they wear their uniforms in a proper manner, present a proper military appearance, and respond to orders with diligence and dispatch. It does not give the dissenter license to ignore the welfare of men and to abdicate their responsibilities in continuing the training mission with a maximum of effort and expenditure of time necessary to get the job done.

Discussions with young officer and enlisted councils initially

revealed a tendency to attempt to make reserve duty more interesting by making it entertaining. Few of the ideas coming from the councils had much merit. After patient and detailed discussions of the missions of units in the 91st Division (Training), and 3d Brigade oriented training the young members of the councils began to change their frame of reference. Written suggestions of the councils and training personnel from the units now show concerted effort to develop ideas and programs that do have meaningful application to the mission of the units. Guidelines published by brigade and battalions have required revision and clarification. Many meetings have been held to insure that all concerned were aware of the policies and nature of the training programs being developed. The exchange of ideas developed into one of the best examples of communications experienced by members of the units involved during their tenure in the reserve center. The input that did not meet mission oriented requirements was discarded but the reasons for nonacceptance were clearly stated and explained. The trite "It doesn't fit higher headquarters policy" or "It does not meet accepted army doctrine " was not used in any instance. For example, swimming does not appear to have much military application in ground<sup>6</sup> fighting army, but on closer examination does have application in river crossings and amphibious landing operations. Both of these fields are certainly mission oriented and the swimming is a good subject to cover during the basic combat training phase of a soldier's introduction to the army. The Basic Combat Training

Army Training Program now includes a block of instruction titled "Drownproofing." Instructors and drill sergeants in training units must be able to teach and assist in this subject which now finds itself in the training program of the 3d Brigade (AIT) 91st Division (Training). The training of swimming instructors and qualifying them for Red Cross certification so that they can use commercial pools in the area, also provides us with trained personnel who can participate in similar community help projects with young people. In 1969 when a soldier suggested swimming as a good subject for reserve duty training, he was castigated by the writer for suggesting such irrelevant things!

The reserve forces have lean days ahead as far as attaining personnel strengths are concerned. The recruiting programs generated by the reserve forces must be well organized and gauged to communicate effectively what is being offered and what is expected in return. False promises or glib discussion will not get the young people in nor will it retain them. Senior commanders must be available to guide, assist, and in some cases actually participate in the recruiting effort as well as the retention effort. The Commanding General, 91st Division (Training) has stated that he is not adverse to becoming engaged in the Division's recruiting effort and has made several contacts with potential recruits during his civilian pursuits. While the financial incentives hold some attraction, this alone will not retain or enlist personnel. Counselling and clear communications must be accomplished at all

levels and particularly from the senior commanders in the chain of command. Senior officers must be available at all time to emphasize the following points:

- a. Importance of the individual's contribution to the reserve program.
- b. The need for an individual's experience and background; and the contribution he can make to the unit, the overall program, and the community.
- c. Service to the nation is something in which an individual can be proud.
- d. A sense of pride, accomplishment, and service to the nation and community in the long run is more important than short term financial incentives.

Senior officers must communicate clearly and frequently, whether it is a training program, a recruiting program, or the personal problems of a member of the command. Above all, he must be communicative. One of the underlying points of contention in "rap sessions" and council meetings is that battalion and brigade commanders are not accessible during reserve duty training drills. Some of this can be attributed to the time lapse between drills, distance between reserve centers of units of the same organization, and the relative short duration of the actual drills. However, a bigger part of the problem may be the self-imposed or staff imposed isolation of the commander from the troops. In addition to being able to articulate his ideas and plans he should often place himself in an environment where he can do so without the stiff formality of a formation, audience, or confrontation.

While a period of time set aside for an "Open Door" policy is good, the commander should go to the troops frequently in their work areas and show concern for what they are doing and how they are going about doing it. The last point comes not from a book or a treatise, but from younger members of units during council meetings and discussions with the unit members on an informal basis. Genuine concern for what the soldier is doing with his time is of interest to the soldier; and the opportunity of talking to the commander so that ideas and opinions can be exchanged on a man-to-man basis frequently develops a feeling of belonging to individuals who otherwise are not attuned to the program. An excerpt from the Field Service Regulation of the Red Army for the year 1936 is appropriate today in any army, and particularly our own:

All sensible initiative of subordinates must be encouraged through all possible means. Sensible initiative is based upon an understanding of the commanders intentions.<sup>6</sup>

The problem in the Soviet Army in 1936 is no different than the US Army in 1972, that is one of relating the purpose of the senior commander to the company commander and men of the unit. Senior commanders<sup>MUST</sup> evaluate themselves to determine if they are really listening when young ideas are presented, new methods proposed, fresh approaches are suggested. All ideas and suggestions coming from the young unit members must be evaluated with a view toward

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<sup>6</sup>Edward M. Earle, "Lenin, Trotsky, Stalin," in Makers of Modern Strategy, ed. Edwin M. Earle, p. 359.

adoption if at all possible. If after careful consideration the offering is not practical or has no merit, then a careful clearly stated reason without denigration must be provided to the individual or group advancing the ideas or suggestion. Insure that the individual or group whose ideas are implemented get credit both verbally and in writing if feasible. Pass the good ideas along to other subordinate and higher units, and make sure the credit goes to the originator. Do not be afraid to experiment, within the limits of propriety and good judgement. Communicating the idea that the "Old Man" is willing to try out good ideas that may be a bit controversial "gets through" to the young man who believes that all senior commanders are arch conservatives who got to be senior commanders because they played it safe. This idea is prevalent among young members of some councils who expressed it during several personal discussions.

Among many of our young people there exists a feeling that patriotism is out moded. Many seniors feel that it is useless to appeal to a sense of patriotism among the young. This should not be so. President Kennedy's challenge to all of America, "Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country", did not have a caveat which excluded the young. The adverse material in the press and on television which denigrate the United States and its military establishment in general and the US Army in particular can be counteracted by honest communications with our young officers and enlisted men. We must have the courage

of our convictions and the will to express them in an environment susceptible to proper receipt, that of a proud young people with pride in their forefathers, their leaders, their country, themselves, and the job they are doing as members of the reserve and their civilian communities.

*Agnes W. Wager*

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