

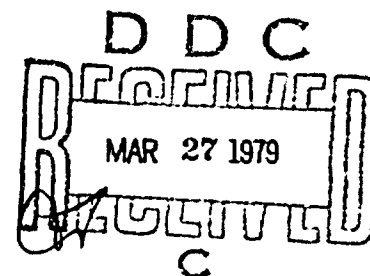
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FAMILY POLICY IN THE ARMED FORCES

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NAVAL MEDICAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT COMMAND

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FAMILY POLICY IN THE ARMED FORCES :
(AN ASSESSMENT)*

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Interview reprinted

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FAMILY POLICY IN THE ARMED FORCES

an assessment

DR. HAMILTON I. McCUBBIN

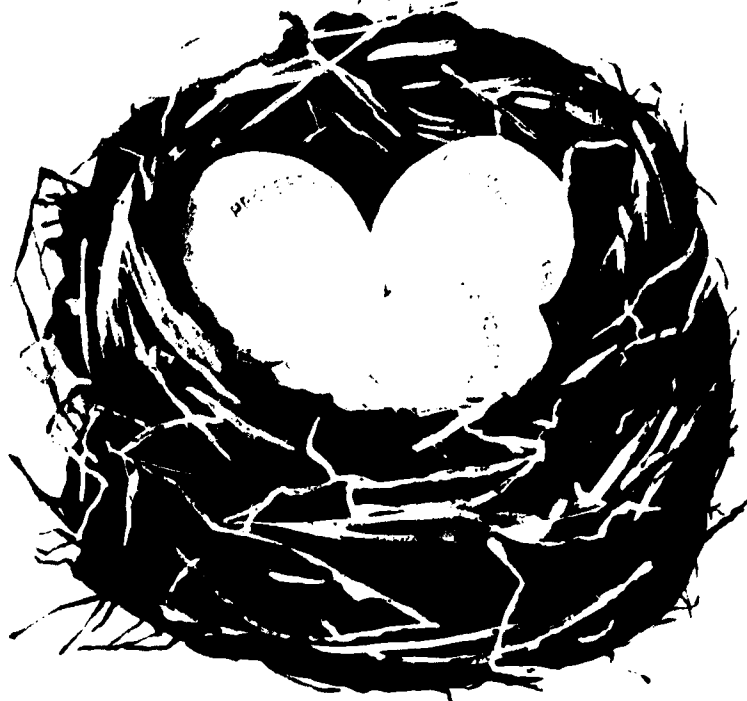
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DR. CHARLES C. MOSKOS, JR., in his application of developmental analysis to the military establishment in the United States today, concluded that "the overriding and clearly dominant trend in contemporary military organization is the decline of the institutional format and the corresponding ascendancy of the occupational model."¹ Such a conceptual shift implies not only organizational consequences such as trade unionism and increased use of civilian technicians but also a gradual yet distinct change in the role of the military family from that of a passive appendage to that of an active component of the military profession. Essentially, this shift departs from traditional military values and norms

underscoring a "calling," which overrides individual and family interest in favor of the higher goal of national defense. Historically, members of the military and their families have been guided by prin-



ciples of sacrifice and dedication to the organization; their efforts, in turn, have been partially repaid by an array of social and financial supports signifying the military's intent to "take care of its own."²

The emerging occupational model of military service, by contrast, is derived from a marketplace that provides monetary rewards for equivalent skills.³ Within this model, military personnel exert influence in the determination of salaries, working conditions, and benefits; first priority is clearly given to self and family interest rather than to that of the employing organization. The occupational model gives legitimacy and weight to the service members' individual and family needs, which are commonly suppressed within the institutional model. Implicitly, the occupational model stimulates the creation of programs and benefits more responsive to family needs and more equitable in view of the unique demands placed on the family by the employing military organization. Within this model, such presently unquestioned realities of military service as forced family relocations, separations, financial hardships, and fluctuating benefits may well become negotiable contractual issues between employee service members and the employer organization.

By viewing the changing military system in terms of this emerging occupational model, we can better understand and respond to the increasingly activist role of the military family and appreciate even more the family's role in the military mission. Within this context, military and national leaders face an important and difficult challenge: to make the family a primary and integral component of military policy. To meet this challenge effectively, policy-makers need to: (1) examine carefully and modify traditional assumptions regarding the military fam-

ily, (2) understand the dynamics of both the changing roles of women and the family within the military, (3) evaluate the impact of existing military policies on the health and stability of the family unit, and (4) assess the impact of projected policies on the family.

Assumptions Underlying Family Policy in the Military

Not since Reuben Hill's classic study of military families' experiencing war-induced separations and reunions, in which he appealed for a "national policy which deals with American families as a precious national resource," has any serious examination of social policy and the military family been attempted.⁴ No systematic, comprehensive effort has been made to study the host of assumptions, issues, and policies of the military system that impinges on the lives of families of career-motivated service members, including both officer and enlisted personnel from all branches of the armed forces, collectively referred to in this article as "the military family." It appears now that such an effort should be made in view of increasing evidence that the family *does* influence the well-being, performance, and retention of the service member and thus affects the overall functioning of the military system. The following assumptions appear to be rooted in the historical development of the military system. These assumptions, although slightly modified over time, remain basically unchanged, influential in determining policy, and perhaps not totally appropriate in the emerging occupational model of the military organization.

- The primary mission of the military is the defense of the United States; family concerns and needs are subordinate to this mission.



- The military profession is far more than a job; it is a way of life in which both service members and their families are expected to accept willingly such inherent stresses as extended family separations and frequent relocations.

- The traditional, supportive but subordinate role of the military wife, which has been strictly and comprehensively defined by the system, must be maintained.

- The tradition of the military to "care for its own" means that programs and benefits for family members are a reflection of the military's interest in them, but these benefits should not be considered guaranteed rights.

- Relative to civilian standards, military pay scales, allowances, and benefits are fair, generous, and conducive

to a comfortable standard of living for the family. The unique financial demands of military life, such as losses due to forced relocations, do not need to be calculated in the salary and benefits formula for service members.

- Except in extreme cases, family influences are not significant factors in the recruitment, health, performance, and retention of military career personnel.

- Because of immense logistical problems, family concerns cannot be considered in job assignments, career planning, relocations, and separations—except in rare hardship cases.

- Family problems are outside the domain of military policy. If they occur, they can and should be handled within the family unit, using limited help from existing military and community resources when necessary. Difficulties within a family, particularly deviant behavior of the spouse or children, reflect negatively on the service member.

- It is improper for the family to challenge the military system on policy issues.

- Any data needed to formulate and evaluate policies affecting the service member or the military family are readily available to policy-makers and are taken into account when making or changing policy.

A REVIEW of relevant research casts considerable doubt on the soundness of the preceding assumptions and suggests that policies based on them may be undesirably costly to the system.⁵ Although costs such as the impaired functioning of military wives, children, and families may defy exact computation, they are nonetheless real and are documented in the research literature.⁶ Additional

evidence for the need to re-examine family related policies in the military may be gained from a consideration of (1) the changing and increasingly important role of women in society, the military, and the family; (2) the changing role of the military family itself; and (3) the impact of certain military policies on family life.

*changing role of women
in society and the military*

Within the past few years, the women's liberation movement has provided the impetus for a re-evaluation of sex role definitions, policies, and attitudes that had previously limited the options available to women in our society.⁷ With varying degrees of speed and success, many of the economic, legal, educational, and occupational barriers commonly encountered by women are beginning to crumble. The institutions of marriage and the family, based on their traditional, strictly defined sex roles, are being critically examined by growing numbers of women and men alike. The women's movement may be viewed as a strong social force that legitimizes women's interests outside the home and, by extension, legitimizes men's interests inside the home.⁸ Stereotyped, traditional, and inflexible sex roles are gradually becoming modified, and the effects of these changes within both the family unit and the entire society are quite likely to be substantial.

In an effort to keep pace with the move toward equal opportunity for both sexes, the military establishment has recently begun to recruit more women and develop more diverse career options for them within the military services.⁹ However, the integration and full utilization of women in the armed forces continue to be limited by both legal restriction and societal resistance.¹⁰ Nevertheless, it may be

hypothesized that as women *do* become incorporated more fully into the military system, sex role stereotypes will tend to erode as men and women relate to one another in a variety of superior/equal/subordinate job relationships. It may also be hypothesized that service members will begin to relate to their spouses and children in a less sex-stereotyped manner. Double standards of sexual behavior will fade, and the military system itself will gradually cease to be a "cult of masculinity."

The changing roles of women in society, in the military, and in the family will probably soon have profound effects on the quality of military life. For policy-makers, a host of family-related issues come to mind and need to be addressed. What is the expected role of the "dependent" husband whose wife is a service member? Or that of the "dependent" military wife who has a career of her own? How will these changing situations affect military job assignments, family moves, and extended separations? Will members of military families become less dependent on the system, more assertive of their personal and family needs, and less willing to subordinate their lives to the orders of the military establishment? Are family problems and divorces in the military community likely to increase? How difficult will it be to recruit, socialize, and retain high-quality military personnel in light of these current and projected social changes?

changing role of the military family

Slowly and often painfully, many of today's military family members, especially wives, are breaking away from the bonds of military traditions and stereotyped sex roles to develop themselves more according to their own wishes and abilities. As they re-evaluate their educational,

occupational, and other life goals, a growing number of military wives are beginning to question the complete subordination of themselves to the needs of their husbands' military careers.

The contemporary egalitarian family pattern contrasts dramatically with the traditional companionate pattern in which the military community molded family life to the requirements of the profession.¹¹ Until fairly recently, the young serviceman often postponed marriage because of his low salary. When he did marry, the ceremony was often conducted with full military ritual, and the new bride was dramatically introduced into the closed community that was to be her entire life. Apparently, the strains of military life were less disruptive in earlier times because the family was enveloped in a strictly defined, internally consistent lifestyle.

The contemporary military family does not really fit into this traditional framework. Today, a service member often marries and begins his career simultaneously, and his spouse is far less likely to be actively socialized into the military community. The contemporary military family may also be a single-parent family, with either a serviceman or a servicewoman at its head. Pregnancy is now legally classified as a temporary disability, and the servicewoman may choose to remain on active duty. In other military families, both spouses are service members, or perhaps the wife is the service member and the husband the military dependent.

During the Vietnam War, the strength and changing role of the military family were dramatically underscored by the emergence of the National League of Families of American Prisoners of War and Missing in Action in Southeast Asia.¹² Composed of parents, wives, and other

relatives of American servicemen declared prisoners of war or missing in action, this highly visible and vocal group demanded that the government (1) provide families with a full accounting of their missing husbands and sons, (2) end the war as quickly as possible, and (3) pressure enemy governments to do the same and provide humane treatment to prisoners of war, as guaranteed under the Geneva Conventions. Backed by extensive publicity from the media, members of the National League of Families voiced their concerns and demands to the Secretary of Defense, members of Congress, and the President himself—as well as to representatives of the governments of North Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos. It is obvious that the efforts of the National League of Families had a significant impact on the military establishment and the federal government. Family services and benefits were developed; legal support and tax benefits were provided; and, perhaps most important, military families were represented, heard, and respected.¹³

Within the context of an emerging occupational model of military service, increasingly composed of married service members, several current and projected policies appear to have especially undesirable consequences for family life and, thus, for the morale, recruitment, and retention of high-quality personnel. For example, cutbacks in programs providing subsidized commissaries, low-cost housing, family health care at military facilities, and supplementary services through the Civilian Health and Medical Program of the Uniformed Services (CHAMPUS) are certain to affect negatively those family-oriented persons considering military service as a career.

Clearly, the conflict between the two institutions—the military and the family—over the same resource, the service

member, produces strains and dilemmas for all parties.¹⁴ The considerable power of the family in this conflict has been underscored in the retention studies of enlisted personnel and military academy graduates, which reveal that family influences, especially wives' attitudes toward the military, are crucial factors in determining whether service members remain in the military.¹⁵

impact of existing policies on family life

The military community of the future will probably be characterized by all volunteer personnel, increasing options for women (both as service members and military wives), diversity of family forms and lifestyles, less commitment to the traditional military way of life, and increased assertiveness of families regarding their needs and concerns. Since these trends are already observable, policy-makers would be wise to examine carefully the impact of certain existing policies on the lives of today's military families.

Service members and their families are routinely ordered to make a major change of residence approximately every two years. For all but the lowest grades of enlisted personnel, an allowance is provided for moving family members and household furnishings to the new location. Usually, however, this allowance is quite inadequate, and the family is forced to absorb the extra costs—along with totally nonreimbursable expenses such as losses incurred through buying and selling a home on short notice, temporary family lodging costs, extraordinary transportation outlays (e.g., automobile repairs), and replacement purchases of household furnishings at the new location.¹⁶ The financial stresses associated with forced relocation are serious and continual, especially for families of enlisted personnel; service members frequently try to

work on a second job to supplement their family income.

Besides the high financial costs of frequent relocations, military families must also pay the psychosocial costs associated with a nomadic lifestyle.¹⁷ Isolated from the traditional supports of extended family, close friends, and a stable community, members of military families, especially the wives and children, often experience emotional and interpersonal difficulties that seem to be related to their rootlessness. For military children, problems in school, with friends, and at home have been noted.¹⁸ For the military wives, frequent relocations make serious educational or career ambitions practically impossible.¹⁹ Although military families may certainly enjoy such benefits as travel, exposure to diverse lifestyles, and close camaraderie with other military families, the financial and sociopsychological difficulties involved in frequent, forced family relocations are surely serious enough to warrant closer policy analysis.²⁰

Family isolation. Because of national and international defense commitments, military families are sometimes relocated in foreign countries or in relatively remote areas within the United States. In such situations, families frequently live close together in enclaves of military quarters and may become isolated from the larger, nonmilitary society. Such "ghetto-ization," in turn, may foster a lack of family privacy, an extreme dependence on the military system, a parochial view of the world, and a distorted environment for children.²¹ Although some families may actually prefer these living arrangements because of safety, convenience, and economy, policy-makers would benefit from a thorough review of family adjustments and problems associated with this social-cultural isolation.²²

With American military personnel assigned to duty in many parts of the world, it is not surprising that a number of their spouses are foreign-born. In most military communities, a notable proportion of servicemen's wives are European, Japanese, Korean, or Vietnamese. Moreover, because Filipinos serve in the United States Navy, entire families may find themselves placed in a culture quite different from the one in which they were born. For these foreign-born spouses and families, the "double culture shock" of adjusting to military life as well as to American life is indeed difficult.²³

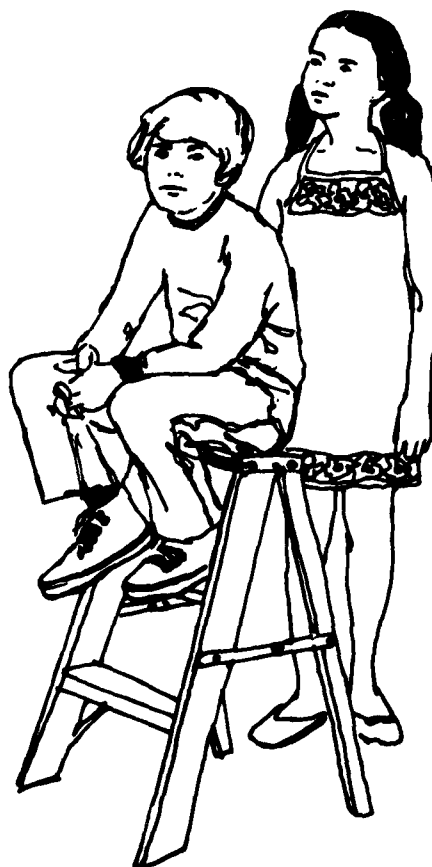
Although very little is actually known about these mixed-cultural families, it appears that they are often socially isolated from other military families, unsure of their English and reluctant to seek help for problems. Furthermore, it seems likely that their children may experience special difficulties because of their dual heritage and differing treatment by parents, teachers, and peers. If these somewhat isolated and vulnerable mixed-cultural families are to become fully integrated into the military community, policy-makers must initiate research documenting their specific needs so that appropriate services can be developed.

family separation and reunion

Another major stress experienced by military families is the periodic family separation required by the system's need for a number of its service members to serve aboard ships at sea, in hardship duty abroad, on special assignments, or in actual combat. Although the nature, frequency, and length are variable, family separations share many similarities in the dramatic role shifts and conflicts found in the husband-wife and parent-child relationships during the actual separation and the subsequent reunion.²⁴

The impact of father absence on children's adjustment is highly complex and related to a host of intervening variables, such as nature of separation (wartime or peacetime, short or long), age and sex of child, attitude of mother toward the separation, quality of mother-father-child relationships, family's prior separations, and availability of father surrogates during the separation.²⁵ Despite differences in circumstances and coping responses, however, it appears that the stresses brought about by forced family separations are considerable for military children.

Although today's military families may



display remarkable resourcefulness and resilience in adapting to the strains of separation and reunion, the longitudinal effects of family functioning under these stresses have only recently begun to be studied.²⁶ How do family separations and associated problems affect the health and performance of service members? How might family members be better prepared for required separations? What is the feasibility of making changes in the nature of separations—e.g., shorter duration, more opportunity for rest and recuperation leave with families, improved planning of separations in careers, and more meaningful family support services during separation? Should the military system actively encourage wives to develop their own interests, skills, and independence so that they may become more confident and effective co-leaders of their families? If so, how would this affect family stability?

War and family life. Coupled with the stresses of family separation, the fear and reality of wartime injury, captivity, and death produce a number of marital and family difficulties, which have been documented in studies of families during World War II and the Vietnam War.²⁷ The impact of war and family separation on children's emotional and social development has also been examined during World War II, the Vietnam War, and the recent Israeli-Arab conflicts.²⁸ While the substantial stresses of war, separation, and reunion may disturb even the most stable of families, military families have generally been discouraged from admitting the existence of problems and seeking help. The experiences of the families of returned prisoners of war and men declared missing in action underscore the need to research key issues related to wartime stresses and to formulate appropriate policy responses.

Legitimacy of Family Policy in the Military

Although the nature and intensity of these family stresses may vary, the authors contend that they are substantial, that they detract from the performance of service members, and that they should be examined much more carefully by military policy-makers. This review of research findings lends legitimacy to the next logical and more complex issue: should family considerations receive higher priority than they now receive, and should they become an integral part of the military's policy-making process?

The traditional viewpoint has been that increased efforts by the military system to help meet its families' psychosocial and financial needs are inappropriate, impractical, and unnecessary considering the existence of federal, state, and local assistance programs. Only in cases of extreme family hardship, it has been argued, should the military system intervene; even then, its programs and services should be strictly limited.

In contrast, the authors maintain that military families, while certainly sharing some problems with their civilian counterparts, are subjected to unique stresses and problems that are not always amenable to help from existing federal, state, and local programs and that responsibility for developing sound policies to minimize and alleviate these stresses lies clearly within the military system itself. If the goal of a high-quality all-volunteer force is to be realized, the system cannot ignore the potent influence of the family on the recruitment, performance, and retention of military personnel.

Within both the larger American society and the military system within it, there is ample evidence documenting the need to incorporate the significant role of the

family into public policy review and development. Major efforts have recently been directed in Congress, toward the improvement of family health and stability.²⁹ Family policy specialists are being trained to analyze the impact of projected public and private policies on families and to assist in developing innovative and sound family-related policies.³⁰ Within the military, the limited but increasing body of research about the military family and women service members heralds a positive trend toward clarifying the close relationships among legislation, military policy, and the family.³¹

Re-evaluation of Assumptions

Given the needs of the present military system and those of its families, how much weight can be given realistically to family considerations in the policy-making process? Because the family is playing an increasingly important role in the emerging occupational model of the armed services, the authors contend that family issues must be given high priority in the development of both short- and long-term military policies.

Clearly the traditional assumptions of military policy-makers, and the policies resulting from these assumptions, have not reflected fully the important roles and needs of the contemporary military family. In contrast to those traditional but no longer appropriate assumptions, the authors offer the following assumptions for consideration by policy-makers:

- The health and stability of service members and their families are vital to the accomplishment of the primary military mission of national defense.

- The implementation of military policies and the realization of desired

goals are greatly facilitated if family needs and the projected impact of specific policies on families become integral parts of the decision-making process.

- To attain and maintain a high level of personnel effectiveness, military policies regarding the recruitment, health, performance, and retention of service members must reflect a positive emphasis on the supportive role of the family.

- Policies regarding pay scales, allowances, and benefits must take into account the financial and psychosocial hardships of military life and their impact on family members.

- Military-sponsored medical, financial, and social service programs and benefits must be considered guaranteed rights of the service member's family in partial compensation for the stresses inherent in military life.

- To the greatest possible extent, family considerations should be incorporated into personnel policies regarding duty assignment, relocation, separation, and career planning.

- Family problems are not outside the domain of military policy; coordinated services within the military system and effective linkages to civilian resources must be mobilized to offer appropriate preventive and treatment programs for family problems.

- Family members have the right and responsibility to challenge, seek clarification of, and attempt to change policies that they feel undermine family stability.

- Systematic investigations of the functioning, problems, and needs of the military family are the responsibility of policy-makers; knowledge derived from such studies is an essential component of policy-making and policy-review processes.

These revised assumptions are based on

the premise that it is time for the military system to recognize the family as a key factor in the formulation and assessment of military policy. Because precise or coherent policy is far better than ambiguous or fragmented policy, the authors propose the establishment of a family impact commission or task force within the military's policy-making organization.³² This concept of a commission is an adaptation of existing national and international programs, which review policy and develop impact statements reflecting the present and projected consequences to the family of existing and proposed public policies. Nations such as Austria and Sweden, for example, have explicit family commissions that emphasize the analysis and improvement of governmental actions related to family life.³³

The proposed military-sponsored commission would focus on policy analysis

and the formulation of family impact statements comparable to the existing environmental impact statements mandated in the U.S. 1971 Environmental Policy Act.³⁴ Simply stated, the ultimate goal of the commission would be the improvement of military family life through policy-making and review. Following Sheila Kamerman's guidelines for the development of a family impact statement, the commission would adopt these immediate goals: (1) analysis and clarification of the consequences of military policies for families, (2) direct communication of knowledge and research findings to policy-makers, and (3) assistance in modifying existing policies and developing new ones that would contribute to family health and stability.³⁵

TRADITIONAL military assumptions and policies concerning the families of service members must be revised in light of evidence which underscores: (1) the significant influence of families on per-



sonnel performance, job satisfaction, and retention; (2) the considerable stresses inherent in military family life; and (3) the changing and increasingly assertive roles of women and families within the military system.

Through the creation of a family impact commission within the military, systematic policy analyses and recommendations could be carried out most effectively. The authors contend that sound policies concerning the military family would improve the service member's performance, provide effective recruit-

ment and retention incentives, promote necessary family stability, and facilitate the overall mission accomplishment of the military system. Through the development of such policies, the family and the military system might reach a more mutually satisfying future, as envisioned by Reuben Hill: "...Two institutions [which] co-exist to achieve a level of collaboration that is more rewarding than what is seen by some as the present state of antagonistic cooperation."³⁶

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and their families. Support for a major review of policies affecting military families is presented through a discussion of the changing role of women and of the military family, and through a discussion of the impact of existing policies upon family life in the areas of family relocation, family isolation, family separation and war and family life. This emphasis upon policy and family life is in keeping with the growing national interest in the identification and change in arbitrary policies that place hardships on families and children and in the desire to develop policies that strengthen families.

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