

A Society of Fighting Fools and Thinking Cowards

By JAMES BOND STOCKDALE

The nation that will insist on drawing a broad line of demarcation between the fighting man and the thinking man is liable to find its fighting done by fools and its thinking done by cowards.

—Sir William Francis Butler

With the advent of the All-Volunteer Force, the armed services entered into a high-rolling game of barter and exchange for the cream of this nation's youth, banking on the supposition that they could compete with the civilian job market in attracting and retaining the highest caliber talent. However, with the military recruitment process now underpinned by a marketplace business ethic, the true meaning of service somehow got left out of the equation.

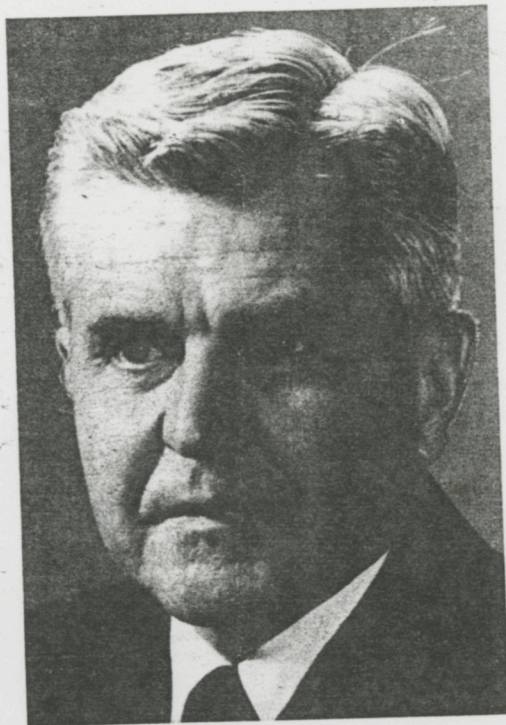
That a program that relies on enticements such as choice of duty station, delayed entry, the promise of specialized training, educational credits and higher salaries should automatically accrue those drives that have kept this nation free for the past 200 years, namely "duty, honor and country," has never tracked. The businesslike style of our recruiting has affected the outlook and perspective of both potential recruits and those already serving; for many, time in the armed services is simply another job. The Madison Avenue mentality is aiming us toward that bifurcated society of fighting fools and thinking cowards.

Yet history has shown that mercenaries do not win wars or maintain deterrence. People committed to their country and bound by a common duty do so. An injection of the non-quantifiable factors that encourage people to serve in the military is overdue, regardless of the future of the All-Volunteer Force.

Why won't Uncle Sam's enticement system work? Because the application of rational business concepts to the profession of arms runs contrary to the nature of war; rejects the strong probability of future war; ignores the fact that people, not machines or computers, will win future wars; and disregards the historic promise of freedom on which this nation was founded. The clear and simple rational model never captures the scope of human predicament. Alfred North Whitehead was right when he said, "There is a danger in clarity, the danger of overlooking the subtleties of truth."

Adapting the business approach to the military profession has serious drawbacks — too many in uniform have caught the trendy habit of looking out for No. 1, of asking "What's in it for me?" This type of self-centered careerism may be *de rigueur* on Wall Street but is the antithesis of the service ethic. War is a unique human enterprise that cannot be managed on the margin the way bureaucrats haggle over budget apportionments. The fact that all but 268 years in the past 4000 have seen this planet enduring the blight of war is a grim reminder that Vietnam was not an inoculation that would free us from future conflicts any more than was the "war to end all wars" more than a temporary placebo.

For those who believe that we've seen our last war, I



U.S. Navy Photo

STOCKDALE

commend that application of the logic of the 17th century philosopher Blaise Pascal, who advised that in matters of great import, one should choose that outcome by which he'd stand to lose the least in case he's wrong. I don't think that it's too whimsical or too insensitive to apply Pascal's logic to the prime dilemma of our age — the occurrence or non-occurrence of global war in the next decade or two. I think Pascal would agree that the smart wager is that some sort of global conflict will occur.

Despite the "Star Wars" technology of our weapons systems, the next war will be won by people. Sure, they will have very sophisticated arms, computers and the like, but I'm confident that there will be many times when victory or defeat will rest on the ability of the commander on scene to lead, motivate and inspire. I came home from Hanoi after years of listening to sophisticated weaponry pop and crackle in the big world outside the prison, con-

vinced that it is not lasers but bayonets that will determine the course of history for years to come. I fear that our frenetic efforts to man the services fail to recognize this possibility. What our military needs is men and women whose sense of honor allows them to make do with less, and whose sense of country transcends ethnic or family allegiance. Just how can these people be attracted to the military when service demand requires not only meeting standards far above those of the common citizenry but also long hours, frequent separation, financial hardship and little recognition?

• First, by telling it like it is. Make it clear that there is a very real possibility that there will be combat, perhaps in a foreign country with which we have no clear ties. People, civilian as well as military, may be wounded or killed. Prisoners will likely be isolated and tortured. Moreover, when the chips are down there can be no more carrot and stick — no enticements, no perquisites, no easy way to opt out. Our warriors must rely on themselves and their fellow Americans. Looking out for No. 1 loses its validity very quickly when everyone is looking over the precipice, staring at the bottom of the barrel, together.

• Second, by appealing to that better man or woman who lives inside every person. Low-order enticements are short term and cannot match the higher order commitment to duty and country. Contemplation during my years in solitary confinement led me to conclude that a good life is one that accumulates high-quality memories. Can memories of comfort and a workaday life, even a workaday life spiced with financial coups, compete with memories of bold strokes of service which one knows in his gut really mattered in the course of history? For what, in his old age, would one trade his lifetime memories of uplifting comradeship in times of shared danger? For what, in his old age, would one trade that flush of comfort in knowing that he has paid his dues as he listens to the band strike up the National Anthem?

• Third, by underscoring the historic roots of this nation's freedom. We've fought wars around the globe in freedom's name and have paid a terrible price for our most fundamental national belief. All must be clear on the fact that those in uniform may someday sacrifice their lives for this country and the freedom for which it stands.

The long-term health of our nation depends to a great extent on the ability of our armed forces. Those in uniform are the ones who guard the passes and protect the ramparts. Let's not stoop to marketplace tactics to fill our ranks. We owe to those who will don American military uniforms the untainted pride of service to their nation and the respect of a thankful citizenry.

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