Where Have You Gone, Vinegar Joe?

Thoughts on the Profession of Arms

by Samuel Hux (March 2016)

Only a very few years ago, from the time just after 9/11—I am confident of this generalization—there was no institution in the United States that enjoyed the nation's respect to the degree that the American military did. Not a smidgin of the irony that the political class for instance, or the press for another, unintentionally invited. I can even recall hardened journalists and other unsentimental types confessing they felt they had missed something in their lives by never having been in uniform, never having experienced the *profession of arms*. Now? 2016? Well, that question is what drives these almost-but-not-quite random, but certainly serpentine, thoughts. Simon and Garfunkel sang "Where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio, a nation turns its lonely eyes to you," but I'm not sure this nation longs for the *military* greats of the past.

Morris Janowitz concluded his classic study *The Professional Soldier* in 1960 with the hope and advice that we would evolve a "constabulary" military. "The military establishment becomes a constabulary force when it is continuously prepared to act, committed to the minimum use of force, and seeks viable international relations, rather than victory, because it has incorporated a protective military posture." This was meant as a feasible alternative to the total-mobilization and total-victory concept necessary in World War II. But it was hardly pacific, to say the least, for "The constabulary force concept encompasses the entire range of military power and organization. At the upper end are the weapons of mass destruction; those of flexible and specialized capacity are at the lower end, including the specialists in military aid programs, in para-military operations, in guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare." 1960. Is a constabulary in fact what we have now going on towards two decades in the 21st century? Is it what we've had most of the time since 1960? Assuming a qualified and formal Yes, the next question is: Has the one we've had been worth it, did it work, does it? South Vietnam did not give us good marks at "the lower end." Nor did the short-of-nuclear use of "the upper end" against

North Vietnam. And since?

The fact is: before the events succeeding the 9/11 destructions revealed that the U.S. military had become an overpowering war machine, the American armed forces were just not that impressive. Grenada couldn't be taken seriously. I doubt that even the cheerleaders of that game took it so, or the interception soon after of an Egyptian airliner and brief capture of terrorists would not have been greeted with cries of (in effect) "At last we've won one!" The fiasco in the Iranian desert is embarrassing to recall. How did that one happen? I think I'd better back up a bit.

The marginalization of the *distinctive military mentality* (of which I have a great deal more to say eventually) is a complicated affair. Two quite opposite impulses in our time have conspired in that single result. Technology and, call it, a variety of "humanism."

It was only to be expected that in a military that would become increasingly technologically sophisticated, where the sabre would be no more than a parade-ground prop, the technician would reign—not only at the level of Technician First Class (what used to be a Sergeant) but among the brass. Of course military academy graduates were traditionally engineers, but that was no more than a college major, about as significant in most cases as some civilian with a degree in English selling insurance. An "engineer" like George Patton is clearly not what we mean when we speak of the technician. Nor should technology be understood only in the engineering sense, but as applied social science as well. In a large organization such as Army, Navy, or Air Force, social science as institutional analysis and managerial technique would be as important as the technological sophistication required to handle complex weapons systems and such. The spirited craziness of someone like Patton may have been admired years before—and there will be no movie made about General Alexander Haig—but it surely came to be judged as out of place.

It was probably not inevitable, but understandable nonetheless, that civilian humanistic concerns would work toward the "demotion" of the distinctive military mind. There were no laws passed, no organized efforts on the part of civilians to screen corps applicants—but a military establishment dependent on allocations, and sensitive like a good social science department to public moods, would have to know what was approved and what wasn't. And while the

American public approves a loony loaded-pistol like George Custer when it wants to be entertained, it generally can distinguish historical romance from contemporary reality, and war is too important to be. . . . The Vietnam debacle did not help matters (or rather did, if one possessed an anti-military perspective, one of the prominent diseases of the '60s and '70s), making the military mind seem even less desirable. That was the result, in spite of the fact that that show was run not by the old-fashioned soldierly type but by the civilianized military manager who had superseded him.

For these reasons I cannot buy in its entirety Arthur T. Hadley's "Great Divorce" thesis from *The Straw Giant* in 1986: "the less-than-amicable separation of the military from the political and intellectual elite of the country." For the military had been imitating the elites to a fare thee well. I agree however that "Whole segments of our society. . . have regarded the military as an unwanted stepchild." Citizens did not trust what they judged to be the prototypical soldier; but that was because they misjudged the military they had, their judgments far out of date. The victory of managerialism had not erased certain popular images. And of course the military of the time, while making the old rambunctious heroic fighter pretty much an anachronism, yet insisted sometimes on singing his virtues, just as motorized units are often called "cavalry." And without enormous military co-operation a movie like the Paramount extravaganza of 1986, *Top Gun*, could not have been made: in which a hotshot fighter pilot (Tom Cruise) called "Maverick" was both celebrated and chastised for the qualities of his name, as the screenwriter both had his Coors and drank it.

But if you wouldn't want to give someone like Patton too free a hand for fear he'd go too far, his historical replacement often turned out—even with a limited objective—to be less than inspiring. The military no longer seemed to be a breeding ground for *statesmen,* no more than you'd expect an engineering firm to be, so the days of a George Marshall or a Dwight Eisenhower were pretty much over. The managerial technocrats who replaced the Pattons were controlled by managerial technocrats who outranked them. The old anarchist Errico Malatesta was right about the difference between *government*, "delegation of power," and *administration*, "delegation of work." Decision-making vs. managing. The trouble is, however, that managers don't like merely to manage, prefer to govern; and in a military *sans* Marshalls they did. But the manager of exalted ambition usually

doesn’t govern any better than he manages. An interloper in the councils of power, although legally there where he doesn’t fit by virtue, he tends to be jealous and distrustful of other interlopers. This ethos obtains not only among those managers who have achieved their ambitions of governance—as in Joint Chiefs—but also among those managers stuck down the chain of command at the level of mere management. One way to protect one’s place and prerogatives is not to communicate, or not too clearly (a sort of territorial imperative functioning through secretiveness), except in so far as one communicates in the spirit of “gi’ me mine.” But one who doesn’t communicate can no more manage effectively than govern. So. . . .

An instance of managers-become-governors communicating in the spirit of “gi’ me mine” was the decision-making surrounding the 1986 Libyan air strikes. This mustn’t be a Navy show alone; we in the Air Force must have a part as well. Inter-service rivalry often expressed itself, ironically, in ostensible inter-service co-operation. Thus: a decision which not only caused needless diplomatic embarrassment in relation to Britain and France—the matter of Air Force “overflights,” which naval sorties from Mediterranean-based aircraft carriers would have avoided—but also complicated the logistics of the mission and compromised its chances of total success.

A more dramatic, and truly disgraceful and disgusting, instance of secretiveness and “gi’ me mine” at the levels of both managerial misgovernance and managerial mismanagement was the Iranian desert fiasco in 1980, the attempt to free hostages held by the Ayatollah and his thugs. The details (see Hadley’s *The Straw Giant*) would be comical were they not so tragically ridiculous.

Since the helicopters carrying commandos would be conveyed to Iranian proximity by sea and the Navy insisted only Navy pilots would be welcome aboard, the Atlantic Fleet originally supplied the chopper pilots. But since the Atlantic commander was not told the nature and gravity of the mission, he sent not the best but what he preferred to spare. Some of these classical “volunteers” refused when enlightened about the mission and some didn’t pass muster. So the Marine Corps (a Navy department after all) was told to select last-minute volunteers. And this made a nice spread to boot, along with Navy ships, Air Force transport planes, and Army commandos.

The fact that the Marine pilots were neither familiar with these helicopters nor

trained for such a mission, while the Air Force had available over a hundred pilots who were Vietnam veterans with years of training in rescue, was less important than the balanced ticket. C.I.A. weather reports didn't reach the chopper pilots, who flew into sandstorms they could have avoided by elevating 400 feet. One turned back. Another misread the instrument panels of the unfamiliar craft and ditched. Etc. Etc. And the rest we know.

Recalling my own brief military experience, I try to recall the true soldierly type in the flesh. Frankly I remember him with sergeant's stripes. And one of the shocks of reading Janowitz is that the character of the title, *The Professional Soldier*, is more or less interchangeable with "the officer." That's part, I think, of a problem. *Professional* as in physician, lawyer, engineer: an achieved level of occupational respectability.

The true soldierly type. . . . No, let us be candid. The *Warrior* is not some recondite characterization. We suspect we know what he's like—and that's why so many fear him. He may have imagination, he may be brave—both virtues. Although he does not have to be an idiot like Custer (without the caution that comes with that real imagination which enables one to judge risks), the warrior *is* excited by danger. That's not incidental for him. For not only is courting danger or its possibility his occupational choice, it's vital to his sense of self. He's a lucky man in this respect. Most people do not realize themselves in their jobs: for most the self is something that comes to life in leisure and is put on hold at work. But he, like a professional criminal, suffers no alienation between life and livelihood. And I think that some fear him not only because he is. . . well, fearsome; but because if we know history we think we have an unfortunate experience of him when his source of luck, war, is taken away.

"How y' gonna keep 'em down on the farm after they've seen Paree?" was an innocent enough song. But "How are you going to keep them out of the *Freikorps* after they've been in the trenches?" was a serious question in post-World War I Germany. Unemployment, sense of betrayal, and general social dislocation indeed account for many veterans who could not readjust. But there was also what you might call the Ernst Röhm phenomenon: after the "socialism of the trenches," clerking didn't measure up to all that marching about with those para-military groups that bred the Nazi SA and SS did. That is, there is the suspicion of something potentially *fascistic* about the warrior—and although I am not a man of the Left, where most suspicions about the military breed and rage, I am not

prepared to dismiss the *possibility*. But the *probability* is another matter. Röhm and his ilk were not *warriors;* they only hungered—safely in truncheon-bearing numbers—for the warrior's panache. To assume a native affinity between the warrior and the fascist mentality is to pay fascism a compliment it seems to me. General Sepp Dietrich was a *real* warrior, being Nazi and Waffen-SS; Colonel Frank Merrill of "Merrill's Marauders" only incidentally had a war to fight. This is balderdash.

But, crypto-fascist or no, the warrior isn't necessarily a very attractive personality. My historical example of Merrill, and others I could mention, and will, may transcend type. As did, say, Bibi's older brother Jonathan Netanyahu of Entebbe fame. That's a nice thought. But Israel is another place, another experience.

Give or take a few exceptions, the Israeli soldier is not an unattractive compulsive. We may even have a popular image of him (or her!) anxious to get back to the law texts or archeological digs. Nonetheless, decades of a state of war and immediate requirements of defense make military service as "normal" as school, college, or civilian job, so that even those of the very best intellect and imagination might judge a military career not an odd way to spend a life. The simple laws of average dictate that in perforce the smartest army in the world there will be a plentiful supply of imagination that can be turned to any task. And the immediacy of the threats the Israelis face means that no matter how hi-tech their systems may be in this modern and up-to-date army the military manager is not going to render the imaginative warrior passé. The temptations of managerialism are more persuasive when you're at some comfortable distance from your enemies and things don't seem so consistently so serious. With all this you have a prescription for an extraordinarily flexible and imaginative soldiery. Well worth remembering in the U.S. as our enemies no longer seem to be at much of a distance after all.

Civilians have often scoffed at the military mind even when not thinking it somehow fascistic, associating it with psychotic or mercenary bellicosity. Like most professions, that of arms has always had its rituals which seem odd to the outsider, just a little silly. Which judgment could in reverse engender in the insider, the soldier, a degree of condescension and sometimes hostility toward the "uninitiated." I gather this is partly what is meant by a military caste.

Warring, for some, has always been fun, as Byron Farwell's *Eminent Victorian Soldiers* reminds—"indescribably exciting," as one of his eminents, General Charles "Chinese" Gordon, put it. The professional of arms was indeed often an odd bird, the greatest often the oddest. Gordon. Or another Brit, General Orde Wingate, famed for his Chindits in Burma in 1943-44, his Gideon Force of guerrillas in Ethiopia in 1940, and for whom Israeli villages are named in recognition of his Night Squads of British regulars and Haganah counter-attacking Arab terrorists in 1938. The oddest may have been Wingate's nominal commander in Asia, General Joseph W. Stilwell, "Vinegar Joe." Those of my generation will have childhood memories of newsreels and photos from CBI ("China-Burma-India"): Uncle Joe lean and taut, in un-regulation dress, general's stars missing, World War I campaign hat above atrocious haircut and hawk nose with steel-frame combat glasses. A general pacing, literally, the walk out of Burma in 1942, and appearing where a major shouldn't be during the reconquest. Readers of Barbara Tuchman (*Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911-1945*), Theodore H. White (*In Search of History*), and *The Stilwell Papers* edited by White, will know a caustic and cranky man, a hater of horses and all cavalry claptrap, a "soldier's soldier" of extraordinary courage even beyond what the media could document; and will know a near tragic story of a certifiable military genius spending his talents trying to pump will into "Peanut," as he called Chiang Kai-shek. Those readers will also know a private familiar essayist as well as a published infantry theorist; a man of wide culture fluent in French, Spanish, and Mandarin; a rock-ribbed Republican by temperament who yet wondered if property, "Often an accident," wasn't foreign to the democratic spirit. A tangle of anomalies.

Something "attractive" about these old warriors, remarkable men by any measure. Wingate was often called a visionary, and he had the qualities of absolute conviction and egocentricity we associate with the type. But, strangely, he *was*: at least he predicted in the '30s the major global strategic turns of the World War to come and the shape of his own career within them. And although no leftist, he was a "premature anti-fascist" and a Gentile Zionist who felt that one war aim had to be to "redeem our promises to Jewry"—not a pattern of mind you associate with the British officer corps.

Even had there been no tragic death in Khartoum, Gordon would still have a firm place in history, not least for his Nile explorations and his campaign against

slavery in the Sudan, and because he's a kind of metaphor, gathering into one complex personality the signal characteristics of the Victorian eccentric. Winston Churchill's judgment that a world with no place for Gordon is a poorer world is surely a forgivable sort of romanticism.

I've already said enough about Stilwell to suggest he was no ordinary general or man. But it's worth noting that George Marshall recommended *Lieutenant Colonel* Stilwell as "qualified for any command in peace or war," "a genius for instruction," and "exceptionally brilliant and cultured"—the point being that it's hard to imagine intellectual culture as a strong consideration for your garden-variety military nabobs.

Of course any military has a certain respect for mental endowment, the way any engineering firm must, and certain with-it cultural priorities, with stress seminars and such probably as good as in any self-respecting corporation. But general culture is something else. I'm certainly not suggesting that culture makes one a better warrior, only that a person of culture is more likely to have a fertile imagination than the manager-technocrat is. If you'll take my meaning, there was something "Israeli" about Stilwell: it's not difficult to imagine him as Professor of Oriental Studies at Harvard between stints of command, instead of instructor of French, Spanish, history, and tactics at West Point.

Or put it this way. Gordon, Wingate, and Stilwell were "literary" warriors. By which I mean that one is more likely to find their primitive prototype in epic and saga. Odysseus was a lover of trouble (that's what his name means), but Homer makes it clear he had immense curiosity, loved to hear or tell a good story, and was always solicitous of the bards. The heroes of Icelandic saga were ferocious warriors, but also poets and lawgivers. I grasp the extremeness of these allusions. But it's a tactic to suggest how extreme it would be to expect an officer corps of Stilwells. Might have a better chance of finding Prester John.

I confess to a smidgin of romanticism about soldiering—although this teenage soldier boy resisted the strong temptation to re-enlist. The first hard-cover book I ever bought with my allowance was Colonel Robert L. Scott's *God Is My Co-Pilot*, about Claire Chennault's Flying Tigers under contract to the Chinese Nationalists. Years ago in Spain I struck up a friendship with a Hungarian exile, a teenage freedom fighter in '56, who was "waiting for a job." My

sabbatical up, I was tempted (in theory and easy day-dreaming) to ask if I might tag along. The last I heard of him, years later, was an item in the *New York Times:* abortive coup; boatload of mercenaries captured off West African coast.

There was obviously something of the temperamental mercenary about Gordon ("Chinese" for his command of the Ching army during the Taiping Rebellion), whom I first met in the original *Eminent Victorians*, Lytton Strachey's, and in Alan Moorehead's *The White Nile,* before his apotheosis as Charlton Heston. And there was about Wingate too, with all his T.E. Lawrentian strangeness, and for all his Bible thumping (no Anglican, he was a congregant with the Plymouth Brethren), and in spite of the fact that his unorthodox commands were always up-and-up legitimate. And strange to say there was about Stilwell too.

He was a "mercenary" in superficial circumstance; that is, he was so often during his career on loan to someone or other. As a lieutenant in 1907 he worked directly for the U.S. government on a topographical survey of Guatemala. During World War I he was detached to the French. In 1921 as a major he was seconded to the International Famine Relief Committee as chief engineer for road-building in Shansi province, China. And when he gained his greatest fame, and fourth star, he was in fact Chief of Staff of Chinese Nationalist forces.

But obviously I'm not referring just to superficial circumstance, and by *mercenary* I do not mean the normal usage: Stilwell like Wingate never took a dime. *Temperamental* is the adjective I've used.

Michael Walzer in *Just and Unjust Wars* makes some valuable distinctions between mercenaries. There were those who were the norm for long periods of military history without conscript or standing armies, such as the *condottieri* of Renaissance Italy. Since they were selling their services but not their hearts they often had a vested interest in limiting the degrees of danger to themselves. Then there are a different sort, less fortunate and less driven by personal volition, "desperately impoverished men, who can find no other way of feeding themselves and their families except by signing up." (Although admittedly this could describe many of the enlisted ranks of regular armies also.) Then there are other professionals who don't sell their services "on the open market" but "serve only their own prince or people and, though they may earn their bread by soldiering, disdain the name of mercenary." This pro is "like a doctor who risks his life during an epidemic, using professional skills

he chose to acquire but whose acquisition is not a sign that he hopes for epidemics."

I'm not sure that Stilwell would have agreed that this sort of pro does not hope for "epidemics." There is his partly ironic observation that "It is common knowledge that an Army officer has a one-track mind, that he is personally interested in stirring up wars so that he can get promoted and be decorated." But I'm sure that Stilwell and Wingate would have "disdain[ed] the name of mercenary," although Gordon could not have with any consistency except the rare times he served his "own prince or people." Service of prince or people would seem to imply a primary patriotic motivation. But my bringing up the matter of the mercenary in the first place is a tactic to suggest that patriotism is no necessary and inherent virtue of the warrior. They also serve who only enjoy the serving itself—which many more than Gordon have found "indescribably exciting." I just recently had a conversation with a retired army officer who'd been paratrooper, Ranger, Green Beret, and had even trained Navy-style in under-water demolition in the Philippines: "I wish I were still young enough; I loved every single minute of it."

An odd truth about Wingate was that although he served national policy, he had a greater attachment to his own universal visions of Biblical justice than to Britain, and was emotionally committed to British policy only to the degree it squared with his visions. For one instance, his Plymouth Brethren style love of Jews as the Old Testament descendants was stronger than any love for his own—the absence of which some of his colleagues remarked upon.

I'm sure Gordon would have affirmed his love of Britain, even when escaping it. But Moorehead has an intriguing observation which seems fairly pointed. After a comment on Gordon's iconoclasm and individuality: "He can switch his loyalties in twenty different directions and still he seems to us to be utterly loyal to the fundamentals of his own nature and to mankind." And clearly his career said: "If Britain is right, all right; but if she's not. . . ." If you could ask Gladstone. . . .

Stilwell was the more conventionally patriotic: he simply does not seem to have thought much about it, as if to say, what's the big deal? A remark William Styron once made of General Douglas McArthur—he loved his country so much he chose to remain thirteen straight years away from it—might be applied, with a

numerical adjustment, to Stilwell. And if that observation can be multiply ironic, it is still the case that patriotism was not one of his many intellectual passions. And when you find an apparently xenophobic remark (habit of the patriot of scoundrel variety) it's insignificant in itself: Frogs and Squareheads lining up with the rich, the polo players, cavalry officers, or whoever was within range during occasional bouts of misanthropy.

I have a suspicion that if three officer candidates had characteristics identifiable as Stilwellian, Wingatean, or Gordonian—but not clearly recognizable as such—they would be washed out of West Point or OCS as not the right types. So I have to hope we'd be lucky enough for them not to be recognized. You cannot have an excellent military without a profession of arms. And that profession implies a distinctive mentality, the imaginative warrior's. The managerial and technocratic priorities *necessary for* a modern military are also *threats to* a flexible military. The understandable civilian mistrust and suspicion of the warrior mentality (so culturally foreign, remember) re-enforces the threat. Of course there's always a theoretical danger that a pro of the old mentality would set off to Khartoum with the intention of ignoring Gladstone's directives. But I think that danger greatly less than in Gordon's simpler day. "*Colonel* Kurtz, he dead"—someone might wish to remind me of the Marlon Brando character's private war in Cambodia. Yes, but I take it that Francis Ford Coppola's "Heart of Darkness"—*Apocalypse Now!*—was a fiction. And even the AirCav colonel, if you'll recall Robert Duvall's brilliant characterization, would be useful in a necessary military venture. He's a dangerous character of course. But he would not have grown to love the smell of napalm in the morning if government policy had not introduced the substance. I wonder what he'd do in retirement. Not contemplate the scriptures like Gordon. Nor turn to his memoirs as I imagine Wingate would have done if he'd lived beyond forty-one, and as Stilwell surely would have done if he'd had more than a year of life after the war ended. On the other hand, I cannot imagine him making the easy transition from CO to CEO so many of the officer corps nowadays manage to make.

"Indescribably exciting." That may be a field grade officer's description rather more than the recollection of an enlisted infantryman or a platoon leader. But it is undeniable that one who chooses the military as a career—not necessarily someone who chooses an enlistment as a brief and circumscribed experience

(someone, that is, such as I)—is one who is not afraid of risk and may even be addicted to it. That is certainly the case with, say, Marine Recon unit members, Special Forces (Rangers, Green Berets, Delta Force, Seals, and other units less publicized), that is, all those who most exactly now resemble the old-fashioned soldiery the managerial technocrats most distrusted. It is hard to imagine some other primary motivation for a soldier who—let us construct an instructive example—a soldier who is not only a physical specimen and expert marksman but also intellectually endowed enough to be a linguist in a relatively obscure tongue and also a trained medic with the knowledge equivalent to what a physician's assistant possesses—and yet who looks forward to jumping from an airplane at night and drifting down to a small area behind enemy lines, either to organize native friendlies or to call in air strikes. What fun.

It is now fairly common knowledge that soldiers fight for their fellow soldiers, rather than for love of country (although they may indeed love their country). That is what *duty* means to them. Nor is dying for his country what is on his mind. It was a very romantic notion, John Ruskin's in "The Roots of Honour" in *Unto This Last*, "For the soldier's trade, verily and essentially, is not slaying, but being slain." But Ruskin really didn't know much about war. He didn't even know the war that is man-woman sex, the conflict that the *Kama Sutra* calls "flowery combat." General Patton was much wiser, telling his command to get rid of the notion of dying for their country: the point was to make the other dumb son of a bitch die for *his* country.

Arthur Hadley's "Great Divorce" thesis of the social rupture between military and civilian life might be re-interpreted now as the demotion of the military veteran in the scheme of electoral politics. Eisenhower was perhaps the last presidential candidate whose military career worked actively in his political favor: indeed, it got him elected. Kennedy's romantic PT Boat image was probably no more advantageous to him than Nixon's 5 o'clock shadow, but certainly did not hurt him. When Nixon finally won, his World War II naval commission was at best a neutral issue, as was Carter's being an Annapolis graduate. Indeed, in Carter's case the only positive aspect of his brief naval career was the absurd claim that like Admiral Hyman Rickover he was a nuclear scientist. We all knew that Bush #1 plunged into the South Pacific, but I don't recall that adventure rising to the level of JFK's romantic misadventure.

The fact is that by the 1970s, '80s, '90s, a candidate's military career or

service was no factor at all: it simply did not matter in the least to the electorate. Sadly—more than sadly!—Bob Dole's heroic and life-long-debilitating war experience in World War II Italy gained him nothing at all against the successfully draft-avoiding (or -dodging) Bill Clinton. It might be tempting to liken Vietnam vet John Kerry's fate against mere Air National Guardsman Bush #2 to Dole's against Clinton, but Kerry's service was more or less cancelled out by his own pre-politician efforts at demeaning Vietnam vets by calling them murderers—so in an odd way Bush's more modest kind of service looked at least honorable in comparison. In effect the competition was a wash.

But to suggest how very piddling little-to-nothing military service has become as an electoral consideration one has only to consider 2008: a mini-experienced conventional Chicago pol educated in universities which had long banned ROTC bests a fighter pilot who served honorably both in naval uniform and in "Hanoi Hilton" prisoner's togs, for five years, and who could in consequence no more raise his injured arms above his head than could Bob Dole. The life and suffering of certifiable military hero John McCain meant not enough (if "nothing" is too extreme a word) against Barack Obama's bland but seductive narrative. In fact it may have worked against him, if I am to trust what I heard on (and off) campus to the effect that warriors were not to be trusted in such a dangerous world. How very ironic!

And now? Well, "now" is not the way it was back-in-the-day. If, say fifty-sixty years ago, a Donald Trump had insulted a John McCain, ridiculing the hero for having been captured in combat, he would have been finished. *Kaput. Terminado. Fin.* That's all Doc.

"And now?" I ask again.

The American military has been endangered for some years now by efforts to transform it into what it was never meant to be. When, during the military ventures of the Bush years, I mean the post-9/11 years, protesters answered the patriotic slogan "Support the Troops" with the counter-slogan "Support the Troops by Bringing Them Home," they were consciously and explicitly saying that the purpose of a military was not military, that "the boys" should not be placed in harm's way, that they were in the military in the first place because it was a job like any other; that rather than a "profession of arms" (a concept foreign to the counter-sloganizers) the military was for "the kids" a kind of employer

of last resort with clearly understood “welfare” functions and a publicly-financed jobs-training school. . . and a costly asset too valuable to be seriously risked in serious anger.

A digression of sorts: In an odd way the military establishment pre-9/11 collaborated, quite unintentionally, with this condescension (that’s the word) toward the warrior. The so-called “Powell Doctrine” made a lot of sense: be sure the nation is behind the military’s venture, have overwhelming force, have a precise exit strategy so as not to overstay the venture, etc. But it also meant don’t use the military unless all other avenues have been exhausted (which of course is subject to alternative interpretations), which inspired Madeleine Albright to ask Colin Powell what was the point of the military he boasted about if it wasn’t to be used? And it meant, in effect, not in intention, the nation should finish any military operation as soon as it bloody well could, which hastened the exit in the first Gulf War and gave Saddam Hussein an extended decade or more of Hitlerizing. And it also meant we shouldn’t commit to war or police actions unless the military can be absolutely sure there’s no chance of suffering defeat, which means a riskless national defense policy (unless you’re kicking ass some place like Grenada) and at some level a violation of military culture. It’s a striking irony that the most famous warrior of the period was the reluctant warrior Colin Powell.

I am fully aware of a kind of disproportionality in an ex-supply sergeant taking a critical view of an American folk hero. But when a soldier who had been National Security Advisor, Commander of the Army, Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Secretary of State—and therefore should know the importance of the Commander-in-Chief—decides in a time of extraordinary international danger competing with 1939 to desert Republican ranks and snub a tried defense maven like John McCain to bless a neophyte *pisher* whose only knowledge of combat was Chicago politics and to re-endorse him in 2012 after he had revealed his defense policy incompetence. . . then the folk hero has surrendered any claim on any serious person’s residual respect for vanished wisdom. *End of digression*.

Now the military is to be yet something else: a free and non-discriminatory employer with politically correct rules and regulations. Gender free, that is. Even in combat units. Barack Obama’s Secretary of Defense Ash Carter has announced it: In effect (although the good cabinet minister doesn’t put it this way), women have the same right as men to be wounded, maimed, and killed, no

matter that more infantry*men* will be wounded, maimed, and killed practicing protective gallantry—unless these PC geniuses discover (as isn't very likely at all) some way to neutralize normal and healthy male psychology. This social revolution has been on its way for a considerable time, at least as far back as when General Claudia Kennedy was pleased to announce at West Point in 1997, "This is not your father's Army anymore." Indeed. I find I don't feel safer after this obituary.

A great and painful irony is that after the recovery of the military's honor especially during the George W. Bush administration, now that we have a military in which Stilwell would feel right at home, with a Special Forces contingent that would suit Wingate to a T, we have had since the 2008 election a "commander-in-chief" (lower-case intentional) who neither understands it nor respects it, who—if you listen closely enough—holds it in contempt.

Since the military is, in one of its functions, an instrument of foreign policy, it is an absolute certainty that if a commander-in-chief has an incoherent foreign policy then his use (or just as likely, non-use) of the military—or, more broadly, his controlling attitude toward the military—will be equally incoherent. Obama's may well be—or rather, is—the most incoherent foreign policy in remembered and recorded American history. "Exemplary" case in point: When Egyptians took to the streets to protest the regime of Hosni Mubarak, who while no doubt a despot was still a *to-be-trusted* ally of the United Sates (because given the realities in a dangerous part of the world a *might-as-well-be-trusted* ally), Obama demanded he step down or else. When Libyans took to the streets with clear and predictable and soon proven danger to themselves, to protest the regime of Muammar Gadhafi, to whom the word *despot* would be a ridiculous courtesy, and who had remained for decades an unpunished murderer of American citizens, Obama assured the world (which included the Libyan Hitler) that the timid American unmuscular approval of U.N. actions did not signal a demand for regime change. If this could be considered coherent it would be a quality of coherence no sane person would wish to own: we prefer enemy strong men to friendly ones.

A "thought" (a *pensée*) is not sufficient space for recalling all of Obama's malpractices as commander-in-chief. All leaked or memoired inside information confirms that this lifetime civilian routinely ignores his military advisors: I'll tell you generals how many troops you need. Without a doubt worst of all:

he announces to the world, in full knowledge that terrorists are listening, that a U.S. military commitment will end on such and such a date—when it is absolutely impossible not to know that this is paramount to aiding and abetting the enemy. This has to be a first in military history. Try to imagine any other American president providing such gifts to an enemy.

No greater proof of Barack Obama's utter incomprehension of the warrior mentality (before his actions added a kind of meta-proof) was his confidence to cadets at West Point in 2009, totally oblivious of his audience from which he clearly expected popular approbation, that he did not want in his military any soldiers who liked "fighting for the sake of fighting." No warrior myself (or I would have reenlisted), I am absolutely certain nonetheless that soldiers would understand me in the following. If someone were to insult my wife I would respond with signal discourtesy, something on the order of: Insult my wife one more time and I'll knock your bloody +*&^%$#@! head off. During his first presidential campaign someone spoke ill of Michelle Obama and her cool husband watched his manners and let everyone know that such talk was "unacceptable." (The word almost swishes.) Of course that's not the only kind of talk that's unacceptable—as General Stanley McChrystal, then commander of Joint Special Operations Command, now senior fellow in International Relations at Yale, found out in 2010. Called by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates "perhaps the finest warrior and leader of men in combat I ever met," but no more diplomatic than Vinegar Joe, McChrystal was heard by a journalist speaking disrespectfully of the Obama administration's military acumen. Obama, expecting Special Forces warriors to watch their manners, asked for and received the resignation of the most Stilwellian general in the army.

Samuel Hux is Adjunct Professor of Philosophy at York College of the City University of New York. He has published in *Dissent, The New Republic, Saturday Review, Moment, Antioch Review, Commonweal, New Oxford Review, Midstream, Commentary, Modern Age*, *Worldview*, *The New Criterion* and many others.

To comment on this essay, please click