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PUBLIC OPINION AND THE ARMED FORCES
21 May 1948

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GENERAL VANAMAN: Gentlemen: We are very fortunate to have as our lecturer this morning the Deputy Chief of Staff of the United States Army. All of you, of course, are familiar with the brilliant career of General Collins. You are also familiar with the fact that he has been, and is, a very good friend of the Industrial College of the Armed Forces and of the National War College. You are all familiar with his biographical sketch, but I would like to emphasize the fact that he is a graduate of the Industrial College of the Armed Forces (then the Army Industrial College), class of 1937, and is also a graduate of the then War College and now the National War College.

We, as I said, are extremely fortunate in having him lecture to us this morning on "Public Opinion and the Armed Forces." He is well qualified due to the fact that he was Chief of Public Information of the Army. I take great pleasure in presenting to the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, to the National War College, and to our guests, General Collins.

GENERAL COLLINS: General Vanaman, gentlemen: It might be interesting to you to know something of the circumstances under which I came to the Industrial College when it was located in the Munitions Building some years ago. I think this story illustrates the change that has taken place in the status of this College since that time.

I was out in the Philippines as G-2--G-3 of the Philippine Division and was on maneuvers over in Bataan when I had a call one evening from Mrs. Collins after work was over. She said, "We've gotten our orders." I asked, "Where are we going?" "To the Army Industrial College," she replied. "Where in the world is that?" I said, "I never heard of it."

I was one of the few people who had not asked to go to this particular school. When I came back, I discovered what it was and where it was; after a year of the worst struggle that I have had in my existence, I believe, they finally gave me a diploma and sent me on my way, which happened to be here to the Army War College (now National War College). I took them in rapid succession. It may cheer you somewhat to know that I managed to survive two years of this stuff in a row and then stayed on actually for another two years as instructor at the War College.

During the time I was a student at the Industrial College, old Colonel Jordan, who was the Commandant at that time, kept saying to me, "Well, I hope, Collins, that when you get through here, they put you in G-4 on the War Department General Staff." I kept replying to him, "But, Colonel, that isn't the place I ought to go if I am going to be of any use to you or to

our children into Manila and thereby endangering the health of all of the school children in the City of Manila. He said, "I'd like to get some information on this." I said, "I can assure you right off that we have some infantile paralysis out here, but we don't have an epidemic. I'll get some information for you. I'll phone you back in a half hour and give you the low-down on this thing." And I hung up.

Then it occured to me that it might be well to check with the Chief of Staff of the Division. I got him on the phone and told him this tale. His immediate reaction was, "Joe, don't tell them anything. It's none of their dammed business." I said, "Colonel, I think we would be making an awful mistake if I took that attitude." He said, "No, don't tell them anything. We know what we are doing out here." This officer was a very fine officer of the old school, but, of course, he was dead wrong. I then said, "Well, Colonel, do you mind if I call the General about it?" I was still young and rambunctious, and I could still do something about it when I got a "no" for an answer. He said, "Oh, no; call the General." I got the General on the phone and, fortunately, he was an extremely able man, and his answer was just as prompt in the opposite direction. "Of course tell them. Get the doctor, get all the facts, and give the information to them at once." I did that. We had a few cases of infantile paralysis spread over a period of about 10 months. The percentage was no higher than it was right in the City of Manilla itself. I gave that to the editor. He said, "Thank you very much. I won't publish the letter." And he didn't.

Now, just think, gentlemen, what would have happened if I called him back and said, "I'm sorry; it's none of your dammed business." The epidemic would have been a real epidemic then, and it would not have been confined to infantile paralysis either, I assure you. I believe, thank God, that all of the Armed Services have gotten away from that old-fashioned point of view. It is the public's business to know what we are doing in the Armed Services because we belong to the public. It is not our Army or our Navy or our Air Force; it is the Armed Services of the American people themselves; it is their Army, their Navy, and their Air Force. They are interested in knowing what we are doing, and they are entitled to know what we are doing. As I said, I believe all the Services now recognize that point of view and are actively doing something about it.

After the First World War, we all receded into our shells. The American people said, "Thank God that's over with. We are never going to have another war. Let's not hear any more about it." They practically said, "The hell with the Army and the Navy and the Air Forces." And we thumbed our noses back and receded into our shells. We went back into our little two-by-four army posts and naval stations and so on; and there was a break between this public that we had had a lot of business with and ourselves. That was most unfortunate. I hope that will not happen again after this late war because, as I said before, the public must know what we are doing;

When General Marshall came back from his war service and was about to hang up his coat in his lovely home in Leesburg, he heard his phone ringing. Those of you who have read Mrs. Marshall's charming story "Together" will remember the picture she painted of their finally coming to his house; as they were entering it, the phone was ringing. General Marshall went to it, and the President of the United States was on the other end of the line. He said, "George, I'm sorry but I am going to have to send you out to China." Should he have said, "No, Mr. President, I refuse to go"? Or should he, as the good soldier that he was, have shrugged his shoulders and gone on and done his job? If we present the thing in that way to people, I believe they will better understand the problem.

I have never yet met anybody in the Services who felt that the military ought to dominate our civil government. I have been taught since the time I was a cadet at the Military Academy, that military power is subservient to the civil power in this country. It must be that way in a democracy. We do not want it otherwise. But we must constantly disabuse our people of the baseless fear that the military is seeking to dominate the civil government.

Now, what is the best way to combat it? It is to let the public know what we are doing. In my opinion, that starts with our foreign policy, and that gets us into the field of security--you might say both diplomatic security and military security.

I am one of those who are on the side of the liberals when I say that we overdo military security. I am not in a position to state whether we overdo State Department security, because I do not know enough about that; but on the military side, I am convinced that we overdo security, including security in the strategic field. I think that we must get closer together with the State Department in order that we can present to the State Department our view of the approach that must be made to the people when a new policy or a new operation is about to be put into effect so that the people may understand not only the diplomatic phases of it, but the military phases as well. In my judgment we have a long way to go in that field.

I was partly instrumental in settling up an interdepartmental committee between State, War, and Navy a year and a half ago to inquire into just this field. How we should tie in the public information program of the State Department with that of the War and the Navy Departments; if some item of broad interest is about to break, how we ought to stage the informational presentation of it to the people. I am afraid little or nothing has come of it. There is a committee, but it is just a committee; and I personally feel that the fault lies right up near the top in both the State Department and in the Army, Navy, and Air Departments. Our top people are not actively enough concerned with the fact that we must

I took extracts from these publications and wrote a letter to the security control people and cited all of these things. It still came back "no." But when I read Russ Dean's book "Strange Alliance" which I had not read at that time, and found that the Russians had been in on this cover plan, that the thing had been outlined to them in Paris and they had cooperated in it, I said, "Who are we trying to fool? We have already fooled the Germans. Who are we kidding anyhow, other than the American people? Everybody knows about it except the American people." Well, I believe that about a week ago the decision was finally made to release the First Army history--after two years of struggle.

We must get away from that sort of thing within the Armed Services--this overcautious approach to security for something that is already past history. Of course we will have cover plans in a future war, but they will never be just the same.

I cite that as a specific example of what we are still doing in the Services. That, in my opinion, is wrong. We should release some of these histories, even though they contain matter that might be debatable. There are some lessons, for example, with respect to amphibious warfare written down in the First Army history. The Navy and, I believe, the Marine Corps took exception to those. At first they would not relase them. We said, "This is only the First Army's view of what the lessons are. The fact that they are released does not mean that the JCS has given its stamp of approval to the lessons the First Army thinks it learned from these operations." So, as I say, I believe that history is finally going to be released.

That is the sort of thing, gentlemen, which we must get away from in the Armed Services. If the people know about our plans, if they have some concept of the terrific complications of an amphibious operation, which anybody could get if he would read the First Army history, they will better understand what our problems are; they will know that it takes brains, that it takes initiative, and that it takes a great deal of staff planning and coordination to make such a colossal undertaking work. This will enhance our prestige with the people. It will enable them to understand our problems to an infinitely greater degree. That is the sort of thing that I think we must do more of if we want to have the public understand our problems. I could cite example after example along the same general line, but I am sure many of you know similar instances of your own. It takes just plain common sense, in most instances, to decide whether to release something or not to release it. My vote will always be on the "release it" side. Release it as completely as possible and as rapidly as possible.

The time element is another thing of tremendous importance. We frequently let the Russians or somebody else beat us to the punch. We stand back and say, "No, we can't release that thing." Then somebody lets it out--

us and scorn us. And when we get into the field of "Who is going to win the next war?" that gets even worse.

Of course we are going to have honest differences of opinion about these matters. We would not be human if we did not have them. And of course we should fight for the things that we believe in. But, in my judgment, we ought to keep as much as we can within the family.

That does not mean that I believe in setting a party line and adhering to the party line. Not at all. I am a firm believer in freedom of thought and freedom of expression of opinion. That used to be one of the marvelous things about these colleges, incidentally. I hope you still have it. A student could get up and criticize anything in the military program. For God's sake, do it; and do not let them talk you down. You ought to do it here particularly and in the various interdepartmental boards, the inter-Service boards. Up on the "Hill" we ought to support the over-all program; but, of course, if you are asked questions, you must answer truthfully what you believe in. But the manner of doing that can make a lot of difference. You should demonstrate that you are looking at this as objectively as human beings can look at anything objectively. If you do that, you will go a long way toward breaking down the lack of confidence on the part of the public at large because of our internal jealousies.

I am going to address our Army people for a moment now a little bit more specifically. I know more about that. I think we have taken steps within the Army itself along the proper line and I hope that we will continue to do so. The single promotion list, in my opinion, was a tremendous step forward in internal public relations, strange as it may seem. We have one promotion list now. The setting up of the chiefs of the technical services as officers of the line (formerly they were selected from just one narrow group for four years and then could never be changed and could never do any other service) so that they can command units as well as serve in the technical services will, I think, go a long way toward breaking down the still remaining jealousies between the line people of the Army and the service people of the Army. The Engineer Corps has always been in a preferred position. Some of our top commanders in this war were engineer officers. The Ordnance people and the Quartermaster people did not have that same chance. I am confident that there are many able people in our Services who could command divisions but who have not had the opportunity to do so in the past. They will have the opportunity under this new system.

The difference between the Infantry and the Artillery, which once was a terrible source of irritation in the Army, has been largely done away with by the war. I am a doughboy. I happen to be a graduate of the Field Artillery School. In fact, I am one of the most educated people you have ever seen. /Laughter? But the thing that I got out of the Field Artillery School was a general appreciation of the power of artillery. As an infantryman

of doing business with them, their lack of judgment and knowledge, their narrow, provincial point of view, and so on. I would like to say now, gentlemen, that my opinion of the Congress--and I have been fairly closely associated with it now for several years--has gone up, and not down, the more I have come to know it. I think all of us in the Services ought to appreciate the terrific task that the leaders of Congress, the men who really do the work on the committees, have. They are under just as much pressure as we are, and more by a jugful. Most of them are extremely able men.

If you go up before one of these committees on the "Hill," you had better know your business, you had better have all of the facts at your finger tips. I warn you of that ahead of time. If you do not have the facts there and they ask you a question you do not know how to answer right then, for God's sake don't try to answer it. Say frankly, "I don't know, but I can get the information for you." Do not try to bluff your way through.

So I say to those of you who are going to the War Department or the Navy Department or the Air Department after you leave here--and undoubtedly many of you will--go with the point of view that you are going to have to cooperate, whether you like it or not, with the men on the "Hill." You had better like it; you had better understand their point of view; and if you do understand the point of view of the American people, if you know that any plan you have has to be weighed in the light of the American people's opinion on it, and that their opinion will be reflected in what these Congressmen say to you and ask you, you will be on the road to knowing how to inform the Congress in a proper way.

I was very happy to learn from your Commandant this morning of the fact that in all of your major studies here at the Industrial College, along with the other phases of a problem, you have people specifically put in to weigh the effect of public opinion in respect to any given plan. That is a wonderful step forward. We have tried to do that within the Department of the Army. I am sure the Navy and the Air people must do the same thing.

When I was made Chief of Public Information, everybody was a little bit startled that a three-star man should be assigned to that lowly job. A civilian was responsible for that--Mr. Arthur Page, who is going to address you, I believe, sometime next week. He is a longheaded fellow. Listen well to what he has to tell you. He set up this scheme of a public relations unit in the War Department which combines the Public Information Division, the Legislative and Liaison Division, and the Information and Education Division. (Incidentally, before I finish my talk I want to touch upon one other element of our internal public relations, which I slipped up on a moment ago; that is, the matter of our relations with our men, which has profound implications with the public at large.) Mr. Page said that whoever has this job should be a top-ranking man, particularly now, and he should have access to the Secretary, he should have access to the Chief of Staff, and he should sit in on all the major problems in the Department

If that were not explained to him and to many other people, I can assure you that in the event of war they would be raising hell with us if we did not have antiaircraft guns on top of every roof in this country when we were talking about civil-defense plans, and they would be raising hell with their Congressmen. That is where the tie-in with Congress comes into the picture. They will yell to their Congressmen and their Congressmen will see that something is done about it or will do their best to see that something is done about it at any rate.

The whole approach to the civil-defense problem right now, in my opinion, will have to be weighed with great care and with an eye to what will be the effect on the public. You all know that in the late war little villages out in the mid-West were getting up plans for their own defense. If we don't watch ourselves on civil defense, we are going to dissipate our effort in the next war trying to protect every hamlet in this country. Everybody is likely to be excited about the fact that an atomic bomb is going to be dropped on, let us say, Oskaloosa, that our effort will be completely dissipated.

This might be an appropriate time for me to pick up that lost thread about our relationships with our men and their effect on public opinion.

Something like 15 million men came through the Services during the war, if I remember rightly; and if you and I had done a better job of leading those men, we would have 15 million advocates of preparedness in the country today--15 million of them, some in every community in the United States. Think what a power that would be toward assisting us in our plans!

For one reason or another--the press of war, the tremendous expansion of our officer corps--in the Army we went from something like sixteen or eighteen thousand officers to almost nine hundred thousand officers. In that process, of course, we had to rush men through. Somewhere along the line we failed in our business of explaining to the men why they had to give up some of their freedoms when they came into the Army and why we have this curious discipline, this curious relationship between officer and man, in the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force. We missed the boat somewhere along the line and made enemies of many of them.

We have gotten together in the Armed Services in our information and education program and are now beginning to realize the importance of informing our enlisted men about these matters which are of tremendous concern to them, of letting them know what they are fighting for in this event of war, of letting them know what this Armed Service of ours is all about. I have met resistance to this program on the part of some of our senior commanders who were highly skeptical of it. They believe we are getting namby-pamby, that we are not firm enough, and all that sort of thing.

QUESTION: General, aside from analyzing newspaper editorials and so forth, is there any means of measuring the exact effectiveness of public relations on the public or any other end recipient?

GENERAL COLLINS: Of course, we have the public-opinion survey, including Roper's and the Gallup Poll. We feel they are very accurate gauges of public opinion. We have similar polls conducted within the Army by the Information and Education Service of the Army, which takes polls among our enlisted men on various questions. There has been considerable opposition on the part of many senior commanders to that. They feel we put bad ideas in the minds of our soldiers or raise questions which they might not raise themselves. We are confident that that is not the case. The sampling is done on a scale such as could not possibly affect the opinion of the men as a whole. We believe those opinion surveys are very valuable, and we make use of them in our Personnel Division all the time. Similarly with the public at large, I think the Roper and Gallup surveys are of value. They are not exact, but they certainly give a pretty close picture of what public opinion is.

QUESTION: General, would you care to discuss the expenditures of public monies indulged in by the Army and recently criticized by Congress in putting forth to the public its viewpoint on UMT?

GENERAL COLLINS: That is a good question. I happened to be in the middle of that one for a while. Of course, you are all familiar with the fact that there is a law which prohibits any person in the Armed Services doing anything that will affect or put pressure on the Congress to pass certain pieces of legislation. That is the sense of the law. The question has arisen, particularly, in the Subcommittee on Expenditures of the House as to whether or not the Army was carrying on a propaganda campaign for UMT. We were accused, first of all, of having set up a propaganda agency at Fort Knox in the form of this Experimental Unit out there. We were charged with having hired civilians for the specific purpose of having them urge the public to write to Congressmen to effect the passage of the law. We were charged with the illegal use of Government funds in the use of airplanes to take people out to Knox to see what was being done, and that the Army as a whole was carrying on a propaganda campaign to have the legislation passed. There were those four major items.

I, among others, was called up to answer questions in connection with these charges. First of all, with respect to the over-all proposition of whether or not we were carrying on a propaganda campaign, we vigorously denied it. We said, "Certainly we are carrying on an information campaign, and we are going to continue to carry on an information campaign." We said that the people had to know about this program. If they did not know, how could they intelligently gauge what to have their Congressmen do? You are at the root of democracy when you say that the people may not be informed as to something they are going to have to act upon. In a representative democracy they do not vote themselves, they elect Congressmen who, in turn, vote

connotes something that is dishonest, something that is subterfuge. I say that if we can convince the people that we are honest in what we are doing, that we are not trying to hide anything from them, and that we are not afraid to bring out into the open what we are doing, we will have established a sound approach to public information in contradistinction to propaganda.

COMMANDER CAMPBELL: General, you mentioned the importance of our public relations with the men. Of course, in peacetime that is done with the Regular officers. In wartime, when the Reserve officers are brought into the picture in really larger numbers than are Regular officers, the leadership which is involved in our relations with the men becomes very important. What are we doing about that now? I know we have revised and improved our leadership programs both at West Point and Annapolis. But what are we doing to get this thing across to the Reserve officers whom we will have with us in wartime?

GENERAL COLLINS: We are trying to do that through the distribution of our instructional matter along this line. There is a new pamphlet now being developed between the Air Force and the Army--I think the Navy is in on it also--that goes back to a discussion of the fundamentals of leadership, the fundamentals of relations between an officer and a man, and that sort of thing. It will be distributed and used in our schools for Reserve and National Guard officers, as we did in the Regular Service.

So far as I know, that probably is the only specific thing that has been done and maybe it is the only specific thing that can be done.

There are two ways really to get at that problem and, unfortunately, you cannot do it until war actually comes on. I want to interpose for a moment that I do not believe we ought to try to pin on the onus on our Reserve and Guard officers for failure to handle our enlisted men properly. The responsibility rests on the Regulars, in my judgment. There is no doubt about it. We set the tone, the approach, the attitude that affects them. That is the first thing we must do. If the Regulars will do their job well and if they will take the lead in explaining things to their men, the problem will be well on its way toward being solved. That applies not only to the junior Regulars but to the senior Regulars as well.

Sometime during the war somebody got the idea that there ought to be a Morale Division in the Army. The idea was to have morale officers on the staffs of the various commanders. I for one protested vigorously against that. I said, "In my outfit I am the morale officer." The commander is the morale officer. You cannot let a staff officer do that. You must do it yourself. You are the one who is running the outfit. You do the explaining; you set the tone; and if you don't set it, no staff officer can possibly do it for you. We did away with the morale officers and I hope we will never have them again.

one extreme. We could do away with all public-relations officers in the Armed Services if we did a perfect job. There would be no public-relations problem if we could ever reach that stage. If we had a program so good, so sound, and if we administered it and executed it with such acute good judgment, we would not have to have any public-relations officers. To that extent I think you are absolutely right. If we have a sound program administered ably and with common sense, we will have solved most of our public-relations problems. But, after the late war, when we were having a terrible time with the question of our morals and all that sort of thing, somebody threw a naked woman out of a front window of a house in Germany one night. If we are going to do that, we are going to have bad public relations, of course.

COLONEL McCULLOCH: Sir, I was wondering whether there isn't a danger that we might extend our activities in public relations to the point where we might get outside the normal field. I am thinking about the two pamphlets published in the last year by I & E, one explaining communism and the other explaining the labor movement, which brought a howl of protest from the press in some instances. It seemed to me that that was something that lay outside of the strictly military field. I do not see where we gained anything by doing that.

GENERAL COLLINS: It is a debatable matter. Personally I am firmly on the side of doing it for our soldiers if it is done objectively. Of course, when we make any such move as this, we are going to get criticism from some element of our people. Since our people are so wide in their range of ideas and opinions and since this is a democracy, we are always going to get criticism for doing anything that is constructive and new. We received fine praise from much of the press on our pamphlet on communism, and we got a good deal of praise from certain elements in the Congress on our pamphlet on labor unions, and so on.

We did our very best to make them down-the-middle objective pamphlets. We got a clearance from the Labor Department and we got a clearance from the State Department, and we consulted everybody up and down the line on them. In my opinion, they were well worth while.

When a man is taken into the Armed Services for a period of two or three years, of course he can read the newspapers; but we have a responsibility, while we have him in our Service, in my judgment, to inform him as to what is going on in the world and what are the basic problems in the world that might lead to war. Certainly communism is one of them, and he should be told what this Communist Party is, what communism is. That is what was done in that pamphlet. I personally thought it was an excellent one.

Of course, we are bordering on the fringe of our proper activities, but I say that anything that concerns informing our enlisted men is a definite problem that we have and it is our responsibility to inform them broadly.

public-information people within your own Department. But whenever you get into the field of interdepartmental relationships, whenever you get into the strategic field, in my personal judgment, such matters should be cleared by Mr. Forrestal's office. In general that is the case today.

There was one other element in your question that escaped me.

QUESTIONER: The State Department tie-up.

GENERAL COLLINS: Yes. How much is actually being done right now along the line you suggest, I am not clear on. But I have--and again I have to speak as an individual--suggested to the State Department that they must take the leadership. This must be under the direction of the State Department, not under the direction of the military departments. If any problem comes up--the question of aid to Greece, we will say--that is a political question and not a military question essentially, the basic principles must be determined by the State Department, although they ought to consult the military to see what we can do, how we can support their program. They must take the leadership in informing the people early in the game as to what the problem is--the basic political, economic, and other factors of the problem--and then, in my personal opinion, it would be well for the State Department to ask the Army, Navy, and Air Force to send men over to outline the strictly military aspects of the problem at one of these background, off-the-record press conferences. I made that definite suggestion. I do not know whether the State Department is doing it now or not, but I certainly think it ought to be done. It ought to be under the aegis of the State Department and ought to be off the record for use by the writers as background.

GENERAL VANAMAN: General Collins, on behalf of the joint colleges, I thank you very much for taking your very valuable time in conducting us behind the scenes of public opinion as you have done this morning. We value highly the thoughts that you have left with us.

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