PART III

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No Parade

CHINA
Poseh
N
NORTH VIETNAM
RED R.
Langson
BURMA
Dienbienphu
Son Tay
Haiphong
Hanoi
MEKONG R.
LAOS
GULF OF TONKIN
HAINAN I.
Yulin
Vientiane
Udorn
Nakhon Phanom
HO CHI MINH TRAIL
Quang Tri
Hue
Ashau Valley
Da Nang
THAILAND
Kham Duc
I CORPS
My Lai
Quang Ngai
SOUTH CHINA SEA
Dak To
Eagle's Nest
Kontum
Pleiku
An Khe
Bangkok
CAMBODIA
Ia Drang
Duc Co
Plei Me
U Taphao
SOUTH VIETNAM
II CORPS
Sattahip
DONLE SAP
MEKONG R.
Ban Me Thuot
Nha Trang
Cam Ranh Bay
Phnom Penh
III CORPS
Tay Ninh
PARROT'S BEAK
Tan Son Nhut Air Base
Bien Hoa
GULF OF THAILAND
Saigon
Long Thanh
IV CORPS
MEKONG DELTA
SOUTHEAST ASIA
1945 - 1975

Chapter Seven

The Profession of Arms

1953–1957

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Flying home from Korea was a strange experience. I was leaving the war zone while the battle still raged. During World War II, I'd moved from one theater to another in a global struggle against fascism, a war that rumbled inexorably toward victory. In the summer of 1953, however, military victory in Korea was no longer an option. The best we could hope for was an armistice that would leave both armies in place, and which would allow South Korea the chance to rebuild its shattered nation. But the farther I moved from the battle lines, the more remote this bitter struggle became.

When the Canadian Pacific Constellation finally landed in the warm drizzle of Vancouver, the comfortable prosperity of North America in the 1950s overwhelmed the intense alertness that grips every soldier in the combat zone. The bus down to Fort Lawton in Seattle was surrounded by shiny new cars, many with the candy bright colors that had suddenly replaced the ubiquitous black enamel of the 1940s. Along the summer highway, young families crowded the parks and softball fields. Prefab suburbia seemed a peaceful and secure civilization. As I repacked my bags for the flight to the East Coast, the dried red mud of Outpost Harry crumbled from my boots and sifted to the waxed tile floor of the BOQ. For me, the war was over.

I joined Mary at her parents' home in New Jersey. Little Elisabeth was shy at first. An absence of eighteen months is an immense gap to a child of four. But she did recognize her dad. When I'd left, John Jr. was hardly walking. Now he dashed about on sturdy legs. After I picked him up and gave him a big hug, he stood staring at me, then turned to Mary. "Who is that man?" he asked.

Neither child noticed the vivid red scar on my arm or that I walked with a slight limp. But Mary did. She'd known what to expect when she'd married a soldier, but I don't think she had understood the wars I had to fight would continue indefinitely. I suppose none of us had.

But I followed news reports of the fighting in Korea very closely. The 15th Infantry was still in the line, although the 2nd Battalion had been hit so hard that it had been put in reserve and its place taken by the Greek Expeditionary Force Battalion.

Although the Communists had accepted the Indian-sponsored compromise on the prisoner repatriation issue and had resumed regular peace talks at Panmunjom, they didn't really get serious until June. Then, in one week, they agreed to virtually every United Nations truce proposal. All that remained to be done before a cease-fire went into effect was to work out the technical details of the prisoner exchanges, as well as boundaries for the so-called Demilitarized Zone that was to be established along the fighting lines. It was logical to assume the Communists would scale down the level of fighting at this time.

But the Chinese and North Koreans did not operate by the principles of Western logic. Even with the cease-fire pending, they continued to fight. And the Iron Triangle took the brunt of some of their heaviest attacks. In mid-June the Greeks repelled a major Chinese assault on Outpost Harry. The Chinese had chosen a moonless night to send their assault troops down the valley and hit Harry after a massive artillery barrage. But the positions I'd helped fortify that spring protected the Greeks, who fought back with a frenzied determination. Even the massed assault of 4,000 Chinese troops, who swarmed in waves across the hilltop from all directions, couldn't capture the outpost. Once more the division's massed artillery delivered accurate VT fire on the position. When the Chinese finally pulled back before dawn, Harry's slopes were littered with 120 dead and almost 500 wounded Chinese.[1]

The attacks mounted in scale and intensity over the next several weeks, and by mid-July a full-scale, multidivision offensive was under way. Sixty thousand Chinese troops launched the biggest attack in two years and drove the ROK Capital Division back through its carefully constructed reserve lines and into the corps rear.[2] The line was stabilized on the south bank of the Kumsong with the help of the U.S. 3rd Division. The Chinese had succeeded in capturing a bulge several miles deep and almost twenty-five miles wide, but the cost had been horrendous. In effect, they had sacrificed their troops to massed artillery in a senseless slaughter reminiscent of the fruitless British Flanders Offensive in 1917. The Chinese had lost an estimated 72,000 men, including 25,000 killed in this final mindless assault.[3]

The United Nations resolve in stopping the final offensive eventually restored stability to the battle lines. The Chinese reluctantly agreed to end

the bloodshed. But when the cease-fire finally came on July 27, and the thousands of artillery tubes and mortars stopped firing, I had to accept the fact that the armistice was simply that, a pause in the hostilities, not their cessation.

And, as the Korean War wound down, the war in French Indochina intensified. The French were making little progress suppressing Ho Chi Minh's Communist insurgents, the Viet Minh. Now the Chinese could shift resources from Korea to the south to assist Ho. As we drove through the calm midwestern countryside, I knew it was likely I would have to fight in another Asian war.

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THE Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, was located at one of the Army's historic posts. In 1827, the War Department sent Colonel Henry Leavenworth west to the bend in the Missouri River that marked an informal border between the settlements of America's western frontier and the plains of the Indian nations. In this century the post grew, with many of its handsome buildings retaining the fort's traditional style of hewn gray limestone. The Army established its penitentiary there, officially the U.S. Army Disciplinary Barracks, a classic stone castle that looked like something out of a Jimmy Cagney movie.

In 1881, General William T. Sherman, the commanding general of the U.S. Army, added an educational role to the frontier support mission of Fort Leavenworth by establishing the School of Application of Infantry and Cavalry. The school activities were shut down during the Spanish American War, but in 1902 Secretary of War Elihu Root directed the establishment of the General Service and Staff College to help educate the Army's officer corps in the details of the general-staff system that Secretary Root had just introduced into the U.S. Army. Root was impressed by the French *Etat Major* system, which prepared senior officers for command through rigorous formal education.[4] The main teaching facility was in an imposing, high-roofed riding hall that dated from the turn of the century when equestrian proficiency was required of all Army officers, whatever their branch. The concept of formal courses of instruction for career officers reached the U.S. Army via the European general-staff system, which had evolved on the Continent in the nineteenth century.

Prior to World War I, our government considered the Army a relatively simple organization with a straightforward mission: waging war in the defense of the Republic. Then, the Army had been a small body of regulars composed of officers, noncommissioned officers, and enlisted men. The U.S. Military Academy at West Point provided most of the officers. A young

West Point graduate could choose a commission in a particular branch of the Army, such as the infantry, cavalry, or the engineers. He could expect to remain in that branch, advancing slowly in rank and responsibility. The heart of this system was the regiment, where an officer might serve his entire career. Building on his West Point education, he acquired the additional skills of command from personal experience.

But World War I made it clear that a small force of traditional regiments was insufficient. America faced global responsibilities that required a greatly expanded army. The draft and the reserve forces would provide most of the manpower. But we needed a larger pool of qualified officers. In 1917, for example, the Army ballooned from a few regiments to almost 100 divisions.

Commanding a division in peacetime garrison duty was demanding in itself; successfully leading a large unit in combat was infinitely more challenging. Most civilians view war as chaos, a cruel, formless anarchy in which victory or defeat is beyond human control. Career soldiers know differently. Success in war depends on effective leadership and well-motivated troops. And effective leadership means making correct decisions, one after another, in the proper sequence, throughout the confusion and turmoil of battle. Few men are born with the innate skills of such leadership. Most have to be taught.

This was the theory behind the Command and General Staff College. The "College," as we called it, represented one stage in a career officer's ongoing education, which began with his attending the basic school of his particular branch. In my own case, I'd gone through the equivalent of the Basic Infantry Officer's School at Fort Benning. I was trained to lead an Airborne rifle platoon in combat. The advanced infantry course, also at Fort Benning, had prepared me for battalion command in Korea. Now, as a lieutenant colonel, the one-year College course would give me the skills and knowledge needed to serve on a division or higher-level staff. Later, if I were fortunate, I might be selected to attend the Army War College, the final graduate school in the profession of arms, the alma mater of most of our general officers.

This system was a pyramid. Only the top half of the graduates of the Advanced Infantry School, for example, were chosen for Staff College. And only a small percentage of the College graduates eventually went on to the War College. Before World War II, the Command and General Staff College had been a two-year program with only the top half of the first-year's class continuing for the second term. Those who didn't make the grade had to face the fact that their chances for advancement were low indeed. Suicides were not uncommon among the unsuccessful first-year students. The Army was a meritocracy, not the aristocracy that critics of the military often accused it of being.

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THAT August I joined about 500 other field-grade officers—majors and lieutenant colonels—as students in the College class of 1954. How well we did in the ten-month course would shape the rest of our careers. Like many modern graduate schools, the College relied on a case-method curriculum. Whereas Harvard Business School students might study the financing and development of a particular industrial complex, we worked with battlefield scenarios called "problems." The vast teaching hall was divided by movable walls into twelve classrooms, each seating forty students at two-man tables. The instructors lectured from platforms, and relied heavily on maps, silk-screen charts, and Viewgraph slides.

Some of the problems were one-day exercises; others might take a week. We were expected to become experts not only in our own branch, but also in each of the other branches available to a division or corps commander. A typical problem might concern a classic battle of World War II, the German airborne invasion of Crete, for example. The instructor would lay out the overall situation, then his NCO assistant would "issue the tissue," distribute transparent map overlays with symbols representing the positions of the opposing forces. The instructor would then state his first "requirement."

"You're the division G-3," he'd say, referring to the division operations officer. "What are your actions and orders on receiving the first alert of the German airborne attack?"

Whoever was called on had to stand and recite as concisely and authoritatively as possible the procedures and orders required by the situation.

The day would proceed apace, with the "battle" unfolding as a map exercise. The instructors gave us minimum information and kept up the pressure, to simulate an actual command post atmosphere. In the final hour of instruction we might be asked to write a detailed critique of the enemy infantry commander or the commander of the friendly artillery. On another day, we might be given the job of organizing a task force to defend a river crossing in Burma; that requirement might be to write a formal order organizing the group, bearing in mind all the special needs of such a unit, possibly including bridging equipment, artillery forward observers, liaison aircraft, and so on. We were graded on such written work, and the instructors were no pushovers when it came to these grades.

As the semester advanced, we were increasingly required to make key decisions at the pivotal point in a particular operation, either a hypothetical or a historical battle that had been analyzed for the exercise. It was this decision-making ability—usually under rigorous time constraints, with less

than adequate information—that would determine our eventual rank in the class.

Although most of the exercises involved standard-formation units waging conventional war (thus the emphasis on World War II), we were introduced to the concept of tactical nuclear weapons, and some of our problems covered anti-guerrilla warfare. Mainly, however, we learned to think like division or corps commanders. The idea was to become fully familiar with the concept of "combined arms"—infantry, armor, and artillery—supported by ordnance, signal, and engineers. Any man who couldn't keep all these mental balls juggling under pressure had no place on a division staff, and certainly was not destined for high command.

Most of us were fascinated by the intellectual challenge. This certainly didn't mean we were eager for war. There aren't many professional soldiers who actually find combat pleasurable. Critics of the military—especially liberal academics and journalists—mistakenly believe that soldiers enjoy war. That's as logical as assuming surgeons enjoy cancer. We study the profession of arms not to wage war, but to defend the values of our civilization. This is an uncomplicated patriotic notion that is hard for sophisticated civilians to swallow. But our dedication to professional excellence does not mean that career soldiers are especially cruel, or that we value human life less than our civilian counterparts. In fact, there is abundant proof to the contrary to be found in the thousands of citations for combat gallantry in actions to save lives.

Acquiring this expertise kept us at our desks or in the library late each night. But on weekends College tradition provided for general relaxation, focused on that hallowed Army institution the Friday-night happy hour. My family was quartered in a converted wartime barracks that had been divided into four reasonably comfortable apartments. The other three units were occupied by married majors in my class. As the senior man, it was up to me to host the happy hour. So on Fridays (and on other nights, schedule permitting) I would blow my duck call into the rattling old furnace vents and the noise would reverberate through the building. Within minutes my colleagues and their wives would be down and the first martini would be poured.

The Kansas plains are prime quail-hunting country. I like to eat quail, and I couldn't afford to buy them. I also liked bird shooting, for both the exercise and the practice it gave keeping my shooting eye sharp. But I needed a good bird dog. That's how I acquired Prince, a truly exceptional little Brittany spaniel, which another officer had to sell due to a sudden reassignment. He was a bright-eyed spotted pup when I got him, and I didn't know much about training bird dogs. Luckily, my friend Lieutenant Colonel John Hay, whom Mary called "the handsomest officer in the U.S. Army,"

was a former forest ranger from Montana who'd hunted quail with dogs his whole life. Within a few months we had Prince outperforming much more experienced dogs. What Prince had in his favor was absolutely boundless energy and a fiendish desire to hunt. He learned to point, search out birds in briar patches, and retrieve. Brittanys are not tall dogs, and prairie grass is over their heads. To follow my hand signals, Prince learned to leap up on all four legs like a jack-in-the-box, catch my signal, spin in the air, and hit the ground running in the right direction.

Several years later at Fort Campbell, Kentucky, I had to find a home for Prince when I got overseas orders. John Hay was fortunate enough to be stationed there at the time and snapped at my offer to adopt Prince. With that dog, John became the champion quail hunter on the post. He would often hunt with the governor of Kentucky, a genteel sportsman who came with dog handlers and a batch of six or eight expensive German shorthaired pointers.

Giving Prince a dubious look, the Governor asked John, "Colonel, will *that* little dog honor my dogs' point?"

"Yes, sir," John replied. "You just watch him." At the end of the morning, when the Governor's first three pointers were exhausted, Prince was literally doing back flips to get away from the lunch tent and out to the field again. The Governor never disparaged Brittany spaniels again.

A couple of years after the episode we'd returned to the States, and I made overtures to John about getting Prince back.

"Jack," he said in a convincing tone, "you've got a better chance of getting my *daughter* than my dog."

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Happy hours and quail hunting, of course, were diversions that broke the stress of our profession. By the time I completed my ten months as a student at the College, the Cold War with the Soviet Union was reaching an ominous level of intensity. In 1949, the Soviets had shocked the West by exploding their first atomic bomb, several years before our intelligence services estimated they would. It was reasonable to assume that this nuclear capability had given Stalin the confidence to unleash the Communist aggression in Korea, ten months later. And, while America came to grips with the reality of Soviet atom bombs, the Russians proceeded directly from fission weapons to the development of a fusion device, the so-called superbomb, the thermonuclear or hydrogen weapon, which was vastly more destructive than the bombs that flattened Hiroshima and Nagasaki.[5]

Harry Truman made the decision to follow suit and build an American hydrogen bomb in 1950, overcoming the reluctance of his science advisers

who feared this development would start a spiraling arms race. The Soviets obviously had no such constraints. Under the leadership of physicist Andrei Sakharov, they were well on their way to producing the world's first true hydrogen bomb. Edward Teller led the American scientists at the Los Alamos National Laboratory in a desperate game of catch-up. In 1952, they had produced a thermonuclear weapon with a ten-megaton "yield," the explosive equivalent of 10 million tons of TNT. But the device was large and cumbersome, too heavy to be carried by our B-36, the world's biggest bomber.

The Soviet Union had already overcome this problem by eliminating the bulky refrigeration equipment needed to condense the weapon's hydrogen-isotope fuel, deuterium. They made a compact bomb fueled with lithium deuteride, a greasy solid the consistency of sea salt. This was the true stuff of H-bombs. In the summer of 1953, they overcame the humiliation of their failed Korean adventure by exploding a "small" hydrogen bomb at their Arctic test site. Again, the Americans scrambled to equal the feat. By 1954, we had our own H-bomb weighing less than five tons. It was tested at the Bikini atoll and vaporized the entire test island with a fifteen-megaton blast.[6]

Mankind now had the ability to unleash the power of the sun as a weapon.

With the reality of lightweight thermonuclear weapons, the technology to deliver them halfway around the planet by ballistic missile was quickly advancing. Once more, the United States reluctantly played catch-up with the Soviet Union, this time to develop the first intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM).[7] Years later, I found it ironic that many leaders of the various peace movements always faulted the United States for "goading" the hapless, underdeveloped Soviet Union into the wasteful folly of the arms race.

Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet leader who eventually replaced Stalin, was enamored of his country's growing nuclear arsenal. These weapons neutralized those of the West and provided an effective new saber to rattle whenever the Soviets' aggressive expansion was challenged. By the time of the Soviet-sponsored invasion in Korea, the Russians had brutally crushed all democratic resistance to their empire in Eastern Europe. Socialists, trade unionists, agrarian parties, and moderates of all persuasions were eliminated; thousands were murdered by the Soviet secret police, the NKVD. Tens of thousands of others disappeared into the labor camp Gulag. As Churchill had warned, a true Iron Curtain had descended across the continent, walling in the formerly independent nations of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria. The Soviet occupation zone in Germany became a Communist puppet state.

In response, the Western powers relied on a system of global alliances. NATO armies faced the Soviets along a tense frontier that stretched from the Arctic Ocean all the way to eastern Turkey. An overlapping system of

other military treaty "organizations" bolstered the frontier the rest of the way around the planet's northern hemisphere. Communist China was restrained on the Asian mainland. In effect, totalitarian communism was quarantined by the military power of the West. And the United States provided the bulk of the forces and bore the lion's share of the expense in this defensive system.

The West was unable to free the millions already under Communist domination, but we were determined to hold the line. To transform this determination into practical policy, President Eisenhower's secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, formalized the de facto containment policy into the flawed strategy of massive retaliation. If the Soviets or Chinese broke through our containment wall to expand their empires, we would respond "massively" with nuclear arms. It was an inflexible strategy; there would be either peace or nuclear holocaust.

This was the troubled geopolitical situation my colleagues and I faced as we prepared for the responsibilities of senior command. Because the Cold War eventually lasted so long, it's easy to forget how unsettling the new reality was at the time. As soon as both sides had practical nuclear arsenals, the haunting prospect of a third world war fought with hydrogen bombs—in which hundreds of millions of civilians would be incinerated along with their cities—had to be accepted as a practical possibility, not an insane nightmare. In the bizarre language of the period, military planners did indeed have to think the "unthinkable."

Within the Defense Department, it was the Air Force that benefited most from our massive retaliation policy. They had the planes and missiles to deliver the nuclear weapons on China or the Soviet Union. The more massive our threat, the Soviet (and later Chinese) counterthreat, and our own anti-counterthreat response became, the greater the Air Force's need for manned strategic bombers, fighter-bombers, and long-range missiles. By 1954, there were even rumblings that the Air Force could eventually replace the Army, which was viewed in some quarters as being on the verge of obsolescence. Conventional ground forces, it was argued, simply couldn't be defended against atom bombs. And nuclear weapons were, after all, cheaper than a huge standing army. Even though we had a peacetime draft, expanding the U.S. Army to the size needed to realistically counter the combined threats of the huge Soviet and Chinese ground forces would have completely altered our *peacetime* society. So for almost a dozen years—until the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962—America relied increasingly on its nuclear strike force, to the detriment of the Army.[8]

That such a ludicrous argument could gain the credence it eventually did is a reflection of the dilemma we faced. Postwar American prosperity was fueled by a free-market consumer economy supported by the world's largest

middle class, who enjoyed remarkably low taxes. On the other hand, meeting our global Cold War commitments required a steadily growing defense establishment, which each year absorbed a larger portion of our national wealth. The country wanted both guns and butter, but our political leaders feared the economic dislocation of such a policy. A nuclear arsenal was simply cheaper than a large conventional force. In one form or another, this dilemma has bedeviled us through all the decades of the Cold War.

Almost as soon as the massive retaliation doctrine was accepted, however, its shortcomings became obvious. The Soviet Union was constrained from a conventional assault on Western Europe for fear of nuclear retaliation. And the Chinese were equally discouraged from renewing the aggression in Korea or invading the Nationalist Republic of China on Taiwan. But fear of America's nuclear arsenal did not stop either the Chinese or the Soviets from supporting (and in some cases actually sponsoring) the so-called wars of national liberation that became one of the major military aspects of the Cold War.[9]

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THE first of these conflicts was the Greek civil war, a bitter struggle that dragged on for five years before the Soviet-backed forces were defeated. In the Far East, a different type of conflict evolved in Indochina. France's Asian war was in many ways a testing ground for the political and military strategies, the battlefield tactics, and the technology of similar struggles in the emerging post-colonial world over the coming decades.

The sweeping Japanese victories in the early years of World War II laid the ground for the anti-colonial struggle of the postwar years. The European imperial powers—France, the Netherlands, and Great Britain—had all been defeated by the Japanese. The myth of European racial superiority crumbled. In 1945, when the colonial powers returned to take up business as usual, nationalist leaders in Malaya, Indonesia, and French Indochina realized that their colonial masters were not invincible. In Tonkin, the northern region of Vietnam, it was Chiang Kai-shek's KMT, not the French, who took the Japanese surrender.[10]

The colony's best-organized anti-French resistance, the Communist Viet Minh, seized large amounts of French and Japanese munitions, overpowered lesser nationalist groups, and proclaimed the independence of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in early September 1945.

When the French military finally arrived in force, they made the mistake of assuming that Ho's Viet Minh were a ragtag band of malcontents who could be either persuaded to accept the benefits of French rule or, alternatively, ruthlessly suppressed by superior arms. They were wrong on both

counts. Ho Chi Minh was a nationalist in name only. Although he was fervently anti-colonialist, Ho saw himself as the leader of a revolutionary Communist "nation" that transcended traditional boundaries.[11]

Ho had founded the Indochina Communist Party in 1930; it evolved into the broader-based Viet Minh in 1941. He came from a poor family of rural Vietnamese Mandarin (Nguyen) scholars and was trained as a teacher by the French. But he left the colony as a young man before the First World War and spent almost twenty years abroad, much of it in France, where he became a militant founding member of the new French Communist Party in 1920. He was trained as an international agent in Moscow, where he spent a year, then served in various capacities in Asia as an official representative of Comintern, the Communist International. The wartime struggle against both the French and the Japanese drew him closer to a cadre of tough, like-minded younger lieutenants, particularly Vo Nguyen Giap and Pham Van Dong. They all were convinced that Mao's principles of revolutionary struggle would sweep the post-colonial world.[12]

The French military was the first European army to encounter such an enemy. Initially, they tried to reclaim their colony using conventional military forces. One of their chief strategists, General Jean de Lattre de Tassigny, devised an ambitious multiphase plan involving fortified urban zones free of the Viet Minh, which would serve as enclave garrisons to shelter the French forces and the quasi-independent local government headed by the loyalist emperor Bao Dai. Within the enclaves, the loyal Vietnamese were to train an anti-Communist army. And regiment-size *groupements mobiles* (mechanized mobile columns) were to stage forays from the enclaves, seeking out and destroying the Viet Minh in the jungle hinterland. America provided the weapons and matériel for these mobile groups: tanks, armored cars, half-tracks, trucks, and artillery.

But de Lattre's plan had fundamental defects. First, little progress was made building a loyal indigenous army. Also, the mobile groups were restricted to the colony's rudimentary "highways." And when a mobile group actually encountered a large enemy force, the Viet Minh dissolved into small guerrilla bands, just as Mao's troops did in Manchuria. Finally, when the French tried to "pacify" the countryside with small paramilitary units, the Viet Minh reverted to large-scale combat.

The French unleashed their air power on indiscriminate punitive raids, which only drove more alienated peasants into the arms of the Viet Minh. (The archetype of such counterproductive punitive actions was the French naval bombardment of Haiphong in November 1946, a senselessly brutal response to a Viet Minh provocation that killed 6,000 innocent civilians and became the stimulus Ho needed for broad-based support.[13])

By May 1954, as I was preparing to graduate from Command and General

Staff College, the French military effort in Indochina was about to end in defeat. The cream of their elite parachute regiments faced annihilation by the Viet Minh at Dienbienphu, a valley outpost near the Lao border. Contrary to accepted infantry doctrine (either conventional or guerrilla), the French had opted to hold a valley position, dominated by steep mountains. Despite ample experience, the French commander, Lieutenant General Henri Navarre, had been confident that Ho's *irregular* forces would not be able to oppose them in this remote area. The French forces in this trackless mountain valley were resupplied by airlift; the Viet Minh did not have that option.

But Ho's principal military leader, General Vo Nguyen Giap, confounded the French once again. That spring he deployed 35,000 troops, equipped with almost 200 artillery pieces and mortars (many recently transshipped from the Chinese lines in Korea), in a ring of steel above the French positions. Giap's supply lines to China were relatively short and protected from air attack by heavy jungle cover. And when the French air force tried to suppress the artillery and increase the resupply effort, they were met with devastating anti-aircraft fire from Soviet-provided 37mm and 57mm guns.[14] The battle dragged on for several months, as the French threw one unit after another into the cauldron. By May, it was over. Dienbienphu had been overrun. Two thousand sick and wounded survivors were marched away as dejected prisoners, long columns of gaunt Europeans guarded by wiry Asians in threadbare khaki, an image that haunted the Western world for years. Ho's Viet Minh (supported by the Chinese and Soviets) had defeated the best of the French empire.[15]

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ALL of us at the College with Airborne backgrounds watched the unfolding debacle of Dienbienphu very closely. As the French artillery blundered toward inevitable defeat, an intense debate over American intervention on the French side developed within the Eisenhower administration. Contingency plans ranged from a multidivision airborne and amphibious invasion of Tonkin to massive air raids with B-29s dropping conventional bombs, to the use of nuclear weapons against the Viet Minh. These plans anticipated Chinese support of their Communist allies in reaction to our support of the French. One plan even called for the airborne occupation of Hainan Island as part of an overall intervention in Indochina.

When it became clear that our European allies who had fought with us in Korea did not have the stomach to answer Secretary of State Dulles's call for a "united front to resist Communist aggression in southeast Asia," the U.S. Army led the resistance to unilateral American intervention.[16] It

was Army Chief of Staff General Matt Ridgway—an Airborne leader not known for avoiding battle—who fought hardest against ill-advised half-measures and such panaceas as nuclear attacks against Viet Minh jungle bases.

As historian Ronald Spector has revealed, Ridgway cut to the heart of the matter. "If it was really vital to the United States to prevent the loss of Vietnam, the wisest course, in Ridgway's view, would be to strike directly at China, without whose aid the Viet Minh would be unable to persist."[17] But this action, Ridgway reminded the politicians, would require a full mobilization of the United States and the direct cooperation of our Western allies, who at least would have to take up the slack on the NATO front while we fought China. Ridgway was not guilty of alarmist fantasy. He was an experienced, realistic wartime leader who knew what was involved in Indochina. The French had been bled to death by half-measures. If America was going to fight there, he wanted the war to be on our terms.

But the war was avoided, or at least deferred. A peace conference in Geneva that summer involving the Soviet Union, Communist China, France, Great Britain, and the United States—as well as representatives of France's other Indochinese colonies and the Viet Minh—agreed on a face-saving independence formula. Vietnam would be "temporarily" divided at the 17th parallel between a Communist government in the north and a French-sponsored administration in the south, pending general elections two years later. Most experts privately dismissed this agreement as an impractical, face-saving political expedient from the beginning, one that merely allowed the French army a chance to regroup in the regions of Annam and Cochinchina. Laos and Cambodia would become self-governing during the same period. The French army would be allowed to withdraw with the tattered remnants of their honor intact. But the issue of "national" elections was moribund from the outset. North Vietnam had a much larger population than the South, and the Communist Viet Minh had already purged its ranks of non-Communists while simultaneously dispatching Communist agents south to infiltrate democratic (or at least anti-Communist) political parties. The deck was stacked in Ho's favor.

As my friends and I discussed the significance of these events to our futures, we were also naturally preoccupied with our next assignments. I had hoped to go from the College to become the operations or intelligence officer of one of our Airborne divisions, the 11th Airborne based in Germany or the 82nd Airborne at Fort Bragg. I was pleased when I got my graduation ranking, 75th in a class of over 500, which placed me in the top 15 percent. But, surprisingly, I was assigned as a faculty member at the College, a three-year position normally granted to the Army's most intellectual and promising field-grade officers.

When I got over my surprise, I realized the faculty assignment represented a real opportunity. Army doctrine—that formal body of plans and directives controlling strategy and tactics—was undergoing a convulsive evolution, given the rapidly changing nature of the Cold War. The advent of tactical nuclear weapons, atomic munitions fired from artillery or short-range missiles, would soon radically alter the doctrine of ground warfare. And it became obvious that the Army's new doctrines would be developed here by the College faculty.

I was assigned to Department IV, which was responsible for Airborne, Army Aviation, and amphibious operations. My immediate boss in the department was Lieutenant Colonel Norman Martin, an artilleryman who had served with the 11th Airborne Division in the Pacific in World War II. He was one of the most meticulous officers I'd ever met, not a nit-picking perfectionist, but rather a man who sincerely believed in giving every assignment his maximum effort. He expected such an effort from his subordinates.

Norm was not content repeating the same student exercises each semester, mainly rehashes of Allied and German airborne operations in World War II. More to the point, the introduction of battlefield nuclear weapons had a special impact on Airborne doctrine.[18] Unlike a standard infantry division, which might assemble for an attack from widely separated regimental or battalion base areas, Airborne units had always mustered at a single airfield complex and been flown to their drop zones in tight formations of aircraft. This doctrine made Airborne forces lucrative targets on the nuclear battlefield as they assembled before takeoff. And the tight formations of their airlift columns were equally vulnerable. But traditional doctrine held that parachute troops had to be delivered in a massed formation, not piecemeal, if they were to survive in the enemy rear, their normal area of operation.

Colonel Martin gave me the assignment of evolving a new doctrine for the Airborne, one which would permit a division to assemble at widely dispersed departure fields and fly to their objectives in multiple air columns, to land simultaneously on multiple drop zones, then quickly reassemble to carry out their mission. This was a logical, seemingly straightforward evolution of procedures. But, once I got into the exercise, I soon realized how complex this problem was.

The capability of our para-drop aircraft was only one of many knotty issues. During World War II, the twin-engine C-47 (the military version of the DC-3) was the standard Airborne plane. It carried twenty-four paratroopers and had a range of only a few hundred miles. Ten years later, we had advanced to the C-119 Flying Boxcar that had a larger payload and a greater range, but which was still severely limited. Neither of these aircraft was capable of the flexibility we envisioned for the Airborne. What was

needed would be a large, fast transport that could operate from departure airfields separated by hundreds of miles, which had the speed and the reliability (hence, four engines) to operate in multiple air columns that arrived simultaneously on the objectives.

After several months of evolving these new requirements, I ran the exercises through my classes, and was delighted by the enthusiastic response of my students. Inventing new doctrine was far more exciting than studying the invasion of Sicily or the D-Day landings at Normandy. I was especially heartened when senior Army staff officers from outside the College began to send queries about our exercises. I realized that the work we were doing here stood a good chance of being adopted in the real world beyond our classrooms.

Given this stimulus, I didn't regret my faculty assignment. Besides, this was the first time that Mary and I had been able to enjoy a reasonably normal family life in ten years of marriage. When our third child, Mary Ann, was born in September 1954, I decided to stay in the delivery room. I'd missed out on the births of both our other children; Elisabeth was born while I was in China, and John came along while I was on my first temporary duty assignment in Korea. As a combat soldier, I'd seen my fair share of unusual sights, but the birth of one of my own children was a powerful experience.

Immediately after the delivery, the Army obstetrician took me aside. "Colonel," he said, "are you all right?"

"Of course," I muttered. "Why?"

"Well, he answered, "I've never seen anybody look quite that green."

So much for the tough soldier.

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ARMY Aviation was another of the Department's responsibilities in need of modernization. In Korea, Army pilots had flown artillery spotter planes and the buzzing little liaison helicopters that ferried senior officers around the corps areas behind the MLR. That was about the extent of Army Aviation in the mid-1950s.

The Aviation instructors in my department were all World War II liaison pilots who saw no use for Army aircraft beyond spotter planes and possibly medical evacuation helicopters—provided the vulnerable choppers did not venture too close to the actual fighting. Once more, however, under Norm Martin's creative direction, we began working on the problem of expanding the role of Army Aviation. Rapid troop mobility was the key to success on the nuclear battlefield; widely dispersed troops were less vulnerable to atomic attack, but to operate effectively a commander had to be able to

bring these disparate units together quickly. Troop-carrying helicopters could accomplish this mission. Once you accepted this principle, the concept of *armed* helicopters serving as flying artillery support platforms was a logical development. We were beginning to hammer out the rough shape of a doctrine that eventually became known as airmobile warfare.[19]

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DURING my first two years on the faculty our work with modernized doctrine ran parallel to a major overhaul of the Army then being planned by none other than Chief of Staff General Maxwell Taylor. He had been deeply troubled by the congressional support the Air Force had garnered for the wrongheaded notion of drastically reducing the *obsolete* Army. This situation transcended traditional interservice rivalries. There were some in high government positions who believed the Army could be cut to a tiny fragment of its normal size and relieved of its traditional battlefield role, which would devolve to the panacea of our nuclear strike force.

Despite the pressure of our teaching loads, several of us on the faculty joined an informal group that met every other Sunday to discuss the major issues of our profession. Naturally, we were preoccupied by the debate over massive retaliation and the "obsolescent" Army. I worked with Lieutenant Colonel Winant Sidle, a gifted writer, and Lieutenant Colonel Raymond L. Shoemaker to write an article proposing a more logical national strategy of flexible response to Communist aggression. We argued that threatening the Soviets with Armageddon over every aggression was tantamount to crying wolf; America needed a more practical, appropriate doctrine of military reaction. To our surprise, the article was published in the *Military Review,* and won the annual award for best original contribution.[20] More important, our article served to expand the national debate on this vital issue.

General Taylor's response to the zealous advocates of massive retaliation was to put forward a radical concept he called the "Pentomic Army," a structural reorganization of traditional units, which allowed ground forces to be widely dispersed in much the same way we had proposed for Airborne units. To accomplish this, Taylor proposed abolishing the Army's traditional building blocks: the battalion and regiment. The heart of the reorganization would be the Pentomic division, made up of five battle groups of 1,400 men each. They would be composed of five rifle companies, plus support companies that were larger than traditional rifle companies. The battle group would be a third bigger than a normal battalion—hence, more powerful—but much smaller than a regiment. Battle groups were meant to have dispersed garrisons and greatly increased mobility. The Pentomic Army was designed to survive and fight on a battlefield dominated by tactical nuclear

weapons. For the first time, ground forces would have their own nuclear arms, albeit relatively crude ones such as the Davey Crockett, Honest John, and Little John battlefield fission weapons. These were supplemented by long-range artillery capable of firing nuclear shells. This force was Taylor's method of implementing a policy of flexible response.[21]

General Taylor was known as a powerful personality of strong intellect and vast experience, who rarely lost a fight on or off the battlefield. When he decided on the Pentomic Army, his will prevailed. It was up to people like us to transform this new organization into meaningful doctrine. This was opposite of standard procedure. In World War II, for example, a new doctrine of armored warfare would be hammered out, then the armored units needed to implement that doctrine would be organized. Our responsibility was the reverse. General Taylor laid down the organization; the Army had to develop doctrine to make it work. And he wanted results fast.[22]

To exacerbate the situation, the College got a new commandant, Major General Lionel C. McGarr, a crusty, sawed-off West Pointer with a brilliant combat record in both World War II and Korea, where he had amassed an amazing total of seven Purple Hearts and several decorations for valor, including the Distinguished Service Cross. The General was the type of old-school officer who believed in authoritarian command.

When he took over the College, McGarr had been directed to modernize the curriculum in anticipation of the upcoming Pentomic reorganization. He understood his orders to mean the entire curriculum would be completely rewritten—every exercise, every problem, and all the vast panoply of supporting maps and audiovisual aids. Before any problem became part of the curriculum, the class material had to be carefully reviewed by faculty panels, modified, then critiqued again. We weren't training humanities undergraduates here, but the future leaders of the U.S. Army. Completely reorganizing the curriculum was a gargantuan project that would require thousands of hours of demanding staff work.

But General McGarr arbitrarily decreed that the revamped curriculum would be ready within a single academic year. Further, the faculty would accomplish this task while simultaneously teaching their regular class load. We normally worked over forty hours a week as it was, what with classroom preparation, counseling students, and supervising special projects. Suddenly our workload shot up to eighty, even ninety hours a week. Friends of mine like Harvey Short, now a lieutenant colonel, who had joined the faculty after a military adviser assignment in the Philippines, stood up reasonably well to the strain. Harvey was an intellectual soldier who combined brains with battlefield courage. But others, men who had fought some of the bitterest campaigns of World War II and Korea, virtually staggered under this punishing workload.

What made this especially difficult was the needless deadline and the total reorganization that McGarr had decreed. In Department IV, for example, we had already rewritten our curriculum to match the new Airborne doctrine we were evolving. This was true to a lesser degree in other departments. But McGarr refused to discuss retaining existing material. In fact, he rarely deigned to converse with anyone below the rank of general. He quickly became an archvillain. Because of his beer-barrel physique and a haircut that divided the top of his head into two waxy wings, he acquired the derisive nickname "Split-head Magoo."

Whereas the General's cartoon namesake, Mr. Magoo, was a benign dolt, McGarr displayed malevolent (even paranoid) cunning, not unlike the fictional Captain Queeg of *The Caine Mutiny*. The College's assistant commandant, Brigadier General Fred Zierath, tried to reason with him, but McGarr saw this as disloyalty. He appointed two personal advisers, Majors Dick Hallock and Jack Cushman, to oversee the reorganization. In effect, they were McGarr's spies.[23] Within weeks the normal atmosphere of professional camaraderie had been poisoned. Men who had felt honored to serve on the College faculty suddenly found their careers in jeopardy. Based on reports of disloyalty, McGarr began relieving hard-working officers. The stress was terrible. McGarr was undeterred, however. He accomplished his cherished modernization, but he left the blighted careers of several fine officers in his wake.[24]

(Those who appreciate poetic justice will be interested to learn what eventually happened to General McGarr. In 1960, he was assigned to command the trouble-plagued Military Assistance Advisory Group in South Vietnam, the precursor of our larger Military Assistance Command in Saigon. The security situation was deteriorating rapidly as the Communist Vietcong increased operations under orders from Hanoi. McGarr couldn't take the strain. He had a complete mental breakdown and had to be institutionalized at an Army hospital in the States. Like the men he had broken years before at the College, General McGarr was forced to retire with his career in shambles.)

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WHILE the College faculty struggled to follow General McGarr's arbitrary orders, events in Europe and the Middle East exploded, dramatizing the dangerous and unpredictable state of international affairs.

The people of Hungary rose up against their Soviet masters in October 1956. This revolt was a stunning development, in that both the supposedly loyal puppet Communist government led by Premier Imre Nagy and the Soviet-sponsored Hungarian army joined the rebels. The Hungarian army

opened its arsenals to the rebels, equipping civilians with light weapons and even armored vehicles. By the last week of October, Nagy had managed to create a genuine coalition government that was predominantly non-Communist. Even more surprising, Soviet troops had evacuated the country or retreated into garrisons, and Nagy predicted a complete Red Army pull-out. He announced that Hungary had withdrawn from the Warsaw Pact and requested the United Nations recognize his country as a neutral state. It appeared the Soviet empire was crumbling.

American reaction was cautious. We could give the brave Hungarians moral support, but their country lay behind a shield of dozens of Red Army divisions on full alert in East Germany and Czechoslovakia. On November 3, the world learned of the Soviet response. The Red Army reentered Hungary in strength. Within two weeks Soviet tanks had brutally suppressed the democratic rebels in bitter street fighting throughout the country. Thousands died; thousands more were rounded up and shipped in cattle cars to Siberian labor camps. Almost 200,000 refugees escaped to Austria and on to Western Europe. Imre Nagy and his advisers were kidnapped by the Soviet secret police and later executed.

While this drama unfolded in central Europe, another crisis exploded in the Middle East. Egyptian president Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser nationalized the Anglo-French Suez Canal Company, and threatened to close the waterway to "imperialist" traffic. Nasser's action went beyond radical nationalism. The year before he had established close ties with the Soviet bloc and had become their unofficial proconsul in the Middle East, in exchange for massive economic and military aid. His seizure of the canal was ostensibly a reprisal against Great Britain and the United States for their refusal to fund the gargantuan construction project of a hydroelectric dam at Aswan.

Great Britain, France, and Israel reacted by launching a combined airborne, amphibious, and ground attack to seize the Suez Canal. The Soviets responded with ominous threats of nuclear retaliation. The United States policy was muddled—first bolstering our NATO allies, then condemning them. The Suez War sputtered to an inconclusive settlement with the eventual withdrawal of foreign troops from the canal.

These two crises, although disparate in nature, underscored the type of military situation the United States could expect to confront in the unstable world of the Cold War. The sad fact was that we had almost no means of influencing these events because we lacked the ability to project our military power quickly and decisively on a global scale. America had opted for the least expensive defense establishment in terms of financial and human sacrifice. Nuclear weapons were cheaper than a huge standing army, and the air and sea lifts needed to transport this army around the world. And this also meant that most of our skilled young citizens could be employed in

productive civilian employment. But Hungary and Suez had demonstrated that the policy of massive retaliation was patently impractical. We couldn't simply threaten to incinerate the Soviet Union every time American and Soviet interests clashed. We needed a more flexible, practical response.

The Marine Corps was our primary intervention force, but Marine strength was below two divisions and the Navy lacked the fast amphibious capability to deliver Marine battalions overseas. This situation underscored the need for a modern, effective U.S. Army Airborne reaction force that could be quickly deployed to trouble spots throughout the world. General Taylor had already decided to reactivate his former World War II unit, the 101st Airborne Division, as the Army's first Pentomic division. This would bring Army Airborne strength to three full divisions. In theory, this was exactly the type of force the country could rely on in the so-called "brushfire" military situations breaking out across the world, especially where Western and Soviet interests conflicted in newly independent or developing countries.

The only problem with all this was that our Airborne forces simply did not have the airplanes—the "airlift capability"—to carry them into battle. The U.S. Air Force was responsible for transporting the Airborne. But Air Force leadership at the time was preoccupied with building manned bombers and developing a variety of nuclear ballistic missiles. They had devoted a piddling 5,000 tons of airlift to the Army, most of it in the form of lumbering piston-engine transport planes, C-47s, C-119s, and the clumsy C-123, which had actually been designed as a glider in World War II, and now, with two engines added as an afterthought, functioned as an incredibly slow airdrop plane. There were some bigger, four-engine C-124s, capable of dropping almost 300 paratroopers, but they were also slow and vulnerable to ground fire.

Even if the Army grudgingly accepted these obsolescent transport planes as a serious Air Force contribution to national security, the 5,000-ton total airlift capability was woefully inadequate. It took 20,000 tons of airlift to transport just one Airborne division into battle. We now had three divisions. General Taylor gave top priority to calculating the Army's true airlift requirement. He knew the current world situation augured well for congressional funding of a viable fast-reaction Army force. In effect, creating an Airborne force supported by a realistic airlift would give America a practical alternative to Dulles's unrealistic massive retaliation.

But before lobbying Congress to fund such a force, Taylor needed to know exactly what the Army required. To his chagrin, he could find no one in the Pentagon capable of calculating these requirements. He next turned to the Continental Army Command (CONARC) at Fort Monroe, Virginia. But they had no one qualified for this demanding task. Officers at CONARC recalled, however, that Department IV of the Command and General Staff

College had been active in devising modern Airborne doctrine. That summer I had led discussions on this new doctrine during Exercise Pine Cone, a large-scale Airborne maneuver at Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

So in late November 1954 I left Mary and the kids to have Thanksgiving dinner without me and boarded a plane to Fort Monroe. In typical Army fashion, the team I joined had been given all of twelve days to calculate the entire airlift requirement for the Airborne. The leader of this effort was Major General Harvey J. Jablonsky, known to his troops as "Jabo." He had been my regimental executive officer back in the 515th Parachute Infantry in 1943, and had commanded Airborne troops in combat in Europe. Jabo believed in assigning the right man to a job, whatever his rank, then letting him get on with it.

I ended up as team chief and, along with Lieutenant Colonel Jay W. Herrington of Jabo's staff and my friend Captain Bob Channon (a former Ranger officer I'd helped train for combat in Korea), we calculated the total airlift requirements to move every man and every piece of equipment in the entire division plus the necessary ammunition and supplies to enable it to fight. We worked practically around the clock, and had to repeatedly revise our painstaking calculations as more information became available.

The heart of the problem involved the unique nature of airborne warfare. In conventional ground operations an infantry division with a standard complement of men and equipment would attack an objective and be reinforced as needed with men and special weapons during the course of the offensive. Planning for such an operation was therefore a sequential responsibility that moved geographically *forward* from the assembly area toward the particular real estate to be occupied. An airborne operation was the reverse of this. Parachute troops arrived en masse at their objective; everything and everybody needed to accomplish the mission had to be calculated in advance. This meant the planner had to realistically calculate the *exact* number of 60mm mortar rounds, hand grenades, medical corpsmen, radio men, and all the other myriad requirements of men and matériel that composed an Airborne division in battle.

And we had twelve days to do this. Luckily, CONARC had computers, rudimentary as they were in 1956. These mysterious, humming machines were serviced by white-coated, almost priestly experts accustomed to conducting their abstract labors without the interference of impatient field soldiers like me. But I had a hunch their exotic computers could simplify our task. I was right. Once the computer experts understood the nature of our problem, they accepted the challenge enthusiastically.

To everyone's surprise, we completed our exercise a day ahead of schedule. For the first time in the history of the Airborne, the Army knew exactly how many and which type of aircraft were needed to transport its forces to

a variety of objectives throughout the world. One of the major offshoots of this exercise was the realization by the Defense Department that America needed modern airlift equipment. We could no longer rely on planes of World War II vintage. Within a few years the Air Force had deployed a whole new class of fast, long-range transports, including the durable turboprop C-130 Hercules and the jet C-141.

One of the unexpected results of this exercise was to force the Army's leaders to assess realistically our country's global military responsibilities. We had passed through the roller-coaster cycles of postwar demobilization and the chaotic mobilization for the Korean War. It was now time to accept the harsh reality that we were locked in a protracted political and military competition with a powerful and intransigent foe. There was no end in sight to the Cold War, and we were in for the duration.