

America's Armed Forces:

2. "In Time of Peace": The Army

By Major General Smedley D. Butler

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[Editor's Note: I have omitted one section of this article, concerning military debates in the '30s, which is of little contemporary interest. I have also omitted Butler's very isolationist and naive conclusion. If you want the whole article, or the whole series of five articles, please request them from the Inter-Library Loan department of any good library. The International Bibliography of Periodical Literature will give the exact references -- late 1935 to early 1936, in Common Sense.]

*I have also put some paragraphs in **bold face**. These are the parts most frequently quoted, in that they document Butler's contention that U.S. policy was imperialist and exploitative, never "defensive," from at least the beginning of the 20th century.*

General Smedley D. Butler was the most decorated soldier in American uniform; Commander of the Marine Corps school; and passed over for Marine Corps commandant only because of his increasingly anti-imperialist views.

He was very popular with rank-and-file soldiers and veterans. He strongly defended the "Bonus Marchers", attacked by U.S. troops under General Douglas MacArthur and Colonel Dwight D. Eisenhower in Washington DC in 1932.

*In an incident whose history is suppressed today, Gen. Butler was approached by representatives of the Morgan Bank who wished him to lead a fascist military coup d'état against the Roosevelt government in 1932. He refused and went to the press. A Congressional investigation was eventually suppressed. See Jules Archer, *The Plot to Seize the White House* for a recent, documented version of this cover-up, well-publicized at the time but virtually "blacked out" today!*

-- Grover Furr]

THE New Deal has dealt us a military and naval hand that makes us big time contenders in the war racket.

Events in Ethiopia indicate that all too soon it will be our turn to play the cards. We ought to make

a good showing. We're getting plenty of practice.

Our army and navy have only recently completed their largest and most ambitious peace-time maneuvers. Our National Guardsmen have done even better. In the past two years large National Guard forces have seen active service in 20 strikes in as many different states, from the Pacific Coast to New England, from Minnesota to Georgia. They have used gas, bullets, and tanks -- the most lethal weapons of modern war -- against striking workers. Casualty lists have been impressive. In one instance they erected barbed wire concentration camps in Georgia to "coordinate" striking workers with all the efficiency of the fascist repressive technique.

There isn't a trick in the racketeering bag that the military gang is blind to. It has its "finger men" (to point out enemies), its "muscle men" (to destroy enemies), its "brain guys," (to plan war preparations) and a "Big Boss," (super-nationalistic capitalism).

I Was a "Racketeer"

It may seem odd for me, a military man to adopt such a comparison. Truthfulness compels me to. I spent 33 years and 4 months in active service as a member of our country's most agile military force -- the Marine Corps. I served in all commissioned ranks from a second lieutenant to Major-General. And during that period I spent most of my time being a high-class muscle man for Big Business, for Wall Street and for the bankers. In short, I was a racketeer for capitalism.

I suspected I was just part of a racket at the time. Now I am sure of it. Like all members of the profession I never had an original thought until I left the service. My mental faculties remained in suspended animation while I obeyed the orders of the higher-ups. This is typical of everyone in the military service.

Thus I, helped make Mexico and especially Tampico safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefit of Wall Street. The record of racketeering is long. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers 1909-12. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. I helped make Honduras "right" for American fruit companies in 1903. In China in 1927 I helped see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested.

During those years, I had, as the boys in the back room would say, a swell racket. I was rewarded with honors, medals, promotion. Looking back on it, I feel I might have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was to operate his racket in three city districts. We Marines operated on three *continents*.

The war: racket operates at full swing in our own country today.- Make no mistake. We no longer fulfill by our example as a nation the role of Leader in Disarmament and Peace-Maker to

Mankind. Our present war preparations and military expenditures forever nullify the Kellogg Peace Pact to which we subscribed, and all our previous efforts to ease the burden of war throughout the world.

Defense or Offense?

It is commonly supposed that our armed forces are entirely defensive in nature, that they have nothing to do with the making of war or the creating of situations that lead to war. The General Staff states publicly, that the military organization "is founded on the principle that we must be unready for aggressive war, yet fully capable of defending ourselves... To be defensive in motive, as we intend to be, a nation must surrender all thought of initiative."

If this statement was a fact and effectively translated into reality, there would be little cause for concern. But close examination reveals that it is just another publicity release from that military sap factory known as the War Department.

Training Regulations No. 10-5 of the War Department contain the official "Doctrine of War," for the United States. Section II, paragraph 2, says "Decision to go to war having been made, operations will be carried into hostile territory... the primary objective will be the destruction of (the enemy's) armed forces, and this demands that the strategical and tactical offensive be taken and maintained until a decision is reached." Section V, paragraph 6, says "the object to be attained by (military) training is to enable the Army to wage offensive warfare, While training must cover certain phases of defensive doctrine and police doctrine the Army must definitely understand that these are only means to the definite end -- offensive warfare -- and every individual in the military service must be imbued with the spirit of the offensive."

Our Ideal Never Defensive

Lest this seem to be the bellicose pipedream of some dyspeptic desk soldier, let us remember that the military deal of our country has never been defensive warfare. Since the Revolution, only the United Kingdom has beaten our record for square miles of territory acquired by military conquest. Our exploits against the American Indian, against the Filipinos, the Mexicans, and against Spain are on a par with the campaigns of Genghis Khan, the Japanese in Manchuria and the African attack of Mussolini. No country has ever declared war on us before we first obliged them with that gesture. Our whole history shows we have never fought a defensive war. And at the rate our armed forces are being implemented at present, the odds are against our fighting one in the near future.

The War Plans Section spends all its time creating blue-prints for the "defense" of this country. This means, of course, vast schemes for foreign invasion and offensive war. The personnel of this division are those whose hides will never be scratched should hostilities occur. Consequently they can devise plans of whatever magnitude they fancy, and against any momentary "enemy." Nothing troubles them; and, as we shall soon see, such a detail as how their next war is going to be paid for is not even considered.

Lloyd's odds on the United States being invaded by a foreign power are 500 to 1 against it. Only the most powerful of coalitions could dream of it -- and unless Great Britain were the spearhead of that coalition even the dream would be a waste of time. Without England's navy, merchant marine and her resources of rubber, nickel, coal and oil, a world coalition would make a hell of a showing! Of course they might capture Guam, Wake Island and even perhaps Hawaii and the Panama Canal. But what serious threat from any quarter can be foreseen on even the most distant horizon?

No. Devising plans for the "defense" of our country, maintaining an army to fulfill those plans and preaching a "defensive doctrine" resolves itself into military hogwash. Actually our armed forces have up to date plans for offensive warfare against almost every country on the globe -- all in the sacred name of "national defense." Should some affront be given to our national honor by Japan, say, there is a plan ready to be put in operation against the Japanese. Should the French run all the Americans out of Paris and say "Lafayette, we are here," a different plan would be pulled from its pigeon hole and we could proceed against the French. And the same for almost any nation you might care to name,

Bigger and Better War Plans

The musical comedy angle of such planning is obvious. It entails, for one thing, the sending of large numbers of our boys abroad as in 1918. It means creating an offensive fighting machine once more. Sound military doctrine, no doubt, and quite in keeping with the European strategy. But viewed coldly, it seems to be little more than the adoption of the military jitters exhibited by foreign nations so situated that their borders are forever threatened with invasion. The opinion of Mr. John A. Public would be that we are acting like damn fools.

None the less our military finger men keep busy pointing out enemies and making bigger and better war plans. The gold braid boys are reliable puppets, obeying the string-pulling of their bosses and bowing to imperialist expediency whenever commanded.

Naturally, the military become anxious to try out these war plans. Obviously they cannot invade other countries. They can't even, like the Navy, hold exercises thousands of miles from our shores and as close to Japan as possible. But the Army can and does share in doubtful gestures toward our Eastern neighbor. Alaskan sites are being surveyed for possible air bases. The Matanushka Valley settlement has a significant military value especially now that it has been placed under the care of Lt. Col. L. P. Hunt, active Marine Corps officer. The Aleutian Islands are being plotted for their military potentialities

Within recent years, our military "finger men" have added a new slant to their work by screaming about the danger of attacks against the United States. Before an executive meeting of the House Military Affairs Committee, the Army pointed out how vulnerable we were to an air attack from Canada which would sweep down upon the vast industrial districts from Pittsburgh to Chicago. still more harrowing to them was the thought of an air and water attack by way of the West Indies or of Alaska. All these little horror-dreams did not, however, get into the press.

What did get into the press was the fact that in the Wilcox bill providing for new air bases, a location just south of the Canadian border was one of the points selected. When we recall that in all our history the Canadian border was never fortified with anything stronger than a line of cement markers, we can understand the type of "grand strategy" the "finger men" are grinding out in Washington.

Function of the Air Force

Of course, these and similar activities have their effect in influencing national policy. For instance, the Wilcox Bill was passed on July 20, 1936, and duly signed by the President. The action of the Treasury Department in providing gold vaults at points far from both the eastern and western coast lines is another symptom of the military hysteria engendered by these plans. Once we get all our gold buried near army posts in the interior, our air bases built and all the other plans of the planners perfected, an arrogant spirit of nationalism will be the logical outgrowth. Quite properly we will be able to adopt the chip-on-the-shoulder attitude and be ready to release all the destructive forces we have so diligently created.

First to release these destructive forces will be the "strong arm boys" -- the aviators. This branch of the armed forces, however, is hardly ready to go out on short notice to do its stuff. It has spent so much time fighting for self-preservation against the vested interest of the foot-soldiers and their civilian well-wishers that it is almost too exhausted to fight at all. In addition the aviators fight among themselves over policy, procurement and training.

(PART OF THE ARTICLE IS OMITTED HERE. THE FOLLOWING SECTION DETAILS BUTLER'S CHARGES AGAINST US MILITARY INTELLIGENCE)

Their Domestic Role

The import of these military intelligence reports can best be judged by the homework of military intelligence. The domestic brand of M. I. is mainly unadulterated Red hunting. Hence intelligence officers cooperate more or less openly with such bulwarks of home defense as !William Randolph Hearst, Ralph Easley, Harry Jung of Chicago, and such organizations as the National Security League, the American Vigilantes and the Order of '76.

The intelligence men further justify their jobs by spy work on radical gatherings, by attending public forums in an attempt to detect political or economic heresy, by keeping tabs on various suspects, and by smelling out what they consider to be subversive activities everywhere. In these extra-curricular activities whole-hearted cooperation from professional patrioteers and the Reserve Officers is received. In the New York area, for instance, the military intelligence officers are especially busy. With the 2nd Corps Area headquarters at Governor's Island off the Battery, and the Headquarters of the Communist party near Union Square, the intelligence men work like little beavers. Radical meetings are attended, notes taken, speakers listed, and as many of the audience identified as possible. It is well known in liberal and radical circles that the military intelligence units have been planting men within suspected organizations. Often the "plant"

appears in uniform carrying a radical publication and pretends to be a backslider for the benefit of the Reds. Other times, he operates as the following from the columns of the New York Herald-Tribune of July 12th, 1933, explains:

"Madison, Wis. (C:P). The United States Secret Service was supplied with information regarding the activity of communists at the University of Wisconsin. William H. Haight, Jr., nineteen years old, a student and Reserve Officer's Training Corps member told a legislators' investigation committee here.

"Haight said he had been assigned to supply... information regarding communistic activity at Chicago and later continued his work here."

Every so often some regular, National Guardsman or retired officer gets so fed up with the absurdities of the military intelligence, that he cannot longer view this degradation of his profession without protesting. But in order to save his skin he must take the cloak of anonymity. For instance, on August 1st, 1932, one nameless Reservist was unable to stomach the War Department's ousting of the Bonus Army and subsequent comment by M.I.N.I., the columnist for the "Army and Navy Journal" upon the event. M.I.N.I. lumped the veterans of the Bonus Army with communists "and others of like ilk" and lauded General MacArthur for saving the country from the Red Menace. The nameless Reserve officer wrote the N. Y. Times, in part as follows:

"Who 'M.I.N.I.' may be I do not know, but if by any chance those letters should stand for 'military intelligence, naval intelligence,' would anybody be greatly surprised? The kind of intelligence that could produce such inconceivable rot is unhappily too much like the kind of intelligence that before now has been observed to distinguish our military and naval thinkers."

Supplies for the Next War

Now should the "finger" and "muscle" and "brain" men get the country all set for another war where mould we Get the supplies? Here is a question, the answer to which is very reassuring. Since the National Defense Act of 1920 the Procurement Planning division of the War Department has been busy surveying the industry of the country and its potential manufacturing capacity for war purposes. Thousands of factories have been visited and the manufacture of 2,500 articles in gigantic quantities for an army of several million men has been fully plotted.

The diversity of the articles touches virtually every industry; from breakfast food to boiler plates. The amounts run, in estimated first costs, to several billions of dollars --sufficient to boom industry to new levels, to give impetus to a new maritime inflation and to create a new batch of millionaires equal to those of the past war.

But there is just one little flaw in this vast procurement plan of the army's. They haven't bothered to

figure out any way to pay for all the thousands of tons of articles and raw materials needed. In their procurement work they have devised a dummy contract with all the various manufacturers ... but this contract does not specify price, payment or credit arrangements.

These contracts are of inestimable value to the War Department. Every manufacturer who has one, who has had his factory surveyed, his production capacity noted and his "M"-Day orders delivered, is a great big booster for the military. The fortunate industrialist! He knows that as soon as hostilities break out there will be nice fat orders to keep his factories running for some time. Indeed, he senses that a demand for more active war preparations would cause a good share of these contracts to be executed at once. The aircraft manufacturers and the shipbuilding industry, thanks to New Deal public works money have already learned this lesson. They wax fat -- fatter than ever before in peace time.

Profiteering, Past and Future

Not only have the procurement plans of the army convinced the minds of industry that war means more and bigger business, but the War Department in the years since the war has looked slightly at any attempt to introduce legislation that would limit profits and impose higher taxes on war earnings. In 1931 the War Department before the War Policies Commission declared publicly that a 6% return upon invested capital in wartime was a fair return. Everything above that might be taxed in varying degrees. The army favored the Baruch plan to freeze prices and put a "ceiling" on the price structure upon the outbreak of war in an effort to prevent profiteering.

As the Senate Munitions Committee pointed out, the freezing of prices -- with upward adjustments allowable to increase production -- would not accomplish its purpose. The Senate Committee showed that fixed prices slowed down production and that the threat of high taxes made it possible for industry to secure the necessary working capital. The alternative of attempting to commandeer industry and forcing it to produce at fixed prices in a proper manner is often more expensive to the government than paying high prices for the material in the first place. Says the report of the Senate Committee on price control, page 4: "During the War the copper industry simply refused to produce at even the liberal prices first proposed by the government. The steel industry similarly refused to fill government orders until prices had been stabilized at levels satisfactory to the industry. The du Pont Company refused to build a great powder plant which it alone was qualified to build until it was assured of what is considered sufficient profits. Mr. Pierre du Pont wrote that "we cannot assent to allowing our patriotism to interfere with our duties as trustees."

At the Mercy of Capitalism

The Senate report continues: "The government is more at the mercy of a strike by capital than at the mercy of a strike by labor. The War Department bills which have been prepared for adoption upon the outbreak of war, provide in effect that labor can be drafted and that men must either work or fight. With these powers and with a whole labor pool to draw on in the form of the conscript army, there is no question that the Army can break any labor strike. (The Army) is in no

similar situation in regard to a strike by capital or management... .A strike (of capital) is neither open nor advised. It was not until the hearings of this committee, some 17 or 18 years after the event, that the strikes of certain of our industrial companies in connection with war-time price fixing became known."

In other words this means that the War Department and the government, under the present law, is at the mercy of the rulers of industry and finance. The contracts of the War Department for future war supplies exist -- industry will have its own way about profits.

General MacArthur's final report as Chief of Staff comments on the 45,000 men just added to the regular forces and the amount of new equipment needed in the next five years to make this new force effective. Of course, little was said about needing new equipment when the man-power increment was requested. But now new apparatus for motorization, mechanization, armament artillery, ammunition and chemical warfare must be had. In a short while we will see the War Department revise itself -- it will need still more men to man the equipment purchased. Either the army is undermanned -- or under-equipped. Indeed, there is not a general in active service today who would dare state that we are properly armed. The appetites of the military for new material, for more men is insatiable.

Add up these phases of the war racket we harbor and encourage, and the result is a pretty picture. We support armed forces that have all the evils of the old-time European prussianized military systems. They point out "enemies" for us. The speediest and most deadly branch, the Air Corps, is engaged in activities liable to drag us into a world crisis. The intelligence branch of the army is engaged in collecting useless and incendiary information abroad and in reprehensible activities at home. And industry has been invited into partnership with our armed forces so that the advent of war cannot be less than welcome to it,

What is the Answer?

The correction of these evils is our immediate duty. We must deny to our armed forces the functions of diplomats, politicians and agents provocateur. To do this means reorienting the military both in location and in policy as well. Our entire doctrine of war must be restated as a defensive doctrine in theory and adhered to in practice.

[Editor's note: The conclusion of Butler's article -- isolationist -- is omitted here]

BACK to Grover Furr's [Politics and Social Issues Page](#).