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# Samuel Huntington, Professionalism, and Self-Policing in the US Army Officer Corps

Brian McAllister Linn

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**ABSTRACT:** Drawing on Samuel P. Huntington's three phases of self-regulation used to determine if an occupation qualifies as a profession, this article focuses on the third phase of policing and removing those who fail to uphold the standards set forth in the first two phases. It reviews how the Army implemented this phase following the Civil War through the post-Vietnam War years and the implications for the officer corps.

**I**n the 64 years since its publication, Samuel P. Huntington's *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* has inspired an extensive literature on military professionalism. In keeping with Huntington's own focus, most of the commentary has focused on his concepts of proper civil-military relations, such as objective control, corporate identity, responsibility to society, and apolitical service. What has seldom been addressed is the implication behind his assertion that the officers in the armed forces were professionals because there existed "an organization which formalizes and applies the standards of professional competence and establishes and enforces the standards of professional responsibility."<sup>1</sup> In short, three phases of self-regulation—defining its ethics and proficiencies, credentialing its members, and policing and removing those who failed to uphold those standards—were essential to determining whether an occupation qualifies as a profession. While the first two aspects of self-regulation have generated a great deal of literature, there has been little study of the last.

This article redresses this imbalance by examining the US Army's self-policing efforts in the decades between the 1890s to the 1950s that Huntington used as his model. It then extends its analysis to the volunteer professional force of the post-Vietnam era. It will focus not on the discharge of officers for ethical or physical causes, but on the elimination of deadwood—the substandard, the incompetent, the placeholders who, like *Beetle Bailey's* General Halftrack, continue to be not

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1. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (New York: Vintage Books, 1957), 10. For a small sample of the scholarship that expands on Huntington's thesis, see James L. Abrahamson, *America Arms for a New Century: The Making of a Great Military Power* (New York: Free Press, 1981); Risa Brooks, "Beyond Huntington: US Military Professionalism Today," *Parameters* 51 (Spring 2021): 65–77; J. P. Clark, *Preparing for War: The Emergence of the Modern U.S. Army, 1815–1917* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017); Edward M. Coffman, "The Long Shadow of *The Soldier and the State*," *Journal of Military History* 55 (January 1991): 69–82; William B. Skelton, "Samuel B. Huntington and the Roots of American Military Tradition," *Journal of Military History* 60 (April 1996): 325–38. Don M. Snider has commented extensively on Army professionalism and ethics. For example, see Don M. Snider, "Reviewing the Motivational Power of the Army's Professional Ethic," *Parameters* 44 (Autumn 2014): 7–12.

only retained, but promoted. On an institutional level, it provides context on an impediment to officer corps excellence that has concerned the service throughout its existence. On an individual level, it addresses a question most officers have asked themselves at least once: “How is that person still in uniform?”

## Post-Civil War Era

Huntington began his study with the post-Civil War decades. For the 30-year period after Reconstruction the strength of the officer corps was fixed at 2,200, creating a closely knit community. Upon commissioning in the Regular Army, each officer received a number and advanced in seniority within their branch or bureau as fast as officers ahead of them were promoted, retired, or died. Although West Point held a virtual monopoly on new commissions, Civil War veterans dominated the field grades and could be found commanding companies as late as 1898. Most regarded officership as a sinecure for loyal service rather than a profession, to be held until retirement at 45 years of service or the age of 62 (after 1870). Their horizons were confined by decades spent in garrison life, limited by the incessant routines of drill, administration, supervising fatigue (work) details of perhaps 20 men, and social events: “soldiering had long since become a chore to them, and they were not looking for work.”<sup>2</sup> The mediocrity of so many of their colleagues outraged progressives. In 1884, Lieutenant Arthur Wagner put forward as a professional standard for any regular officer the ability to command a wartime regiment. He noted sarcastically that many who wore epaulets could not discharge a sergeant’s duties.<sup>3</sup> That same year, Commanding General Philip Sheridan told Congress the primary impediment to Army efficiency was the overabundance of sick, crippled, and otherwise incapacitated officers.<sup>4</sup>

In 1890 in what might be interpreted as the first effort at mandating professional self-policing, Congress, despite significant Regular Army opposition, required both annual efficiency reports and examinations for promotion up to major. An officer who failed his examination lost his place on the seniority list; if he failed again, he was discharged. Although the exam itself was rigorous, there is no evidence of any officers, veteran or not, being discharged for failing. In 1896 when Lieutenant William Carey Brown suggested that officers incapable of physically or mentally performing their duties be retired, an officer retorted it was better to have an infirm lieutenant of 60 than to force out a loyal

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2. Hunter Liggett, *A. E. F.: Ten Years Ago in France* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1928), 260; and J. A. Dapray, “A Subaltern’s View of the Army,” *United Service* 5 (December 1881): 707–12.

3. Arthur L. Wagner, “The Military Necessities of the United States, and the Best Provisions for Meeting Them,” *Journal of the Military Service Institution* 5 (September 1884): 262.

4. *Report of the Secretary of War: Being Part of the Message and Documents Communicated to the Two Houses of Congress*, 48th Cong. (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1884), 50.

officer.<sup>5</sup> The wars in Cuba and the Philippines demonstrated the consequences of protecting caste rather than promoting professional merit. One veteran wrote of his colleagues' dismay at the "useless slaughter of our men at San Juan through the worst possible mismanagement" and their bitterness that "the blunderers were promoted with indecent haste, while most of the army thought they would be courtmartialed."<sup>6</sup>

Huntington considers the "Root reforms as *a*, if not *the* fulcrum" in the transition to a professional officer corps. While it is certainly true the Root era institutional reforms—the General Staff, the War College, the Leavenworth schools, and so forth—contributed to professional expertise, did these reforms result in enhanced professional self-policing? Like Huntington, many researchers have confused this era's creation of the aforementioned professional organizations with the enforcement of higher professional standards but were these parallel developments? Throughout the decade following Root's alleged transformation, there were complaints that the retention of the superannuated ensured the "dead stagnation in promotion."<sup>7</sup> In 1905, only 11 of the 346 officers taking promotion exams failed, and not a few of these due to moral or medical causes.<sup>8</sup> A 1909 report by a major general noted many "officers utterly incompetent for the commands they exercise have clearly demonstrated their inefficiency yet under existing regulations and interpretations thereof it has been found impossible to get rid of these officers."<sup>9</sup> In a 1910 letter to Leonard Wood, John J. Pershing listed some of the "fossils" he was cursed with: "Colonel Bowen of the 12th Infantry whose utter inefficiency you are familiar with; Lieutenant Colonel Ames of the same regiment, whose worthlessness has continued throughout his army career; and Colonel Dodd of the 12th Cavalry, who has drunk himself into a hopeless state of imbecility."<sup>10</sup>

Pershing's sentiments, if not his pungent language, were echoed that year in Chief of Staff J. Franklin Bell's testimony to the Senate. The Army's peacetime promotion policies all but ensured "the minimum of promotion with the maximum of rust and decrepitude." Promotion by merit would "kill ambitions and destroy zeal" and those passed over "would remain to spread dissatisfaction and

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5. William C. Brown, "Reorganization and Graded Retirement for the Cavalry," *Journal of the US Cavalry Association* 9 (September 1896): 215–26, 226–35.

6. Charles Morton to his brother, "Philippine Campaigning," *Cavalry Journal* 39, no. 138 (January 1929): 20.

7. Lloyd Buchanan, "Army as a Career," *World's Work* 11 (February 1906): 7236–38; and "Eliminating Army Officers," *Nation* 82 (February 1906): 110–11.

8. "Report of the Secretary of War," in *Annual Reports of the War Department for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1906*, vol. 1 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1906), 12, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiug.30112099981158&view=lup&seq=18&skin=2021>.

9. "Report of the Philippine Commission," in *Annual Reports of the War Department for Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1909*, vol. 6 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1909), 3, 201; and Robert H. Noble, "Selection versus Seniority," *Infantry Journal* 6 (July 1909): 63–77.

10. John J. Pershing to Leonard Wood, February 11, 1910, Box 48, Leonard Wood Papers, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress.

discontent and poison the military atmosphere in their vicinity.”<sup>11</sup> Bell’s solution was to increase the number of majors and colonels—the very group he admitted were the most underperforming—on the grounds it would free up advancement for lieutenants and captains. Unimpressed by this logic, Congress refused the plan. Bell’s successor declared all efforts to eliminate “deadwood” in the officer corps “a practical failure.”<sup>12</sup>

## Era of the World Wars

The post–World War I peacetime force had a similar problem with self-policing despite both the Regular Army and Congress declaring their intention to purge the substandard. The 1920 National Defense Act mandated an annual evaluation for each active-duty officer, first by his immediate superior and then by the personnel department of his respective branch. Those who received unsatisfactory ratings (Class B) were to appear before a board for possible discharge. As with previous (and future) efforts to eliminate officers, this policy worked better in theory than practice.

The first officer evaluation form was a fiasco. Its 1922 replacement had a longer tenure, not because it was adequate but because the agencies overseeing the profession’s self-assessment process could not agree on its revision. In one respect, the evaluation system did work; it revealed a true Army of Excellence. In 1926, 11,400 officers were rated; 343 were assessed as superior, 4,323 as above average, 6,546 as average, and only 86 as below average. The 1927–28 Class B board with 14,000 potential candidates, classified only 131 into Class B status, of which only 46 retired or resigned.<sup>13</sup> After a thorough study of the process, Major J. C. F. Tillson of the US Army War College concluded they allowed poor commanders to intimidate subordinates with the threat of a Class B, “thus disgusting and losing the true loyalty of the better officers and making the deceitful ones more cunning.”<sup>14</sup> The criticism had merit. From a perspective three decades later, one prominent military intellectual dated the decline in officer integrity to making promotion dependent on efficiency reports rather than examinations. Prior to this, he recalled, officers had obeyed orders with exactitude, but did not hesitate to disagree with their superiors on military issues in social

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11. *Hearings before the Senate Committee on Military Affairs Relating to Various Army Matters of the US Senate Committee on Military Affairs* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1910), 14–15.

12. “Report of the Secretary of War,” in *War Department Annual Reports, 1911* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1911), 8, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiug.30112099980879&view=1up&cseq=16&skin=2021>

13. “Report of the Secretary of War to the President, 1928” in *War Department Annual Reports, 1928* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1928), 221, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b4987585&view=1up&cseq=5&skin=2021>.

14. J. C. F. Tillson, “Efficiency Reports: How May the Present Report be Improved?,” February 28, 1931, US Army Heritage and Education Center (AHEC), Carlisle, PA; and *War Department Annual Reports, 1928*, 221.

settings. Afterwards, they fawned over their seniors and avoided any hint of independent thought.<sup>15</sup>

The Officer Personnel Act of 1947 (OPA-47) represented, in part, another Congressional effort to impose professional standards and remove subpar officers. It replaced the century-old process of promotion by lineal seniority with one of up-or-out merit and established a career path with clear gates to advancement. Promotion would be rapid in the early grades, with a second lieutenant pinning on lieutenant's bars after three years, a captain's bars after seven years, and a major's oak leaves at 14 years. Most careers would end with retirement at 20 years as senior majors with pension, health care, and other benefits. An ever-shrinking select would progress to lieutenant colonel, colonel, and general, all but the latter retiring by 30 years with even more generous pensions.

To ensure only the best officers advanced, promotion past lieutenant was competitive, with each year's candidates evaluated by selection boards. Officers turned back twice were dropped from active duty. In theory, the OPA-47 provided the nation and professional officers with three great benefits. It outlined a fair, stable, and rewarding path to advancement for an elite of dedicated career officers while eliminating anyone unable to make the grade. It provided sufficient senior and field grade officers to prepare the Army in peace and administer and command the mobilized citizen-soldier forces in war. Finally, it created in the reserves a second tier of experienced commanders, specialists, and managers who could be called back to the colors. A fourth benefit was not mentioned, but in making the officer corps responsible for deciding the standards of merit, it awarded the professionals autonomy in policing their membership (or what Huntington termed "objective control").<sup>16</sup>

Passed prior to the Cold War buildup, the OPA-47 anticipated an all-volunteer career force of 50,000 officers and 400,000 enlisted. A decade later the Army numbered 96,000 officers, with almost 900,000 in other ranks. Congress deferred to the Armed Forces' conviction that any future conflict would require a host of senior managers to direct the nation's military mobilization and to train, administer, and command millions of citizen-warriors. In 1946 and 1971 the US Armed Forces were roughly equivalent at 3,000,000—but in 1971 they boasted 21,000 more majors (or their equivalent), 15,000 more lieutenant colonels, and 4,000 more colonels—and almost 120,000 less lieutenants! The ensuing emphasis on retaining senior management inflated these grades far beyond peacetime needs. At the other end, the OPA-47 assumed a steady, predictable stream of entry-level second lieutenants rising through

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15. Conrad H. Lanza, "Military Honor," *Combat Forces Journal* 1 (July 1951): 6.

16. Matthew W. Markel, "The Organization Man at War: Promotions Policies and Military Leadership" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2000), 200–6.

in rank and keeping the career escalator moving smoothly. However, what if—as was demonstrated after OPA-47’s passage—there were too few superior, or even average lieutenants and captains willing to make the service a profession? Then the need to maintain the career escalator might force the promotion of the substandard who remained, adding a new layer of deadwood.<sup>17</sup>

The Officer Personnel Act of 1947 also encouraged Army career managers to make professional military education one more box to check in the up-or-out timelines. According to Michael David Stewart, historian, at the formerly elite Command and General Staff College, “selection to attend, rather than learning while in attendance, became a mark of professional achievement.”<sup>18</sup> The Army further diluted education credentials by awarding them for nonacademic duties and keeping high performers out of school. Huntington’s definition of “expertise” emphasized individual experience was insufficient, and a profession required “institutions of research and education for the extension and transmission of professional knowledge and skill.” In the pre-World War II Army, an officer’s performance at the elite staff and war colleges often played a significant role in his selection for higher command. In the post-OPA-47 decades, however, the primacy of officer career management could make advanced professional military education one more box to check: selection to the school mattered, not excellence once there. Reflecting the emphasis on experience rather than education, two years into the Korean War, the commandant of the Command and General Staff College complained that not one of his 900 incoming students had been a successful regimental commander in that conflict. He dreaded the imminent bureaucratic fight to have even a few of these elites diverted from their Pentagon assignments.<sup>19</sup>

## Cold War and Corporatization

As matriculation at the educational institutions that formalized and applied the standards of professional competence increasingly became rungs up the career ladder, so the enforcement of standards to remove nonperformers declined. In the two decades following the passage of OPA-47, the metric to identify both merit and mediocrity—the Officer Evaluation Report (OER)—was rewritten an average of once every three years. Surveys found a majority of officers believed each variation was unfair, and some senior officers refused to follow the

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17. Tom Barratt, “The Officer Personnel Act of 1947” (Carlisle, PA: US Army Heritage and Education Center, April 1, 1953); and *Hearings before the Special Subcommittee on the Utilization of Manpower in the Military, House of Representatives Committee on Armed Services*, HASC No. 92-51, 92nd Congress, 1st and 2nd Sessions, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1971-72), 12241-42.

18. Michael David Stewart, “Raising a Pragmatic Army: Officer Education at the US Army Command and General Staff College, 1946-1986” (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2010), 306, [https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/bitstream/handle/1808/6390/Stewart\\_ku\\_0099D\\_10887\\_DATA\\_1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y](https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/bitstream/handle/1808/6390/Stewart_ku_0099D_10887_DATA_1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y).

19. Hiram I. Hodes to James A. Van Fleet, May 19, 1952, F-28, Box 69, James A. Van Fleet Papers, George C. Marshall Library, Virginia Military Institute, Lexington, VA.

guidelines. Nor did the OER prove an effective pruning tool. The Army emphasized that all officers with OERs placing them in the bottom 2 percent must go before a board for possible separation; in the five years prior to 1957 only 220 regular officers were involuntarily eliminated.<sup>20</sup> Frustrated by the bloated officer corps and the inability to remove the substandard, Congress forced reductions between 1953 and 1957, eliminating 5,500 active-duty officers. Yet these draconian cuts may have actually increased the proportion of deadwood. R. N. Young, one of the chief agents in the separation process, estimated the Army would have purged over twice as many “at the bottom of the efficiency totem pole” had not “voluntary attrition [of] our most efficient officers” made their retention necessary.<sup>21</sup>

Cuts came largely through outside directives and not the service’s elimination process. Congress passed the 1960 White Charger Act that removed many of the World War II cadre who had been rapidly promoted and then went to seed. In 1964, the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel estimated that among 110,000 active-duty officers less than 200 were separated each fiscal year for incompetence and another 300 for being passed over twice. As a point of comparison, the Army routinely lost three times as many officers through resignation.<sup>22</sup> These resignations were most prevalent among the high-performing junior officers the service needed to retain, and surveys consistently reported a, if not the, primary reason was poor leadership. As an unintended consequence, the generous retirement package provided by the OPA-47 led many officers to opt for early retirement including roughly two-thirds of the colonels during the Vietnam War.<sup>23</sup>

In the wake of the My Lai massacre and the US Army War College *Study on Military Professionalism*, Army Chief of Staff William C. Westmoreland made yet another effort at corporate policing.<sup>24</sup> He directed General Walter T. Kerwin Jr., his deputy chief of staff for personnel, to reform the officer selection system. Even more than fast-tracking high performers, he emphasized it was essential to “institute a *vigorous ‘selection out’* process” for those officers whose toxic leadership or mediocre abilities were “highly detrimental”

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20. US Deputy Chief of Staff Personnel (DCSPER), “Quality of the Officer Corps: Staff Study,” August 19, 1964, AHEC; and John T. English, “Military Personnel Management” (lecture, US Army War College, February 27, 1957), AHEC.

21. R. N. Young, “Responsibilities and Problems of the Army G-1,” (lecture, US Army War College, November 18, 1953), AHEC.

22. DCSPER, “Quality of the Officer Corps.”

23. Newton B. Morgan and Robert J. Morressey, “Premature Retirement of Senior Service College Graduates—Why?,” March 9, 1970, AHEC; J. Robert Moskin, “Our Military Manpower Scandal,” *Look* 22 (March 18, 1958): 27–33; Max L. Pitney, “Retention of Junior Officers,” March 19, 1959, AHEC; and David Byron Park, “An Analysis of the Factors Influencing the Retention of Junior Officers on Active Duty in the United States Army” (master’s thesis, University of Washington, 1971).

24. US Army War College (USAWC), *Study on Military Professionalism* (Carlisle, PA: USAWC, 1970).



to the morale and effectiveness of their subordinates.<sup>25</sup> Kerwin's efforts to incorporate Westmoreland's mandate into the Officer Professional Management System encountered great resistance from senior officers whose careers had benefited from the existing methods. Most of the more ambitious initiatives, including the identification and elimination of substandard officers, were not implemented. Westmoreland's successor, Creighton Abrams Jr., famously warned field commanders, in his "pull up your socks" memo, that they would be sanctioned if they inflated OERs. Within six months Abrams had been forced to surrender, and OERs continued to rate the great majority of officers as above average.<sup>26</sup>

Congressionally imposed postwar reductions cut active-duty officer strength from 111,000 at the Vietnam War peak to 98,200 in 1976. Did the service ensure this was a qualitative as well as quantitative reduction? According to Secretary of the Army Robert E. Froehlke, the service's boards had discharged those "who, in the harsh light of competition, we felt would not measure up in the longer haul."<sup>27</sup> Although the post-Vietnam officer elimination process has been curiously understudied, it is clear the Army targeted specific skills, reservists, Officer Candidate School graduates, and those lacking college credentials. More revealingly, the cuts fell disproportionately on the lower grades. Of the 4,900 officers involuntarily removed from active duty in fiscal year 1974, all were at captain or major grade. These targeted eliminations so protected the Regular Army senior leadership that in 1976 the Army's grade structure contained more lieutenant colonels (10,835) than lieutenants (10,320).<sup>28</sup> This disproportionate rank structure remained despite its original justification—that a large corps of senior managers were necessary for wartime mobilization—had essentially disappeared with the nation's return to a small, all-volunteer professional Army. Moreover, it occurred simultaneously with vacancies in the company grades reaching "crisis proportions."<sup>29</sup>

It might be argued the top-heavy rank structure reflects a higher standard of professionalism. Presumably as officers advance in rank, they are subject to ever-increasing institutional policing and thus become more expert and rigorous

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25. William M. Donnelly, "Professionalism and the Officer Personnel Management System," *Military Review* 93 (May–June 2013): 17, emphasis original.

26. Lewis Sorley, *Thunderbolt: General Creighton Abrams and the Army of His Times* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 356–57. On the lack of faith in the officer evaluation system, see Department of the Army Historical Report (DOAHR), FY 73, 72–73; George B. Bartel, "Are the Troops Getting Enough Officer Duty?," *Army* 23 (September 1973): 41–42; and Lorraine A. Rossi, "Executive Appraisal: Confidence in the Officer Evaluation System" (student paper, USAWC, AHEC, June 18, 1974).

27. Robert F. Froehlke, "Peace-Keeping with Pride and Integrity," *Army* 22 (November 1972): 17.

28. Karl E. Cocke et al., *Department of the Army Historical Summary: Fiscal Year 1976* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1977), 40; and Karl E. Cocke, *Department of the Army Historical Summary: Fiscal Year 1974* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, 1978), 54.

29. Arthur T. Coumbe, *Army Officer Retention: Historical Context* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2010), 6.

in upholding the profession's standards for themselves and others. Officers unwilling to accept these escalating professional standards depart. Unfortunately, there is no evidence to support this trend. Rather, both survey and anecdotal evidence indicates the primary reason the Army failed to retain high-quality junior officers was that these officers perceived their seniors as lacking in both professional ethics and competence. Supporting this view, in fiscal year 1979 one of five colonels and one of 10 lieutenant colonels declined command, the majority on grounds command time would not advance their careers. Nor did this trend get noticeably better in the "zero defects" force of the 1980s; one command climate survey found that three in four officers believed the officer corps was more focused on personal gain than professionalism.<sup>30</sup>

### Implications

The great question remains. Why does a military institution that so prides itself on its Huntington-derived definition of professionalism find it so difficult to shed its deadwood? Additionally, why did this difficulty persist even after Huntington defined officership as a profession because it had, over a half-century of largely internal reforms, "applie[d] the standards of professional competence and established and enforce[d] the standards of professional responsibility?"<sup>31</sup> Two explanations suggest themselves.

The first reason is that the professional corporate identity so valued by Huntington impedes purging substandard personnel. A 1978 RAND study found both Army officers and white-collar counterparts shared "an almost pathological reluctance" to fire fellow managers. Instead, they "shelved" them either through transfer or assignment to unimportant tasks.<sup>32</sup> A career officer's disinclination to terminate underperforming colleagues may be even greater than a white-collar equivalent due to emotional bonds established at the academy, on troop duty, or through intermarriage between military families. This inclination may also explain why the Army, unless forced by outside agencies, had reduced its officer corps by lopping off personnel at the bottom of the career ladder rather than known mediocrities, who are also peers.

A second reason is that Huntington failed to recognize that the rise of the twentieth-century-professional US Army he extolled coincided with that

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30. W. Berry, "Why They Quit," *Army* 20 (December 1970): 3-4; William J. Hauser, "Professionalism and the Junior Officer Drain," *Army* 20 (July 1970): 17-22; Benjamin F. Schemmer, "Internal Army Surveys Suggest Serious Concerns about Army's Senior Leaders," *Armed Forces Journal International* 122 (May 1985): 18-20; and Anneliese M. Steele, "Are the Relationships between Junior and Senior Officers in the US Army Officer Corps Dysfunctional?" April 30, 2001, Combined Arms Research Library.

31. Huntington, *Soldier and the State*, 10.

32. James H. Hayes, *The Evolution of Military Officer Personnel Management Policies: A Preliminary Study with Parallels from Industry* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 1978), 21.

institution's inability to retain enough high-quality career officers in the 6-to-12-year brackets during peacetime. The lack of sufficient high-performing and proven company-grade officers choosing the service as a career creates a vacuum that pulls lower-performing officers into the field grades. The result is a self-perpetuating cycle of too many meritorious officers leaving, too many mediocre officers rising, and the danger that the substandard becomes the new standard.<sup>33</sup>

Is it time to retire Huntington's claim that corporateness equals professional self-regulation as a structural pillar? To recognize that a profession's credentialing agencies exist more as gatekeepers to admission than as monitors of lifetime adherence to its ethical or expert standards? To acknowledge that once initiates have surmounted the hazing of the bar exam, the doctoral dissertation, the medical boards, the tenure process, and so on, all further enforcement of the profession's ideals could well be interpreted as demonstrating these policing agencies had failed?<sup>34</sup>

Perhaps today's officers have become too complacent, claiming a Huntington-based professional status without reflecting on whether their institution is actually following Huntington's criteria. To some officers the very fact their careers are successful proves that institutional self-policing not only exists but works! But what of second-rate peers who are equally successful? When is quantity more important than quality? When does Gresham's Law apply to professions, and when does the supply of bad officers begin to drive out the good?

These are all questions both the Army leadership and its officers must constantly wrestle with. Perhaps, as occurred after the Vietnam War, it is time for the Army officer corps to conduct a deep and hard examination of its profession's ideals and practices. An excellent start would be to recapture the urgency that fueled the US Army War College professionalism and leadership studies. Both studies shed a hard light on the state of the postwar officer corps and inspired many members of the officer corps to reform their service.

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33. Brian McAllister Linn, *Elvis's Army: Cold War GIs and the Atomic Battlefield* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), 180–88; and Thomas D. Koh, "Army Officer Retention: How to Retain the Best and Brightest" (master's thesis, Johns Hopkins University, 2018).

34. USAWC, *Leadership for the 1970s: USAWC Study of Leadership for the Professional Soldier* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: USAWC, 1971); and USAWC, *Study on Military Professionalism* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: USAWC, 1970).