My Military His Military Essay, Research Paper

Nearly 60 Years of Change in the Military (1941 to 2000)

I have been in the military for seventeen years and during my tenure yhere have been countless changes. When I meet a new troop with a fresh attitude I can t help but think of how it was when I first entered the service. More then once I have made the mistake of expressing my thoughts on the change of the military attitude to ex-military. They have all been more than willing to tell me about the real changes in the military. It made me wonder. If the military had changed so much during my time, then how much had it changed from my father s time or even his father s time. Unfortunately, my grandfather is not around to question. So I m left with my research and memories. My Grandfather Keith Sabin, entered the Army in 1941, my father, Earl Dickerson, entered the Navy in 1960, and I entered the Air Force in 1983.

There have been numerous changes over the years. Some have been blatantly obvious, while other have been subtler. All have had a profound impact on both the U.S service member as well as the United States. I m going to cover several key areas that range from technology to the human factor of the military.

When my grandfather entered the Army in 1941 the Air Force had not yet been established. It was still known as the Army Air Corp and would not become its own branch until September 1947. It had only been 30 years since Orville and Wilbur Wright sold their first aircraft to the army as an observation tool. Martin Luther King, Jr. was only 11 years old. Television was still in its infancy and was a long time off from being a household item.

The above information is the basic backdrop of my comparison, not merely how the military has changed but how the changes have impacted the civilian sector. The first issue that will be addressed will be segregation. Unfortunately, during this era, the military cannot hold its head very high on this particular issue. According to Michael Lee Lanning, author of The African-American Soldiers, even though public law had cleared the way for black men to be military pilots, the Army Air Corp was very diligent in its effort to stop blacks from flying. In his book he quotes this excuse given by the Air Corps on May 25, 1941:

We are having difficulty in finding twenty qualified students needed to begin instruction, and now that the War Department is funding and financing this program, and it is the policy not to mix colored and white men in the same tactical organization, and since no provision has been made for any colored Air Corps units in the Army, colored persons are not eligible for enlistment in the Air Corps, so there is no need for additional facilities. (190)

Even after laws where established forcing the military to accept anyone regardless of race, the military still practiced blatant discrimination. A memo written by the senior ranking member of the Air Corp, General Henry H. Arnold stated, Negroes will only be used in positions such as waiters in the mess halls. He went on to say, Negro pilots cannot be used in our present Air Corps units since this would result in a Negro officer serving over a white man. This would create an impossible social problem.

It would be several more years before the federal government took the military by the throat and said you will treat everyone equal. This came in the form of Executive Order 9981, initiated by president Harry S. Truman, and was enacted September 1947. This executive order simply read, It is hereby declared to be the policy of the President that there shall be equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the Armed Service, without regard to race, color, religion, or national origin. Of all the executive orders issued towards the military, none are as well known or as heavily emphasized as this one. It not only changed the way the military treated blacks, but gave credibility to the black man s ability to do everything the white man could. It showed the civilian sector that the black man was as good as anyone, whether they chose to believe it or not.

By the time my Father had enlisted in the military, racial equality was the military s accepted norm. This does not mean all things were equal, it simply means that this was the policy the military had adopted. According to my father, the military was very firm in its public enforcement of racial equality. He also said this of his first day of boot camp, within 15 minutes of getting off of that bus, I knew that even a blind man would have know who the black recruit was. He clarified this by saying, There were approximately 30 people on my bus, but to the Drill Instructor there were only two. They where both black and both in deep S\*\*\*. He went on to say that overall the racial problems where isolated. People knew who the bigots were and stayed clear of them whenever possible. He said it was ironic that the solution to the problems brought on by integration were solved by isolationism. Everyone stayed with their own clicks and for the most part this worked well.

The war in Vietnam was another proving grounds for the blacks. There is much debate as to why the black enlistment rate soared at this time, but for the first time in history blacks were proportionally represented in the armed forces. That is to say, the percentage of blacks in the military was equal to the percentage in the civilian sector.

As the Vietnam War escalated, the acceptance of the black soldier as an American soldier grew by leaps and bounds. Mark Kulik wrote an article entitled Great Society-In Uniform which appeared in Newsweek magazine, on August 22, 1966. The article highlighted the outstanding performance of blacks in Vietnam. It went on to praise the success of the military integration policy. Hanson Baldwin, military editor for the New York Times, wrote this about black in the military, the Negro has never had it so good in the Army. If a statement like this were to appear in a paper today all hell would break loose. But if we look at it through a pair of 1960 s adaptive glasses, it shows the military was making great strides in its quest for equality. An article written by Scottie B. Moore, appeared in the May 26, 1967 issue of Time. He sums up the progress made by both the military and the Black soldier. He concluded:

For the first time in the nation s military history, its the Negro fighting men fully integrated in combat, fruitfully employed in a position of leadership, and fiercely proud of their performance. More than anything else, the performance of the Negro G.I. under fire reaffirms the success-and diversity- of the American experiment.

Upon my entry to the United States Air Force, I was introduced to executive order 9981. When I started this portion of my research, I got real brave and asked two of my newest troops (both black) how they felt about the subject. I got two very different points of view. The first stated that he felt profiled. He felt like he was more severely punished than his white counterparts even though the infractions were the same. He also felt that it wasn t because of policy, but because of attitude and stereotyping. The second individual I talked to said that on occasion he felt a little out of place. He felt this was more due to people worrying about saying or doing the wrong thing. He went on to say that the military is so focused on political correctness, that they sometimes missed the point. I asked what he meant by that and after a little thought he said,

My friends treat each other like crap, they dog each other, bad mouth each other, cut each other to the bone. You know like friends do. When we are alone they do the same to me, I m just one of the boys. But when we get to work everything is prim and proper. Now I m just a troop. They are afraid to be themselves.

Many people, both military and civilian, share this perception. It is one that we have all have had to deal with.

A second change for the military is its advances in technology. The U.S. military has always been the leader in technological break troughs. When my grandfather first entered the military he was trained to read signal flags. This was a means of communication that dated back to medieval warfare. Although it was a last resort, it was something everyone was trained to do. Radios where not always a reliable means of communication, and transmissions could be easily intercepted. One of the military s first and more interesting means of radio security was the use of Native American Indians. There were endless amount of people who spoke several different common languages. It took very little effort to translate a language, and coded transmissions were very cumbersome for the intended receiver to translate. The other problem with coded messages was the more it was used, the more likely it was to be compromised. What was wonderful about the Native Americans was their ancestral language. The only place it could be learned was at home. It wasn t taught in any college or university. With over 20 major dialects, it was impossible to train someone to understand the language. Even if someone was captured, it was highly unlikely he would be able understand a specific dialect. Besides, how would the enemy know if he understood it or not?

My grandfather was assigned to an armored division. While I was in Saudi Arabia during Desert Storm/Desert Shield he wrote me about his experiences with tanks and sand. He hated how a tank stood out in the desert and how it sunk so low in the sand. He said he always felt like a duck in the desert. He was out of place and a long ways from home. He told me how the escape hatch was located in the bottom of the tank but it couldn t be used because the tank sat too low in the sand. He told me that it got so hot in the tank that they threw the thermometer out because they didn t want to know how hot it really was inside. He said that this was probably the deciding factor when he chose not to reenlist in the army.

By the time my dad had entered the military, radio encryption was a well-developed science. Satellite communication was a blooming science. Ships in the Atlantic Ocean could communicate with ships in the Pacific. Radar could track an enemy hundreds of miles away instead of just 10 to 20. Radar was even developing to the point were it could identify different types of aircraft. Smart bombs were being tested in Vietnam. These bombs could be guided into a target with extraordinary accuracy. This was in contrast to the past, where the bombers relied on quantity rather than accuracy. During World War II hundreds of planes would be sent to drop thousands of bombs, in hopes of hitting a single target. With the smart bomb, two are three planes could do the job of 50 bombers.

By today s standards that was nothing. Today we have the luxury of sending a ship to sit two hundred miles off the coast of a country and with a single missile, hit a small target five hundred miles inland. Our tanks can travel at 60 miles per hour, hit a target that they cannot even see, and all this without ever slowing down. Communication is so good now, that not only can a soldier, with a high-tech radio, talk to anyone of his comrades, anywhere in the world. Also, if he so chooses he can pull his cell phone out of his pocket and call home, that is if he doesn t mind paying the roaming fees.

I never talked to my grandfather about living conditions while he was in the army. This is something I truly regret. One of the biggest morale issues for today s young soldier is living conditions. When I asked my dad about this, he replied that the conditions were not great but that was an accepted part of military life. Larry H. Ingraham, author of The Boys in the Barracks, had this to say about living conditions in the barracks, During World War II living in the barracks was like living in an Oliver Twist orphanage. The troops slept 80 to a bay, stacked two deep and were close enough to hold hands if they so desired. (212) He went on to say that nobody complained because as long as they where assigned to a barracks they were at home. Over the next 20 years living conditions did not change a great deal. As my Dad described it, it was eighty beds deep, and privacy was not an option. The showers were open stalls and the toilets open walled.

By the time I entered the military things had started to change. My basic training living accommodations were pretty much like my dad described it. However, by the time I arrived at my technical school things were looking up. I had one roommate and our bathroom joined another room shared by two more people. I could shower, or use the toilet in private. Life was good. I had a television in my room, as well as a window-mounted air conditioner. This was the Air Force standard for about the next ten years. After the draw down, the Air Force found that it could give everyone their own room. New dormitories would now be built with this concept in mind. In the last 3 to 4 years, in order help with retention, the Air Force has gone one step farther. They are now building what they call 1+1 dormitories. This is basically a small 2-bedroom apartment that has a common kitchen and living room. The two occupants have there own private bedrooms.

One more key aspect of the military life is the pay. If the soldier is not in it for duty, honor, or love of country he chose the wrong profession. The pay scales have changed astronomically since my grandfather first entered the service, but it still is not going to make a soldier rich. The earliest pay charts available by the military date back to 1949. A basic trainee would receive $75.00 a month as his basic pay. If he were to marry and live off post he could receive and additional $45.00 to $85.00 depending on how may dependents he had. A senior enlisted member with the pay grade of E-7 (highest enlisted grade) would make $294.00 for his basic pay. In 1963 a basic trainee would earn $78.00 a month. In a 24-year period the basic trainees pay only increased $3.00. However, the senior enlisted member who was an E-9 (the military added two pay grades) earned $560.00. This was a nearly 100% increase over the same 24 year period. The military has put a great deal more value on the American G.I. The basic pay for a new troop is $950.00 per month. This is a far cry from that $78.00 that was being paid 27 years earlier. In fact it is almost $400.00 more than the senior ranking enlisted man was making in 1963. Now as for what that same E-9 is making today, he will take home a little over $3100.00 a month in basic pay. He will receive additional money for living off base, a possible cost of living allowance based on the cost of living in a particular area, and a food allowance. On average this E-9 s paycheck will be $3800.00 a month.

There are countless other comparisons that could be made about these three generations of the military. Many of these things are tangible, and easily compared to the past, but many are not. Attitudes have changed. People are joining for educational benefits rather than duty and love of county. In the past, many young men came in with the intention of making the military a career, because that s what their fathers did and grandfathers did. Today, very few join with a lifetime commitment in mind. They join because of the excellent educational opportunities or for some other personal reasons. The new soldier is interested in the bottom dollar what s in it for me? The sense of pride that my grandfather, my father and myself cherished seems to have been lost in our new military.

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