

TODAY and TOMORROW

BY WALTER LIPPMANN

Back Them Up

The immediate thing to be done here at home to support Eisenhower, MacArthur and Halsey is to reject the O'Daniel amendment which forbids the Army to use teen-age drafted men in actual combat duty outside Continental United States until they have had at least one year's military training. The Senators who voted for this amendment need have no qualms about changing their votes. I have been told that it took the general staff a week of intense study to understand in full its disastrous consequences, and no Senator need be ashamed, therefore, to say that he has re-examined the question and has changed his mind.

For the intent of the amendment—which was to protect impetuous but untrained men from being flung into battle—was altogether sound. The trouble with the amendment is that its practical effect is to deliver a crippling blow to the Army and also that, as a protection to the young men themselves, it is a snare and a delusion. It is important that the people should understand why this is the effect. The reasons are not obvious to a civilian, and the explanation has to be attended to carefully.

The first thing to fix in mind is that the United States is still building its army. When it is built, the army will consist of ground and air forces organized in a certain number of military formations. This work of building the Army will not be completed for about a year, and a great number of men are now being used not in the Army itself—but to build it. There are about a million men employed to build the army—to train recruits, to run the innumerable schools, and to do the housekeeping and administrative work all the way from the induction centers to the training fields. These million men who are building the Army, and the physical facilities in the camps and schools, are just large enough to deal with the flow of recruits which pass through them in order to provide the active Army with the number of trained military formations which our strategic plans call for.

The Army building machinery might be compared to a transient hotel with a certain number of waiters and chambermaids and a certain number of rooms which can accommodate a certain number of guests if all the guests come when they are expected and check out again when the time comes for other guests to arrive. It will readily be seen that if the old guests stay on, then there will be no room for the new guests, and the whole traffic must become jammed and snarled up.

Now with this in mind, we can see what would happen to the Army if the O'Daniel amendment is made law. From January to June of 1943 about 800,000 teen-agers will be inducted into the Army. But they cannot begin to go overseas until a year later. Yet next summer and next autumn our armies in the field abroad will need about 500,000 men to keep up to their full strength. This does not mean that Eisenhower and MacArthur and our other commanders overseas expect 500,000 casualties next year. Not at all. We have fought no large land battles as yet. But in order to give men at the front a rest, to bring back veterans from the front to teach the Army what they have learned, to replace men who fall sick, and so on as men to fail to

send wounded men back to battle before they are fully recovered, we now use about 100,000 trained men a month as replacements.

Under the O'Daniel amendment the teen-agers cannot go abroad as part of these 100,000 monthly replacements next year. Therefore in addition to training the 800,000 teen-agers, the Army would also have to induct at least 500,000 older men, who must be trained between January and June, in order to fill the gaps between July and December. But the Army does not have the facilities for training both the 800,000 teen-agers, who can't be used for a year, and the 500,000 older men, who would, therefore, have to be used. The hotel is not big enough, and we cannot afford to make the hotel bigger by taking still more men, needed for active service, to run the hotel.

One of the things must happen, therefore, if the O'Daniel amendment is not rejected. Either the Army must wreck existing divisions and use the men and the officers to fill up divisions at the front—or the Army must segregate the teen-agers in separate divisions ear-marked for service a year later. This is a choice between the frying pan and the fire.

To wreck existing divisions in order to rob them of men to fill up other divisions is to take the awful chance of not having enough divisions next year to push home the offensive, and to win the war if opportunity knocks. For we do not wish to prolong this war one day longer than necessary, and it would be a dreadful situation indeed if, by next year, with the enemy cracking, we did not have the divisions ready to go to town and finish the job.

The other choice, which is to segregate the teen-agers, is equally bad. They would have to be segregated in infantry divisions because the facilities would not be available to train the young men in the specialized services. The teen-agers would, therefore, become infantry shock troops, and because they were all very young, very impetuous, without the leveling of maturer men, and relatively unskilled in a military sense, they would have to be used in those operations where men are sacrificed most freely to gain an objective. Thus the teen-agers, whom the amendment is supposed to protect, would be denied the chance to become specialists, to choose an interesting branch of the service, to become officers as rapidly as their abilities permitted, and they would be earmarked in the mass as the least skilled expendable shock infantry. That is why the young men themselves,

once they have understood the O'Daniel amendment, are against it, and that is why their parents, if they will make the effort to understand it, will be even more passionately against it.

The underlying error in the amendment is a very simple one. Senator O'Daniel and his colleagues thought it took a year to train a soldier. It does not. It takes on the average about four months. It does, however, take a year to train a division—that is to the Senators went wrong was in confusing the training of the team and the training of the individual player for his part on the team. They did not see that for a good division which has been trained as a division for a year, not to speak of all the ground forces of the air corps, new recruits who have had four months training are quite ready to join the team. They cannot learn anything more about soldiering until they join the team.

That is why it is so vitally important to keep the old teams, the seasoned divisions and other formations, at full strength by sending them replacements of fully trained individual soldiers. For what is hard to train are the teams, not the individuals who are absorbed into the teams later. That is why General Sherman said that 200 men in an old military unit are worth 1,000 men in a new military unit.

The case against the O'Daniel amendment is so conclusive that it seems impossible to suppose that Congress will not now reject it. But if by any chance Congress does not now reject it, the measure will have to be vetoed, and the question reopened immediately. For the Army's carefully worked out plans must not be thrown off schedule at this time when our forces are on the march.

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