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CURRENT BOOKS

REVIEWS OF NEW AND NOTEWORTHY NONFICTION

A Few (More) Good Men (and Women)

Reviewed by Philip Gold

AFTER FOUR YEARS OF WAGING WAR IN Iraq, the U.S. Army is imploding. Its soldiers are exhausted, as are members of the Army Reserve and the National Guard. Last year, the Army met its goal of 80,000 new hires only by lowering physical and educational standards and issuing waivers for some criminal convictions. And its 490,000-member force is still about 200,000 soldiers shy of what it needs. Where will the necessary additional recruits come from? Can today's volunteer system produce enough quality soldiers to marshal America's future? Or must we return to the draft?

To address these questions, we need to review where we were when Vietnam-era conscription ended, and how we navigated the next 34 years of the all-volunteer force to reach the current mess. *I Want You!* is an invaluable aid in that project. It is a book that economists, bureaucrats, and think-tank poguees (a venerable military term for anyone who's farther from the fighting than you are) will love: 800 pages of dense pack. But with a little digging, general readers also will find the book rewarding.

Its author, Bernard Rostker, is currently a senior fellow at the RAND Corporation, and he has served as under secretary of defense for personnel and readiness, under secretary of the Army, and assistant secretary of the Navy for manpower and reserve affairs. If a Democrat takes the White House in 2008, Rostker will be, deservedly, on the short list for another high Pentagon position. An economist by training, he has written a history of how economic reasoning and analysis helped move America away from conscription in the early 1970s, and contributed to the birth and development of the professional force that, after a rocky start, served America well for a quarter-century.

The book is arranged chronologically, from the 1960s, when the Vietnam draft grew discredited and discussion of alternatives began, to the present. Narrative chapters alternate with ones that assess the analytic studies done in support of policy decisions and, on occasion, their use as models outside the military.

I WANT YOU!
The Evolution
of the
All-Volunteer Force.
By Bernard Rostker.
RAND. 800 pp. (with
DVD). 68.50 cloth

For the most part, these studies deal with pay scales and compensation packages, effects of advertising, measurements of recruit quality, etc. (Many of the original studies and related correspondence between government officials are available on a fine accompanying DVD.) But let me dwell instead on a few aspects of our military's history that Americans would prefer not to consider, but may not be able to avoid much longer.

The first is the official reasoning that led to the abolition of conscription in 1973. After World War II ended in 1945, the Army basically discharged itself. By 1948, however, it was clear that voluntarism could not meet early Cold War needs, and

“Arguably,” writes Rostker, “the single group most responsible for the success of the all-volunteer force has been women.”

the Truman administration reinstated the draft. When the Korean War ended in 1953, the situation was the reverse: a vast excess of bodies. Deferments and exemptions were passed out like Halloween

candy, with a disproportionate number going to young men from relatively privileged families, to encourage them to engage in activities deemed socially desirable: attending college and graduate school, marrying, having kids, pursuing designated occupations, and having more kids. By the Vietnam War, the draft was a significant determinant of American economic life. However, not everyone valued its contributions.

Economist Milton Friedman provided the leitmotif. Conscription was a “tax in kind,” levied upon a small minority of the nation: draft-age males. It was economically inequitable and, worse, inefficient. It hid the true costs of defense, misallocated resources, and forced young men to make economically and personally irrational choices in order to avoid service, such as getting Ph.D.'s in comparative literature when they'd rather be selling insurance, or getting married when they'd prefer to stay single. Shortly after his inauguration, Richard Nixon convened the President's Commission on an All-Volunteer Armed Force, more commonly known as the Gates Commission, to propose a plan

for ending the draft. In its 1970 report, the commission focused on economic rationales for switching to an all-volunteer force.

This economic emphasis provided a convenient exit strategy from the draft, but it did not require the nation to reflect on two aspects of conscription that invalidated it as a system for raising manpower: the curious notion that draftees could be sent on missions unrelated to protecting the homeland, and the inequities and corruptions built into selective service.

After World War II, nearly all democracies drafted (Britain ended its draft in 1962). But conscription was tied to clear legal and customary restraints on the uses to which draftees could be put. The draft was and is acceptable in Switzerland, for example, because its sole purpose is defensive; Switzerland isn't about to invade anybody. West German draftees could not leave their country; neither could French conscripts after the Algerian War. Other NATO countries tied conscription to the need to deter a possible Soviet invasion.

Only the United States assumed that draftees could be sent anywhere to do anything. When that anything proved to be the unpopular and futile Vietnam War, the modicum of legitimacy not already destroyed by massive draft dodging and manipulation of the system vanished. As a result, the draft, like the war, simply faded away. There was no closure.

The all-volunteer force formed in the wake of the draft did not fare particularly well at the start. Quality fell precipitously during the 1970s, as evidenced most spectacularly by the Pentagon's infamous “misnorming” of the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery. The test said recruit quality was fine; the folks in the field knew better. Moreover, the cost of the force sailed past early predictions. Idiotic advertising campaigns with slogans such as “Today's Army Wants to Join You” didn't help, especially when the services were paying full freight for advertising and no longer relying on time and talent provided by agencies and media as a public service.

The result was predictable. Year after year,



Seventeen-year-old Cortland Ely, right, is sworn into the Marines at a ceremony in Dallas, Texas, last spring, bringing the Marines one body closer to its recruitment goals. As America's all-volunteer armed services scramble to enlist soldiers, there are whispers of a renewed draft.

cohorts weak in intelligence, education, and motivation entered the system, and because the military cannot draw its middle management from outside its own ranks, the problems these recruits (including officers) caused were lasting. Still, all the analytic studies conducted by the Defense Department and various government-contracted think tanks, including RAND, on everything from recruiting to compensation, may have resulted in policies that plugged some of the holes in the dike.

Then the Army discovered women.

"Arguably," writes Rostker, "the single group most responsible for the success of the all-volunteer force has been women." No study done before 1972 had seriously entertained the expanded use of women. But as the '70s wore on, the Army found that women, with their generally higher educational attainment, superior performance on intelligence tests, and lower incidence of disciplinary problems, could substitute for some of the high-quality men who weren't signing on.

At roughly the same time, however, organized feminism attacked the military as the last bastion of machismo, to be opened up—or brought down—by any means necessary. The new and growing dependence on women may have improved the statistical profile of the American soldier, but many male soldiers and their leaders resented their female comrades in arms, and the feminist assault didn't help matters. The consequences were predictable and ugly: scandal, criminal harassment and assault, misguided "sensitivity training," and micromanagement of behavior, including one regulation that defined eye contact of more than five seconds as sexual harassment.

From the start, the Army maintained that its female troops would not be sent into combat. But as time wore on, military leaders understood ever more clearly that women would have to fight. Despite law and stated policy, the Army kept moving women into combat units, saying that they were temporarily "attached," not permanently "assigned." The result is that today women

are vital to the U.S. Army—they constitute about 15 percent of the force. And they are assigned to patrols and small units that routinely go into combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. Neither the Army nor the nation has begun to come to terms with this reality.

Rostker's historical account is exhaustive and meticulous. At the last, however, he falters, for he concludes that the all-volunteer force can probably suffice for America's future needs. True, the all-volunteer force did well during the Reagan years. It did well during Desert Storm, as did the service reserves and the National Guard, its vital partners in the Total Force. But as President Bill Clinton reduced and underfunded the force while increasing its deployments and tempo of operations, a certain frazzle set in among both full- and part-time volunteers.

Five years of war under President George W. Bush have demonstrated an ineluctable truth: People wear out. They wear out as soldiers who, whatever their devotion, can't keep returning to war. And they wear out as human beings who want to spend time with their families.

Whatever happens in Iraq, this nation needs a much larger Army to deter or deal with future

conflicts—in Iran, North Korea, Africa. In the face of this reality, Rostker notes only that “increased incentives [i.e., bonuses] have always proven to stretch enlistments, but there is a limit.” Seasoned military leaders will do everything they can to ensure the all-volunteer force's continued success, he concludes, but “only time will tell.”

Indeed it will. Time will tell us that voluntarily putting oneself in harm's way solely for pay is an activity fit for mercenaries, not Uncle Sam's soldiers; that women must be admitted to full equality under arms; and that we cannot much longer avoid renewed consideration of how to raise the Army America needs—whether through the old-style direct federal draft, some form of national service, or an entirely new volunteer arrangement, such as a contract to fight only in the cause of homeland defense. If history is any indication, the coming debate will be acrimonious and ill informed. Those interested in bringing some reason to the table will do well to consult *I Want You!* We can't know where we're going unless we know where we've been.

PHILIP GOLD is author of *The Coming Draft: The Crisis in Our Military and Why Selective Service Is Wrong for America* (2006).

Nashville's Forgotten Little People

Reviewed by Grant Alden

THE 1950S WERE THE AMERICAN DREAM, OR at least they have seemed so ever after. A generation worn hard by the privations of the Depression and harder by the demands of World War II found itself unexpectedly atop a world of plenty, the leaders of a great and kind and undamaged nation in which anything truly *was* possible. We born after can never grasp quite what that meant, or how it felt.

Caricatured today as a time of lockstep conformity, the postwar era saw enormous artistic, economic, and social innovation. The failure of one

idea—one scheme—only begat a dozen others, one of which was simply bound to work. It was a time when, as one aging bohemian put it a decade ago, “We took jobs for sport.”

And America danced. The country was hungry for music, for wartime rationing of shellac had made new records scarce. Years of unrecorded songs awaited capture, and all over the country, men who had nurtured dreams at small-town

A SHOT IN THE DARK:

Making Records in Nashville, 1945–1955.

By Martin Hawkins.
Vanderbilt Univ.
Press/Country Music
Foundation Press.
318 pp. (with CD). \$65