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# Col. Hackworth—A

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# Rare Breed Indeed

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By Brig. Gen. (Ret.)  
S.L.A. MARSHALL  
Military Affairs Analyst

Col. David Hackworth, U.S. Army, made big news recently, though he was almost totally ignored by the American media when the main thing to be said of him was that he has fought longer in Vietnam and won more high combat decorations legitimately than any other serving officer.

Hackworth is of a company with Alvin York, Sam Dreben, Audie Murphy and the lesser-known Harrison Summers. They are extremely rare, these American fighters who perform with almost desperate intrepidity time and again. But heroism above and beyond the call of duty won him no headlines. It is pretty much a tabooed or passed-over subject due to the home front thumbing-down of an unwanted war. When public disenchantment takes over, acts of courage cease to be a story. So, with Hackworth, it wasn't until he played the unhero that he became hot copy.

Hackworth's diatribes against the Army, as pitchforked into the American home via American Broadcasting Corp. television, are an example of what I am talking about—the network idea of what constitutes public service.

In his outpouring Hackworth came up with nothing new, named no names and fixed no dates. But he did prattle and rant and make a whopping case of his resentments and broodings, which was good enough for ABC. In fact, it was so good that toward the end Harry Reasoner came on to say that Hackworth's credentials were "impeccable."

They are, and within a definite limit: Hackworth has not only been outstanding as a combat soldier but also an inspired leader of troops when under fire. Men follow him and think they are lucky because he leads them. Perhaps more important, Hackworth is a quite lovable guy, and when his natural self, a personality so chipper that he gives an uplift to all around him.

But let's stay with the record. Hackworth's attack on the Army was presented in several nightly newscasts and one longer interview broadcast on a Sunday. It was staged as if direct from him to us and was therefore freshly topical. Hackworth appeared dressed in a jungle suit. The interviews were conducted in the Vietnam Delta, so it was said.

The TV stuff was keyed to the publication of a news agency interview in which Hackworth, from Saigon, blasted the Army, and the powers high and low for mismanaging the war. Either that was contrived or it was an amazing coincidence.

For Hackworth, at the time of the unloading of that bomb, was on leave in Australia, The TV taping had been done several months before. With a release that just accidentally coincided with the explosive interview that made page one in the daily press? How remarkable!

When a man has been overlong in battle—and that is Hackworth—what he says in protest may be pardonable. Combat does bring on emotional imbalance. Two months later, given rest and a shot at the gay lift, he may be willing to eat those words. A little ease can change perspective. This is merely to make the point that it is not really today's news that Hackworth blew his stack two months ago.

But there is much more to it than that. In one show Hackworth spent his whole time blasting body counts which, though old stuff, he carried to absurd extremes. He said that all body counts are false and that faking high numbers is the straight road to promotion, there being no other.

He must know that is humbug for we have seen body counts together that were validated beyond doubt. As for faking them being the only path to success, with the approval of the chief of staff, then Gen. H. K. Johnson, Hackworth and I together wrote the instructions to commanders that were supposed to deflate the importance of any such report and warn against stressing it. If we failed to make it clear, the responsibility is partly his.

Hackworth also said that the United States had sufficient force to win the war and that Army misjudgments and wastage of troops flubbed it. There was wastage of troops; since World War II, there has been this general fault in American fighting services. Spoiled by the home front, command tries to hold to a semi-luxury standard of existence.

But in 1967 when the U.S. was coming to force level peak in Vietnam, Hackworth was already convinced that a military victory was impossible.

This story goes a long way back.

I first knew Hackworth when he was a kid sergeant in Able Company, 27th Infantry, in Korea in 1951. He was about to be commissioned through sheer merit. We clicked. I next saw him when he commanded a battalion in the battle of Toumorong in Vietnam in May, 1966.

When I returned to Vietnam on orders six months later, I asked for him personally to go with me, and he was willing. He became my assistant, or more correctly, de facto my executive officer. In our fairly prolonged and closely-joined time together I found him to be fairly steady and always companionable, brilliant in occasional flashes, tending to be resentful of association with higher authority, otherwise generous in spirit, but so given to episodes of moodiness and untriggered expostulation that I began to understand his emotional problems were far beyond my understanding or help. One year later we tried the same thing again at his request and he simply vanished.

Hackworth can get beyond his depths rather quickly. He has had far too much combat, which always shoals the water. No one should help him to stumble. His chance to come out of it is that the Army will prove gentler than the media.

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