

Who Has Really Tarnished the Image of The Army?

The supporters of the Army/Govt.'s version of events in the ongoing discussion of the Rupununi Uprising affair are concerned that those with opposing views may be trying to tarnish the image of the Army/GDF. That is a serious concern and should be addressed by any responsible investigator. Let us therefore look at the situation and see who really tarnished the image of the army. Hopefully, when we face the reality of who damaged the image of the army, we have the courage to accept the truth.

Lowering the selection criteria- Violations of the Recommendations of the ICJ

The US Library of Congress Studies (January, 1992) has a very good account of the history and the beginning of the decline of standards and objectives of a neutral and professional army (*1).

The document states:

“The British government strove to ensure an ethnic balance within the SSU (Special Services Unit). Its reasons were twofold: Guyana was already racially polarized in the 1960s, and the police force consisted mostly of Afro-Guyanese. The British were successful in recruiting a balance of Indo-Guyanese and Afro-Guyanese cadets to fill the junior officer ranks. Indo-Guyanese were also well-represented among students at the Mons Officer Cadet Training School in Britain.” (See ICJ mission, *2)

“The SSU was renamed the Guyana Defence Force in 1965. The transition to complete Guyanese control of the GDF began in 1966, shortly after independence was granted. Prime Minister Linden Forbes Burnham, who also served as minister of defense, oversaw the transition. Major Raymond Sataur, an Indo-Guyanese officer and graduate of the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, was heir apparent to the British GDF commander. But perhaps because of ethnic considerations, Burnham selected an Afro-Guyanese officer (a career civil servant and army reservist), Major Clarence Price, as the new commander. After the 1968 election, Burnham began to purge Indo-Guyanese from the GDF's officer corps. By 1970 Afro-Guyanese dominated both the officer and the enlisted ranks of the GDF.”

(Burnham/PNC Govt kept some Indo-Guyanese officers/soldiers for the usual photo-opportunities and processions to con foreign dignitaries that there are Indo-Guyanese in the army.)

Some of the Burnham/PNC chosen army recruits (mostly PNC loyalists and supporters) for officer training did not meet the admission standards and requirements of Britain's military schools and these were therefore rejected. Burnham needed loyal officers and he also wanted to control these young men by having them indoctrinated with his PNC ideology. He wanted to ensure their loyalty to him, so he started his own training program with his own indoctrination ideology.

The document mentioned above continues:

“Training of Guyanese officer cadets in Britain ceased in the 1970s. The Guyanese government then established a six-month cadet course at Timehri Airport, south of Georgetown. **The ruling PNC began using political and ethnic criteria in selecting**

officer cadets, instead of relying on educational requirements as had been done in the past.”

This self –destructive trend has continued to this day as lamented by Mr Mervyn Major (SN, July 8th, 2005), since Army recruits are so frequently in the News for the wrong reasons (even one recently selected for Sandhurst Military Academy disgraced the army and the country).

Buying the Loyalty of the GDF The document continues:

“The PNC attempted both to consolidate and expand the loyalty of the GDF by manipulating racial symbols and by materially rewarding loyal soldiers. Politically minded officers portrayed the PNC as the sole protector of Afro-Guyanese interests. These same officers also portrayed the opposition People's Progressive Party (PPP) as an Indo-Guyanese organization whose victory would result in economic and political domination of Afro-Guyanese by Indo-Guyanese . In 1973, an aide to Forbes Burnham openly advocated that the GDF pledge its allegiance to the PNC in addition to its loyalty to the nation. This recommendation was made policy the following year. **Although the recommendation was unpopular among career officers, disagreement was not voiced openly for fear of losing high salaries, duty-free cars, housing, and other privileges.** Nevertheless, throughout the 1970s and 1980s an undercurrent of tension existed between officers who favored a politically neutral GDF and those who favored political activism.”

May I also add that the Burnham/PNC Govt. promised lands to the rank and file who faithfully executed their orders for 20 years - a promise that was never fulfilled, but kept the personnel in line (Mr. D. Granger, SN, 9th Dec., 2001- Guyana’s Military Veterans)

Therefore we begin to see the undermining of the professionalism of the army. All those who were potential threats (or of questionable loyalty) were purged. Standards fell, political allegiance (or ethnic affiliation) became the major criteria for selection. Indo-Guyanese officers were relieved of their command or given desk jobs, with no men under their command. Many were forced to leave because of the frustration, exactly as the policy intended. (The good thing for the men who left is that today they do not have to explain to their spouses, children, grandchildren, family, relatives, and friends about their roles in the atrocities committed against the Amerindians, and the suppression subsequently visited upon the rest of the Guyanese people.)

2. Politicization and Subordination of the Army

The **US Library of Congress** (January, 1992) document continues:

“At the PNC's first biennial congress in 1974, the GDF was required to pledge its allegiance to the PNC. During the 1970s and 1980s, GDF soldiers routinely received political indoctrination. The GDF also scheduled marches to celebrate major PNC political events, such as party congresses.”

“The PNC's increasing politicization and subordination of the GDF disturbed many members of the officer corps. When some expressed a desire for military neutrality, PNC informants in the armed forces alerted Burnham to the dissension within the GDF. In

August 1979, Colonel Ulric Pilgrim, the operational force commander, and Colonel Carl Morgan, a battalion commander, were dismissed. Pilgrim and Morgan had been two of the most popular officers in the GDF. Burnham appointed a **PNC loyalist, Colonel David Granger, commander of the GDF**. To extend his influence further, Burnham also replaced the army chief of staff Brigadier General Clarence Price with a Burnham loyalist who had been a civilian police officer. The appointment of Norman McLean, a former traffic chief, shocked and enraged many GDF officers. The PNC government attempted to rebuild support by issuing a postage stamp in 1981 honoring the GDF.”

As if that humiliation was not enough, Army personnel had to sell “New Nation” to the public. (Mr Joe Singh can verify that, he too had to sell the papers outside Bourda and Stabroek markets to demonstrate his undivided loyalty to the ruling Burnham/ PNC party.) Due to length considerations, I shall deal with the indoctrination process in another letter.

So both The US library of Congress documents and the army documents (*3) are in agreement. There are other sources that have documented the involvement of the army in local politics and the perversion of the traditional military code of political neutrality (*4, *5, *6), but I have cited the US Library of Congress studies in detail, since they tell the story very well.

I would like to ask Mr Joe Singh and others: Who lowered the standards for admission? Who forced the decent officers and soldiers to leave? Who politicized the army? Who humiliated the army and perverted its roles? Who has really ‘besmirched and befouled’ the name and professionalism of the army? There is only one answer. Unfortunately, we are still dealing with consequences of those “wicked” actions that “befouled and besmirched” the army. Hopefully, we never go down this destructive road again.

*1 <http://reference.allrefer.com/country-guide-study/guyana/guyana125.html>

*2 **The ICJ mission** <http://www.guyana.org/features/guyanastory/chapter177.html>

*3 Mr D.Granger, History of the GDF -The New Road <http://www.gdf-gy.org/TNR41.htm>

*4 Dr Franz J. T. Lee on Militarization in Guyana , 1970-1984.

<http://www.franz-lee.org/files/coopguy.html#Toc19952330>

*5 Dr Chaitram Singh - Changing the face of Civilian Control of the military in Guyana
<http://itc.gsw.edu/atws/volumes/vol14.htm>

*6 Dr Dion E. Phillips –The military in Guyana: Internal Security Training and Roles. Center for Hemispheric Defence Studies. May 2-25,2001

www.ndu.edu/chds/REDES2001/Papers/Block3/Internal%20Security%20Panel/Phillips.Internal%20Security%20Panel.rtf –

Yours sincerely,
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