

SOME HINTS TO PROFESSORS

By EDWARD C. McDONAGH

Southern Illinois Normal University¹

These hints are sincere suggestions to some of the college teachers who will help teach the 600,000 veterans of this war in our American universities. Perhaps some of these suggestions will enable college professors to adjust themselves to some of the attitudes of veterans. At any rate, the college teacher will be made conscious of the fact that veterans have in some measure been affected by this war.

As an Army counselor interviewing soldiers about to be separated from the service, one cannot but pick up impressions and the attitudes of the men entering civilian life. One gains the impression that for the most part these men are serious persons though they be in their early twenties. These separatees are not only veterans of war, but veterans of travel and life in foreign countries. The constant interplay of ideas from men of all walks of life cannot fail to affect the personality of the soldier. His travel and experiences may in some instances be broader than some of the well-traveled professors. In short, our G.I. students for the most part "have gone places and done things."

Veterans attending college are giving up much for the privilege of attending your classes. They are choosing your courses and the college over the lure of high wages in industries manufacturing civilian products. The college professor of such students has the obligation to be well prepared and up-to-date on the information imparted. It may mean for some preparing new lectures, revising those old prewar notes with the dog-eared edges, and modernizing examinations and methods of testing. Some veterans have received instruction under Army auspices, which was, on the whole, exceptionally well planned and prepared. Modern methods of

¹ On military leave and at present an occupational counselor in the Separation Center, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.

testing have been used on a large scale in the Army. Certainly professors do not want to appear to be behind what the veteran saw in the Army. In most cases professors have kept up and have no fear in this connection, but there may be a few instructors to whom the suggestion could apply.

It will be to the advantage of the instructor to find out as much as possible about the military backgrounds, assignments, and ranks of his veteran students. However, woe be unto the professor who naïvely manifests a *deference* to a student because of past rank in the Army. Privates will not appreciate references to the successes and military status of high ranking non-coms and commissioned officers. A fair number of veterans may interpret success or failure in the Army almost in terms of historical accidents. Some success in the Army may have been largely due to being present at the right place at the right time. A conjunction of favorable factors may thus account for some military success. The fact that some of the outstanding college presidents of the present day were privates in the first World War may add some weight to the suggestion that the academic person may not always possess the type of personality demanded in a line outfit where a premium may be placed on physical endurance and a tough exterior. In short, the military rôle is of necessity different from many of the rôles civilian life commands. Hence, as a democratic scholar do not handicap the person who failed to succeed in the Army provided he has a good mentality and an eagerness to succeed.

One excellent example of a good portion of the college-minded crowd in the Army is found in the former students of the Army Specialized Training Program. These were on the whole bright young men, many of whom never held a conspicuous rank in the non-commissioned officer grades; yet, this is a reservoir of potential civilian leaders. The history and disposition of the ASTP units are well known by college educators. Most of them were transferred into the Army Ground Forces during the months of February, March, and April of 1944. The Infantry and Combat Engineers received many of these capable young men. This brings up another tactful suggestion. It is wise to be cautious in praising one branch of the Army to the exclusion of others. If

you become emotional about the successes of the Air Forces, one of the ASTP Infantry veterans is likely to remind you that once in a while the Air Forces dropped bombs on allied troops by mistake and that the Air Forces received more pay, etc., than did the Infantry. Any reference to one branch as *the* leader is almost certain to initiate a controversy which will become so emotional and charged that the only outcome will be a vivid display of the over-functioning of the endocrine glands. Let the American Legion meetings of the future settle all such questions.

Practical professors will be appreciated by students who have already been retarded a few years in their educational development. Try as much as possible to connect your course with the life of the veteran as a living person. If you are teaching ancient history, attempt to associate historical places with the towns veterans have seen. The more information you can gather about your veterans, the more practical and interesting a course presented. Renaissance art has its contemporary American critics among the G.I.'s of your class. Do not miss opportunities to utilize their past experiences.

Make your courses expressions of effective living. Remember that the instruction the veteran received in the Army was usually closely tied up with the task at hand. He could see the utilization of courses in arms, tactics, map reading, and chemical warfare. This does not mean that your courses need become mundane statements of utilities, but it may mean something to the men out of uniform to know that there is a good reason for including your course in the curriculum. Veterans may enter college with a feeling that you have never experienced much, being an academician buried in books, and your theories may not seem to be grounded on the facts of a practical world. Show that your theoretical premises offer an explanation of why the practical world reacts as it does. Theory and practice are often twin brothers dressed differently.

Young men who have been bored by the loneliness of isolated areas, been frightened by the danger and noise of combat, and who have lost much valuable time, deserve some good lecturing from you. They will appreciate the instructor who gives them something to think about. You will not wish to appear as a dead

monotone, but a living person bringing to the ambitious youth of the land some of the really important thoughts and facts about man and his universe. Your courses deserve the embellishment of interest.

Utilize humor. It will not be necessary to fall over the waste basket to create the humorous or ludicrous situation! Your good stories and examples will be appreciated. It may help in some cases to utilize some of the "slanguage" of the Army. As long as you pronounce these expressions correctly you may stimulate smiles on the faces of your veterans. Of course, much of this type of thing will depend on your personality and vitality. For some instructors such humor or mirth would be a failure and for others even the success of such devices would be frowned upon. But for the instructor who has a natural sense of humor and enjoys creating a pleasant atmosphere in the classroom, such types of humor may be occasionally used.

Attempt to select assignments in reading and concentrated study that will be challenging. When you make your assignments it may be wise to offer them as "suggested" reading, or call them voluntary aids to the course. Refrain from the tone of voice of a top kick when asking the students to undertake a project. You and the average first sergeant may not always be a pleasant association for your veteran students.

Give the veteran enough time during his first semester in college to regain his study methods. His first semester in college may be an experiment in attempting to determine what he should major in. Try to control the veteran's natural tendency to make up for lost time. Perhaps he should not take more than 12 semester hours of work the first semester on campus. The G.I. Bill of Rights will give him full subsistence for a light load of 12 hours and many a potential failure may be saved by starting out slowly. A full load of academic work for a veteran who has spent considerable time in the Army simply means that he cannot do justice to the work contemplated or to himself. He may need refresher courses, but in such courses it may be wise to have a few "civilian" students in the same course. Thus regular refresher courses rather than "refresher courses for veterans" would seem most desirable. Some

of the students who were physically disqualified from military service may need the same type of courses veterans seek.

Finally, give the veteran a feeling of status and importance. In addressing a student the accepted practice of calling him Mister is sound. No title will seem as wonderful to the average soldier as "Mister." Such a title means that he is not a serial number, but a person with personal freedom and importance. Naturally, comments about the "soldier boys" will not be appreciated. Look upon your veterans as a group of young Americans who have sacrificed to sit in your classes and try in every way possible to be their outstanding professor. Veterans will appreciate what you have to offer and they deserve your best professional service more than any group of students you have ever taught.