
Regimental Chief Warrant Officer



Chief Warrant Officer Four T.L. Williams

In this issue, I will address one of the many questions that I am often asked—Why is the U.S. Army Criminal Investigation Command (USACIDC) (commonly referred to as the “CID”) a “stovepipe” organization? In other words, why does the CID commander report directly to the Chief of Staff of the Army? Well, it all started in Germany and it ended with a former stripper testifying before a Senate subcommittee during the Vietnam Era.

This is the “Year of the NCO.” I have great respect for NCOs. I have been trained by some of the best of them throughout my career. They have helped me become a better Soldier and a better person. In fact, before becoming a warrant officer, I was a staff sergeant; and I have not forgotten my roots—nor would I want to. Therefore, my purpose in writing about this incident is not to point out the shortcomings of NCOs or the Regiment, but rather to relate our history. The acknowledgement of this dark history helps us to appreciate where we came from and where we are going. Growing up in a family of teachers, I was always instructed that “understanding your history keeps you from repeating it.” The fact that incidents such as the one described here have not been repeated is a testament to those NCOs who recognized and corrected our shortcomings and set Regimental and Army standards accordingly. In this way, knowing the history of our Regiment has made us stronger.

In 1966, General Harold Johnson, Chief of Staff of the Army, selected Command Sergeant Major William O. Wooldridge to be the first Sergeant Major of the Army. The new job was chartered “to look after the interests of” the Army’s 1.25 million Soldiers. Wooldridge was appointed to this prestigious job to improve morale.

While Command Sergeant Major Wooldridge was stationed in Germany, he worked with several senior noncommissioned officers (NCOs) who skimmed \$350,000 per year from the slot machine profits at the clubs of the 24th Infantry Division in the area of Augsburg-Mannheim, Germany. This was just the start. The so-called “Khaki Mafia” operation moved to Fort Benning, Georgia, and then to Vietnam. After Command Sergeant Major Wooldridge completed his tenure as the Sergeant Major of the Army, he requested to be stationed in Vietnam, where he was the Command Sergeant Major of the Military Assistance Command. He meticulously selected the NCOs who were put in charge of the clubs. The clubs purchased merchandise through MareDEM, Ltd. (a corporation developed by Wooldridge).

While the Vietnam War was raging on and Soldiers were dying by the thousands, the club systems were thriving. The NCO proprietors were making money at the Soldiers’ expense. Nonappropriated funds were spent on such things as entertainment, snacks, and furniture; and kickbacks and graft were part of it all.

Miss June Skewes, an Australian-born entertainer who was better-known by her professional name of June Collins, had spent many years in Korea and Vietnam. To make money, she started off as a stripper and then later became a booking agent for bands. She testified to a Senate subcommittee that she could book a band for \$150—with \$100 going to the band, \$25 going to her, and \$25 going as a “kickback” to the sergeant in charge of the club. Some club managers even requested sexual favors, which Miss Skewes did not supply. She became extremely upset with the corruption and eventually reported what she knew to the CID. Miss Skewes later coauthored the book, *The Khaki Mafia*, with Robin Moore (author of *The Green Berets* and *The French Connection*).¹

During this time, CID offices reported to the provost marshals at each installation; the provost marshals, in turn, reported up their chains of command. When the Khaki Mafia operation moved from Europe to Fort Benning, the CID in

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“We can learn from history how past generations thought and acted, how they responded to the demands of their time, and how they solved their problems. We can learn by analogy, not by example, for our circumstances will always be different than theirs were. The main thing history can teach us is that human actions have consequences and that certain choices, once made, cannot be undone. They foreclose the possibility of making other choices; and thus, they determine future events.”

—Gerda Lerner

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the United States was ineffective, primarily because access to the reports from the earlier Augsburg probe was banned by Major General Carl C. Turner, the Provost Marshal General of the Army. Turner initially told the Senate subcommittee that General Johnson had ordered him to hinder the investigations, but he later testified that it was his own decision. The investigations were closed, but were later reopened. The Central District of California eventually handed down a 21-count indictment.

Major General Turner, who later served as the Justice Department's chief U.S. marshal during the Nixon Administration, suppressed an investigation of Command Sergeant Major Woolridge. A witness testified that a report linking Woolridge to financial irregularities related to service clubs was recreated to exclude his name. In addition, Major General Turner was also accused of selling firearms. As a result of the subcommittee probe, Turner was fired as the chief U.S. marshal, convicted for income tax evasion and fraud, and sentenced to a prison term. The basis for his conviction was not necessarily his role in the Khaki Mafia, but rather his acquisition (under false pretenses of Army training and display in an Army gun museum) of 397 firearms from the Chicago and Kansas City police departments. He sold several of the weapons for personal profit; some were recovered during a raid of a weapons cache.

The allegations against Command Sergeant Major Woolridge included the protection by influential generals, concealment of vital records, and control of military personnel assignments to important service clubs. Command Sergeant Major Woolridge invoked his 5th Amendment rights throughout the hearings. He and three other NCOs were convicted, but none received prison sentences. Instead, they were placed on probation, with the proviso that they perform charity work without salary and sign virtually all of their assets over to the government. The federal judge stated that he wanted the defendants to be "penniless." The Army revoked the Distinguished Service Medals that were previously awarded to Command Sergeant Major Woolridge and Major General Turner.

In 1971, the Senate subcommittee published a 300-page report which indicated that the senior Army military police officer had created barriers on several occasions. According to the report, when sufficient evidence was obtained, senior officers took action that prevented the CID from doing its work. As a result, on 17 September 1971, the CID was established as a major Army command and an independent investigative agency designed to be free of command influence at all levels. All CID special agents now take an oath to ". . . at all times seek diligently to discover the truth, deterred neither by fear nor prejudice . . ."

Endnote:

¹Robin Moore with June Collins, *The Khaki Mafia*, Crown Publishers, New York, 1971.

Of the Troops and For the Troops! Warrior CID!