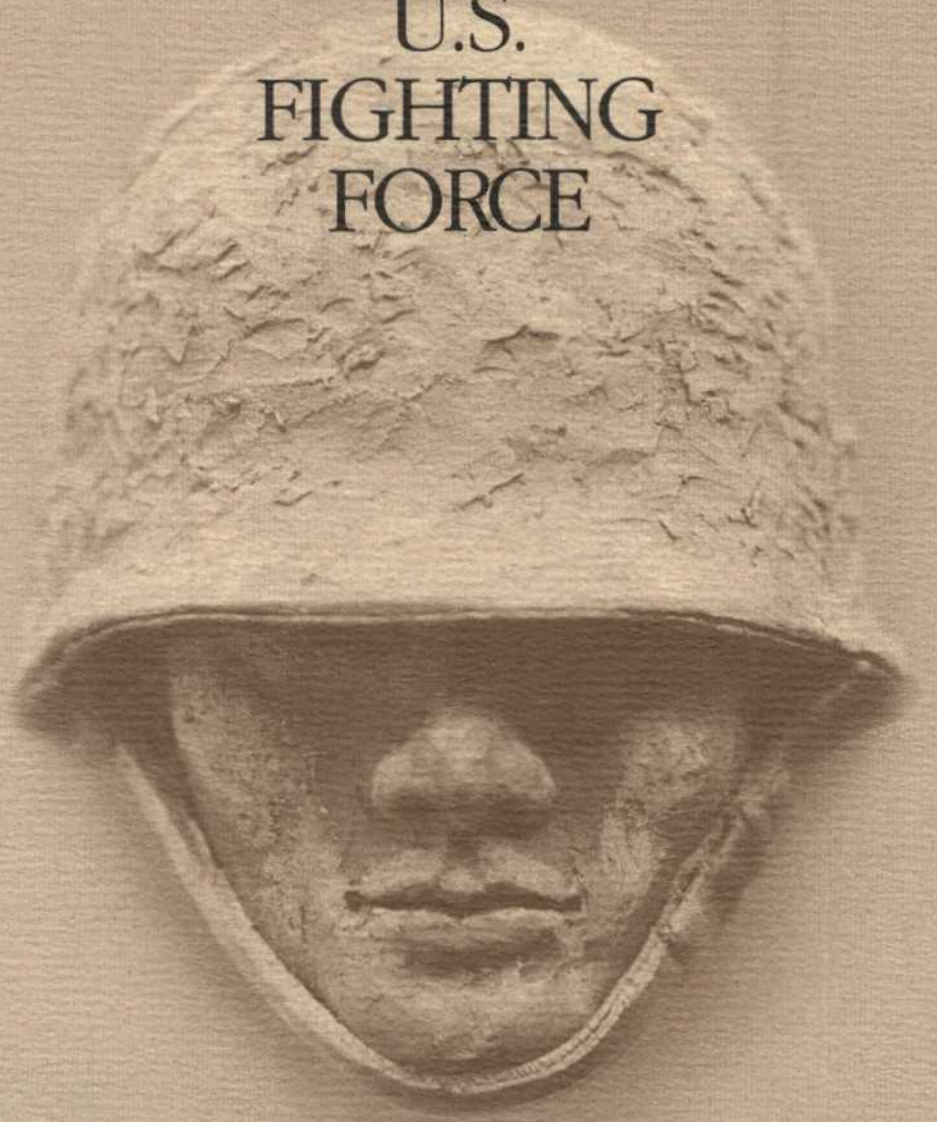
CODE OF THE U.S. FIGHTING FORCE



AMERICAN FORCES INFORMATION SERVICE • DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE
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CODE OF THE U.S. FIGHTING FORCE

As a member of the armed forces of the United States, you are protecting your nation. It is your duty to oppose all enemies of the United States in combat or, if a captive, in a prisoner of war compound. Your behavior is guided by the Code of Conduct, which has evolved from the heroic lives, experiences and deeds of Americans from the Revolutionary War to the Southeast Asian Conflict.

Your obligations as a U.S. citizen and a member of the armed forces result from the traditional values that underlie the American experience as a nation. These values are best expressed in the U.S. Constitution and Bill of Rights, which you have sworn to uphold and defend. You would have these obligations—to your country, your service and unit and your fellow Americans—even if the Code of Conduct had never been formulated as a high standard of general behavior.

Just as you have a responsibility to your country under the Code of Conduct, the United States government has an equal responsibility—always to keep faith with you and stand by you as you fight for your country. If you are unfortunate enough to become a prisoner of war, you may rest assured that your government will care for your dependents and will never forget you. Furthermore, the government will use every practical means to contact, support and gain release for you and for all other prisoners of war.

To live up to the code, you must know not only its words but the ideas and principles behind those words.

This pamphlet contains the code, an explanation of its principles and a statement of the standards expected of you.

The Code of Conduct is an ethical guide. Its six articles deal with your chief concerns as an American in combat; these concerns become critical when you must evade capture, resist while a prisoner or escape from the enemy.

Experiences of captured Americans reveal that to survive captivity honorably would demand from you great courage, deep dedication and high motivation. To sustain these personal values throughout captivity requires that you understand and believe strongly in our free and democratic institutions, love your country, trust in the justice of our cause, keep faithful and loyal to your fellow prisoners and hold firmly to your religious and moral beliefs in time of trial.

Your courage, dedication and motivation supported by understanding, trust and fidelity will help you endure the terrors of captivity, prevail over your captors and return to your family, home and nation with honor and pride.

The Code of Conduct for members of the Armed Forces of the United States was first promulgated by President Dwight D. Eisenhower Aug. 17, 1955. The code, including its basic philosophy, was reaffirmed on July 8, 1964, in DoD Directive No. 1300.7. In March 1988, President Ronald Reagan issued Executive Order 12633, amending the code with language that is gender-neutral. The code, although first expressed in written form in 1955, is based on time-honored concepts and traditions that date back to the days of the American Revolution.

CODE OF CONDUCT I

I am an American, fighting in the forces which guard my country and our way of life. I am prepared to give my life in their defense.

All men and women in the armed forces have the duty at all times and under all circumstances to oppose the enemies of the United States and support its national interests. In training or in combat, alone or with others, while evading capture or enduring captivity, this duty belongs to each American defending our nation regardless of circumstances.

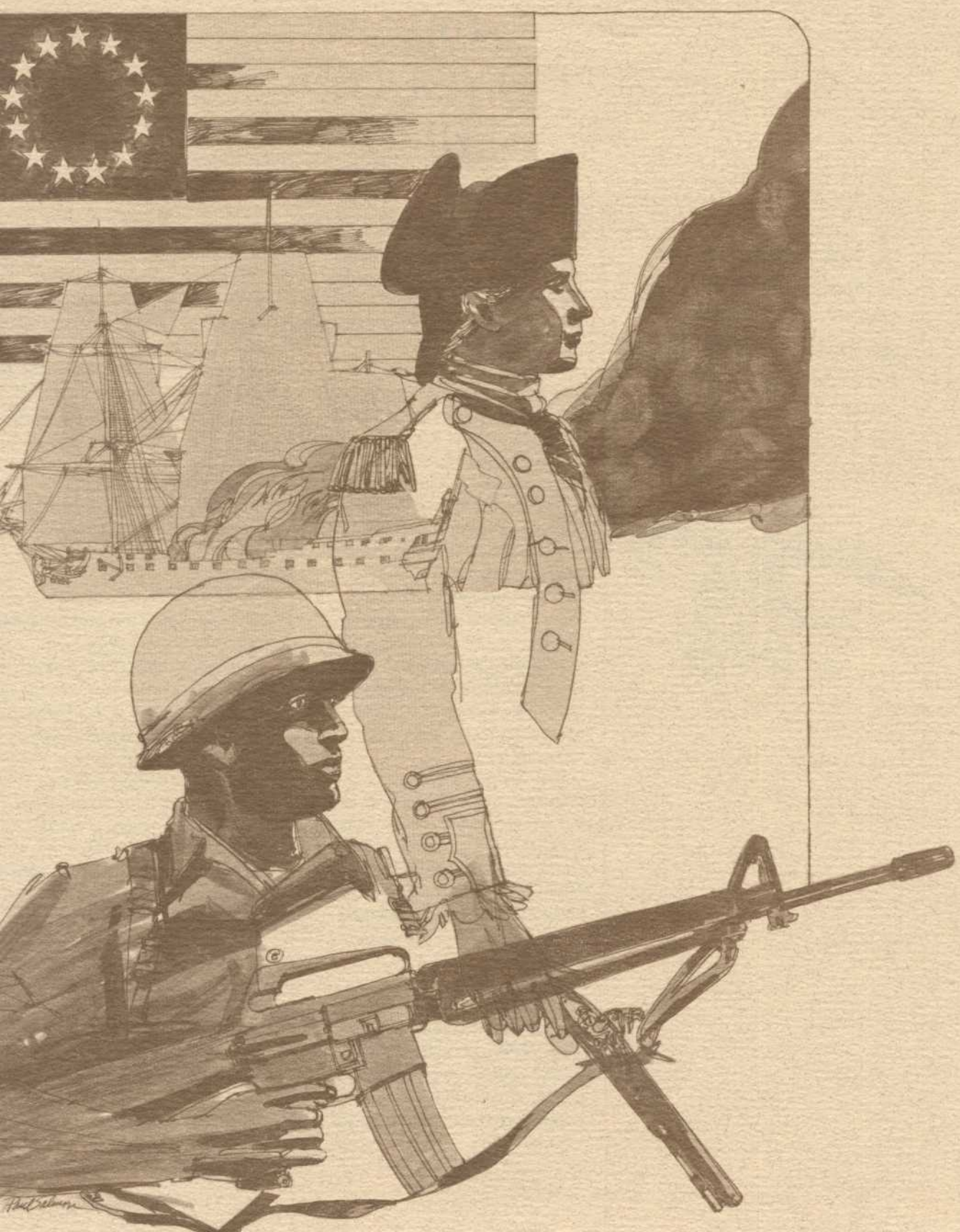
CODE OF CONDUCT II

I will never surrender of my own free will. If in command, I will never surrender the members of my command while they still have the means to resist.

As an individual, a member of the armed forces may never voluntarily surrender. When isolated and no longer able to inflict casualties on the enemy, the American soldier has an obligation to evade capture and rejoin friendly forces.

Only when evasion by an individual is impossible and further fighting would lead only to death with no significant loss to the enemy should one consider surrender. With all reasonable means of resistance exhausted and with certain death the only alternative, capture does not imply dishonor.

The responsibility and authority of a commander never extends to the surrender of a command to the enemy while the command has the power to fight and evade. When isolated, cut off or surrounded, a unit must continue to fight until relieved or able to rejoin friendly forces through continued efforts to break out or evade the enemy.



CODE OF CONDUCT III

If I am captured I will continue to resist by all means available. I will make every effort to escape and aid others to escape. I will accept neither parole nor special favors from the enemy.

The duty of a member of the armed forces to use all means available to resist the enemy is not lessened by the misfortune of captivity. A POW is still legally bound by the Uniform Code of Military Justice and ethically guided by the Code of Conduct. Under provisions of the Geneva Convention, a prisoner of war is also subject to certain rules imposed by the captor nation. When repatriated, a prisoner of war will not be condemned for having obeyed reasonable captor rules, such as sanitation regulations. The duty of a member of the armed forces to continue to resist does not mean a prisoner should engage in unreasonable harassment as a form of resistance. Retaliation by captors to the detriment of that prisoner and other prisoners is frequently the primary result of such harassment.

The Geneva Convention recognizes that a POW may have the duty to attempt escape. In fact, the Geneva Convention prohibits a captor nation from executing a POW simply for attempting escape. Under the authority of the senior official (often called the senior ranking officer, or SRO), a POW must be prepared to escape whenever the opportunity presents itself. In a POW compound, the senior POW must consider the welfare of those remaining behind after an escape. However, as a matter of conscious determination, a POW must plan to escape, try to escape and assist others to escape.

Contrary to the spirit of the Geneva Convention, enemies engaged by U.S. forces since 1950 have regarded the POW compound as an extension of the battlefield. In doing so, they have used a variety of tactics and pressures, including physical and mental mistreatment, torture and medical neglect, to exploit POWs for propaganda purposes, to obtain military information or to undermine POW organization, communication and resistance.

Such enemies have attempted to lure American POWs into accepting special favors or privileges in exchange for statements, acts or information. Unless it is essential to the life or welfare of that person or another prisoner of war or to the success of efforts to resist or escape, a POW must neither seek nor accept special favors or privileges.

One such privilege is called parole. Parole is a promise by a prisoner of war to a captor to fulfill certain conditions—such as agreeing not to escape nor to fight again once released—in return for such favors as relief from physical bondage, improved food and living conditions or repatriation ahead of the sick, injured or longer-held prisoners. An American POW will never sign nor otherwise accept parole.

CODE OF CONDUCT IV

If I become a prisoner of war, I will keep faith with my fellow prisoners. I will give no information or take part in any action which might be harmful to my comrades. If I am senior, I will take command. If not, I will obey the lawful orders of those appointed over me and will back them up in every way.

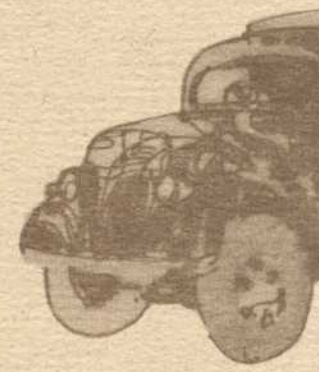
Informing or any other action to the detriment of a fellow prisoner is despicable and is expressly forbidden. Prisoners of war must avoid helping the enemy identify fellow prisoners who may have knowledge of particular value to the enemy and who may, therefore, be made to suffer coercive interrogation.

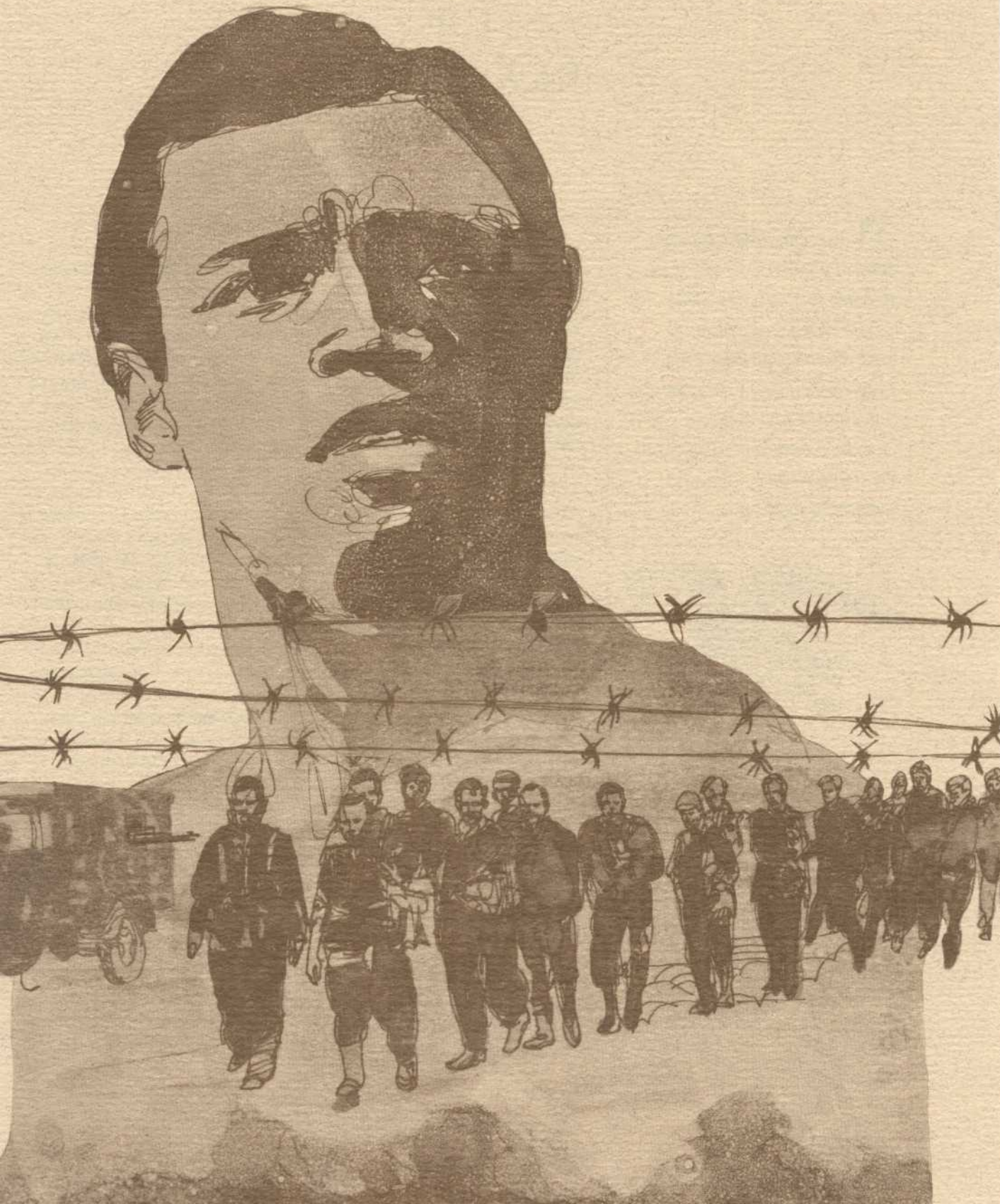
Strong leadership and communication are essential to discipline. Discipline is the key to camp organization, resistance and even survival. Personal hygiene, camp sanitation and care of sick and wounded are imperative. Officers and non-commissioned officers of the United States must continue to carry out their responsibilities and exercise their authority in captivity. The senior, regardless of service, must accept command. This responsibility and accountability may not be evaded.

If the senior is incapacitated or is otherwise unable to act, the next senior person will assume command. Camp leaders should make every effort to inform all POWs of the chain of command and try to represent them in dealing with enemy authorities. The responsibility of subordinates to obey the lawful orders of ranking American military personnel remains unchanged in captivity.

The Geneva Convention Relative to Treatment of Prisoners of War provides for election of a "prisoners' representative" in POW camps containing enlisted personnel but no commissioned officers. American POWs should understand that such a representative is only a spokesman for the actual senior-ranking person. Should the enemy appoint a POW chain of command for its own purposes, American POWs should make all efforts to adhere to the principles of Article IV.

As with other provisions of this code, common sense and the conditions of captivity will affect the way in which the senior person and the other POWs organize to carry out their responsibilities. What is important is that everyone support and work within the POW organization.





CODE OF CONDUCT V

When questioned, should I become a prisoner of war, I am required to give name, rank, service number, and date of birth. I will evade answering further questions to the utmost of my ability. I will make no oral or written statements disloyal to my country and its allies or harmful to their cause.

When questioned, a prisoner of war is required by the Geneva Convention and this code to give name, rank, service number (Social Security number) and date of birth. The prisoner should make every effort to avoid giving the captor any additional information. The prisoner may communicate with captors on matters of health and welfare and additionally may write letters home and fill out a Geneva Convention "capture card."

It is a violation of the Geneva Convention to place a prisoner under physical or mental duress, torture or any other form of coercion in an effort to secure information. If under such intense coercion, a POW discloses unauthorized information, makes an unauthorized statement or performs an unauthorized act, that prisoner's peace of mind and survival require a quick recovery of courage, dedication and motivation to resist anew each subsequent coercion.

Actions every POW should resist include making oral or written confessions and apologies, answering questionnaires, providing personal histories, creating propaganda recordings, broadcasting appeals to other prisoners of war, providing any other material readily usable for propaganda purposes, appealing for surrender or parole, furnishing self-criticisms and communicating on behalf of the enemy to the detriment of the United States, its allies, its armed forces or other POWs.

Every POW should also recognize that any confession signed or any statement made may be used by the enemy as a false evidence that the person is a "war criminal" rather than a POW. Several countries have made reservations to the Geneva Convention in which they assert that a "war criminal" conviction deprives the convicted individual of prisoner-of-war status, removes that person from protection under the Geneva Convention and revokes all rights to repatriation until a prison sentence is served.

Recent experiences of American prisoners of war have proved that, although enemy interrogation sessions may be harsh and cruel, one can resist brutal mistreatment when the will to resist remains intact.

The best way for a prisoner to keep faith with country, fellow prisoners and self is to provide the enemy with as little information as possible.

CODE OF CONDUCT VI

I will never forget that I am an American, fighting for freedom, responsible for my actions, and dedicated to the principles which made my country free. I will trust in my God and in the United States of Ameirca.

A member of the armed forces remains responsible for personal actions at all times.

A member of the armed forces who is captured has a continuing obligation to resist and to remain loyal to country, service, unit and fellow prisoners.

Upon repatriation, POWs can expect their actions to be reviewed, both as to circumstances of capture and conduct during detention. The purpose of such review is to recognize meritorious performance as well as to investigate possible misconduct. Each review will be conducted with due regard for the rights of the individual and consideration for the conditions of captivity; captivity of itself is not a condition of culpability.

Members of the armed forces should remember that they and their dependents will be taken care of by the appropriate service and that pay and allowances, eligibility and procedures for promotion and benefits for dependents continue while the service member is detained. Service members should assure that their personal affairs and family matters (such as pay, powers of attorney, current will and provisions for family maintenance and education) are properly and currently arranged. Failure to so arrange matters can create a serious sense of guilt for a POW and place unnecessary hardship on family members.

The life of a prisoner of war is hard. Each person in this stressful situation must always sustain hope and resist enemy indoctrination. Prisoners of war standing firm and united against the enemy will support and inspire one another in surviving their ordeal and in prevailing over misfortune with honor.

Paul Salmon

Code of the U.S. Fighting Force (DoD Gen-11B)—This official Department of Defense publication is for the use of personnel in the military services.

The Secretary of Defense
June 1988

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This pamphlet supersedes DoD GEN-11A/DA Pam 360-512/NAVEDTRA 46907, Navy Stock No. 0503-LP-004-5350/AFP 34-10/NAVMC 2681, which are obsolete.

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