

What Did You Do in the Cold War, Daddy?

My official Cold War Recognition Certificate arrived in the mail the other day, signed by the United States secretary of defense or at least his autopen. About time somebody showed a little appreciation for my role in toppling the Evil Empire. I've been waiting since 1956.

I learned that my day was coming last August, when the news appeared that Congress had finally set up a Cold War Recognition Certificate program for those of us who toiled, unsung, in the shadowy corridors of our longest war. At once I mailed off my request to an address* in Fairfax. Nine short months sped by, and now the certificate is on my desk.

It reads, "In recognition of your service during the period of the Cold War (2 September 1945–26 December 1991) in promoting peace and stability for this Nation, the people of this Nation are forever grateful."

Secretary Cohen has gone a little light on the specifics here, no doubt due to considerations of national security. But at this late date surely no harm can come of revealing what the secretary left out.

My Cold War contributions began modestly in early 1956 with my appointment as a private to Headquarters & Headquarters Company, First Radio Broadcasting and Leaflet Battalion, PsyWar Center, Fort Bragg, N.C. My assignment was to rake up pinecones outside the battalion's S2 building while

other draftees, inside it, prepared secret intelligence studies on two small Southeast Asian countries code-named soaL and manteiV. Really.

After several months of this preliminary training I was sent to .C.D, notgnihsaW, to edit *The Fort McNair Passing Review*. There my sense of duty, as I understood the concept, compelled me one day to fill out a column in the paper with a seemingly harmless reenlistment slogan. In fact, though, this message concealed a devastating attack on our principal Cold War opponent.

The initial letters of the slogan's first four words spelled out a verb in common use among the rude soldiery of those days; the first letters of the remaining words spelled "the Soviet Army." The "Soviet" portion of the coded message, however, somehow got lost in the editing process.

During the misunderstanding that followed I faced court martial for sending obscene material through the mails, disaffection with the Army, conduct unbecoming a soldier, incitement to riot, and incitement to mutiny. These charges were dropped, however, once I had groveled sufficiently before two investigators from the Counterintelligence Corps. Instead I got two weeks of kitchen police, the initials of which spell out "K.P."

A decade of private sector employment passed before my Cold War service resumed. In one of those incredible coincidences that could only happen in real life, I had by then become the press attaché at our embassy in soaL. My chief duty was to tell reporters that the heaviest aerial bombardment in the history of warfare was the work of "unarmed reconnaissance flights accompanied by armed escorts who have the right to return fire if fired upon." Sounds simple enough, doesn't it? But try to say it the way I had to, without giggling.

My third chance to serve in the front lines of the Cold War came in 1977, when I followed Jimmy Carter to the

White House as a speechwriter. In those early days of the administration it still seemed possible that Mr. Carter would turn out to be more Rooseveltian than Trumanesque in his foreign policy. Accordingly I suggested this line for a speech the president gave at Notre Dame:

“We are now free of that inordinate fear of communism which once led us to embrace any dictator who joined us in that fear.”

The immediate outbreak of foam-flecked hysteria from the right made it clear that we were not free of it at all. Evidently inordinate (“exceeding reasonable limits”) exactly described the sort of fear that any true patriot should feel.

President Carter came to feel it, too, and unfortunately it led him to embrace a dictator who joined him in that fear, the Shah of Iran. This in turn led to the hostage crisis, which installed Ronald Reagan in the White House and me in Connecticut.

The new president threw himself with enthusiasm into the Cold War for the next eight years, in spite of Mikhail Gorbachev’s awkward refusal to cooperate. Mr. Gorbachev finally managed to end it nonetheless, demonstrating that it really does take two to tango. And so he was the one who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1990.

Ten more years would pass before a little appreciation worked its way down to me, not that I’m complaining. Frankly, I’m surprised Congress noticed at all.

* As a service to other grizzled vets: Cold War Recognition, 4035 Ridge Top Road, Fairfax, VA 22030-7445.



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