

Col. Carl F. Bernard (USA Ret.): A Courageous Soldier-Intellectual

by Edward Spannaus and Dean Andromidas

Carl Franklin Bernard, a highly decorated retired U.S. Army Colonel and a longtime friend of the LaRouche movement, was buried with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery on June 4. Colonel Bernard, a soldier-intellectual, and one of America's true military heroes, passed away on March 4 at his residence at Fort Belvoir in Alexandria, Virginia, at the age of 81.

Retired four-star Gen. Volney Warner wrote upon hearing of Bernard's death, "Carl was indeed the bravest combat soldier that I have ever known." Speaking at the funeral, Warner said, "Those soldiers who survived the initial North Korea onslaught with him worshipped the ground he fought on, and the rest of us loved him for what he was, and would follow him anywhere."

In his later years, Bernard remained very active in policy debates within military and defense circles, both in formal and informal groups, which constitute what Lyndon LaRouche has called "the institution of the Presidency"—largely retired military and intelligence professionals, and others, who see their patriotic duty as fighting for policies to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States.

A Personal Recollection

Colonel Bernard brought the same courage of the many battlefields on which he fought, to those taking place within Washington's Beltway. One of us (Dean Andromidas) had the privilege to serve with him in an engagement in one of those political battles, which reflects the behind-the-scenes role that "retired" patriots play.



Courtesy of Joel Bernard

Col. Carl Bernard (USA ret.) was "the bravest combat soldier I have ever known," said Gen. Volney Warner, at Bernard's funeral.

It was an experience never to be forgotten. It was in 1999, during the NATO Summit in Washington, at the height of the NATO intervention in Kosovo—a war the U.S. should have never entered. The air war, as Bernard had already forewarned, was proving totally ineffective, if not disastrous, and the British were demanding that NATO launch a ground assault—which Bernard not only opposed but was lobbying against within the military security establishment that was advising then-President Bill Clinton.

Meeting in the kitchen in his suburban Virginia home, I briefed Bernard on LaRouche's assessment, and how our movement was working to stop this British ploy. He was dead-set against any ground war, and briefed me—as he had no doubt briefed many in high places—on why it would be a disaster, citing everything from

the Yugoslav Resistance in World War II, to his own rich experience in Vietnam. LaRouche's evaluation tracked closely with his own assessment, and his determination to stop it.

When I suggested that some high-ranking military officials make a show by resigning in protest, he quickly said, "You never resign." Here was a man who, in his long career, had a hundred opportunities to "resign in protest," but stayed in the fight to do what he thought was right, to change a disastrous policy. By the end of the NATO conference, President Clinton had ruled out any land war. It was a skirmish won that would not even make a footnote in history, but it nonetheless left me with a great deal of respect for Bernard, and another insight into his unique character.

The Korean Crucible

Born in Texas in 1926, and raised in the oil fields of the West, Carl Bernard enlisted as a Marine, in 1944, during World War II, and served in the Pacific and China. In 1947, he enlisted in the U.S. Army, and was commissioned an infantry officer in 1949, and became a platoon leader with L Company of the 21st Infantry Regiment, then part of the 24th Infantry Division.

Stationed in Japan, in the Spring of 1950, 1st Lt. Bernard was commandeered by Col. Charles Smith, and flown into Korea with “Task Force Smith” at the beginning of the war, and was one of that unfortunate unit’s few survivors after it was overrun at Osan by North Korean forces. Bernard led the remnants of his platoon through enemy lines and back to U.S. positions a week later; he later wrote that the reason he never got the withdrawal order was that Smith had been told that Bernard was dead and his platoon gone. After he was patched up, he rejoined his L Company, which had since arrived back in Korea.

The lessons of the opening weeks of the Korean War—the lack of preparation of the troops, faulty equipment, and a belief that infantry troops were obsolete in the nuclear age—became the basis for Bernard’s lifelong battle for military readiness and competence.

In comments to *EIR*, accompanying his article, “The High Cost of Not Being Ready,” published in the Nov. 12, 1999 issue (http://www.larouchepub.com/other/1999/2645_korea_bernard.html), Bernard pointed out that there was a prevailing belief at the time that the infantry soldier didn’t count any more, because we were now in a nuclear age, and that the war would be over in a week. He wrote, “We went into Korea believing the North Koreans would turn and head back as soon as they discovered we were there.” Bernard traced the problem back to the air-power doctrine, that we could bomb small countries into doing whatever we demanded.

After Korea—more accurately, because of it—Bernard remained in the Army for almost three decades, voluntarily serving in what he described as relatively low-level combat assignments, in Laos in 1960 (Special Forces), and in Vietnam; he also attended the Army Ranger School at Fort Benning, the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, and the French Army’s Ecole d’Etat Major, and he helped develop the curriculum for the J.F. Kennedy Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg. After his retirement from the Army in 1975, Bernard set up a consulting firm, focussing on



Courtesy of Joel Bernard

Carl Bernard in Hau Nghia, Vietnam, ca. 1968, with the daughter of the province chief’s cook.

readiness, and on U.S.-French military relations.

The Wrong Wars

Colonel Bernard’s life elucidates the tragedy of the U.S. military following the death of Franklin D. Roosevelt. His first military service was in the “total war” of World War II, which, under FDR’s leadership, was intended to lay the foundation of a total peace, which would involve the dismantling of the British and other colonial empires.

With FDR’s untimely death, and the ascendancy of Harry Truman to the Oval Office, Bernard found himself fighting in precisely the types of wars that FDR had sought to end forever, including the “limited war” in Korea, and the “asymmetric” war in Vietnam. Critical of the “Utopian” doctrines introduced by Maxwell Taylor and Robert McNamara, Bernard held to

the universal principles of war centered on the well-trained and educated infantryman, who brought to war not only courage and leadership, but the moral integrity for which the United States had traditionally been known.

The commonplace notion of the foot soldier as a borderline-idiot grunt was totally foreign to Bernard’s thinking. He never tired of reiterating that “posting a stupid man to the infantry is tantamount to condemning him to death.”

This man, who witnessed 11 atomic bomb tests at Camp Desert Rock in 1953, understood that the application of unlimited force is not what necessarily wins wars—and may indeed lose them. Bernard always viewed the indiscriminate use of air power in Vietnam as doing the Viet Cong’s work for them, in turning the population against the United States and the South Vietnamese government that U.S. troops were defending.

Likewise, during the “Swift Boat” attacks on Sen. John Kerry in the 2004 Presidential campaign, Bernard said that from what he had observed, the Navy swift boats “were the foremost recruiters for the Viet Cong,” with their indiscriminate machine-gunning of hamlets along the river banks. He said that, in contrast, “Kerry’s going to the river bank with a rifle is what an infantryman would do, not spray a village with machine gun bullets.”

Bernard always emphasized the central importance of small-unit cohesion. As he put it in a letter to two top Pentagon generals in 1999, reflecting on the annual reunions of the 21st Infantry Regiment: “Simply, our most successful fighting units became families. We came to love one another. ...

The attitudes and sense of responsibility for one another touched each of us regardless of rank.” Bernard’s oft-stated belief, put simply, was that what holds the infantry unit together is love.

Characteristically, Bernard remained close to his surviving L Company comrades for the rest of his life. A number of them attended his funeral at the Old Post Chapel at Fort Meyer, adjacent to Arlington Cemetery, including General Warner, who had reported to L Company as a 2nd Lieutenant, fresh out of West Point, in 1950, in Korea. (Warner recalled that Bernard was charged with fitting Warner and his just-graduated classmates into the remnants of Task Force Smith. “Carl took one look at the lot of us and remarked, ‘The war is over.’”)

The Vietnam Debacle

Bernard had a clear view of our entanglement in Indochina: We never should have entered the war. As a result of his liaison work with the French military, which began with a NATO posting in Germany in the 1950s, he had intimate knowledge of the French involvement—and failures—in Indochina and Algeria. French officers had cautioned the U.S. military not to get involved in Indochina, and warned that the U.S. would surely lose; it was an assessment that Bernard appreciated, but which former Defense Secretary Robert McNamara and his like obviously didn’t.

As an expert on counterinsurgency, before it became popular, Bernard clashed repeatedly with generals who were convinced that artillery and tanks were the way to deal with guerrilla warfare.

“Ominous and far-reaching is the cavalier disregard of U.S. commanders for the dictates of the pacification program, in their headlong rush to ‘Kill VC,’ still touted as the objective,” Bernard wrote in a 1969 after-action report to the CIA’s William Colby, after two years in the central Vietnam. Tasked with a pacification program, to win over the “hearts and minds” of the local population, Bernard found that his own army was often a bigger problem than the Viet Cong. “The U.S. Air Force and the 9th Infantry Division were the best recruiting tools the VC had,” Bernard told his longtime friend and adjutant, Jim Bartlett, years later. “At the end of the day, there were more Vietnamese against us than for us. It was a long road getting there, but we made it sure enough.”

Bernard’s description of incidents that turned the population against the government and the Americans, reads eerily similar to what has been happening in Iraq and Afghanistan in recent years: villages shelled deliberately, or by accident; maltreatment and beatings of VC in detention centers where they were supposed to be convinced to join the government side; drunken troops grenading a Vietnamese family dog, and then smashing the family’s house with an armored personnel carrier; a local Vietnamese security director imprisoned under harsh conditions as a VC; U.S. operatives killing villag-

ers instead of the communist cadre they were supposed to be targetting.

“The tools of the US overwhelmingly are military, i.e., bombs, artillery and infantry battalions. This basic failure in the US perception of the war insured the enemy becomes stronger each year despite heroic lists of KIA [killed-in-action], weapons captured and VC eliminated,” Bernard wrote in his after-action report.

Bernard’s report was apparently so damning, that Colby “immediately snatched back every copy Bernard had forwarded to others in his circle, in effect, classifying the report,” Bartlett wrote.

After his postings to Laos and Vietnam, Bernard’s final assignment was to the University of California at Berkeley—a center of the anti-war movement and the rising counterculture—in 1972, to restore the Army ROTC program. Throwing the old ROTC curriculum out the window, Bernard put together a series of lectures and courses centering on revolution and insurgency/counterinsurgency, which drew standing-room-only audiences, including prominent student radicals and anti-war protesters. As one of his relatives said concerning Bernard’s assignment at Berkeley: The war protesters liked him, because he was also a war protester.

‘How Fortunate We Were...’

An intellectual by nature, Bernard embodied that all-too-rare combination of intelligence and guts. A close friend described him as the rare embodiment of a man who had little fear of controversy, and who could—and did—deal with many groups across a wide spectrum of beliefs, savoring the dynamics and unique viewpoints of each.

Bernard’s intellectual curiosity brought him into contact with the LaRouche movement, and into regular discussions of strategic and military policy with us. He attended a number of events at which LaRouche spoke, and, after one such event, sent one of his ubiquitous e-mails to his circle of friends describing the event as “an extraordinary affair,” and commenting on LaRouche’s presentation, that “The erudition of this man and the breadth of his knowledge of our world was striking.”

In 2002, on the occasion of LaRouche’s 80th birthday, Carl Bernard submitted the following for publication in the *Festschrift* for LaRouche:

“The two of us have lasted a long time. Looking back at the world I knew is moving. Thinking about what you’ve done with your life and your world touches me as well. Reflections on our early days and what we knew then is one of the most valuable of the gifts that time has left with us. You have touched many lives and you will never be forgotten. My time as a soldier let me understand the perspectives of many young men, including those of a number we were allied with or fighting against. My conclusions for the pair of us focus on how fortunate we were to have been involved in so many of the prime events of our times.”