

“Don’t smoke ‘em if you got ‘em”
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An officer multitasks, smoking and signing a scroll commemorating the 86th Anniversary of the Signal Corps, here, 3 March 1949.

A report released June 28 may change military culture drastically.

“Combating Tobacco in Military and Veteran Populations,” calls for Defense Department officials to ban the use of tobacco by troops and end its sale on military property.

The proposed ban would be enacted over a period of years.

Officials from the Pentagon and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) first asked the Institute of Medicine to prepare this report in 2007.

The report said, in part, that a tobacco ban would confront a military culture in which “the image of the battle-weary soldier in fatigues and helmet, fighting for his country, has frequently included his lit cigarette.”

How did that culture evolve? According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Army surgeons during WWI praised cigarettes for helping the wounded relax and easing their pain. TRICARE reports that C-rations and K-rations included cigarettes from WWII through 1975.

Les Stevens, who was stationed at Fort Monmouth from 1970-71, shared, “Interestingly, I started smoking in the service when small packs were included with each C-ration.”

Though Soldiers’ rations no longer contain cigarettes, Jim Garamone of the American Forces Press Services reports that more than 30-percent of active-duty military members currently use tobacco products of some kind.

In fact, “Combating Tobacco” states that “The rate of tobacco use in the military has increased since 1998” and that “smoking rates among military personnel returning from Iraq and Afghanistan may be 50-percent higher than rates among non-deployed military personnel.”



Bad influence? A Captain at the Signal School, here, smokes while catching up on paperwork, c. 1952.



EXPERIMENTAL "GAS-CELL" BATTERY

Combustibility be damned! A pipe smoker looks on as Dr. Wernher von Braun, Chief Scientist of the Army's missile program, inspects a "gas-cell" battery, here, 13 November 1959. The battery converted hydrogen and oxygen to electrical power.

Tobacco use costs the Pentagon \$846 million per year in medical care and lost productivity, according to the report. It also says that the VA spends up to \$6 billion in treatments for tobacco-related illnesses.

This makes sense to a veteran like Dr. William Ryan, who served at Fort Monmouth from 1952-1954. Ryan remarked, "Smoking cigarettes was the thing to do in the 40s, 50s and 60s and of course these are the heart patients of the 80s, 90s and the new millennium."

The CECOM LCMC Historians found ready examples of Fort Monmouth, Signal Corps, and CECOM-predecessor command Soldiers, veterans, and civilians lighting up both on and off duty. This seems foreign to many who have joined the workforce since the federal government restricted smoking in all of its facilities in 1979, or banned smoking in all interior space owned, rented, or leased by the executive branch in 1998, or mandated all DoD facilities smoke free in 2002.

But Ryan remembers the smoking culture well. He shared, "I remember all barracks [at Fort Monmouth] were equipped with what were termed 'butt cans.' They were gallon sized cans probably acquired from the mess sergeant [with] about an inch of water in the bottom. You could smoke sitting on a bunk and not lying down on it. The more sophisticated outfits provided sand instead of water."

Ryan said of the newly proposed ban, "It may be unpopular but I think it is long overdue."

Van Dee Allen II, who was stationed at Fort Monmouth from 1971-1972, agreed, and joked, "It seems to me that when I was in the Army getting sunburn could get you charged with a crime: destruction of government property. Why not the same for smoking?"

Stevens, who has since retired and stopped smoking, expressed some concerns with the proposed ban. He said, "While I think this is a noble idea it isn't practical...I'm sure smoking could be controlled in military facilities but not with those troops out on the front line."

Regarding the possibility of restricting it in combat, 5 year Vietnam era Army veteran Don Scanga said that it was "about as crazy as anything I have ever hear...While smoking is somewhat hazardous to your health, having someone shoot at



Captain Edward Boyd, First Cav Air Mobile Div, establishes communications during operation Long Reach, RVN, 1965.

you is a little worse.”

Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates has since made it clear that he does not plan to restrict tobacco use among troops in war zones.

But Pentagon Spokeswoman Cynthia Smith says officials believe an otherwise tobacco-free military is achievable through development and execution of a comprehensive plan as recommended by the report.

Allen suggested that the ban might be more successful “if the military also supplies a benefit to help the personnel to quit smoking.” Such resources are available. Those who want to quit can visit The “Quit Tobacco -- Make Everyone Proud” campaign at <http://www.ucanquit2.org>. The Web site provides information, resources, interactive tools, and practical help. Service members who want to quit tobacco can get immediate help from a trained tobacco-cessation coach from 8:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. EST every day.



Pancakes? Check. Coffee? Check. Ashtray? Check. Veterans enjoy breakfast here on Armed Forces Day, 18 March 1974.