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HEADLINE: Army at Odds: **West Point Posting Becomes a Minefield** For 'Warrior' Officer --- Col. Hallums Won Medals But Lost Career in Fight Over Academy's Vision --- A Bully, or Victim of PC?

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BODY:

WEST POINT, N.Y. -- Col. James Hallums, a veteran of two wars, had seen lots of nasty skirmishes in his career. But he thought his combat days were behind him when he arrived to instill a "warrior spirit" in the leadership department of the U.S. Military Academy here.

He was wrong. Soon, some subordinate academic officers would rise up in open revolt, and eventually some female faculty members would complain that he was sexist.

This was hard for a tough infantry officer to take. West Point, though a college, is still part of the Army and the colonel expected to be obeyed. This insurrection was all insubordination and nonsense, in his estimation, and he fought back.

Yet today Col. Hallums, who once seemed assured of a promotion to general, finds himself pilloried as a bully -- and out of the Army, his 30-year-career brought to an ugly end.

He was brought to the academy out of worries that the venerable institution had lost its military and disciplinary edge. But late last year, after a tumultuous one-year stint and a rancorous investigation of his actions by academy superiors, he lost his post as head of the leadership department, sacked for "abusive leadership."

Among the charges against him: that he harassed some of his female subordinates by lecturing them about their personal lives and showed a gender bias because he was so gung-ho about combat forces, and under Army rules, women are excluded from ground combat roles. Yet, Col. Hallums, whose supporters say he sometimes showed a clumsiness around women professionals, had been maverick enough to favor giving women a role on the front lines.

His supporters, a number of West Point women among them, remain bitter about his treatment, and use a military

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metaphor to describe what befell the colonel: ambush. They contend that the same divisive culture wars that have been raging in the corridors of U.S. education, religion and the workplace have now broken out in the military. Col. Hallums, a soldier of the Old School, had been plenty good enough to lead men into deadly combat and win medals of valor. But, supporters say, he didn't pass muster with the "weenie" element of the modern Army. Too gruff, blunt and demanding for the academics around him; too proud of his warrior past. He was, they charge, drummed out of the service for being politically incorrect.

Detractors have another version. They say the colonel was a bullying loudmouth who went out of his way to offend and humiliate certain of his subordinates. He treated his post like an infantry command, running roughshod over the academy's academic mission. In the end, critics say Col. Hallums proved himself a macho, oafish officer out of step with the reality of a peacetime Army whose purpose is now more complicated than storming a machine-gun nest -- and whose culture now includes technicians and managers as well as warriors like himself.

More neutral observers wonder whether he wasn't simply what one calls "the wrong man for the wrong times." But neutral observers are hard to find.

"What West Point did to Col. Hallums is sordid," says retired Col. Robert Seigle, an ardent supporter of the colonel. But Brig. Gen. Fletcher M. Lamkin Jr., dean of West Point's academic board, defends the academy's decision, saying Col. Hallums was undone by his style, not his politics. "Abusive leadership has no place in the Army," the general says.

The polarized sides in this fracas do agree on one thing: The culture war isn't over, and it is a fight for the Army's soul and future. Indeed, the West Point skirmish follows a host of sexual abuse and harassment charges that have bedeviled the military in recent months. In one high-profile case involving a number of drill sergeants at Aberdeen, Md., affairs took an even more divisive turn this week when four female soldiers recanted rape allegations against superiors -- saying they had been pressured by overzealous Army investigators.

Moreover, the Hallums matter, and its handling, points to a long-simmering debate within West Point itself. "In the last 30 years, West Point has had an intellectual crisis as to whether it's a military academy or an Ivy League college," says retired Lt. Gen. Richard Trefry, a West Point graduate and former inspector general of the Army who also has served as an academy adviser.

The bad blood left behind and the handling of the matter remain so controversial that few in the academy would speak on the record about it. But interviews with insiders, and details in a West Point investigator's report and scores of other government documents, paint the picture of a culture war at West Point.

When this all began, Col. Hallums was seen as a solution, not a problem. In 1990, Col. Seigle, then commander of the 18th Aviation Brigade at Fort Bragg, N.C., wrote a fierce letter to West Point's commanders to complain that "for those of us out in the Army, the product you're putting out doesn't measure up." Specifically, he said the leadership department needed a genuine warrior in charge, not a mild academic in uniform.

Complaints from commanders of hotshot combat brigades resonate in the Army. And Col. Seigle was articulating a frustration that had been bubbling within the Army's ranks for years. The criticism hit home at the academy, in the midst of its own soul-searching about, among other things, a rise in the flameout rate of West Point graduates who leave the Army. When an academy committee began looking for a chairman of what is formally called the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership, it turned to Col. Hallums.

The colonel was known throughout the Army as a tough infantry commander from the West Point class of '66, on which the Vietnam War fell heavily. As a young lieutenant, he had fought in the battle of Hue and twice was decorated for valor. At age 24, he became one of the youngest company commanders in the elite 101st Airborne Division there.

A decade later, his brigade commander, one Col. Colin Powell, evaluated him as "a forceful, tough leader as well as a brilliant staff officer" with "a great enthusiasm and love for the Army." He called James Hallums a general in the

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making.

Col. Hallums's Army career included an unusual six additional tours in six different countries. He advised the military of El Salvador -- and then went to Harvard to co-author a monograph critical of how the U.S. handled guerrilla war there. He led a sensitive mission in Honduras and then served on the front lines of the drug war in Bolivia.

When the West Point post came up, Col. Hallums recalls being "practically ordered" to take it. He was shipped off to Vanderbilt University to earn the doctorate he needed to burnish his academic credentials. He reported to the academy in the summer of 1995 for what normally would have been a posting of five years or more. The real plum: a brigadier general's rank upon retirement from West Point and the Army.

Col. Hallums, given his considerable command experience, figured he was ready for anything. Besides, he had bagged what seemed like a helpful degree, in sociology. But West Point's leadership department had few similarities to his familiar terrain.

Housed in the faux-Gothic fortress of Thayer Hall, it was proud of its academic atmosphere and consensus management. Many of its permanent faculty members, though Army officers, are essentially tenured professors -- and view themselves with the same independence. Col. Hallums was shocked by his initial meetings as the department prepared for fall 1995 classes. He recalls encountering what he considered "a visceral antimilitary feeling."

Other arrivals from the regular Army felt the same way. Col. Michael Anderson, a senior instructor who had led an infantry battalion at Fort Lewis, Wash., was stunned to hear his experiences derided by some academics as mere war stories. "I was told that professional experiences I had in my operational assignments had no place in the leadership course I taught," he later wrote in a memorandum to Brig. Gen. Lamkin, the dean.

Col. Hallums set out, in his words, "to bring the department back into the Army." This proved no simple matter. Small and energetic, his normal communication is a bellow -- a trait some faculty interpreted as macho aggressiveness. He ended the practice of calling superiors by their first names; he wanted to be addressed as "Colonel Hallums." On the first day of classes, he ordered officers to wear their "Class A" uniforms, the equivalent of business suits; before, they had dressed in military sweaters and slacks.

The sniping began soon enough. Col. Anderson, in his memo to Gen. Lamkin, said some officers cracked "that Col. Hallums just wanted to show off his war medals and display the contrast with the rest of the faculty with little to no combat experience." Another groused that Col. Hallums, in his insistence on more formal uniforms, "obviously had no identity outside the military," according to a memo by Lt. Col. Randall Chase that became part of the investigation. He is a career artillery-man and another department member.

The new chairman also irked faculty members by judging them, in part, by their fitness for combat, viewing this as relevant to their role of training future military leaders. At age 53, he was a hard-body fitness nut whose two-hour daily regime alternated weightlifting with running. He amused himself by showing others he could undulate chest muscles beneath his shirt.

Several younger officers welcomed this new approach, especially those fresh from combat units. Maj. Christopher Putko, a former battery commander in the premier 82nd Airborne Division, based at Fort Bragg, later told investigators in a written statement that the new chairman had been "a breath of fresh air" in a department mocked by other faculty as "touchy-feely."

But the handful of lieutenant colonels who served as permanent faculty were appalled -- and began resisting. Among these senior officers, one in particular stood out: Michael Hughes, who taught psychology and counseling and, after an earlier stint in the infantry, had embarked on a military career in counseling. In a memo written during the investigation, Lt. Col. Chase noted that at one autumn meeting Lt. Col. Hughes said "someone needed to tell Col. Hallums that this was not his department, but theirs and the academy's." (Lt. Col. Hughes, like all of Col. Hallums's

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departmental critics, declined to be interviewed for this story.)

Meanwhile, Col. Hallums gave his subordinates some ammunition. He called in the department's civilian female teachers and asked if they had any romantic entanglements he should know about. Early in September, Barbara Hunter later recalled, the colonel told her she was expected to serve at West Point "for the long haul and that I couldn't be expected to get married and move." Unaware that she was divorced, the colonel, a married man with three daughters, told her he thought people who divorce lack commitment. A few days later, Col. Hallums had a similar conversation with civilian professor Patricia Rooney.

One senior faculty member, Lt. Col. Gayle Watkins, learned of these conversations and criticized them. Col. Hallums sent an apology down the chain of command; he says he doesn't recall hearing any other objections to his behavior during the entire academic year. But there would be some, dumped in one load at the end of the year. "I didn't realize they were keeping book on me," he later said.

On Sept. 8, Col. Hallums, while working out, learned from a junior faculty member, Special Forces Capt. Kevin Berry, that the lieutenant colonels were being openly critical of him. Such dissent was common in the old leadership department, but Col. Hallums saw it as improper in a military unit -- his unit. He told his executive officer, Lt. Col. Chase, that senior faculty members "were saying things that in any unit he had ever been in would have been seen as disloyal," the XO later wrote in a memorandum.

Col. Anderson, who as the department's electives director supervised several of the dissident lieutenant colonels, tried to head off the looming confrontation between the chairman and faculty. On Sept. 29, he sent a blunt warning memo to Lt. Col. Hughes and others that Col. Hallums wasn't to be trifled with: "He does not want to be one of your colleagues," the memo said.

More provocatively, Col. Hallums insisted the department's attitude, not his, must change. In January, he found a line of cadets waiting to file course change slips. What branch are you going into, he asked one. "Infantry," came the answer. Responded a pleased Col. Hallums: "Go to the head of the line."

But he confounded those who would later portray him as sexist by selecting a woman, Maj. Deirdre Dixon, for a departmental plum: directing its core course on military leadership. It was, Col. Anderson later noted, a position that "traditionally goes to the most dynamic officer in the department." Maj. Dixon herself was a physical fitness buff -- and also a master parachutist.

In February 1996, Col. Hallums directly confronted the dissenters. As the meeting began, his tone was chillier than the winter fog rolling off the Hudson River just downhill from his office.

As Lt. Col. Hughes later recalled, Col. Hallums told the three unhappy lieutenant colonels he was tired of their criticism. They said they were just doing their jobs. At this, Col. Hallums blew his stack. "Don't you get it?" he shouted, according to several accounts. "The only correct response to a decision I make is silence and obedience on your part. I don't want your input, just your absolute obedience."

Red-faced, he leaned across the table and said, through clenched teeth, "Do you understand me, lieutenant colonels?" He made each answer in turn: "Yes, sir."

Col. Hallums left the meeting having decided that the three officers had lost touch with the Army and with soldiering. But the next day Lt. Col. Hughes sent an upbeat memo to his immediate supervisor, Col. Anderson, detailing five steps he was taking to get with the program. Among other things, he said he would volunteer to help with cadets' military training. "I am really hitting it!" he concluded.

Yet a guerrilla war was under way. The more resistance Col. Hallums met, the more he acted as if he were still an infantryman in the field where soldiers breathe, eat and sleep together -- and where commanders are obeyed instantly.

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One March day, he thought little of changing into running clothes while talking to Lt. Col. Hughes in his office, though he says he did first ask permission. Lt. Col. Hughes, himself an infantryman, took deep offense. "I felt very awkward," he would later formally complain. "It was intended to be a 'power session' where he clearly was in control."

In May, as the academic year ended, the department held a formal dinner at nearby Nicole's Restaurant to say farewell to junior faculty members moving on to new assignments. Col. Hallums had ordered the officers to wear their dress-blue uniforms. Maj. Putko, a departing psychology teacher, stood with his souvenir guidon, a small black-and-gold departmental pennant, and said he would follow Col. Hallums into battle without hesitation, the highest praise one warrior can bestow on another. Yet for some of the senior academics there, this was more goading. They weren't heading into combat; they were trying to teach psychology, sociology and leadership to undergraduates.

Four days earlier, in fact, at a year-end cocktail party aboard the academy superintendent's yacht, Lt. Col. Hughes had unburdened himself to another senior West Point officer, who took the allegations to the office of Brig. Gen. Lamkin.

On May 15, Lt. Col. Hughes delivered a seven-page, single-spaced memorandum to Gen. Lamkin. It charged Col. Hallums with "abusive leadership" saying that, among other things, he had feared the colonel might strike him at the explosive February meeting. He recounted the scene in which Col. Hallums had lectured him while changing into exercise clothes. Col. Hallums also made women feel uncomfortable, the lieutenant colonel alleged further, by walking through the department in a sleeveless shirt and Spandex shorts. Gen. Lamkin immediately began his inquiry.

In the following days, Gen. Lamkin said in an interview, he was flooded with complaints. Ms. Hunter and Ms. Rooney, two of the department's three civilian female professors, filed sworn statements formally accusing Col. Hallums of sexism. Ms. Hunter cited his denunciation of those who divorce as "gender discrimination." Ms. Rooney said the colonel's September conversation with her had "implied that as a woman, my career shouldn't come first. This is sexism." (The third female civilian professor filed a dissent saying she had found Col. Hallums to be supportive.)

A sworn statement by Capt. Sharon Bowers said that, in February, Col. Hallums showed off his biceps and invited her to touch them. "In retrospect, I believe this was sexual harassment," she said.

Lt. Col. Joseph Napoleon LeBoeuf, one of the three senior officers confronted by Col. Hallums at the February meeting, summarized his concerns in a sworn statement. Because women aren't allowed in ground combat, he argued, "Colonel Hallums' glorification of the combat arms . . . translates into a program that is being perceived as exclusionary of women." In addition, he said, the colonel was "insensitive to our feelings." Though he and his colleagues were technically subordinate, he added, "it was hardly the way we expect to be treated."

Several other department members, both junior and senior, filed sharply different views. Capt. Berry, the Special Forces officer, said Col. Hallums was in touch with the ordinary soldier and "has a 'grunt in muddy boots' way of looking at issues." Col. Anderson, who in effect was deputy department head, said in a sworn statement, "I suspect these complaints against Colonel Hallums are a conspiracy to overthrow him."

Then came a wave of sworn statements from West Point's "tactical officers," who actually command cadets that others teach. In their view, an officer they respected was being torn down by professors they saw as "weenies."

More than a dozen of these young hard chargers formally questioned their superiors' actions. "I would serve anywhere with Colonel Hallums," stated Capt. David Duffy, a Special Forces officer. Tactical officers believe, said Capt. Robert Roggeman, "he has improved the command climate."

Even female tactical officers supported the colonel. Capt. Trese LaCamera, a military-intelligence specialist, said he "always made me feel as though I were part of the team and no different because I am a woman." Capt. Cheryl Solomon, a military-police officer, said, "I would gladly serve in his command."

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But inside Thayer Hall the atmosphere was poisonous. "The climate is crazy in the department," Maj. Dixon, who had gotten a plum promotion from Col. Hallums, told investigators. Her conclusion: The colonel "has worked only with men before, and I think he just isn't educated on how to work with women."

In late May Col. Hallums offered to resign but Brig. Gen. Lamkin dissuaded him by saying, the general recalls, "Whoa, you're not a quitter. Let's see what the facts are."

On June 10, Col. Dennis Hunt, head of West Point's law department, found Col. Hallums guilty of sexual harassment under Army Regulation 600-20, not for seeking sexual favors but for creating "an intimidating, hostile or offensive environment." He was also adjudged to have belittled the Army's support branches. "Many in the department perceive that he disdains the non-combat arms, and by implication, female officers," the investigator wrote. He also said the colonel chewed out his subordinates "far too often."

Col. Hunt recommended that Col. Hallums be retained but counseled. "Fairness suggests he be given an opportunity to put things right," he wrote. He also recommended that Col. Hallums be ordered to remove all athletic gear from his office, "never appear at his office in exercise clothes and cease all posing, flexing and making body-oriented comments."

But West Point's superintendent, Lt. Gen. Daniel Christman, rejected that recommendation and removed Col. Hallums from his post, effectively forcing him to retire.

On Jan. 24, Col. Hallums left the Army. Significantly, Gen. David Bramlett, who had headed the original search committee that selected Col. Hallums, sponsored his retirement ceremony -- not at West Point but at the 101st Airborne's post at Fort Campbell, Ky. "Jim Hallums went where the Army sent him and he did his duty," the four-star general said at the ceremony. Facing the colonel, he added, "Your example stands for all of us."

West Point has a new leadership department chairman, Col. Charles "Casey" Brower, a member of the academy's history department and a former military aide to President Reagan. Col. Hallums says he isn't bitter, but offers: "Vietnam was tough but I would say that one year at West Point was the only bad time I had in the Army."

NOTES:

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