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The Enduring Legacy of Inspector General von Steuben

According to one 20th Century Army historian, “the military services of two men, and of two men alone, can be regarded as indispensable to the achievement of American Independence. These two men were Washington and Steuben. . . . Washington was the indispensable commander. Steuben was his indispensable staff officer.”¹

When Benjamin Franklin recruited Baron von Steuben in 1777 from the latter’s post-Prussian Army position as “Hofmarschall” (Lord Chamberlain) of a small Hohenzollern principality in what is now Southern Germany, how could anyone have envisioned the enduring legacy of this first effective American Inspector General: “integrity, knowledge, and loyalty to conscience”?² The Steuben family motto, *Sub Tutela Altissimi Semper*³ (translated, Under the Protection of the Almighty Always), might have foreshadowed the legacy of this German-American patriot whose monument graces the park across from the White House, along with Generals Lafayette, Rochambeau, and Kosciuszko: all four of whom “testify to the gratitude of the American people to those from France, from Poland, and from Prussia

¹ John Palmer, *General von Steuben* 1 (Yale University Press, 1937).

² Joseph Whitehorne, “Von Steuben’s Legacy,” *The Inspectors General of the United States Army, 1903-1939*, at 4 (Office of the Inspector General & Center of Military History, United States Army, 1998).

³ Henning-Hubertus Baron von Steuben, *Chronik der Familie von Steuben* 4 (1998).

who aided them in their struggle for national independence and existence.”⁴

Ever since the Revolutionary War, the military Inspector General in America has served as *an independent extension of the eyes, ears, and conscience of the Commander*.⁵ Still today, all Inspectors General in the Department of Defense, including the military departments, are trained to serve in this role; as such, the military Inspector General is always a paradigm of military leadership—the only issue is whether he or she is a good paradigm.

While today’s Army Inspector General is the modern day personification of the enduring legacy of General von Steuben, it is also clear that General von Steuben is much more than the founding father of the Army Inspector General system. He is, of course, that. Not only is the first lesson plan of the Army Inspector General School devoted to General von Steuben, the entire 3-week course is permeated with the “Von Steuben Model.” He is the enduring prime role model for every one of the 239 principal Army Inspectors General, a veritable “IG-Network” of senior officers serving full time in assistance, inspection, non-criminal investigation, and “teach & train” functions at every major command around the world.

Modern day military Inspectors General serve in a variety of uniforms: the 239 principal Army IGs mentioned above; 150 senior Air Force IGs and an additional 2,000 counterintelligence and criminal investigative professionals report to the Air Force Inspector General; the Navy and Marine Corps together deploy more than 70 IGs in similar functions. All three service Inspectors General are three-star flag and general officers; the

Marine Corps IG has two-stars. By statute, however, “No member of the Armed Forces, active or reserve, shall be appointed Inspector General of the Department of Defense”⁶—a Senate-confirmed civilian officer responsible for approximately 1,250 professional auditors, inspectors, and investigators, including 30 uniformed military officers.

Inspector General von Steuben is also a role model for the 30 Presidentially-appointed civilian Inspectors General who comprise the President’s Council on Integrity and Efficiency (PCIE) and another 27 agency head-appointed civilian Inspectors General who comprise the Executive Council on Integrity and Efficiency (ECIE). (See <http://www.ignet.gov>.) According to the PCIE/ ECIE *Progress Report to the President* for FY 2001, this “community of nearly 10,000 employees has accounted for over \$28 billion in saved and recovered funds and was instrumental in over 7,600 successful prosecutions, suspensions or debarments of nearly 8,800 individuals or businesses, and more than 2,000 civil or personnel actions.”⁷ In addition to the Federal PCIE/ECIE community, a robust “Association of Inspectors General” caters to a multitude of “Inspectors General at all levels of government [who] are entrusted with fostering and promoting accountability and integrity in government.”⁸

How is it that this historical paradigm of military leadership has become the modern professional role model for civilians? As explained below, the answer is not just in the title. Although he is most known for military training, discipline, and accountability, General von Steuben is also known for his integrity and aversion to fraud and waste: “Prolonged study of his official correspondence and other military papers shows them to be models of veracity and scientific precision.”⁹

⁴ William Howard Taft, “Address of the President of the United States,” reprinted in *Proceedings Upon the Unveiling of the Statue of Baron von Steuben, Major General Inspector General in the Continental Army During the Revolutionary War 49* (Joint Committee on Printing, 1912).

⁵ Army Regulation 20-1, *Inspector General Activities and Procedures* 5 (Department of the Army, 2002).

⁶ Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, Section 8.

⁷ PCIE/ECIE Press Release, December 10, 2002.

⁸ Association of Inspectors General, *Principles and Standards for Officers of Inspector General 3* (May 2001) (<http://www.inspectorsgeneral.org>).

⁹ Palmer, General von Steuben, *supra*, at 5.

According to the official history of the Army Inspectors General, “Steuben, beginning work as an advisor to [General] Washington, proclaimed the money department ‘a mere farce,’ and said that paying quartermaster agents a commission according to what they spent was a prescription for waste.”¹⁰

Integrity & Efficiency. “Although Maj. Gen. Friedrich W. A. von Steuben was preceded briefly by three Inspectors General, he is credited with establishing the high standards desired by Washington—integrity, knowledge, and loyalty to conscience—that have been the measure of the inspection system ever since.”¹¹

According to the recently published chronicle of the Steuben family, the 13 years Baron von Steuben served Prince Joseph Wilhelm von Hohenzollern-Hechingen “were the most difficult times of his life.”¹² The modern day Baron von Steuben concludes that his namesake’s service as Hofmarschall “strongly shaped his attitudes”: “Because the Prince was a spendthrift, Steuben tried everything financially to save the principality. . . . This experience shaped his understanding of honesty, probity, efficiency and truthfulness. These principles he later brought to the American Army, above all to his training of its military commanders.”¹³

In his own writing, approved by Congress in March 29, 1779, as “invariable rules for the order and discipline of the troops,”¹⁴ General von Steuben admonished that “the commanding

officer of a regiment must preserve the strictest discipline and order in his corps, obliging every officer to a strict performance of his duty, without relaxing in the smallest point; punishing impartially the faults that are committed, without distinction of rank or service.”¹⁵

Training. General von Steuben’s most well known legacy, “Military Instruction,” is enshrined on his monument in Lafayette Park. Upon arrival at Valley Forge in 1778, he confronted an American Army, simply stated, in disarray. His first task was to train General Washington’s own guard. Having proved his value as a military trainer to his Commander-in-Chief, Steuben’s acumen for training soon spread to the entire army. According to the U.S. Army’s official history of the Inspectors General, “Steuben shocked American officers by personally teaching men the manual of arms and drill, but his success helped to convince them. . . . With Washington’s support, Steuben set out to involve officers in training, making the subordinate inspectors—a body of officers drilled by Steuben—his agents.”¹⁶

According to President William Howard Taft, “The effect of STEUBEN’S instruction in the American Army teaches us a lesson that is well for us all to keep in mind, and that is that no people, however warlike in spirit and ambition, in natural courage and self-confidence, can be made at once, by uniforms and guns, a military force. Until they learn drill and discipline, they are a mob, and the theory that they can be made an army overnight has cost this Nation billions of dollars and thousands of lives.”¹⁷

Discipline. According to the 1902 Proceedings in Congress, “[General von Steuben] made

¹⁰ David Clary and Joseph Whitehorne, *The Inspectors General of the United States Army, 1777-1903*, 37 (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1987).

¹¹ Whitehorne, “Von Steuben’s Legacy,” *The Inspectors General, 1903-1939*, *supra*, at 4.

¹² Henning-Hubertus Baron von Steuben, *Chronik der Familie von Steuben*, *supra*, at 73.

¹³ Henning von Steuben, Translated E-mail to Joseph E. Schmitz, December 1, 2002.

¹⁴ “In Congress, 29th March, 1779,” reprinted in Baron von Steuben’s *Revolutionary War Drill Manual: A Facsimile Reprint of the 1794 Edition A2* (New York, Dover Publications, 1985).

¹⁵ Frederick William Baron von Steuben, *Revolutionary War Drill Manual: A Facsimile Reprint of the 1794 Edition*, *supra*, at 128.

¹⁶ Clary and Whitehorne, *The Inspectors General, 1777-1903*, *supra*, at 40.

¹⁷ Proceedings Upon the Unveiling of the Statue of Baron von Steuben, *supra*, at 50.

the patriotic army a disciplined and effective force—the drilled corps that ultimately won the war for freedom. He worked incessantly to do this under the greatest difficulties and the credit for it is all his own.”¹⁸ When the Pentagon commissioned its “Soldier-Signers of the Constitution Corridor” in 1986, the following signage accompanied the central oil painting of Washington at Valley Forge, surrounded by his mounted staff and tattered soldiers: “During the coming months they would suffer from shortages of food and clothing, and from the cold, but under the tutelage of Washington and Major General Frederick Steuben [sic] would gain the professional training necessary to become the equal of the British and Hessians in open battle.”

Accountability. Parallel with his emphasis on training and drilling the troops, General von Steuben maintained that his inspectors “must depart from purely military inspection and must also examine financial accounts.”¹⁹ Inspector General von Steuben himself described what he encountered on arrival at Valley Forge in 1778, and how he established a system to eliminate wasteful losses of muskets, bayonets, and other Revolutionary War “accouterments”:

General Knox assured me that, previous to the establishment of my department, there never was a campaign in which the military magazines did not furnish from five thousand to eight thousand muskets to replace those which were lost The loss of bayonets was still greater. The American soldier, never having used this arm, had no faith in it, and never used it but to roast his beefsteak, and indeed often left it at home. This

is not astonishing when it is considered that the majority of the States engaged their soldiers for from six to nine months. Each man who went away took his musket with him, and his successor received another from the public store. No captain kept a book. Accounts were never furnished nor required. As our army is, thank God, little subject to desertion, I venture to say that during an entire campaign there have not been twenty muskets lost since my system came into force. It was the same with the pouches and other accouterments, and I do not believe that I exaggerate when I state that my arrangements have saved the United States at least eight hundred thousand French livres a year.²⁰

The original state of affairs upon his arrival at Valley Forge, according to a Congressional publication, indicated “[t]here were 5,000 muskets more on paper than were required, yet many soldiers were without them. Steuben’s first task was, therefore, to inaugurate a system of control over the needs and supply of arms, and, in course of time, he succeeded in carrying this control to such perfection that, on his last inspection before he left the Army, there were but three muskets missing, and even those were accounted for.”²¹

The Constitution ratified by Congress after the successful conclusion of the Revolutionary War still requires that “a regular Statement and Account of the Receipts and Expenditure of all public Money shall be published from time to time.”²² Moreover,

¹⁸ United States Congress, “Proceedings in Congress Relating to Baron Steuben,” July 1, 1902, reprinted in *Proceedings Upon the Unveiling of the Statue of Baron von Steuben*, *supra*, at 154.

¹⁹ Clary and Whitehorne, *The Inspectors General, 1777-1903*, *supra*, at 37.

²⁰ Friedrich Kapp, *The Life of Frederick William von Steuben, Major General in the Revolutionary Army* 117 (New York, Mason Brothers, 1859) (quoting “Steuben, MS. Papers, vol. xi.”).

²¹ “Address of Hon. Richard Bartholdt” (“Author of the Steuben Statue Legislation”), reprinted in *Proceedings Upon the Unveiling of the Statue of Baron von Steuben*, *supra*, at 22-23.

²² U.S. Constitution, Article I, Section 9.

as explained in the 1789 Preamble to the Bill of Rights, the first ten Amendments were designed “to prevent misconstructions or abuse of its power,”²³ *i.e.*, to prevent abuses of “powers . . . delegated to the United States by the Constitution.”²⁴

Congress subsequently codified these same constitutional principles—200 years after confirming Baron von Steuben as George Washington’s Inspector General—in the Inspector General Act of 1978, which created “independent and objective units” in most major Federal agencies “to provide leadership and coordination and recommend policies for activities designed (A) to promote economy, efficiency, and effectiveness in

the administration of; and (B) to prevent and detect fraud and abuse.”²⁵

So, the next time an Inspector General knocks on someone else’s figurative door, only to encounter a panic or curse (or both), the Inspector General (or the IG’s representative) might remind his or her “customer” that the Inspector General, whether civilian or military, serves as an extension of the *Commander’s Conscience*, guarding a Revolutionary War legacy of: integrity; training and discipline; preventing and detecting fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement; and ensuring constitutional accountability ultimately to “the People of the United States”²⁶—*sub tutela Altissimi semper*. 🏛️

²³ Bill of Rights, Preamble.

²⁴ U.S. Constitution, Amendment X.

²⁵ Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended, Section 2.

²⁶ U.S. Constitution, Preamble.