

nection between the preservation of such rights and the willingness of citizens to defend them. A people not willing to defend its rights will soon have none to defend.

None of these matters is beyond debate, of course: Ours is anything but a perfect democracy, conscription will not alter the fundamental inequalities of our society, and most recent wars have been fought for purposes unrelated to freedom and human rights. But the point is to get the real issues on the national agenda and to make our government, our media, and our citizens begin to consider them.

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## EXCURSUS 5

### Jean Ebbert on ONCE UPON A BUREAUCRACY

In August, 1870, Lieutenant Commander Joe Fyffe, U.S. Navy, was stationed in New London, when he received orders to go to San Francisco and there take command of a Navy frigate. Fyffe was delighted with the prospect of commanding one of the Navy's combat ships, but the trip to San Francisco would cost money he didn't have. Since credit cards were yet to be invented, Fyffe asked the Navy paymaster at New London to advance him money for the trip. The paymaster declined to do so, saying that it was contrary to both custom and regulation.

Fyffe then put the same request to the Navy Department's Bureau of Navigation, the agency that dealt with officers' assignments in those days. But then, even as now, Washington was not much help. The Bureau's officials told Fyffe he should complete the travel and then submit a claim for reimbursement. Fyffe thought poorly of this idea, probably because the claim he'd submitted three years earlier for his travel to New London had yet to be honored. What to do?

Fyffe reexamined his orders and discovered they did not specify *how* he was to travel or *when* he must arrive in San Francisco. (There's a laid-back Navy for you.) The orders required only that he keep the Navy Department

informed of his whereabouts. So Fyffe wrapped the orders in a waterproof envelope, donned his uniform, strapped his sword to his side, and commenced *walking* to San Francisco.

In compliance with his orders he sent a telegram to the Navy Department each day. His telegram of August 25 read: "AM SPENDING NIGHT IN STABLE OF MAYOR OF BRISTOL. NOTE HE HAS HYBRID MULES SPECIALLY BRED FOR THE TROPICS. SUGGEST NAVY INVESTIGATE." Clearly, Fyffe had already discovered a cardinal rule of modern bureaucratic thinking: When in trouble, initiate a study.

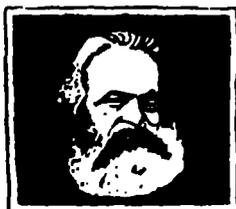
By August 27 Fyffe's mind was on his feet. On that date he telegraphed: "NAVAL OFFICERS BOOTS INADEQUATE FOR PROLONGED WALKING. SUGGEST SURGEON GENERAL INVESTIGATE. SPENDING NIGHT IN LAKEVILLE JAIL, COURTESY LOCAL SHERIFF." Regrettably, we have no record of how the Navy Department received the news that one of its outstanding officers, a man it had chosen to command one of its warships, had spent the night in jail.

Fyffe's telegram of August 28 reveals him a master of public relations, a keen social observer, and (by now) a connoisseur of jails. "PEOPLE THIS AREA NOT FAMILIAR NAVY UNIFORMS. GREAT CROWDS WALKED WITH ME PART WAY TODAY. I SANG THEM SEA CHANTIES. POPULACE THINKS IT GREAT SIGN OF DEMOCRACY FOR COMMANDING OFFICER OF SHIP TO WALK THREE THOUSAND MILES TO NEW STATION. POLICE CHIEF HUDSON NEW YORK HAS GIVEN ME BEST CELL IN JAIL FOR OVERNIGHT."

The next telegram is a superb example of concise reporting and demonstrates that Fyffe knew a thing or two about tactics. Dated August 30, it says: "SHOES FELL APART NOON TODAY. ENTERED ALBANY BAREFOOT. REQUEST RECRUITING OFFICER HERE BE AUTHORIZED TO ISSUE ME NEW SHOES. AM EARNING MY KEEP AS BARTENDER WHILE AWAITING YOUR ANSWER. LOCAL RUM FAR SUPERIOR THAT SERVED IN NAVY. AM SENDING SAMPLE."

And with that it was all over. The Navy Department surrendered, defeated by the combined ignominies of a ship's prospective commanding officer spending nights in stables and jails, trodding the nation's highways barefoot, tending bar, and—perhaps the worst blow of all—suggesting that civilian rum was far superior to the Navy's. Fyffe not only received new boots, he received advance travel money and (we may presume) continued his journey in some manner both more expeditious and appropriate to a Navy man on official orders.

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