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Military Corrections and ACA Evolve Together

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They say the best place to begin is at the beginning; for the Army, that would be with the American Correctional Association. The military correctional system, established by Congress in 1873, evolved from the first meeting of the American Prison Association — predecessor to ACA — in 1870. During that meeting, Maj. Thomas A. Barr became aware of military inmate abuse, lack of uniform treatment for military inmates and limited military control of inmates in state penitentiaries, jails and military stockades. The military disciplinary system relied heavily on corporal punishment and acts of public humiliation as a means of deterrence and to maintain strict discipline. In 1875, U.S. Military Prison became the first military prison, as well as the first prison operated by the federal government.

Today, the military correctional system consists of four service correctional headquarters, three service clemency and parole boards, and 64 correctional facilities throughout the world. Currently all six Army and two of the Navy correctional facilities are ACA accredited. And the Charleston and Miramar naval consolidated brigades have been continuously accredited with a score of 100 percent for at least five accreditation cycles. Each service clemency and parole board reviews

inmates up for release under supervision and clemency actions such as sentence reductions and types of discharge. Articles in this issue of Corrections Today highlight the Navy system, the Army headquarters and the history of the facility located in Germany.

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Each service correctional system provides programs for work, education, training and rehabilitation in order to return the inmate to military duty or to the civilian community as a productive, law-abiding citizen. In 1877, the U.S. Military Prison established the first inmate vocational training program, where inmates were

employed making boots, shoes and similar products. Today military prisons have numerous vocational programs that allow inmates to learn a skill while providing a service to the facility, community or military. In this issue, the U.S. Marine Corps Dog Program for Wounded Warriors is highlighted.

The Army Correctional Training Facility, established in 1968, has been described as the first “boot camp” or “shock incarceration” program. The mission was to return military inmates to duty with improved attributes and motivation through intensive training, supervision and correctional treatment. Today, military correctional facilities provide numerous group and individual treatment and rehabilitation programs that assist inmates in their physical, mental and spiritual well-being. The naval consolidated brigades at Charleston and Miramar, and the U.S. Disciplinary Barracks (USDB) — which became the first ACA accredited military facility in 1982 — specialize in the treatment of sex offenders. Articles in this issue highlight a religious therapy program and the importance of educating correctional cadre about sex offender rehabilitation. Are our efforts successful? One article highlights the Navy recidivism statistics and studies.

Successful correctional systems are more than just facilities and programs, a key ingredient is a professional staff. Continuous professional development activities help to maintain competencies, and ACA certification is a high-quality way to achieve professional development. One article discusses the impact of ACA certification at USDB. Since the war on terrorism, the staff has had to not only operate in military correctional facilities but also use those correctional skills to operate detainee facilities and conduct nation building through training correctional officers and establishing host nation facilities. This issue has three articles that address detainee operations.

The nature of military inmates' offenses has evolved over the years. Up until the 1970s, most military inmates were convicted of alcohol abuse and military offenses — disrespect, disobedience and desertion. Beginning in the 1970s, the charges began to split between military unique offenses and civilian offenses. In the 1980s and 1990s the pendulum continued to swing toward civilian violent offenses, and today there are more crimes against people and drug offenses than property and military crimes. One article addresses the newest type of inmate; military prisons may now confine civilian government employees and contractors.

I want to thank all the civilian correctional professionals serving correctional facilities, community correction programs, central offices and parole boards. The corrections community as individuals and as county, state, private and federal agencies has assisted military corrections in both correctional and detainee facilities. I appreciate and thank ACA Executive Director James A. Gondles, Jr., for highlighting military corrections and for all the assistance he has provided the military. I hope this issue provides some insight into military corrections and builds on the professional relationship between military and civilian corrections. ♦