

The Army's Got Superman Hack

By PAUL HOUSTON
D&C—Los Angeles Times

CUYAHOGA FALLS, OHIO —“Sgt. Hack Wants You.” And How.

But does the Army want Sgt. Hack? Specifically, does it want his psychedelically painted government jeep, his crazy T-shirts and wrist watches, his pretty girls—and more?

All of this may sound like a comic confrontation, but it has serious implication for the success of a “modern volunteer Army”—and for a “true volunteer” Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, National Guard and Reserves.

If there is one thing the armed services are going to need plenty of when the draft expires next June 30, it is imaginative recruiting. Already, with low draft calls in effect, the Army, Navy and Guard have big gaps in their ranks.

The most wildly imaginative recruiter in the country, Pentagon officials say, is based in this affluent suburb of Akron: Staff Sgt. David Denton Hack, 32, husky, blond, blue-eyed, freckled and as gregarious as they come.

Hack's myriad innovations, began several months ago when his new recruiting station failed to draw flies, caught fire in June and produced six immediate and six deferred enlistees against a quota of four. And the momentum is building fast, he says.

Meantime, his flamboyant stunts have been piling up loads of fans, including his congressman, the mayor, prominent businessmen, a popular radio-TV evangelist—and, most important, young people eligible for the Army, who think Sgt. Hack is “cool,” “funny,” “honest” and “right on.”

But within the Army, disfavor apparently has developed in some quarters over the traditions that are being broken, and over the way Hack sometimes has operated out of channels.

Even as Hack's business and popularity were booming, a letter arrived in mid-June from his commanding officer, Col. Alvin C. Hadley of Ft. Sheridan, Ill., reprimanding him for substandard performance, terminating his \$50-a-month special duty bonus and threatening to fire him. No specific charges were made.

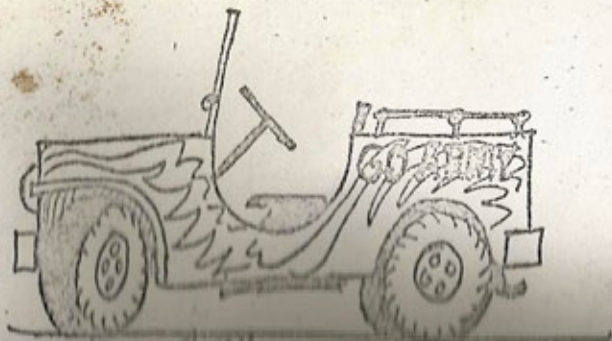
At the same time, it was learned, a cover story written on Hack for an Army magazine has been held up because some officers are concerned about the image Hack is projecting.

A spokesman for Col. Hadley at Ft. Sheridan would only confirm that an investigation is under way.

But Hack remains gung-ho Army: “I love my job. I'm super-devoted.”

He generally works six days a week, often from 6 a.m. to midnight, and seems to have the most fun during off-duty hours, fooling around youthful hangouts at night in a couple of vehicles that turn every head in this hot-crazed culture.

One is a U.S. Army jeep with big racing tires and psyc-



Hack's the most imaginative recruiter in the U.S.

delicately-painted scenes of soldiers parachuting into the sunset (Hack recruits heavily for the 101st Division's airborne brigade at Ft. Campbell, Ky.).

The other vehicle is his own souped-up, wildly-painted 1960 Corvette with brass Army buttons studding the black bucket seats.

New enlistees usually go along for the ride, and sometimes end up in a spirited game of penny-ante poker with their sergeant buddy.

As Hack makes his rounds of drive-ins, nightclubs and main drags, he wears metal-rimmed glasses but not his duty-hours uniform.

Instead, he's usually in sandals, slacks and a red, white and blue T-shirt emblazoned with a replica of the famed James Montgomery Flagg Army recruiting poster. But where the Flagg poster depicts a grizzled old man in top hat saying, “Uncle Sam Wants You,” Hack's customized shirt has Uncle Sam pointing his finger, saying, “Sgt. Hack Wants You.”

That attention-grabbing gambit is turning into one of the biggest fads ever to hit the Akron area, with so many Army prospects and others beseeching Hack for shirts he has been forced to sell most of them at cost and stop giving them away.

Even his five colleagues at the recruiting station have jumped on the bandwagon with their own shirts saying “Sgt. (So-and-So) Wants You.”

“We're known as the good guys of Cuyahoga Falls,” Hack says proudly. “When we moved in last winter, you wouldn't believe the animosity in this town. We have created an awful lot of good will since then.”

Hack says there's “no trickery” involved in his promotional stunts.

“I'm not trying to say, ‘Hey, look, the Army's mod.’ I tell the guys it's still a man's game but that the Army is trying to make things more human.

“I'm looking for good men. I'm not looking for a hippie Army.”

The purpose of the dazzling car, jeep and T-shirts is to “break the ice, get a conversation started,” Hack says. “It blows their minds.”

As for the notoriety he has gained, Hack insists in his native Kentucky drawl that “seeing my name in lights doesn't turn my crank. Recruiting a quality Army is my whole ballgame.”

Hack's station commander, Sgt. Don Mowl, confirms Hack's self-effacing claim that “we've got teamwork here like nobody's business.”

Meanwhile, the Air Force, Navy and Marine recruiters who share the modern complex of offices with the Army here have pressured Hack not to park his psychedelic jeep in front of the building.