# I DISOBEY ARMY REGULATIONS

It was late 1943. The second World War was raging in Europe and the Orient. Under Hitler's orders, Jews, Catholics, Gypsies, homosexuals, Bahai, and the mentally ill were being tortured and systematically murdered in concentration camps throughout Europe. In Japanese prison camps, American prisoners were starved and tortured.   Here in the United States, plans for the Battle of the Bulge had materialized, and we were preparing for it at Fort Meade, Maryland.

I was a twenty-year-old a staff sergeant in charge of an IBM (International Business Machines) section in Army Replacement Depot Number One at Fort Meade, Maryland. Using these machines, we were selecting soldiers to be sent overseas as fighters, cooks, medics, etc. We worked long hours in order to meet the deadline set by General Marshall.

The IBM room was noisy and huge, probably the size of a present-day supermarket There were at least twenty key-punch machines. These were the size of a small black metal desk fitted with keys like a typewriter. They were operated by men who typed information about each soldier: their names, rank, serial number, what outfit they were serving in, and what their training had been. As they typed, the machine punched holes into cards to be sorted and interpreted. There were about a dozen collators, which were about the height of a Xylophone, but bigger. This machine could be wired to sort the cards by various categories such as infantry, cook, medic, etc.   The interpreter was the biggest of all the machines. It also had to be wired for different information. Big and black, it stood no less than ten feet high, four or five feet deep and perhaps ten feet wide. It must have weighed over a ton. Cards were taken from the collator and put into the interpreter which printed out all the required information from the cards.

The ceiling in the room was high, somewhat like a warehouse, but every corner was brightly lit with bulbs that cast a lot of heat.

The machines were running smoothly, but the noise was deafening. We were right on schedule when General George Marshall, himself appeared. Now, when *any* commanding officer enters a room where soldiers are working in offices, army rules require the person in charge to call everyone to come to attention, and then he/she must approach the officer, salute, greet him and ask, "Can I help you, Sir?"

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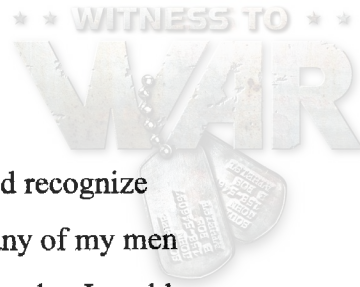
General Marshall had a commanding presence. Anyone who saw him would recognize that he was an officer to be respected. But when he entered the IBM room, few if any of my men noticed, and I did not call them to attention, but I did approach him, salute, and ask what I could do for him.

The general answered me sternly, "Sergeant! Why didn't you call your men to attention when I entered the room?"

I broke out into a cold sweat, sure that I was in bad trouble, but I replied, "Sir, if I had done that, my men would have had to stop their machines, and it would take four hours to get going again. As it is, we'll be lucky to make the deadline we got from the Pentagon."

Without another word, the general left the room and continued his inspection. Luckily, we made the deadline, and the necessary number of replacements were on their way to Europe.

The following day I was busy preparing for the next wave of soldiers to be sent overseas when a sergeant presented me with formal army orders. I had worried all night about what would happen as a result of my insubordination, so I opened those papers gingerly. They were orders from General Marshal promoting me to the rank of tech sergeant, and assigning me to work at the Pentagon in his office.