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Abstract

The new asymmetrical battlefield, combined with Noncommissioned officer (NCO) educational growth and military technological advances, have encouraged a resurgence of our commitment to fuse knowledge and technology in today's Army. NCOs in the Army have dedicated themselves to the challenges of higher learning institutions to compliment the advances in technology used globally as a force multiplier to support the Global War on Terrorism. Army Transformation mandates that NCOs in all Career Management Fields become more accomplished on every front, not just in their trained skill craft, but those skill sets that support new weapons systems on the battlefield, expand leadership roles on the battlefield, and any other technological skill that increases our effective capabilities at the next level of war.

Noncommissioned Officer Education and Technology

The Noncommissioned officer of yester-year did not require a heightened educational background, nor was it expected because of the Army's draconian utilization of its NCO Corps. From the Civil War to the Vietnam War, NCOs have long been recruited for their disciplinarian values and not for their training, planning, and independent critical thinking ability as that was primarily reserved for commissioned officers.

Noncommissioned officers in today's Army have broken away from the norms in terms of lower education upon indoctrination into active and reserve military service. In years past, only commissioned officers were expected to have an education past the twelve grade level. In the 1970's, many enlisted service members joined the military with a General Educational Development (GED) certificate or no high school diploma at all. These service members were required to take night classes to achieve the Army minimal educational expectation during their first enlistment. With the introduction of the Veterans Educational Assistance Program (VEAP) in the early 1980's and the Montgomery GI Bill in the 1990's, Army enlisted service members and their units began to reap the rewards of higher educational opportunities.

Educational benefits for enlisted Soldiers were and are now on the forefront of retention initiatives and recruitment incentives with overwhelming appeal to new recruits.

De-centralized promotion boards greatly influenced the educational growth of junior NCOs in the 1980's by offering promotion points for civilian education. With command emphasis factored in, the NCO Corps began an upward spiral to higher learning, taking the NCO from the standing formation and motor pool grease pits to the training, strategic, and operations center.

Army Chief of Staff, General Eric K. Shinseki said in his October 1999 speech introducing Army Transformation:

To adjust the condition of the Army to better meet the requirements of the next century, we articulate this vision: Soldiers on point for the nation transforming this, the most respected Army in the world, into a strategically responsive force that is dominant across the full spectrum of operations. With that overarching goal to frame us, the Army will undergo a transformation... (¶1)

The educational role of the NCO Corps and Army transformation go hand in hand. The Army transformation roadmap initiatives require a smaller, more lethal and smarter expeditionary force with adaptable capabilities. Technological advances in weaponry and their employment methods require a new teaching methodology that includes the NCO Corps at the forefront. As technology manifests throughout the Army, on every level, so must the educational development of the service members required to operate and maintain these new technological marvels.

Conducting inter-agency operations in support of our National stability, offensive and defensive capabilities, and new support roles will require expanding roles for the future NCO Corps. Education on how these agencies work and what services they can provide for the NCO and his/her Soldiers on the battlefield will be paramount. Future successes can be measured by how well the NCOs understand the inter-agency support purpose and process.

Training with industry has become the norm and the most feasible training method ensuring expedient deployment of new weapon systems to the battlefield. NCOs have challenged themselves to become master trainers for their units, utilizing the train-the-trainer concept to support weapon sustainment in the most austere environments. There are more highly

educated NCO resources than ever in the Army to compliment the advanced technology at the Army's disposal.

NCOs will support the Operational Critical Goals of Army transformation on all fronts. Exploitation of new weapons systems will require a smarter and self-starting future NCO Corps. NCOs will become the lead planners and operators on critical missions, cultural "gurus" in their area of operations, and educators of governmental policies in some cases. Only through a robust and expanded educational role, projected funding for training, and technological maturity can we expect the future NCO Corps to succeed on the asymmetric battlefield.

In the future, NCOs will directly manage lethal and nonlethal capabilities in the battle space through technology. This additional responsibility will require a well educated NCO to manipulate those capabilities that correctly capture the combatant commander's intent.

Technological advances have significantly reduced the amount of resources required to sustain kinetic and non-kinetic operations across the operations spectrum. NCOs now and in the future will conduct these operations daily across the globe. NCOs service and operate technological weaponry as a force multiplier with precision and unparalleled skill.

The Predator, a remote controlled Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) used for short and long range reconnaissance, and deployment of ordinance as needed, is primarily serviced and operated by NCOs. The NCO operator can control the Predator from halfway around the world and provide precise real time streaming video and kinetic operations as required. In years past, we would have had to deploy a team, a unit, or even a battalion with all of their MTOE assets to the front line. We would have to involve CSS units, our sister services, and a complex C2 structure, and a host of other strategic enablers. The Predator can maneuver in the battle space remotely with no risk of loss of life for US service personnel, our partners in peace, or our

coalition allies. This capability allows for flexibility and reallocation of military forces to support multiple contingencies simultaneously across the globe.

The Predator is just one of the many technological advances that provide force multipliers on and off the battlefield. A significant majority of the new technology in the Army inventory used to support the war fighter has an NCO at the helm.

The Army Times noted in an AUSA special report that current active duty enlisted personnel represent 83.6% of the Army force, Army reserve enlisted strength represent 80.8%, and the National Guard represent 89.4% of the Army force (Army Times, 14 October 2007, John Bretschneider/Staff). Who are the technicians and operators of our newest weapons systems now and in the future? Some would say a whole bunch of professional junior and senior NCOs.

The new war has proliferated the NCOs conceptual thinking automatically. No longer do NCOs remain silent in the background awaiting mundane orders for actions of physicality. NCOs have, and continue to adapt, by fusing their experience and technology to best serve their units as well as react to spontaneous actions in the battle space.

To achieve full spectrum domination the NCO Corps of the future must have technical superiority, a battle focused leadership style, and a knowledgeable grasp of Army modernization. New rules and new missions governing the shape and design of future battles will be managed by the smart NCO in his/her expanding role to the commander. Knowing how to successfully call for the proper amount of lethal force and what system to use whilst safeguarding the indigenous people and cultural artifacts that may be present will be assimilated successfully by the future NCO Corps.

The future NCO Corps will have newer educational initiatives that will dramatically change the current NCOES structure across the Army. Driven by technology, the new asymmetrical battlefield, new coalition missions, expanding roles, and the incredible aptitude of our enlisted force, the military enlisted education system must change the current steady course to support the fusion of knowledge and technology.

Conclusion

Proliferation of the NCO Corps educational role combined with technology will pay big dividends to the combatant commanders, the mission, and to our Soldiers. Understanding transformation, broadening the NCO educational scope and the adaptation of technology to effectively dominate the battle space is paramount.

References

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